
Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal

World Heritage Site
Management Plan Summary
2023-2029



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Studley Royal Park including
the Ruins of Fountains Abbey
Inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 1986

Welcome

It's been an incredibly busy period since the publication of our last World Heritage Site Management Plan in 2015.

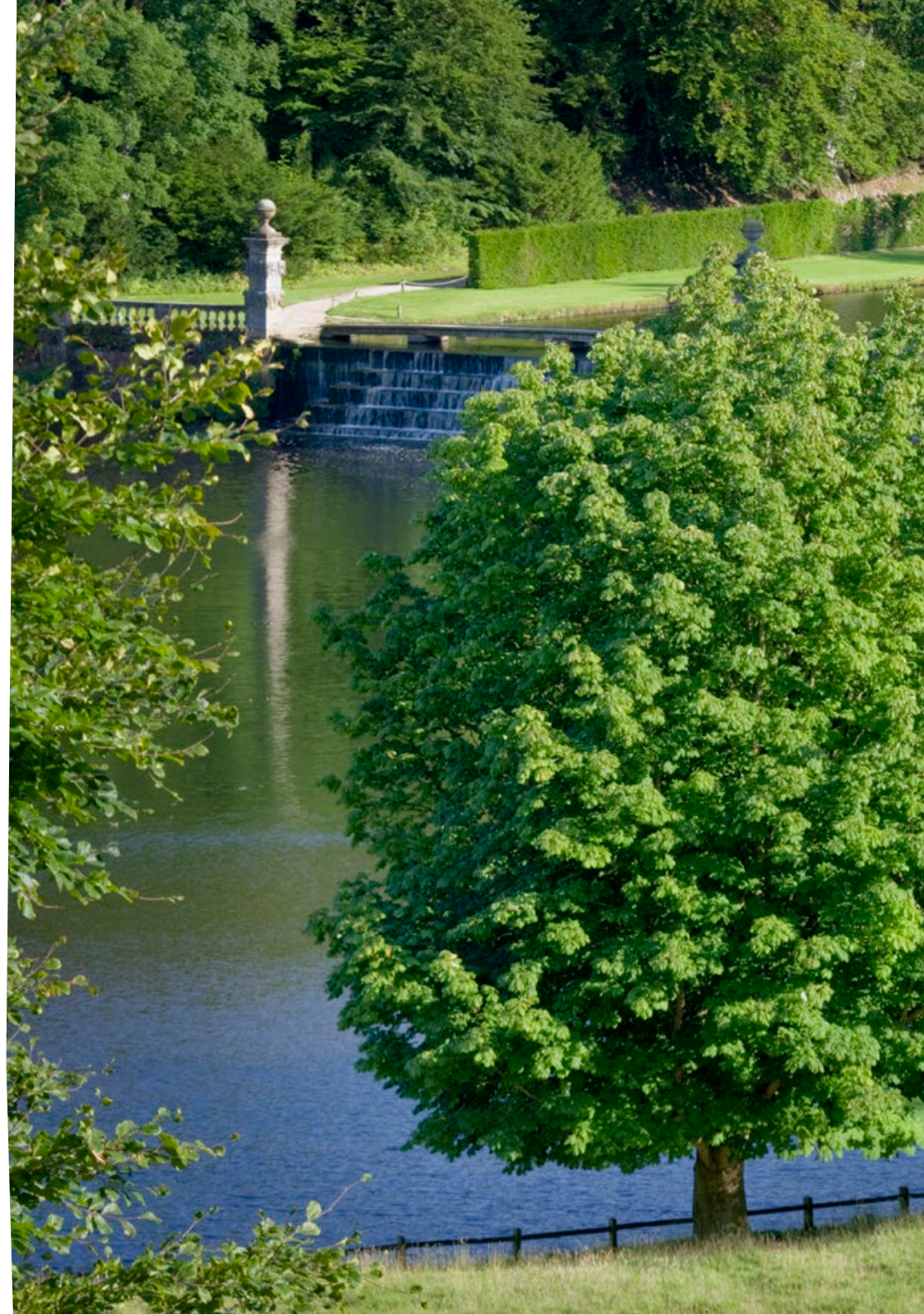
We had the great news in 2020 that our joint bid with Nidderdale AONB to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the Skell Valley Project was a success. This project grew from the previous management plan and is starting to transform the 12 miles of the river Skell, creating a landscape which is more resilient to climate change, a place where nature can thrive and where people play an active role in looking after the landscape.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a big impact on the National Trust, with many of our properties closed to visitors and staff furloughed. The financial situation has been worsened by the current cost of living crisis including the rise in energy costs. However, the popularity and emotional connection that people feel for this magnificent landscape has endured. Our visitor numbers have returned to the levels we saw before the pandemic and the peaceful beauty of the abbey ruins and water garden has never felt more important for our wellbeing.

Every World Heritage Site (WHS) must write a management plan which guides how we look after the site. We've already listened to the views of our visitors and communities at events in the local library and at Fountains. Our key partners have come along to workshops to help identify the challenges facing the WHS and the actions we all need to take to tackle them. The World Heritage Site Steering Group has supported and advised us throughout.

This summary plan gives a flavour of the challenges the site faces today and the actions we're planning over the next six years. We couldn't include everything, but the full plan is available to download from our website.

Sarah France
World Heritage Site Co-ordinator





Key milestones from our last plan

February 2016

Launch of the new management plan & Mark Newman's book about the WHS - 'The Wonder of the North'

March 2016

In 2016, volunteers gave 22,155 hours of their time to look after the WHS

Summer 2016

Repairs to the abbey east green river walls

August 2016

Neptune, Galen, the Wrestlers and Bacchus are given a coat of white paint to restore an 18th century finish

November 2016

Archaeological investigations with Bradford University reveal the monks' burial site

May 2017

3 new holiday cottages are opened - West Lodge, Whitefields and the Boot Room

Summer 2017

Tent Hill is given a new path and restored lawn

Summer 2018

Our masons have spent over 10 years repairing the abbey precinct wall - there's still plenty to do

February 2019

Ripon City Plan is supported by a referendum giving planning protection to the WHS and buffer zone

July 2019

Visitor Centre shop, restaurant and welcome area are completely refurbished

August 2019

The Dying Gladiator is returned to the Studley Royal water garden - the £90,000 was all raised by public appeal

Winter 2019

New bosquet planted at the Temple of Piety and Quebec

January 2020

Biomass boiler installed at Choristers House

February 2020

Storm Ciara causes flooding in the WHS

March 2020

Covid-19 pandemic with most the WHS closed and staff furloughed

March 2020

Harrogate District Local Plan is approved

December 2020

The bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a £1.4M grant for the Skell Valley Project is successful

Summer 2021

Steve Messam's 'These Passing Things' - our biggest and boldest Folly! Art programme so far

September 2021

World Heritage attributes for the WHS approved by the World Heritage Site Steering Group

February 2023

Photovoltaic panels are installed on the Visitor Centre roof

April 2023

16 farms deliver Natural Flood Management measures to protect the WHS & Ripon from flooding as part of the Skell Valley Project

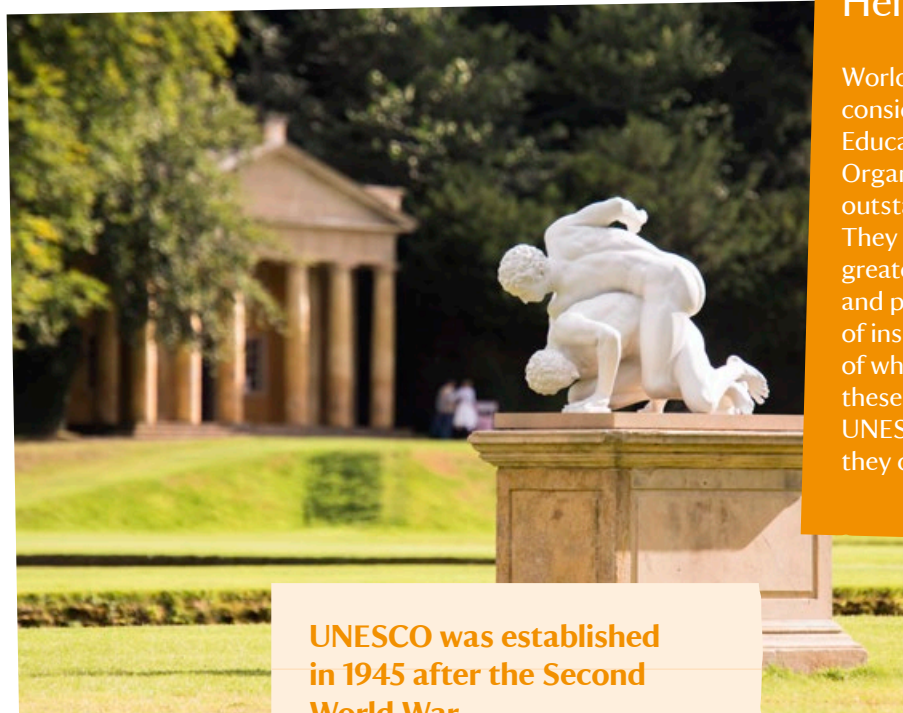
What is a World Heritage Site?

World Heritage Sites are special places considered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to be of outstanding universal value to mankind. They are prime examples of the world's greatest cultural and/or natural sites and provide an irreplaceable source of inspiration to everyone, irrespective of where they are located. By identifying these special places of great value, UNESCO aims to safeguard them so that they can be passed to future generations.

UNESCO was established in 1945 after the Second World War.

The founding vision of UNESCO was to advance, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and the common welfare of mankind. The beginning of the UNESCO Constitution states

'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'.



Why is Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal a World Heritage Site?

To be inscribed as a World Heritage Site, a place must not only demonstrate 'outstanding universal value', it must also fit at least one of ten criteria established by UNESCO.

On inscription Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal fulfilled criteria (i) and (iv):

(i) A masterpiece of human creative genius

(iv) An outstanding example of a landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history

The name of the estate on our World Heritage Site inscription is 'Studley Royal Park, including the ruins of Fountains Abbey', rather than the name we're usually known by, 'Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal'.

You may be surprised to know that the eighteenth century garden, and the way that the Aislabies incorporated the abbey ruins into their forward-thinking garden design is the main reason we're a World Heritage Site.

When most people think of gardens, they think of colourful borders filled with flowers. As an outstanding example of the 'English' garden style, Studley Royal is very different. The early parts of the garden constructed by John Aislabie from 1718 are influenced by earlier formal French and Dutch geometric designs though moving in a more naturalistic, English, direction. Later in the eighteenth century this move towards a more natural

approach progressed further. Instead of imposing a design upon nature, this style worked in harmony with it – especially the natural shapes of the landscape. This was a uniquely English art form that always considered the 'genius of the place' – that special atmosphere that makes a place distinctive. Inspired by and leading such ideas, William Aislabie further developed the garden while maintaining much of his father's earlier designs at its core. In one landscape Studley Royal demonstrates, perhaps uniquely, the evolving garden tastes of the eighteenth century.

Follies, statues and eye-catchers were a common feature in gardens in the eighteenth century. The Aislabies built many of these features, but there could be no finer eye-catcher than the grand ruins of Fountains Abbey, which happened to be in their neighbour's garden. So that the Aislabies and their guests could enjoy the magnificent ruins, viewpoints were created in the garden, with the majestic sight of the abbey a highlight of an eighteenth century tour.

John Messenger, the owner of Fountains Abbey, finally agreed to sell his estate to William Aislabie in 1767 meaning that the abbey could be formally integrated with the rest of the garden.

Of course, there are other significant buildings and landscapes on the estate which also contribute towards our World Heritage Site status. The abbey is more than an eighteenth century romantic folly; it is of international importance in its own right, ruins of one of the select group of Cistercian houses to survive from the twelfth century. There are also Fountains Hall, St. Mary's Church, Fountains Mill and the deer park. Together with the Water Garden, these buildings and landscapes combine to make a harmonious whole.

Writing our new management plan

UNESCO recommends that each World Heritage Site has a management plan. Our plan contains the following:

- What makes the WHS important – its Statement of Outstanding Universal Value and attributes
- A list of the challenges and opportunities facing the WHS
- A vision for the WHS
- 30 year management objectives, grouped under four themes
- A six year action plan for us and our partners to deliver



To create our new management plan, we began by reviewing our old plan. Before we put pen to paper we spoke to stakeholders and partners and held consultations with staff and volunteers so that they could shape the plan at an early stage. We held events in the local library in Ripon and at Fountains to talk to people living locally and visitors about the WHS.

We found that some of the challenges affecting the site had stayed the same, but the impacts of climate change are increasing and nature is under threat. The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis are new challenges. Taking into the account the issues and the suggestions gathered during the consultation events, we've thought carefully about the six year actions we're committing to in the 2023–2029 plan.

The management objectives, and their accompanying actions, are grouped under the following four themes:

Theme 1:
Overall
Management
Approach

Theme 2:
Conservation
and Climate Action

Theme 3:
Access, Inspiration
and Learning

Theme 4:
Local Community
Links and
Partnerships

The next eight pages contain a summary of these themes so that you can get a flavour for the content of the plan.



Vision for the World Heritage Site

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal is a special place, loved for generations. It is a place of calm reflection, of delight and exploration, for those who come to discover it now and for the future. Taking the eighteenth century pleasure gardens as its core and inspiration, the WHS possesses many layers of extraordinary history that have shaped the abbey, the parkland, the rural setting and extended further afield to other landscapes.

The designed landscape was inscribed as a WHS in 1986 and since that time the National Trust has undertaken an ambitious programme of conservation work to restore the gardens to their former splendour, ensuring the outstanding universal value of the WHS is sustainable for further generations to enjoy. We have also installed signage and interpretation and enhanced our website to celebrate and promote our World Heritage Site status to a wide audience.

Our vision is to build on this work and to ensure the WHS will be:

- an exemplary World Heritage Site which aims to make a significant contribution to the purposes and goals of the UN and UNESCO
- a place where sustainable management sits at the heart of all we do
- conserved and enhanced for future generations to enjoy, the genius of the place will be captured and celebrated through delivery of our conservation work
- a place which is accessible to all, brought to life for everyone to understand and enjoy
- a place cherished by the local community and wider communities of interest and an iconic symbol of Yorkshire

Theme 1: Overall Management Approach

Management policy for the World Heritage Site

The World Heritage Convention celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022 and we want to ensure we work with our partners and communities to maintain the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the WHS for future generations to enjoy.

We'll do this by:

- ✓ Reflecting the OUV and the attributes of the WHS in all our management decisions
- 👤 Balancing the cultural and natural values of the WHS
- 🔥 Ensuring we're prepared for managing risks and disasters such as fire and flooding
- 🏠 Working to strong conservation policies and principles
- 🤝 Managing through strong partnerships
- 🔍 Evaluating the impact of our plan

UNESCO was set up in 1945 after World War II to bring about peace and prevent future wars. As part of the family of UNESCO World Heritage Sites we can play a role in promoting the wider aims of UNESCO such as peace and sustainable development.

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal scores more highly with our visitors on 'emotional connection' than any other property owned by the National Trust. The peaceful beauty and sense of connection brings health and wellbeing benefits and has never felt more important.

Key actions

- Write an Evaluation Framework for monitoring and measuring the delivery of actions and key outcomes
- Working with other WHSs, Newcastle University and our communities trial approaches to promoting peace around the theme of sanctuary
- Complete the Quiet Garden at Fountains Hall and develop places in the gardens and parkland where people can find time for calm and contemplation

Finance and people

Staff and financial resources are vital for the conservation and management of the WHS. We want to make sure that staff and volunteers have the skills and resources they need to deliver the management plan. The sustainability of the site depends largely on its role as a visitor attraction and the income generated through ticket sales and memberships, the shop and the cafes and restaurant. The funding for our conservation projects and the gardeners, stonemasons, rangers and conservation specialists who care for the gardens and buildings comes from the income we generate on the estate and fundraising. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need to continue to reduce our reliance on visitors and to diversify our income to include holiday cottages, let estate and filming opportunities.

Key actions

- Invest in staff training and wellbeing
- Develop proposals for better office space for staff at the Visitor Centre
- Maintain and diversify our income to fund conservation work
- Produce a fundraising plan

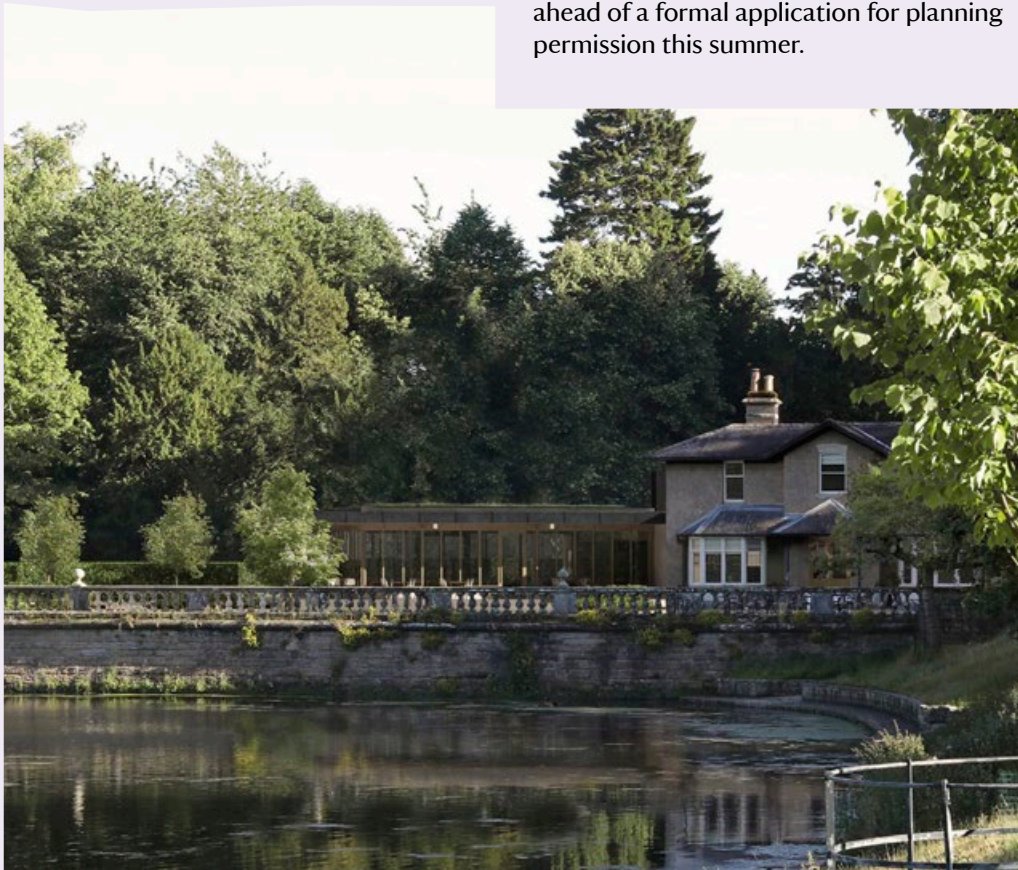


Presentation and visitor infrastructure

The presentation and appearance of the WHS is an important part of maintaining its outstanding universal value and ensuring a beautiful and welcoming experience for everyone. We want to make sure that the facilities we provide for visitors such as the toilets, car parks, shops and restaurants, seating and signage are of a high quality. Central to our visitor experience is the National Trust's Visitor Journey Toolkit which is designed to put our staff in the shoes of our visitors.

One of our priorities for this plan is to deliver much needed improvements to the Studley entrance to the water garden. For almost 300 years the ornate gates at the edge of Studley Lake were the main entrance to the Aislabies' water garden. In the 19th century the Studley tearoom was built to serve the growing numbers of visitors. However, the Studley entrance is now struggling to cope with the needs of visitors and the National Trust has commissioned architects to design alterations and an extension to the existing tearoom – we've called the project 'Studley Revealed'.

Designs for the new building and landscape project have been shared with the public ahead of a formal application for planning permission this summer.



The Studley Revealed project provides an opportunity to:

- Make improvements to a busy area of the water garden.
- Create a more accessible café, admission point and toilets.
- Enhance the appearance and facilities at this part of the estate.
- Tell the important story of the World Heritage Site.
- Make it a place for our visitors to learn more about the fascinating history of Studley Royal.

Planning framework for the WHS

Some of the WHS's most important views stretch to land that does not belong to the National Trust, for example the magnificent view of Ripon Cathedral from the deer park. Poorly planned developments outside the boundaries of the site but within its buffer zone or wider setting could affect the reasons the site is internationally important. We are seeing an increasing number of planning applications around the edges of Ripon.

Key actions

- Work with North Yorkshire Council on the new North Yorkshire Local Plan
- Prepare a Setting Study for the WHS



Theme 2: Conservation and Climate Action

Conservation of the World Heritage Site

Conservation is one of the key objectives set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention. We have a duty to protect and preserve the WHS and pass it on to future generations to enjoy. Working with our communities, visitors and partners we'll continue our ambitious programme of conservation work. Our priorities are:

Revisiting the conservation and presentation of the abbey ruins

The abbey ruins were the hub of daily monastic life until the dissolution of the monastery by Henry VIII in 1539. In the late eighteenth century the ruins of the abbey were embraced into William Aislabie's landscape garden. They have since lost much of their 'romantic' character and feel separated from the water garden. Working with the English Heritage Trust, Historic England and other partners we will look at ways to reconnect them with the water garden and recreate the softer more romantic vision of the eighteenth century.

Writing a plan for Fountains Hall

Fountains Hall has long been the unsung part of the WHS. Public access is limited and the building has suffered much from the failed drainage from the steep hillside behind. The gardens behind the hall have long been neglected. Our priority will be to explore options for the future use of Fountains Hall and garden to ensure access is improved and that it becomes woven into the WHS experience.



Saving the stained glass in St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church in the Studley Royal Deer Park is one of the most richly decorated churches of the Gothic Revival, designed by William Burges in 1871 and considered to be one of his finest works. The interior is extremely lavish in its decoration and this extends to the windows. There is a real threat to the stained glass windows which are actively deteriorating and we are seeing a dramatic loss to the painted details. The church is one of a pair and the windows at the Church of Christ the Consoler at Newby Hall near Ripon are facing the same issues. Working with the English Heritage Trust, the Churches Conservation Trust and Newby Hall, we'll find a solution to stabilize the stained glass and produce a joint fundraising plan for the works.

Where next for the water garden

Conservation works in the water garden were a focus for the previous plan. We replanted overgrown sections of the yew bosquet, reopened views to the follies and reinstated an eighteenth century white painted finish to the lead statues. As the gardens extended to the abbey we repaired and rebuilt the river walls and replaced the rotting timber edges to the ponds. We will continue this programme of repair – refreshing presentation of the interiors of the garden buildings and enhancing the floristic planting. Alongside this we'll work with partners to develop a vision for the long neglected Quebec area of the water garden.

A designed landscape where nature and culture thrive

The World Heritage Convention was the first international convention to link the concept of nature conservation and protection of cultural heritage. Although the WHS is inscribed for its cultural significance it has a rich natural heritage including an internationally important collection of ancient and veteran trees in the deer parks. We'll be working with Natural England on a Parkland Plan. Working with our partners we are also committed to making more space for nature both in the WHS and the wider landscape.



Other actions

- Work with Natural England to produce a Parkland Plan for the deer parks
- Work with local geology groups to carry out more detailed survey and mapping of geology in the WHS
- Research and produce a catalogue of stone for historic building repairs
- Set up a Heritage and Archaeology Ranger Team

Climate change

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face globally and it's threatening nature, people and heritage at a local level. In the World Heritage Site, we are facing catastrophic flooding and high levels of siltation which damage the abbey ruins and water garden. Droughts are also becoming more prolonged and landslides and rockfalls more frequent, particularly around the abbey.

'There is a deep relationship between the heritage and the river – the world-class water garden would not exist without the Skell, but the Skell at times can threaten its very existence. If we can't find a different approach to looking after the land and the water that flows through it, then the heritage of this valley could disappear forever.'

Excerpt from the Skell Valley Project bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019



Through the Skell Valley Project we're working with farmers and landowners to make the WHS and surrounding landscape more resilient to climate change.



We also want to reduce our impact on the planet and work towards carbon net zero by 2030. The National Trust use a model called the Climate RACE

- **reduce** our carbon emissions and the environmental footprint of our site
- take action to help the WHS **adapt**, recover and become more resilient to the impacts of climate change
- **capture** more carbon in our land and maximise its carbon storage potential
- and across it all, share our experiences widely by **engaging** people in our activities

Key actions

- Deliver the Skell Valley Project to manage flooding and siltation in the WHS
- Using Climate Change Vulnerability Models, develop a plan for adaptation of the gardens and parklands to make them more resilient to climate change
- Continue to reduce our energy usage through energy efficiency improvements and renewable energy projects

The Pheasant Shoot

There are privately owned shooting rights which cover the whole WHS and impact on how the site is managed. The shooting rights affect visitor access and enjoyment of the WHS and its conservation.

Key actions

- Seek to acquire the shooting rights that cover the WHS should they become available
- Carry out a condition assessment of the impact of the shooting rights on the WHS

Research

Research is how we increase our knowledge and understanding about the WHS. It helps us to continually improve our conservation work and the experience people have when they visit. We'd like to involve a team of citizen researchers to help us with this research. Some of the themes we'll explore in a new Research Framework include:

1. Connecting people with nature and heritage
2. Heritage understanding and significance
3. Adapting to environmental change
4. Artistic and cultural production
5. Global and national connections



Key actions

- Produce a Research Framework for the WHS
- Increase digital access to research about the WHS
- Explore the feasibility of creating an accessible research library at the WHS

Theme 3: Access, Inspiration and Learning

Everyone welcome

Ensuring that the WHS is welcoming and accessible to all is a big ambition for us. We want the WHS to be a place where anyone who works, volunteers or visits has an equally positive experience. We have already started to tackle some of the physical features that make access difficult for those with mobility issues.

Our conversations with communities as part of the Skell Valley Project highlighted other barriers such as the cost of entry and lack of public transport to the WHS which makes access difficult for those without a car.

Key actions

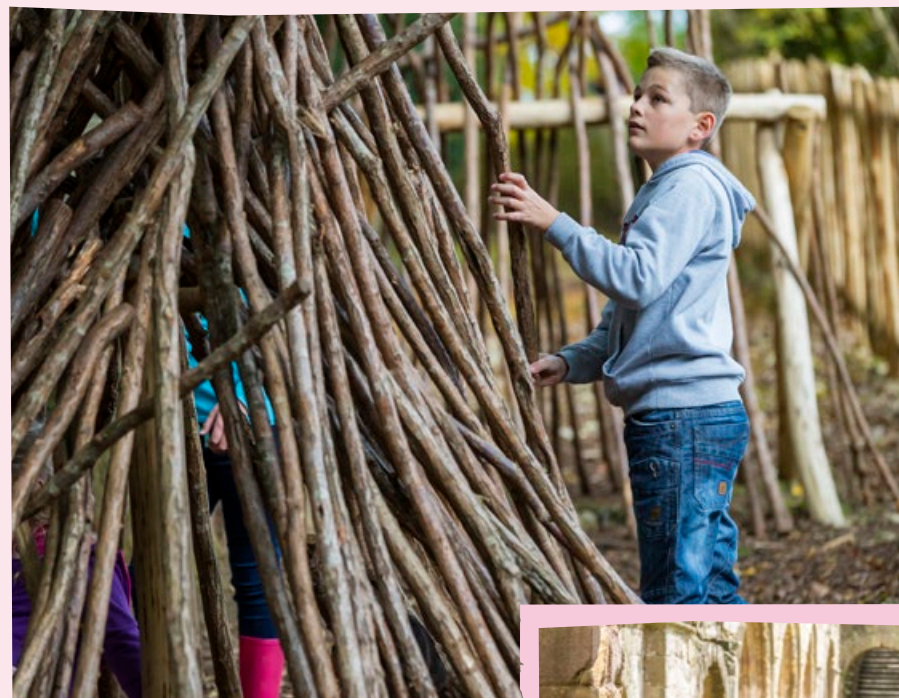
- Continue to embed an inclusive culture in our staff and volunteer teams
- Prepare a Community Engagement Plan to work with under-represented groups and the organisations that support them
- Work with local disability groups to make access improvements to the WHS

Learning

Education and learning are important for passing on the values of World Heritage Sites and ensuring that future generations feel inspired to support and protect them. At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal it includes both formal learning offered to schools and informal visitor activities such as bug box making, pond dipping and interpretation.

Key actions

- Maintain a self-led learning resource for school children
- Continue to develop and strengthen relationships with local schools, colleges and universities
- Provide training in traditional skills through apprenticeships at our new Masonry Centre for Excellence, 'conservation in action' events and workshops
- Work with Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and local schools along the Skell on the 'Watery Wildlife' project to record wildlife in the river



Volunteering

The site couldn't operate without the commitment and enthusiasm of over 300 volunteers. They deliver roles ranging from gardeners, to rangers, to visitor assistants and even organists for St Mary's Church. We are working in partnership with Harrogate District Community Action on the 'Volunteering City of Ripon' project which aims to work with volunteer organisations across Ripon and the surrounding area to develop shared approaches in recruiting, training, managing and supporting volunteers. The project has already started to look at ways to encourage more children and young people to volunteer.



Key actions

- Invest in volunteer training
- Offer regular work experience placements & encourage more young people to volunteer
- Provide more diverse volunteering opportunities

A visitor experience that inspires people

We know that Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal has a big impact on people – a place to make memories and form family traditions. An engaging and inspiring visitor experience helps our visitors and communities to better understand the WHS and form a deeper connection with the heritage, beauty and nature it has to offer.

Feedback from visitors tells us that they feel more interpretation is needed across the WHS and especially around the abbey and water garden. Working with partners as part of the Skell Valley Project we'll look at how we extend that interpretation to the surrounding landscape and the City of Ripon through trails and information hubs.

Key projects planned to enhance the visitor experience at the WHS

The following projects set out on the map are planned over the next plan period with a view to enhancing the overall visitor experience and adding more interpretation across the WHS.

1 The Studley Revealed Project

Enhancing the visitor experience at the Studley entrance and providing much needed interpretation about the designed landscape.

2 Establishing a vision for Quebec

Bringing back to life a lost garden feature of the 18th century landscape.

3 Garden Follies

Reinterpreting and presenting the garden follies.

4 Abbey

Improving the existing abbey interpretation and forming a long term strategy to re-interpret the abbey.

2032 will mark the 900th anniversary of the founding of Fountains Abbey. During this next plan period, we will begin to develop proposals to celebrate this milestone.

5 Stone work

Relocating stone from the Kitchen Bank Stone Store and displaying the abbey stone work to the public in a new visitor exhibition space.

6 Fountains Hall

Trialling and evaluating different approaches for Fountains Hall and settling on a long term strategy.

7 Visitor Centre

Adding interpretation to the Visitor Centre where there is currently none.

8 Deer Park

Delivering a programme of interpretation and activities exploring wildlife and heritage in the deer parks including waymarked trails.

9 Enhanced electricity and wifi provision to the estate



This map does not show the full extent of the World Heritage Site

Theme 4: Local Community Links and Partnerships

The Skell Valley Project in a nutshell

There are 4 overarching themes that make up the Skell Valley Project and a set of 15 individual projects under these themes that will help deliver the project objectives.

The Skell Valley Partnership

The National Trust and Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are the lead partners of 16 organisations who have come together to deliver the Skell Valley Project, which will create a sustainable future for the Skell Valley. Over the last five years partners, farmers, landowners and communities living, working and visiting the valley have worked together to develop and shape the project.

The project is funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, European Regional Development Fund, Wolfson Foundation, Royal Oak Foundation and other donors.

Key actions

- Produce a Legacy Plan for the Skell Valley Project
- Continue to work with INTO (a network of international heritage sites) and other WHSs to share knowledge and skills on tackling global challenges like climate change



Theme 1 – Landscape is resilient

We'll help tackle the threats of climate change and ensure we play our part in a 'green' recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic – making the landscape, its people and the local economy more resilient.



Theme 3 – People are empowered

We'll empower people to deliver projects for nature, heritage and landscape by supporting them in learning the skills they need and removing current barriers that stop people accessing the outdoors and nature around them.



Theme 2 – Nature thrives

We'll reverse the decline in nature, conserve ancient trees and woodlands and the wildlife they support and create nature-rich green spaces near to where people live.



Theme 4 – Heritage is celebrated

We'll save our heritage from the threats of climate change and general neglect and create new and exciting opportunities for people to explore the nature and history of the Skell Valley and be involved in its care.



Sustainable tourism and green travel

As one of the most visited tourist attractions in Yorkshire, with around 600,000 visitors a year, the WHS plays a key role in the local and regional economy. It is a significant employer in the local area and sources a wide range of goods and services locally. In 2022 we signed the UNESCO Sustainable Travel Pledge and are keen to play our part alongside others in promoting sustainable tourism.

As we're located in a rural area with limited public transport to the site it can be difficult to travel to the WHS other than by car. Working with Ripon Business Improvement District, local bus companies and other local businesses we'll seek to improve and promote public transport in the Harrogate and Ripon area. We will also work with partners to develop waymarked and accessible walking routes that connect the WHS to Ripon and the surrounding countryside as part of the 'Exploring the Skell Valley' project.



Key actions

- Work with North Yorkshire Council and other tourism businesses to create a Responsible Tourism Strategy
- Work with partners to deliver the 'Tourism Development in the Skell Valley' project which encourages visitors to stay longer in the local area, spend more and act more sustainably when they're here
- Provide more electric charging points at the WHS
- Improve and promote walking routes that connect the WHS to Ripon and the surrounding countryside

Find out more

We hope that this summary document has given you an insight into the plan, and the wide range of topics it covers.

If you'd like to find out more information then please visit our website:
nationaltrust.org.uk/fountainsabbeywhs

Here you can download the full plan and read it at your leisure.



Working in partnership with



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