



# HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY



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Heart of Neolithic Orkney  
Inscribed on the World  
Heritage List in 1999

World  
Heritage  
Site

Management Plan  
—  
2026—2036



Aerial view of the  
Stones of Stenness

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Visitors to Skara Brae taking part in a pottery session with a potter skilled in the making of Neolithic style pots.  
(© Ken Amer)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney (HONO) was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999 as a Cultural World Heritage Site (WHS). WHS are places that are judged to have Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), transcending national boundaries and of importance for present and future generations. This is a partnership WHS Management Plan agreed by Historic Environment Scotland and Orkney Islands Council.

HONO WHS comprises a group of sites on the island of Mainland in Orkney which date from 3000–2000 BC. The sites are Skara Brae settlement, Maeshowe chambered tomb and the Barnhouse Stone, the Stones of Stenness and the Watch Stone, and the Ring of Brodgar and associated monuments. Individually, the sites are masterpieces of Neolithic design and stonework construction. Collectively, they represent one of the richest surviving Neolithic landscapes in Western Europe.

This Management Plan sets out a ten-year framework for the partners to guide the protection and management of HONO. It encapsulates our shared Vision for the Site, sums up our understanding of the OUV and identifies the key issues that are affecting or will affect the Site and our management of it. It builds upon the results of two previous Management Plans and was informed by consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders. The development process was overseen by the HONO WHS Steering Group, which also oversees delivery of the Plan. The Steering Group is made up of representatives of HES and OIC supported by the Advisory Partners: at present these are Highlands & Islands Enterprise, NatureScot, RSPB and UHI Archaeology Institute.

The Plan includes six long-term Aims for the WHS which look beyond this ten-year management plan period to 2050. The Aims reflect the partner's aspirations for protecting and conserving the OUV; inspiring and engaging people with the WHS, benefiting people and communities in Orkney and elsewhere, interpreting and presenting the Site to the highest standard, responsibly, sustainably and equitably enhancing access to and experience of the WHS, and facilitating a diversity of research which can in turn inform our pursuit of the Aims.

In the near term sixteen strategic Objectives have been designed to address the key challenges and themes facing the WHS and its management. The critical challenges and themes identified are the climate emergency, planning for uncertainty, tourism and access, community involvement, sustainability, and research and learning. To deliver the Objectives a flexible and regularly reviewed Action Plan allows the partners to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

Finally, this Plan also sets out Partnership Principles for its delivery. It considers the wider values of the WHS in addition to the OUV, and sets out a programme of monitoring for the delivery of the Plan and of the state of conservation of the WHS.



## THE VISION

### OUR SHARED ASPIRATIONS FOR THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY 2026-2050

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney and its exceptional testimony to the cultural achievements of the Neolithic peoples of northern Europe will be protected and conserved for present and future generations.

The World Heritage Site will bring social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits to the wider community.

It will offer an exceptional responsible visitor experience, and inspire and catalyse research and learning, widening engagement through participation and discovery.

It will be managed sustainably in ways that contribute to reducing the causes of climate change and address its threat to the Site.

It will contribute to a thriving, sustainable and equitable future for Orkney residents, visitors, and communities of interest worldwide.



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# 1.0 WORLD HERITAGE AND THE MANAGEMENT PLAN



## 1.1 What is World Heritage and Why Does it Matter?

### 1.1.1 WORLD HERITAGE SITES AND THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

World Heritage Sites (WHSs) are exceptional places recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as having such importance that they belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located. Each WHS represents a unique, or the most significant or best, example of the world's cultural and/or natural heritage. This is their Outstanding Universal Value, which transcends national boundaries and is of importance for present and future generations.

World Heritage Status is a high accolade that brings responsibilities and international scrutiny. Once a Site is added to the List, the government of the State where it is located has a duty to protect, conserve and present these Sites for future generations.

*The properties on the World Heritage List are assets held in trust to pass on to generations of the future as their rightful inheritance.*

Budapest Declaration on World Heritage, 2002



Stones of Stenness

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee decides which Sites to inscribe on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee also examines reports on the state of conservation of WHSs on the List and can request that State Parties take action to address conservation issues. It can also add Sites to the List of World Heritage in Danger or, in rare cases, remove them from the World Heritage List.

Three international organisations advise the World Heritage Committee. The most relevant for the Heart of Neolithic Orkney (HONO) is ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites). This is an international, non-governmental organisation which works for the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places. ICOMOS evaluates cultural and mixed properties proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List.

“The overarching benefit of ratifying the World Heritage Convention is that of belonging to an international community of appreciation and concern for universally significant properties that embody a world of outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth.

The States Parties to the Convention, by joining hands to protect and cherish the world’s natural and cultural heritage, express a shared commitment to preserving our legacy for future generations.”

UNESCO

World Heritage United Kingdom  
2023 Annual Conference



World Heritage United Kingdom  
2023 Annual Conference.



## 1.2 World Heritage in Scotland and UK

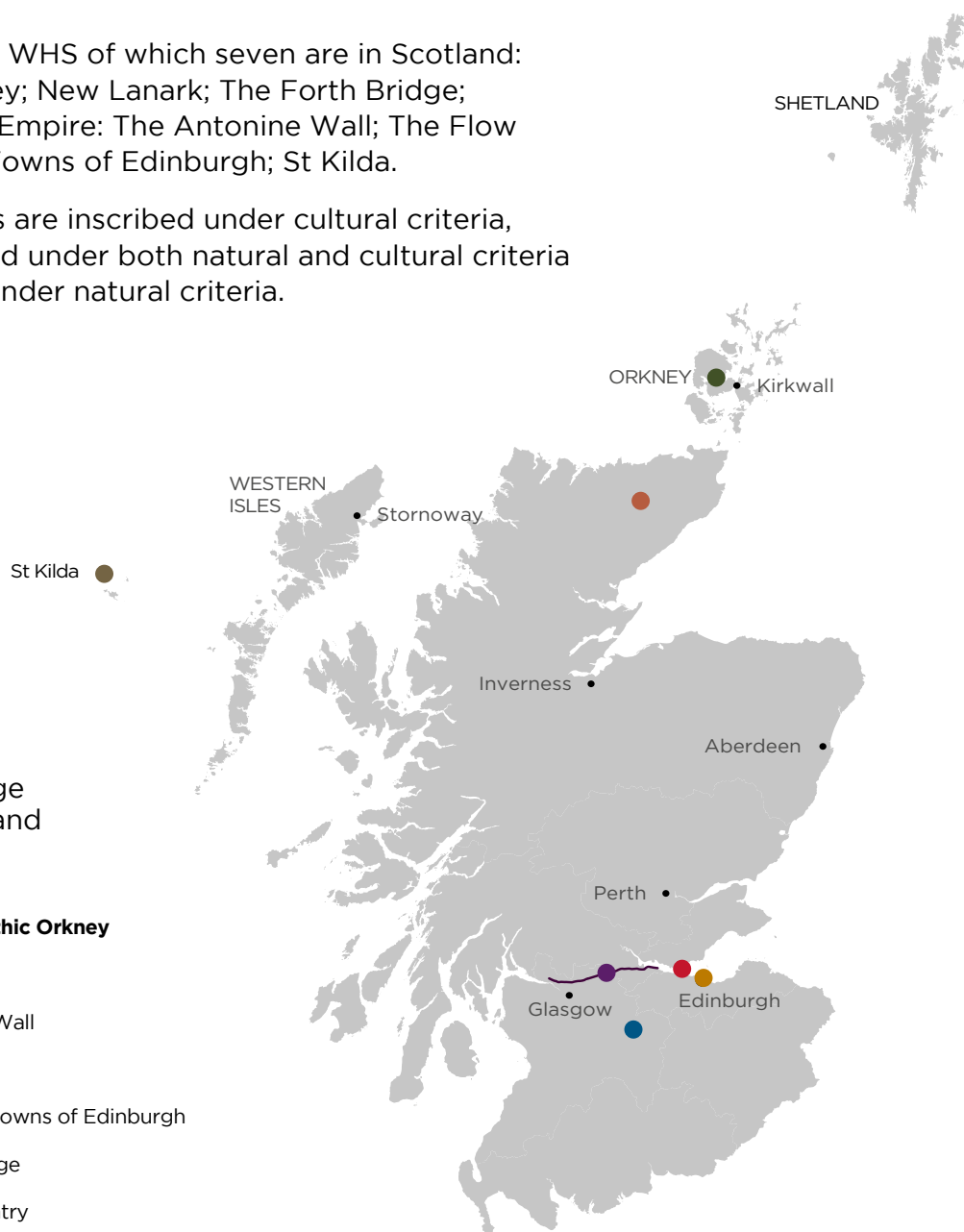
The UK currently has 35 WHS of which seven are in Scotland: Heart of Neolithic Orkney; New Lanark; The Forth Bridge; Frontiers of the Roman Empire: The Antonine Wall; The Flow Country; Old and New Towns of Edinburgh; St Kilda.

Five of Scotland's WHSs are inscribed under cultural criteria, while St Kilda is inscribed under both natural and cultural criteria and The Flow Country under natural criteria.

### World Heritage Sites in Scotland

#### Key

- 1 Heart of Neolithic Orkney
- 2 St Kilda
- 3 The Antonine Wall
- 4 New Lanark
- 5 Old and New Towns of Edinburgh
- 6 The Forth Bridge
- 7 The Flow Country



### 1.2.1 KEY ORGANISATIONS, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

**UK government and Scottish government:** As an international convention, the World Heritage Convention is a reserved matter under the Scotland Act 1998 and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) acts as the UK State Party. Historic England advise them on international heritage issues, including World Heritage. However, heritage legislation, policy and guidance mechanisms are devolved matters and strategic responsibility for World Heritage in Scotland sits with the Culture and Historic Environment Division in the Scottish Government (CHED).

**ICOMOS UK:** The UK National Committee of ICOMOS is an independent charity with a UK-wide and international mission to promote and support best practice in the conservation, care and understanding of the historic environment. They advise on aspects of World Heritage across the UK.



Heart of Neolithic Orkney (© Katie Logan)



St Kilda



The Antonine Wall (© Rediscovering the Antonine Wall)



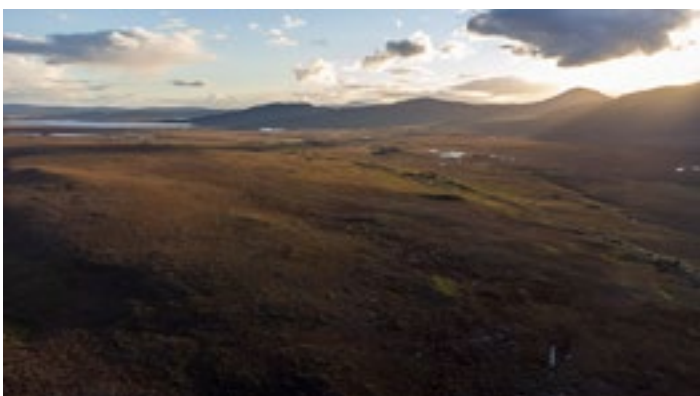
New Lanark



Old and New Towns of Edinburgh (© Laura McRitchie)



Forth Bridge



Flow Country (© Sam Rose)

The formal signatories to the Management Plan are Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Orkney Islands Council (OIC). These signatory Management Partners formally ratify the WHS Management Plan and share accountability for ensuring it is delivered. There are also several Advisory Partners that have important roles in supporting and advising on the development and delivery of the Management Plan where it intersects with their remits. See Section 3.1 for further information about the management and advisory partners for the HONO WHS.

HES is the lead public body for Scotland’s historic environment. HES is a management partner for all six current Scottish WHSs and is also responsible for more than 300 properties in care that are of national importance and internationally significant collections. HES also has statutory functions within the planning system and are responsible for determining consent for works to scheduled monuments, providing advice as a statutory consultee and for designating a range of historic assets and places, including Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, and Battlefields.

Orkney Islands Council is the Local Authority. They are a key partner in the protection and management of the WHS, both through the development and implementation of planning policy and through their engagement with the Management Plan.



The Stones of Stenness





A member of Historic Environment Scotland's Technical Conservation team, laser scanning Skara Brae.



Information board with details of mitigations for site protection and biodiversity at the Ring of Brodgar.

## 1.3 Protecting World Heritage at HONO

World Heritage designation does not result in additional direct legal protections. Instead, HONO is protected through the planning system and the designation of the component sites of the WHS as Scheduled Monuments.

The WHS is protected under the following policies (see Appendix 1 for more detail):

**Scotland’s National Planning Framework 4 (2023)** requires that Development proposals affecting a WHS or its setting will only be supported where their OUV is protected and preserved.

**The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) (2019)** sets out a series of principles and policies for the recognition, care, and sustainable management of the historic environment.

**Scheduled Monuments Consents Policy (2019)** sets out the HES policy for making decisions about consents at scheduled monuments and supports HEPS.

**Managing Change in the Historic Environment** should be used to inform local planning policies and to help make decisions about planning applications that could affect a WHS.

**The Orkney Local Development Plan (2017)** and **Scotland’s National Planning Framework 4 (2023)** form the current Local Development Plan for Orkney. Together they establish policy to protect the WHS and its setting from inappropriate development in order to protect and preserve the OUV.

OIC is reviewing the Local Development Plan and by 2028 will have produced a new Local Development Plan to sit alongside **Scotland’s National Planning Framework 4** providing policy to protect the WHS and its OUV. Progress on the review of the Local Development Plan can be found at [www.orkney.gov.uk](http://www.orkney.gov.uk).

## 1.4 The Management Plan

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre’s Operational Guidelines require every WHS to have effective management structures in place to ensure its preservation and sustainable development and to safeguard the Site’s Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for present and future generations. A Management Plan is essential to guide decision making.

UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies recommend that World Heritage Site Management Plans should have an overall vision for the Site, long-term aims, and shorter-term policies and objectives. Timetabled action plans can be developed from these policies and objectives, informed by the aims and guided by the vision.

This Management Plan sets out how HONO WHS will be managed over the next ten years. It encapsulates the Partner’s shared vision for the Site, sums up our understanding of the Site’s Outstanding Universal Value (Chapter 2), identifies the key issues that are affecting or will affect the Site and our management of it (Chapter 4), and lays out the Objectives designed to address these issues from 2026-2036 (Chapter 5).

This Plan was developed by the management partners, HES and OIC,

and the wider HONO WHS Steering Group (Chapter 3). Like all WHS Management Plans it depends on consensus and commitment from the different partners and stakeholders in the Site for its effectiveness.

#### 1.4.1 THE ORKNEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE PROGRAMME

Islands Growth Deal Orkney Islands Council (OIC) in partnership with Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eillean Siar received commitment from both UK and Scottish Government to support a range of projects amounting to £100M investment over a period of 10 years across the three island groups. The Orkney World Heritage Site Programme is one of these. Responding to the commitments within the HONO Management Plan, this Programme is led by OIC in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland and is seen by the partners as an important opportunity to secure external funding to help realise the vision and shared aspirations set out in the Management Plan. Subject to an approved Full Business Case, consultation and necessary approvals and consents being in place and working with the community and stakeholders, the Orkney World Heritage Site Programme seeks to improve opportunities for the local community and visitors to get to and between sites, enhance the experience, making a positive contribution that will safeguard the sites for the future.

## 1.5 Producing the Plan: Consultations and Assessments

In late 2019, independent consultants sought the views of local and wider communities. The results of this were published online in early 2020 as The Community View: Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan Review 2020. The summary report can be downloaded from the HES website. Two “Place Standard” exercises were also carried out at the West Mainland Agricultural Show, Dounby in 2019 and 2022.

### **Four community priorities emerged strongly from these consultation exercises:**

- Communication - Improvements required in the communication between the WHS managers and Orkney residents and businesses.
- Managing Visitors - Increases in visitor numbers raising mixed views towards tourism and visitors, and a more collaborative approach required to manage this.
- Infrastructure and local facilities - Improvements to infrastructure and local facilities.
- Expanding educational opportunities - Limited engagement of young people with the WHS after primary school.

### **The Place Standard responses also highlighted:**

- Community involvement in the WHS
- Climate change

A **Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI)** assessment undertaken in 2019 identified of key climate change risks to the OUV of HONO WHS. Download the report here. It also captured a series of significant values associated with the WHS generated by the participants, half of whom were Orkney residents, demonstrating the significance and value of the WHS to local people.

- Intangible
- Heritage Practice
- Biodiversity and Ecological
- Archaeological
- Economic
- Recreational
- Natural Systems
- Scenery/ Landscape and Seascape (Aesthetics and Experience)

A series of impact assessments were carried out as part of the development of the Management Plan. See Appendix 3 for information. One of these, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), was available for public consultation alongside the draft Management Plan. After consultation closed, comments were used to inform the final version of the Management Plan. A SEA Post Adoption Statement was published (see Appendix 3). The Action Plan will be accompanied by a sustainability checklist to guide decisions.

The draft Management Plan was available for consultation for six weeks in spring 2025. A report on the results summarised the responses and was used to inform the final Management Plan. A majority of respondents agreed that the right challenges and themes had been identified for the management plan, and well over half agreed that the Plan addressed the needs the challenges.

The issues raised most frequently were:

- Visitor infrastructure
- Physical impacts of visitors on the WHS
- Community involvement
- Desire to see tangible action addressing these

Some issues raised were outwith the remit of the Management Plan to address, in particular comments about cruise tourism to Orkney as a whole. However, these responses were connected to concerns about environmental sustainability, site preservation, and community involvement and engagement, so remain relevant even while this Plan cannot directly address the wider question of cruise. The consultation report has also been shared with the Orkney World Heritage Site Programme (see Section 1.4.1).

The consultation report is available on the HES website in the closed consultations section.



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Aerial view of Skara  
Brae Neolithic village  
and Skail Bay





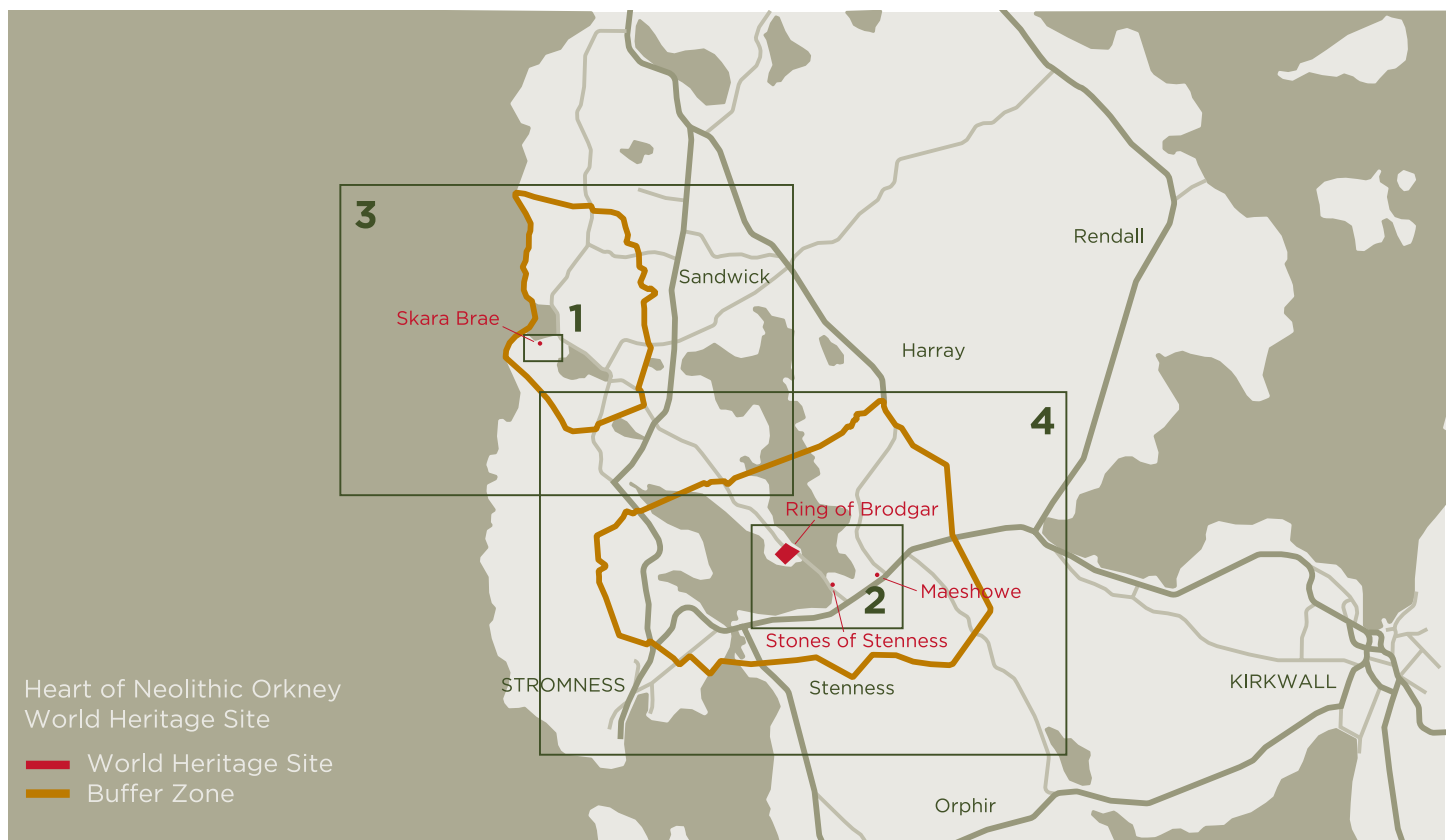
## 2.0 THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY



### 2.1 The World Heritage Site

Orkney is an archipelago of over 70 islands lying 15 km off the northeastern extremity of mainland Scotland where the North Atlantic meets the North Sea. The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site is in the west of Mainland, the largest island of the archipelago.

Map showing the location of the World Heritage Site and Buffer Zone. The black boxes are the areas shown in more detail in the numbered maps that follow.



Map showing Skara Brae and the boundary of the WHS inscription



Four sites together make up the World Heritage Site:

- The settlement of Skara Brae, located on the Bay of Skail on the north-west coast of the island of Mainland.

The other three monuments and their associated standing stones and mounds in central West Mainland about 7km south east of Skara Brae:

- Maeshowe chambered tomb and the associated Barnhouse Stone lie to the east of the south end of the Loch of Harray.
- The Stones of Stenness and the nearby Watch Stone are located near the shore of the Loch of Stenness just to the south of the Loch of Harray.
- The Ring of Brodgar and a series of associated mounds and a stone setting known as the Comet Stone lie a short distance to the north, on the peninsula that divides the Loch of Harray from the Loch of Stenness. The larger mounds are named Salt Knowe, Fresh Knowe, South Knowe and Plumcake Mound.

Between the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness a causeway bridge links the two peninsulas and divides the lochs of Stenness and Harray.

All four sites are Properties in Care, which means they are managed by HES on behalf of Scottish Ministers. The World Heritage property boundary is the same as the boundary of these Properties in Care. Only these four main monuments and the associated standing stones and mounds described above are included in the Site that is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

More information about the WHS and its monuments, including detailed descriptions, their history, discovery, how to visit and more can be found via Appendix 1.

Map showing the location of the Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, Maeshowe, the Watch Stone and Barnhouse Stone, and the boundaries of the WHS inscription.



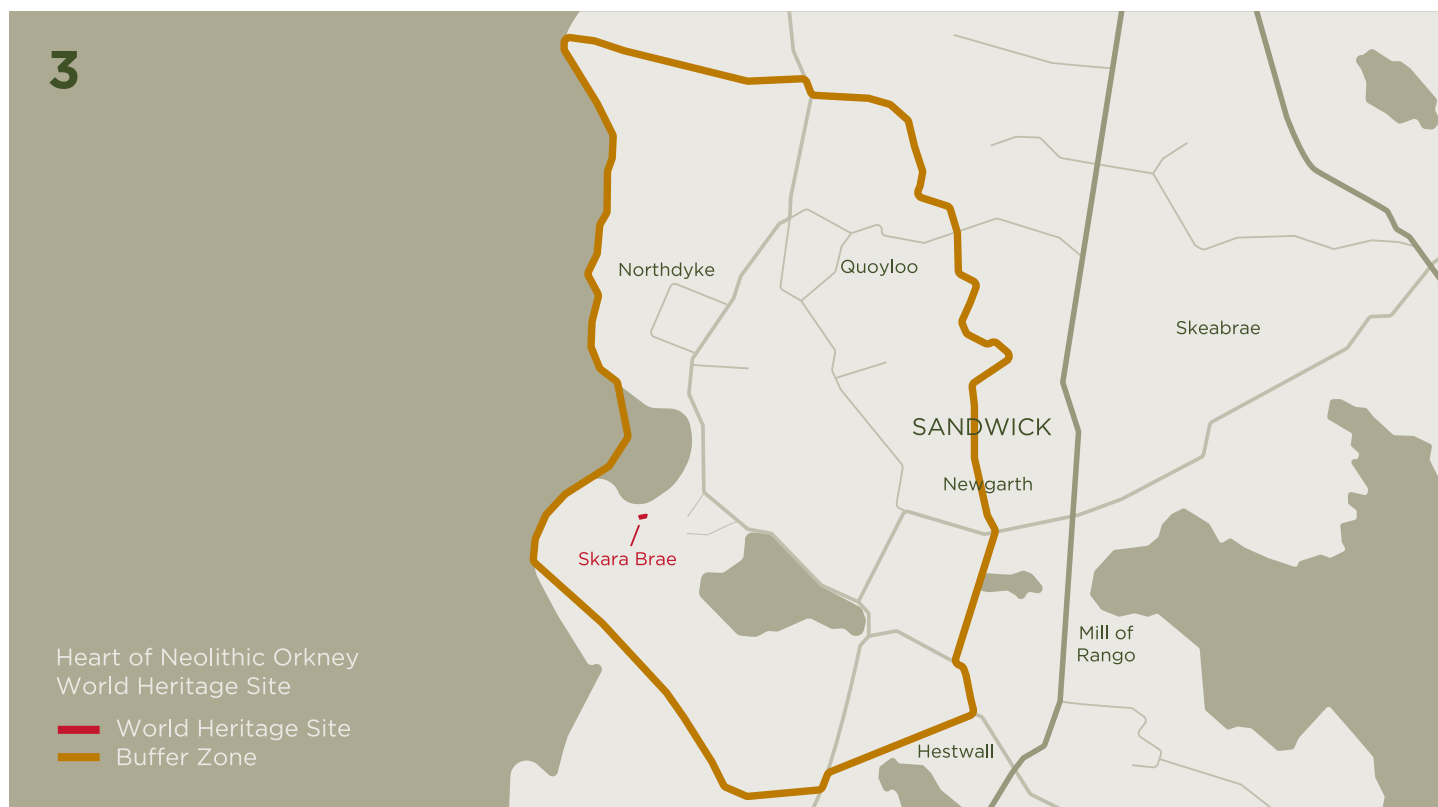
## 2.2 The Buffer Zone and Wider Context

As defined in the UNESCO Operational Guidelines, a WHS Buffer Zone is “an area surrounding the World Heritage Site which has complementary legal restrictions placed on its use and development to give an added layer of protection to the World Heritage Site”

A two-part Buffer Zone surrounds the HONO WHS, one section centred on Skara Brae and the other on the central West Mainland group of monuments (see Figure 2). The Buffer Zone is recognised in the 2017 Orkney Local Development Plan, where it is referred to as the “Inner Sensitive Zone”.

In addition to the Buffer Zone, the Local Development Plan recognises that the monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas were deliberately situated in a vast topographic bowl formed by a series of visually interconnecting sensitive ridgelines that stretch across to Hoy. These ridgelines extend beyond the boundary of the Buffer Zone. The importance of these ridgelines is recognised in the Local Development Plan (as ‘Sensitive Ridgelines’), and additional protection is provided to them through Policy; hence safeguarding a key aspect of the setting of the WHS. This landscape is one of the most sensitive in Scotland, forming part of the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area (NSA) and comprising the setting for this collection of internationally significant monuments.

Map showing the boundary of the Buffer Zone around Skara Brae



The monuments are also visually linked to other contemporary and later monuments around the lochs, and they are a fundamental part of a wider, highly complex, archaeological landscape. Because of this, large-scale or tall development outside of the Buffer Zone also has the potential to impact the setting of the WHS.

When developments are proposed in the Buffer Zones this should act as a trigger for consultation so that potential effects on the OUV of the WHS can be taken into account by developers and decision-makers, in line with national and local policy.

As part of the review of the Local Development Plan OIC will develop Planning Guidance for the Historic Environment including the WHS.



Illustration of a Neolithic pot

Map showing the boundary of the Buffer Zone around the Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, and Maeshowe



## 2.3 Outstanding Universal Value

WHSs are inscribed on the World Heritage List because UNESCO considers that they have Outstanding Universal Value (OUV): that is, their cultural and/or natural significance is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. OUV is a cornerstone of the protection of WHS for UNESCO and for States Parties, and protection of OUV is now built into guidance for heritage protection across the UK.

The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) for HONO WHS can only be amended by UNESCO. This Statement provides a clear understanding of the reasons for the Site's inscription on the World Heritage List, and of what needs to be managed in order to protect and manage the Site to sustain the OUV for the long term.

For the World Heritage Committee and the Advisory Bodies, the SOUV is an essential reference point for monitoring, Periodic Reporting, possible inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger and deletion from the List.

There are ten formal criteria for OUV, six for cultural heritage and four for natural heritage. HONO fulfils criteria (i) to (iv):

- **Criterion (i)** – to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- **Criterion (ii)** – to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.
- **Criterion (iii)** – to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared.
- **Criterion (iv)** – to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

World Heritage properties must possess integrity which means a Site must be of sufficient size, and its components must be sufficiently complete, to demonstrate OUV. Cultural WHS must also demonstrate authenticity: which relates to the credibility of evidence for meeting the above criteria, and an authentic representation of the historical record of the site's cultural and natural attributes. Effective protection and management measures to safeguard the OUV must be in place. This means implementing legal, regulatory and management frameworks to ensure the sustainable conservation and enjoyment of the WHS for current and future generations.



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### 2.3.1 STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The following is an extract from the HONO WHS Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). This was accepted by the WH Committee in 2013. See Appendix 2 for the full Statement.

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The Orkney Islands lie 15 km north of the coast of Scotland. The monuments are in two areas, some 6.6 km apart on the island of Mainland, the largest in the archipelago. The group of monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney consists of a remarkably well-preserved settlement, a large chambered tomb, and two stone circles with surrounding henges, together with a number of associated burial and ceremonial sites. The group constitutes a major relict cultural landscape graphically depicting life five thousand years ago in this remote archipelago.

The four monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney are unquestionably among the most important Neolithic sites in Western Europe. These are the Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, Maeshowe and Skara Brae. They provide exceptional evidence of the material and spiritual standards as well as the beliefs and social structures of this dynamic period of prehistory.

The four main monuments, consisting of the four substantial surviving standing stones of the elliptical Stones of Stenness and the surrounding ditch and bank of the henge, the thirty-six surviving stones of the circular Ring of Brodgar with the thirteen Neolithic and Bronze Age mounds that are found around it and the stone setting known as the Comet Stone, the large stone chambered tomb of Maeshowe, whose passage points close to midwinter sunset, and the sophisticated settlement of Skara Brae with its stone built houses connected by narrow roofed passages, together with the Barnhouse Stone and the Watch Stone, serve as a paradigm of the megalithic culture of north-western Europe that is unparalleled. The property is characteristic of the farming culture prevalent from before 4000 BC in northwest Europe. It provides exceptional evidence of, and demonstrates with exceptional completeness, the domestic, ceremonial, and burial practices of a now vanished 5000-year old culture and illustrates the material standards, social structures and ways of life of this dynamic period of prehistory, which gave rise to Avebury and Stonehenge (England), Bend of the Boyne (Ireland) and Carnac (France).

The monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas were deliberately situated within a vast topographic bowl formed by a series of visually interconnected ridgelines stretching from Hoy to Greeny Hill and back. They are also visually linked to other contemporary and later monuments around the lochs. They thus form a fundamental part of a wider, highly complex archaeological landscape, which stretches over much of Orkney. The current, open and comparatively undeveloped landscape around the monuments allows an understanding of the apparently formal connections between the monuments and their natural settings. The wealth of contemporary burial and occupation sites in the buffer zone constitute an exceptional relict cultural landscape that supports the value of the main sites.

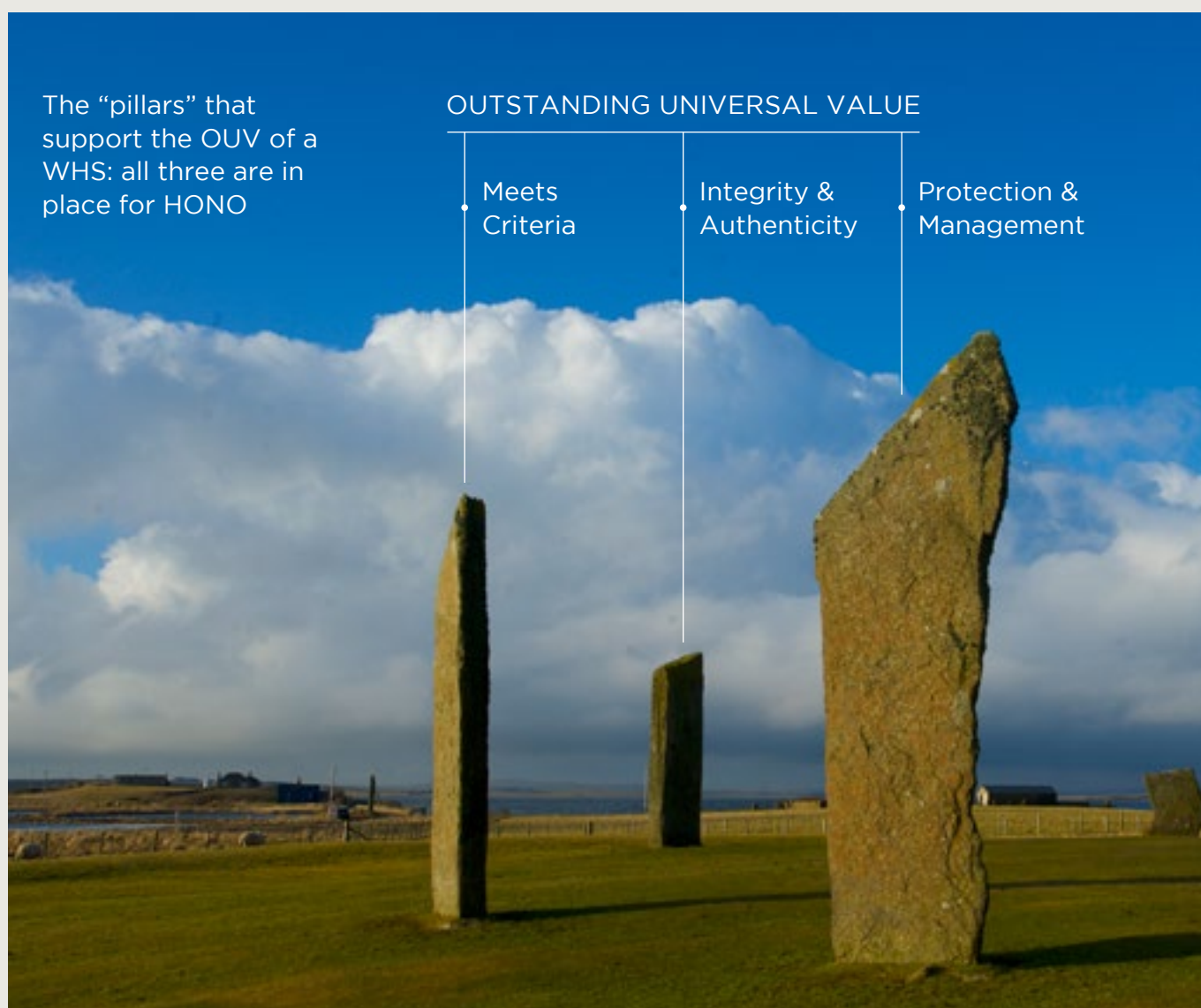


Image: The Stones of Stenness (© Rob McDougall)

**Criterion (i):** *The major monuments of the Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, the chambered tomb of Maeshowe, and the settlement of Skara Brae display the highest sophistication in architectural accomplishment; they are technologically ingenious and monumental masterpieces.*

**Criterion (ii):** *The Heart of Neolithic Orkney exhibits an important interchange of human values during the development of the architecture of major ceremonial complexes in the British Isles, Ireland and northwest Europe.*

**Criterion (iii):** *Through the combination of ceremonial, funerary and domestic sites, the Heart of Neolithic Orkney bears a unique testimony to a cultural tradition that flourished between about 3000 BC and 2000 BC. The state of preservation of Skara Brae is unparalleled amongst Neolithic settlement sites in northern Europe.*

**Criterion (iv):** *The Heart of Neolithic Orkney is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and archaeological landscape that illustrate a significant stage of human history when the first large ceremonial monuments were built.*

## 2.4 The Attributes of OUV

Attributes are elements, processes or features that convey the OUV. Identifying Attributes and understanding their interrelationships is crucial to understanding OUV and to ensuring it is protected and managed. They can be physical features, relationships, and linkages, and tangible or intangible aspects or processes.

At HONO, the Attributes are derived from the SOUV (see Appendix 2). The Brief Synthesis, Criteria for Inscription and the Statements of Authenticity and Integrity are the foundation of the Attributes.

### UNESCO's Operational Guidelines state that Attributes can include:

“form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions, techniques and management systems; location and setting; language, and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; other internal and external factors”.

Conservation of the OUV of a WHS is accomplished through the safeguarding, conserving, and effective management of its distinctive and unique Attributes. It is therefore important to identify and describe a Site's Attributes.

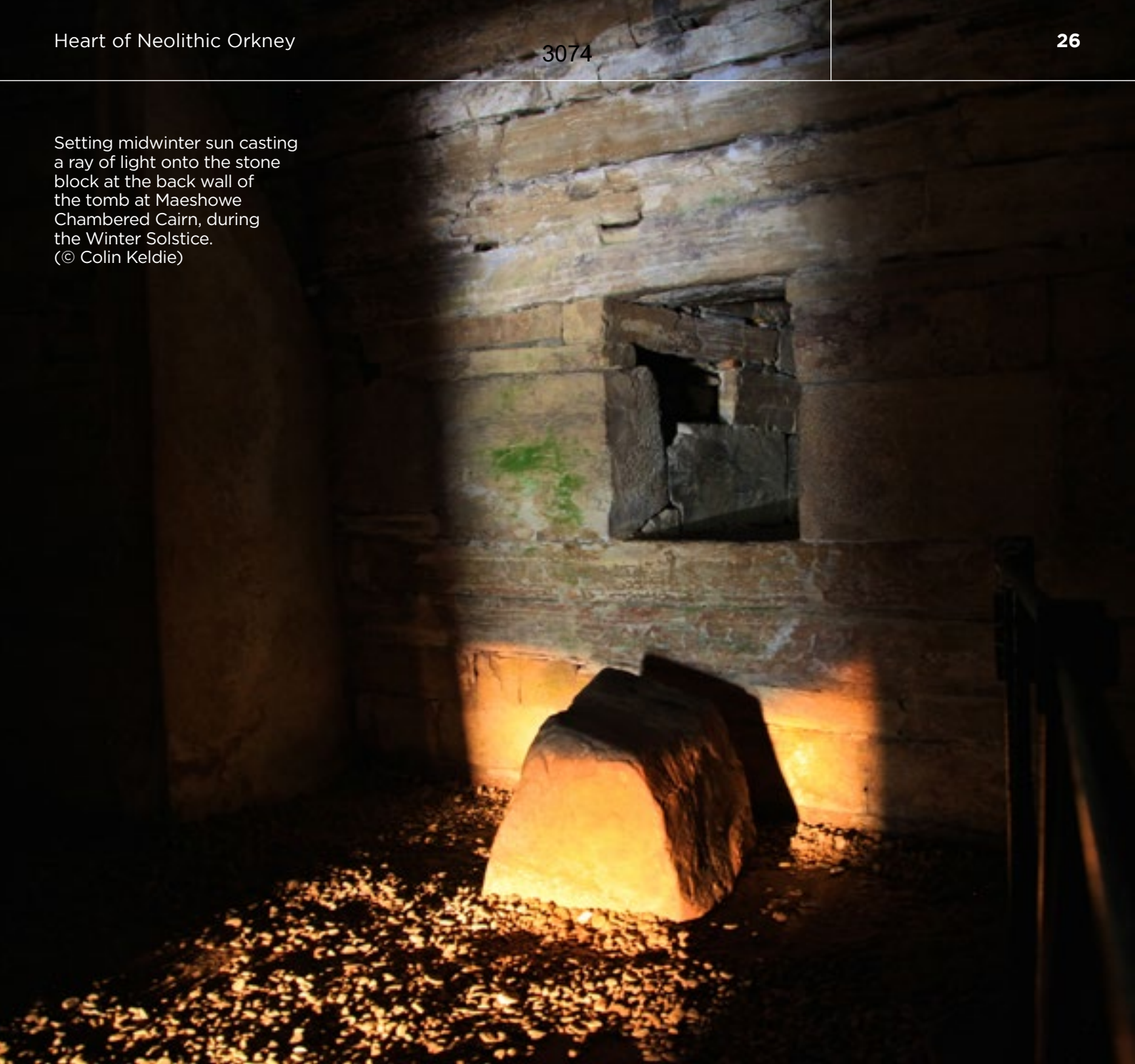


Interpretation panel



Detail of carved  
stone incised  
dragon, Maeshowe  
Chambered Cairn

Setting midwinter sun casting a ray of light onto the stone block at the back wall of the tomb at Maeshowe Chambered Cairn, during the Winter Solstice.  
(© Colin Keldie)



Wildflowers at the Ring of Brodgar (© Claire Smith)



Skara Brae



## Attribute 1:

### **The extensive physical remains of the four major monuments and their associated funerary and ceremonial sites.**

The OUV lies not only in the individual monuments but also in their collective presence. It is located in the extensive physical remains and interconnected presence of the four major monuments and their associated sites, and in the way the ensemble of monuments represents the breadth of Neolithic life - ceremonial, funerary and domestic - in Orkney during this significant period in human history 5000-4000 years ago.

- The sophisticated Skara Brae settlement site is exceptionally well-preserved. Its features include two distinct, visible periods of construction and use, Neolithic carvings on the walls, as well as preserved remains of stone 'furniture'. The individual buildings are linked by covered passageways, set within a complex midden deposit.
- The great Ring of Brodgar stone circle with its 36 extant stones, two causeways, massive surrounding rock-cut ditch and henge, and the nine Bronze Age barrows and four large mounds that cluster around it: Plumcake Mound, Fresh Knowe, South Knowe, Salt Knowe, and a stone setting, the Comet Stone.
- The elliptical Stones of Stenness stone circle and henge with its four surviving monoliths standing up to six metres in height, single causeway, stone setting and central hearth, and the associated standing stone The Watchstone.
- The monumental Maeshowe chambered cairn with its 10 metre-long entrance passageway aligned on the midwinter sunset and associated standing stone the Barnhouse Stone, and the much later Runic inscriptions left inside by Norse travellers.

Maeshowe



Stones of Stenness





Scheduled monuments around Brodgar and Stenness



Maeshowe entrance passageway. (© Colin Keldie)

## Attribute 2:

### **The intricate interplay between the monuments and between the monuments and the wider archaeological landscape forms a rich visual and archaeological narrative.**

The monuments are part of the wider archaeological tapestry. The proximity of monuments and settlements, and what their remains reveal, tell stories of how people lived, and demonstrate the relationships between the domestic and ceremonial architecture. This interconnectedness offers invaluable insights into the social dynamics, cultural practices, and religious beliefs of the Neolithic inhabitants. The land reveals patterns of human activity, and the monuments not only stand as isolated structures but as integral components of a larger narrative.

- The WHS monuments understood at inscription as the best-preserved elements of a complex relict archaeological landscape, carefully located in the cultural/natural landscape by their builders.
- The striking visual interrelationship between the monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas and between these monuments and other contemporary and later monuments around the lochs. This relationship forms a fundamental aspect of their importance without which none of the monuments can be fully understood.
- The relationship between the WHS monuments and an exceptionally rich archaeological landscape in the Buffer Zone and beyond, including the Barnhouse settlement, Ness of Brodgar site, and many contemporary and later archaeological monuments and sites in central West Mainland, including recent findings made via extensive geophysical survey.
- A specific relationship between the Stones of Stenness and the nearby settlement of Barnhouse suggested by similarities in the layout of interior features is evidence of a society whose domestic architecture and ceremonial sites were inextricably linked.
- The location of Skara Brae in the wider Bay of Skail with its variety of archaeological sites, and the geophysical evidence for further areas of contemporary settlement adjoining the excavated settlement site itself.
- The longevity of the central West Mainland sites, which can be seen to exert an influence on archaeologically recorded activity through to the Iron Age and first century CE.





Wildflowers at the Ring of Brodgar



Selfheal, Common Seal & Skylark

### Attribute 3:

## **The relationship of the monuments with the surrounding landscape and environment.**

The placement of each monument provides a striking visual relationship between them and the wider landscape, each being pieces of a larger visual picture and wider historical narrative. The three central West Mainland monuments sit within a topographical bowl, surrounded by sensitive ridgelines that offer striking views and evidence the strategic positioning of the monuments, emphasising their importance in the landscape. Amidst the rural countryside and bodies of water, they stand as prominent features, connecting past and present. Despite environmental changes of thousands of years, the open landscape around the monuments remains relatively unchanged, with remaining phenomena such as the solar alignment still providing awe and intrigue.

- The deliberate location of the monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas within a vast topographic bowl formed by a series of visually interconnecting sensitive ridgelines, including important view to the Hoy hills.
- The central West Mainland monuments as dominant features in the present-day rural landscape.
- The careful positioning of the monumental Ring of Brodgar so as to dominate the skyline from across different directions and over a considerable distance.
- The contribution to the sense that these monuments are situated at the centre of a highly significant cultural landscape informed by the connections to the physical landscape and waterscape.
- The present landscape around the monuments is comparatively undeveloped and open. This setting allows for an understanding of the connections between the monuments and their open landscape or waterscape, despite the extensive environmental and ecological changes since the Neolithic.
- The alignment of the Maeshowe passageway on the Barnhouse stone and beyond to the hills of Hoy and the midwinter sunset is a striking example of a solar alignment. This underscores the significance of seasonal change and corresponding astronomical alignments to the Neolithic builders of the Maeshowe and to their funerary, ritual and ceremonial practices.
- The contemporary sense of place evoked by the interrelationship of the monuments and the surrounding landscape and waterscape and the wider fauna, flora and associated soundscapes.



Barnhouse Stone

Coastal erosion  
near Skara Brae







Interior of Maeshowe

House 1 at Skara Brae  
(© Colin Keldie)



The Stones of Stenness  
(© Claire Smith)

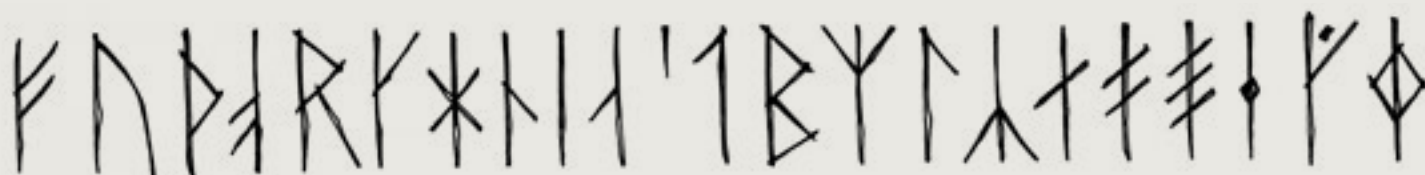
## Attribute 4:

**The architectural sophistication and exceptional preservation of the monuments.**

The monuments and settlements remain as remarkable feats of ancient engineering, demonstrating architectural brilliance and preservation. The archaeological remains are remarkably intact offering insights into ancient materials, craftsmanship and scale, each monument speak to the ingenuity and skill of their builders. Through centuries of change that these elements have endured, they stand preserved, offering a tangible link to past cultures.

- The outstanding preservation of the domestic architecture at Skara Brae due to its construction in stone and the range of artefacts found at excavation enable a unique insight into the realities of living in a Neolithic village.
- The Ring of Brodgar is one of the best preserved and finest truly circular Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age henges known in the British Isles. It represents the architectural culmination of the dense and extended use of this part of Orkney for early prehistoric ceremonial and funerary purposes. Its construction involved considerable manpower and coherent organisation to excavate a massive rock-cut ditch, and quarry, transport and erect up to sixty stones.
- The high degree of preservation of the archaeological remains, including organic materials, below ground at the four sites, none of which have been completely excavated.
- The scale of Maeshowe, the refinement of its design, and the quality of its masonry and the construction of the mound being integral to the internal stone chamber, make it an outstanding architectural achievement.
- The nature and sophistication of the physical remains, including the materials chosen (stone, clay, earth and midden), the craft and skill exhibited, and the scale of undertaking as a testament of the ingenuity of the builders.
- The impressive height and sense of scale of the surviving stones at Stones of Stenness.
- The preservation of the central West Mainland monuments in a form that is attested to by antiquarian views made since the 17th century, and by the records made following the discovery and early excavations at Skara Brae in the 19th century.

Carved runes found within Maeshowe.





Excavations at the  
Ness of Brodgar in 2021  
(© Laura Mackenzie)



Excavations at House 2  
Skara Brae in 1927

## Attribute 5:

### **The role of the WHS monuments in the development of archaeology as a discipline.**

The monuments played a pivotal role in the shaping of the field of archaeology over the centuries. From when antiquarians took interest in the 18th and 19th centuries, the emergence of archaeology as a scientific discipline became more well known, and the area defined as the WHS was at the forefront of archaeological thought and discoveries and research here influenced global considerations of ancient civilisations. As archaeology continues to evolve, so does our understanding of the WHS and the broader Neolithic landscape.

- The West Mainland sites served as a focus of antiquarian interest and investigation in the 18th and 19th centuries. The 20th century saw excavations at Skara Brae as archaeology developed as a scientific discipline. The sites thus played an important role in the development of archaeological thought. The Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness and Maeshowe were amongst the first archaeological sites in Britain to be protected under the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act.
- Skara Brae occupies an iconic position in popular knowledge, in part as a consequence of the work of the first Abercromby Professor of Archaeology, Professor Gordon Childe at Skara Brae in the early 20th century. Through his work Skara Brae came to occupy a foundational role in many considerations of the development of a farming society at a global level.
- The continuing refinement of understanding of the WHS and its monuments and of the broader Neolithic through research and new discoveries, within the WHS boundaries and in the Buffer Zone and beyond.



Artifacts excavated at Skara Brae

## 2.5 The Wider Values

### 2.5.1 COMMUNITY VALUES

**In addition to OUV, all WHSs have many other associated values.**

**UNESCO recognises that**

*“These other values are part of the natural and cultural richness of the property, and the harmonious protection, conservation and management of all values is an objective of good conservation practice. Understanding local values means consulting local people [...] Local people are a primary source of information about local values.”*

(UNESCO Resource Manual, [Preparing World Heritage Nominations](#))

Effectively managing the HONO WHS presents the challenge of not only protecting the OUV but considering the wider range of values associated with the Site in a holistic manner. As demonstrated by the results of the community engagement (see Section 1.5), the people of Orkney, as the community inhabiting the landscape, feel a sense of ownership and stewardship over the Site, the presence of which contributes to the islands' sense of place and identity.

Local communities have clearly indicated that they value the intangible aspects of the WHS including its sense of tranquillity, presence in traditional songs and culture, its inspiration to artists, myths and stories related to the WHS and the memories and identity it inspires. Biodiversity, ecology, the natural environment and the scenery are also of value, as are the ongoing heritage practices such as archaeology, conservation and application of traditional skills. Also valued are the recreational activities including sightseeing, birdwatching, fishing and walking and cycling through the WHS.

Engagement with local communities has also highlighted the need to continue to work to better understand the full range of values associated with the WHS and Buffer Zone, including through encouraging research. This is also important as we make decisions in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Incorporating these values and aspirations into the future management of the site is a priority for the partners.



HONO WHS Community Map



2.5.2 NATURAL HERITAGE VALUES

The World Heritage Centre and advisory bodies increasingly emphasise the integration of cultural and natural heritage. While HONO was inscribed as a cultural WHS it is inextricably connected to the landscapes and habitats that surround it. Orkney has been inhabited for the past 9,000 years, and farming people were changing the landscape from their arrival 6,000 years ago. Management of the WHS must recognise the ways that natural and cultural heritage influence and interconnect with one another. Increasing pressures from climate change (Section 3.3 and 4.1) and nature loss on the landscapes and ecological and natural systems are so interwoven with the past and present of the WHS that it is critical that we do so.

There are multiple natural heritage designations within or partially within the Buffer Zone, recognising key habitats and geological heritage, and the RSPB Brodgar Reserve adjoins the Ring of Brodgar on three sides. Part of the WHS and Buffer Zone falls within the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area. Harray Loch is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) and Stenness Loch is both an SSSI and a Special Area of Conservation (See Appendix 4 for a map showing natural heritage and landscape designations relative to the WHS and Buffer Zone).

Biodiversity action plans have previously been carried out for all the WHS monuments, and management of the meadow at the Ring of Brodgar was developed in consultation with RSPB to encourage biodiversity, but much more

remains to be done to ensure that we manage natural and cultural heritage interests holistically for the benefit of both. As landowners and managers, HES and OIC, plus advisory partners, have a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, in line with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. By ensuring any new development proposals are sensitively located, designed and implemented any potential impacts to biodiversity can be reduced, and opportunities to make positive contributions to biodiversity encouraged.

Flat-stalked pondweed



*“By regarding heritage as both cultural and natural, the Convention reminds us of the ways in which people interact with nature, and of the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.”*

World Heritage Convention

Visitors enjoying a guided tour of the Ring of Brodgar led by a Historic Environment Scotland Ranger



Community members taking part in a Peedie Pottery session at Maeshowe Visitor Centre



Site staff welcoming visitors to Skara Brae at the visitor centre



Learners visiting Maeshowe Chambered Cairn as part of the Historic Environment Scotland Heritage remixed project in Orkney in 2021



A group of visitors on a guided tour of the Ring of Brodgar



Solstice Art workshop with  
Stenness Primary School  
(© Colin Keldie)



## 3.0 PEOPLE AND THE PLAN: PARTNERS, STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY



### 3.1 The Management Plan Partners

As stated in Section 1.2.1, the formal signatories to the Management Plan are HES and OIC who formally ratify the WHS Management Plan. They are supported by a number of Advisory Partners, who bring valuable input and insight in their respective areas.

#### SIGNATORY PARTNERS



**Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** is the lead body for Scotland's historic environment; a charity dedicated to the advancement of heritage, culture, education, and environmental protection. All four main monuments and the associated standing stones and mounds that make up the WHS are designated as Scheduled Monuments and are Properties in Care, managed by HES on behalf of Scottish Ministers, under the terms of the 1979 AMAA Act. This includes caring for the physical condition of the sites, managing visitors at the staffed and unstaffed sites, and providing interpretation and engagement. HES has a lead role in all Scotland's World Heritage properties. HES is also responsible for determining applications for scheduled monument consent, providing advice to local planning authorities on listed building and conservation area consent and planning applications, and is a consultee for Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments.



**Orkney Islands Council (OIC)** is the Local Authority acting for the good of all Orkney: its people, communities, culture, environment and economy, as set out in the [Council Plan 2023 - 2028 \(orkney.gov.uk\)](#). OIC has responsibility for a diverse range of services relevant to management of the WHS and owns and maintains the car parks at the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness. It oversees various key services that are directly relevant to the management and protection of the WHS, including roads and public transport, marine services (which covers cruise ship access to Orkney), economic development, development management, and coastal protection. OIC also implements a range of statutory development planning and management functions and employs a County Archaeologist to maintain the Sites and Monuments Record for Orkney and provide archaeological advice for development management. OIC manages several museums, including the Orkney Museum which holds a collection of artefacts from Skara Brae, and various visitor centres and sites, one of which is the reconstructed Neolithic settlement at Barnhouse in the WHS Buffer Zone.

## ADVISORY PARTNERS



**Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)** is the economic and community development agency for the north and west of Scotland. Their purpose is to help build a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy across the Highlands and Islands, attracting more people to live, work, study, invest and visit here.



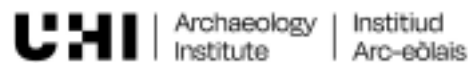
**RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)** is the UK's largest conservation charity. One of the ways in which they deliver on their mission is to protect, restore and manage habitats for biodiversity. The RSPB has a network of 77 nature reserves in Scotland, of which 12 are in Orkney. This includes the Brodgar Reserve which surrounds the Ring of Brodgar on three sides.



Green Space Dark Skies event at the Ring of Brodgar, led by Walk the Plank, is a joyous visual tribute, bringing together artists, engineers, technical innovation, and citizens to create a special moment, the gathering made by human beings working with light  
(© Green Space Dark Skies, Mark Ferguson)



**NatureScot (NS)** is Scotland's nature agency. They work to enhance our natural environment and inspire the people of Scotland to care for it. NatureScot focuses on connecting people and nature and tackling biodiversity loss and the climate emergency with large and small-scale nature-based solutions. They advise local authorities and work with the Scottish Parliament and with public, private and voluntary organisations towards shared aims.



**University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Archaeology Institute** is part of UHI Orkney, which is part of OIC and an affiliated college in the University of the Highlands and Islands. As a teaching and research organisation the Archaeology Institute is dedicated to advancing understanding of the historic environment through the creation, interpretation and dissemination of archaeological knowledge. The Archaeology Institute combines teaching, academic research, and commercial applied research and consultancy. The UHI Archaeology Institute has extensive research expertise in the HONO WHS, and with WHSs worldwide.



A celebration of the 20th anniversary of inscription at the Maeshowe visitor centre with site staff and pupils from Stenness Primary School.

## 3.2 The Management Plan Steering Group

The Management Plan Steering Group provides strategic direction and oversight for the management of the WHS and is accountable for development and implementation of the Management Plan. The Steering Group monitors progress of the Action Plan and keeps both the Objectives and the overall Plan under review. It provides a forum to draw on, and share, the members' range of experience and expertise.

The core Steering Group is made up of representatives from OIC and HES. In addition, the Advisory partners are invited to join the Steering Group as Advisory members, with the aim of ensuring a coordinated approach to management for the WHS. Advisory members may attend only when necessary and relevant to their organisational remit.

The members are the links between the Steering Group and their organisations and relevant and senior departments.

The Steering Group is supported by a WHS Coordinator to help ensure effective coordination between the Partners and to enable the implementation, monitoring and revision of the Management Plan and its Objectives. The coordinator also promotes awareness and understanding of the OUV and public benefit of HONO, and the value of World Heritage status more widely, to Partners, stakeholders and the public, serves as a central point for information and advice about the Site and represents the Steering Group at meetings and event

The Steering Group will meet at least twice annually to review progress on the Management Plan and Action Plan, set priorities for the next six to 12 months, and discuss emerging issues and challenges.

An annual summary and set of recommendations will be produced by the Steering Group to inform their respective organisations and highlight any priorities for action and / or funding (see Section 6. Monitoring and Delivery).

## 3.3 Community and Stakeholders

WHSs have a role in the life of the community, contributing to quality of life and wellbeing. UNESCO recognises the importance of associated communities in understanding and management of WHSs. At the same time, as part of the inheritance of all humanity, a WHS can have stakeholders and communities of interest that are located far from the Site, so some consideration should also be given to their role. Individuals are often members of multiple groups and communities and so can be stakeholders in more than one way. It is important not to oversimplify “community” and ignore the different interests in and connections to a WHS that different individuals and groups may have.

**Local Resident Community** are made up of multiple types and their stake in the WHS may be personal, professional, or both. They include:

- Immediate residents around the WHS and Buffer Zones.
- The wider population of West Mainland.
- Residents of all Orkney Mainland and isles.
- Community Councils represent immediate geographical communities.

Organisations like the Orkney Disability Forum represent the interests of parts of the community with specific needs. Orkney also has a rich range of membership organisations representing members with interests in heritage, local history and archaeology, culture, art, craft, natural heritage and outdoor recreation.

The local community also includes people who work at, in or in connection with, the WHS. This includes HES site and conservation staff; volunteers; members of Orkney's large community of archaeologists; OIC staff who manage and maintain key infrastructure; RSPB reserve wardens.

**Landowners and Land Managers** both public and private, own and manage much of the Buffer Zone. The agricultural community is a vital component in rural stewardship and managing change around the WHS.

**Tourism Stakeholders** are important given the role that the WHS plays in Orkney's tourism economy, and the positive and negative impacts that tourism can have on the WHS. Stakeholders include VisitScotland, Orkney Tourist Guides Association, accommodation providers, restaurants, local tour guiding companies, coach operators, cruise liaison staff, transport providers, craftspeople and leisure activity providers.

**Researchers, students and academics** in archaeology and a wide range of related disciplines, both residents and visiting form a community of interest and are stakeholders in the WHS monuments and wider archaeological and historic landscape, both as individuals and as representatives of their institutions. The UHI and the Ness of Brodgar Trust have brought large numbers of archaeologists and volunteers into the heart of the Stenness and Brodgar Buffer Zone every summer for the past fifteen years to excavate at the Ness of Brodgar site.

**Wider connections** People with family connections to Orkney form one of the non-local, often international communities of interest. This also encompasses people who have no specific connection to Orkney but have a deep interest in and concern for the sites. Visitors, both regional, national and international are often part of this group, or become part of it after visiting Orkney.

The sites are spiritually important to many people, both residents and visitors. This includes practicing Pagans, people of other faiths and people of no formal faith. Marriage and other ceremonies are held at Ring of Brodgar and Stones of Stenness. Finally, the WHS and its landscape act as inspiration, influence or subject to artists, writers and poets both resident and visiting.



The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan consultation (© K4 Graphics)

### 3.4 The Partnership Principles

These are the Partners' agreed ways of working that guide decision-making at every level.

#### Cooperation and Collaboration

To protect and conserve the unique qualities of the WHS it is vital that different organisations and individuals come together with a common goal. Working together we are greater than the sum of our parts. We will collaborate and cooperate to safeguard the OUV of the Site and deliver our shared Vision. We will look for constructive solutions to our challenges and work with other organisations wherever possible to achieve shared goals, seeking to understand and to celebrate the full range of contributions that a diversity of people and groups can make.

#### World Heritage Values

As custodians of a WHS, the Partners have committed to the values that underpin the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The World Heritage Committee has adopted "Five Cs" to guide the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. These are: Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-Building, Communication, and Communities. Of these Conservation, Communication, and Communities are the most relevant to HONO, and we will strive to ensure our decisions are the best they can be to increase public awareness, increase public enjoyment and belonging, public involvement and their role in the management and protection of the WHS.

#### Climate Action and Sustainability

Climate change is a global emergency that transcends national borders. It is an issue that requires international cooperation and coordinated solutions at all levels. Not only does it threaten HONO WHS it also threatens the people of Orkney, Scotland, the UK, and the international community. It is critical that in all our management decisions and actions we seek to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change, and to ensure that we are pursuing sustainable solutions for the future. We will be guided by the World Heritage Convention recognition of the way that people interact with nature, and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.



Learners taking part in the HES Heritage remixed project at the Maeshowe Visitor Centre.



Solstice Art workshop with Stenness Primary School  
(© Colin Keldie)

## 4.0 CHALLENGES AND THEMES



### 4.1 Climate Emergency

UNESCO recognises climate change as one of the most significant and increasing threats to WHSs worldwide and to their potential for contributing to economic and social development at the local level. In recognition of the severity of the climate emergency a commitment to Climate Action and Sustainability has been adopted by the Partners as one of our three guiding principles (Section 3.3. The Partnership Principles). In 2019 OIC declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to making progress towards Net Zero and decarbonisation (see Orkney Council Plan 2023-2028). HES is committed to supporting a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and has a range of roles in understanding and addressing climate change and heritage for Scotland.

HES published a baseline Climate Change Risk Assessment in 2018 for all Scotland's Properties in Care, including the HONO monuments. In 2019 a Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI) assessment for HONO WHS was carried out (see Appendix 1 for the report). This assessment identified that HONO was extremely vulnerable to the impacts of three key climate drivers: Sea Level Change, Precipitation Change, and Storm Intensity and Frequency and that there is potential for major loss or substantial alteration to the OUV of the Site by 2050. The process also identified that Air Temperature Change was likely to be an important driver of change in the future. The results of the CVI assessment informed this Management Plan and underlined the need for further research to better understand current and future impacts.

HES 2020 Climate Action Plan 2020-2025 outlines HES' approach, setting out a programme of work and includes topics relevant to the Management of the WHS including Adaptation, Sustainable Tourism, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Travel.

All management of the WHS should consider the climate resilience planning already in place by HES including Climate Ready HES 2021, Climate Action Plan 2020-2025 and the Climate Change Risk Assessment 2018.

In recent years, the Ring of Brodgar has experienced increased footfall along with changes to precipitation patterns. This has consisted of increased rainfall, changes to rainfall patterns and periods of dry weather, all of which have led to increasing footfall erosion. Cumulatively, these factors threaten the fabric of the site and degrade the experience for all visitors. In response, an extensive programme of works has been carried out to create more resilient surfaces. Despite this, periodic closures of parts of the site have been necessary. In the past, the Stones of

Entrance passage to Maeshowe Chambered Cairn. Note puddles of water and damp on the roof of the passage.



Erosion at the  
Ring of Brodgar



Stenness have proved more resilient, but climate impacts combined with changes in visitation patterns could potentially see increased footfall pressure cause similar issues.

At Maeshowe monitoring reveals that the Viking runic inscriptions on the interior stonework appear stable. However, there are potential impacts to the structure of the monument from changes to wetting/drying cycles and groundwater flooding that are not well understood at present.

At Skara Brae coastal erosion and sea level rise remain the predominant threat to the survival of the site in the longer term. This is being addressed in the short and medium-term by periodic monitoring and ongoing sea wall maintenance and repair, but in the longer term the threat will increase. There is also clear evidence of extensive further archaeological remains beyond the site as it is visible today, and these are also at risk. Finally, there is some potential for a single extreme coastal weather event to seriously damage the site. One of the essential actions identified for the Management Plan is to develop and implement a long-term strategy to address the threat to Skara Brae from climate change, sea level rise and associated coastal erosion.

There may also be changes over time to the landscape of the Buffer Zones driven by changes to the climate. For example, loss of some species, increases in invasive species, changes to vegetation cover and changes to farming practice in response to climate factors could eventually alter local ecosystems/habitat and landscape and affect the sense of place. Changes to flora and fauna on the monuments themselves could also be damaging.



Addressing the climate emergency at HONO must include both adaptation and mitigation:

**Climate Adaptation:** measures taken to adjust to changing climate conditions, reduce vulnerability, and increase resilience of heritage assets to climate-related risks.

**Climate mitigation:** these are actions taken to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.

Waves breaking against the seawall at Skara Brae.

## 4.2 Planning and Uncertainty

The approach taken in this Management Plan is intended to allow for more flexibility in pursuing our shared Vision and Aims in the face of uncertainty, a key lesson learnt following the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing us to better respond to challenges and opportunities whether foreseen or unforeseen. We can anticipate some likely changes and trends, for example:

- Climate change, natural disasters, extreme weather and environmental degradation impacting the WHS, its infrastructure and preservation and conservation efforts.
- Increasing visitor numbers and the physical impacts on the WHS.
- Economic pressures and changing departmental budgets potentially impacting the running of the WHS.
- Changes in community needs changing who visits the WHS and how.
- Cultural shifts and changing tourism patterns impacting visitor demographics and behaviour.
- Political change impacting high-level management decisions and the running of the WHS.

On an immediate level, resource uncertainty can often be an issue. While baseline resourcing to ensure protection and preservation of OUV is not at issue, delivery of individual objectives and actions can be affected if staff or financial resources are lost when organisations restructure, or if wider pressures on partners and stakeholders create conflicting priorities for action. To limit the chances of this happening, agreed Management Plan commitments should be realistic, measurable and embedded at all levels in Partner priorities.

Flexibility will be required to shape our decisions and actions as we navigate anticipated change and when unpredicted events or new trends emerge and to lead or join with complex or multi-level responses.

## 4.3 Tourism and Access

HONO plays a key role in Orkney's tourism economy being a major driver for visitation to the Islands. Many Orkney residents work in the sector, and make a significant contribution to the local economy, with OIC's Island Visitor Survey 2019 calculating that tourism was worth £67 million per year to Orkney, with 394,000 visitors to Orkney. This includes cruise passengers (132,000), and crew (50,000) as well as 28,000 other day visitors. The most visited sites were the Ring of Brodgar, Skara Brae and Skail House (Orkney Tourism Strategy 2020-2030).

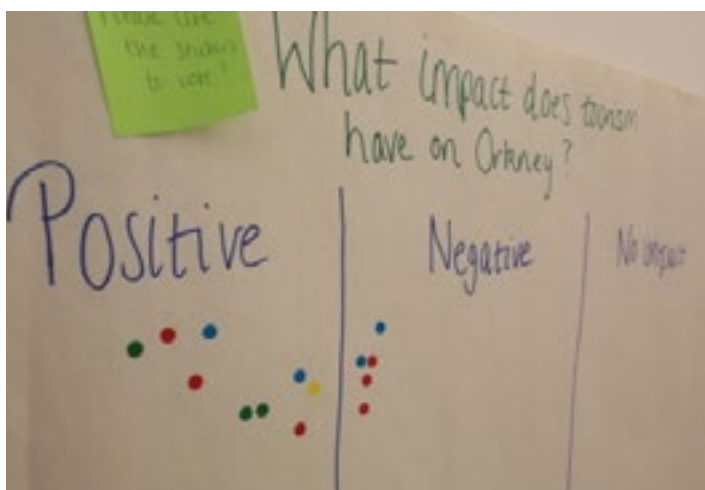
Finding the right balance between enabling access to the HONO for tourists and residents while preserving the OUV of the Site and managing the other values associated with it is a key issue for the long-term management of the Site.

Challenges to be addressed largely result from increasing numbers of visitors to the WHS, particularly to the open access sites at the Ring of Brodgar and Stones of Stenness. In 2022 it is estimated that 269,000 visits were made to the

WHS monuments. This was less than the estimated 2019 high of 327,000 but numbers of visits are projected to increase again for the coming years as the trend continues upwards.

These visits are not spread evenly across the year, and the majority are concentrated into the summer season and within that to specific periods of the day. This reflects the significant role that cruise passengers play in driving levels of visitation, as well as the highly seasonal nature of independent tourism in Orkney. As noted above, the combined impact of this pattern of footfall with climate change impacts has required increasingly major interventions, including periodic closures of parts of the Ring of Brodgar. It also creates visitor management issues at Skara Brae. It is therefore critical that measures are developed to address peak time footfall at the sites to prevent erosion and maintain the visitor experience.

This must be achieved in a manner that reflects the fact that access to the WHS in the widest sense is a fundamental principle for the future management of the Site. This means not only physical access for residents and visitors but also includes intellectual access through interpretation and research, and remote access to information and digital experiences for those who are unable to visit in person.



Feedback provided by the community taking part on the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan consultation. (© K4 Graphics)



SIRFA - Visiting the Ring of Brodgar as part of the SIRFA symposium (© ScARF)



Visitors at the Stones of Stenness

Responsible and sustainable tourism is not only about numbers: it is also about positive and negative impacts on the sites, on infrastructure, on local residents, and on the experience of the WHS for both residents and visitors. At present, high season peak day numbers can cause issues for residents and put pressure on existing facilities, infrastructure and the natural and historic environment. New approaches therefore need to be found to deliver benefits from tourism, while minimising any threats. This is a key driver for this Management Plan, the Partners, and the Orkney WHS Programme.

## 4.4 Community Involvement

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre recognises the importance of ensuring that the communities local to WHSs are engaged in the management of the Site. They recommend an inclusive and participatory approach to planning and stakeholder consultation. Consultation with Orkney residents strongly supported community involvement to ensure sustainable management of the Site. The Steering Group will also invite an elected member for the West Mainland to join. Good communication is a challenge that persists at the WHS and is thus a particularly crucial step in bridging the gap between the organisations protecting and managing the WHS and the surrounding community.

The community consultation work carried out as part of the Plan process (Section 1.5) was one way to understand how the Orkney community views the current management of the WHS, what their priorities are, and whether, and how, they would like to be further informed about and involved in future management planning and delivery. One of the most important findings was a strong desire for better communication between the organisations that manage the WHS and the surrounding area and the wider community, as well as the active involvement in planning and decision making. People were keen to have better understanding of what decisions are being made and why, as well as the assurance that future activity will involve them.

Some voices in the local communities are heard less often than others. Sometimes called “less heard voices” it is often the case that they are “less listened to”. There are opportunities to increase participation, inclusion and intellectual and physical access to the WHS through thinking about how our communication choices affect different groups. To do this well it is important to listen to what people need, through engaging with organisations like Disability Action Orkney, The Blide Trust and Voluntary Action Orkney. Young people are also often missing from these conversations and new ways of ensuring their voices are heard and their views are taken into account are important, not least as they will be the future custodians of the WHS.

Communication should be a two-way process: written reports and social media updates have an important role to play but the Partners should seek a wider variety of ways to communicate, led by community desires and best practice examples at other WHSs, to foster conversations about the management and values of HONO. An accessible plain-English summary of this Management Plan will be published along with the full plan, and the Partners will commit to providing more regular updates – both formal and informal – via local media, holding at least one community meeting event per year, and to exploring a better online presence for the WHS.

The Heart of Neolithic  
Orkney World Heritage Site  
Management Plan consultation  
(© K4 Graphics)





The sea wall protecting Skara Brae during a storm  
(© Colin Keldie)

## 4.5 Sustainability

Sustainable management decisions take into account the environment (natural and cultural), the economy, and present requirements in ways that consider the needs of future generations. Decision-makers should consider if choices made now might damage, deplete or degrade the WHS and its environment for future generations. In line with our shared Principles (Section 3.3) we should also consider the impacts of our decisions on sustainability more broadly – for example, when planning infrastructure changes we should be mindful of the climate impacts and try to avoid choices that constrain the choices of future generations through our actions today. Much of this will be guided by the existing organisational strategies and policies of Partners and stakeholders, and we should be mindful that the Actions we design to deliver this Plan align with these.

In line with responses to the SEA Environmental Report the Steering Group will draft and agree a sustainability checklist to sit alongside the Action Plan and as part of ongoing mitigation and monitoring commitments in delivering the Management Plan (see Appendices 3 and 4).

UNESCO's Operational Guidelines emphasise the importance of sustainability at WHSs which, so long as the OUV is respected, "may sustain biological and cultural diversity and provide ecosystem services and other benefits, which may contribute to environmental and cultural sustainability. Properties may support a variety of ongoing and proposed uses that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may enhance the quality of life and well-being of communities concerned."

### THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

There are 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), part of the of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all member states. These interconnected goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity and cover areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice. The crucial importance of heritage to societies and its great potential to contribute to social, economic and environmental goals are now recognised as an enabler of sustainable development. We are encouraged to harness the potential of World Heritage properties to contribute to sustainable development and increase the effectiveness and relevance of the World Heritage Convention.



Detailed image of the sea wall constructed at Skara Brae to help protect the site from the damaging effects of coastal erosion.

**Scotland's National Performance Framework**  
National Outcomes



Culture



Environment



Education



Communities



Fair work & business



International

United Nations **Sustainable Development Goals**



Sustainable Cities & Communities



Climate Action



Good health & Wellbeing



Sustainable Cities & Communities



Quality Education



Partnership for the Goals



Quality Education



Decent Work & Economic Growth

Management Plan: **Long Term Aims**

Aim  
1, 2, 4, 5

Aim  
1, 5

Aim  
2, 4, 5, 6

Aim  
1, 3

Aim  
3, 6

Aim  
1, 2, 3, 6

Table showing the connections between Scotland's National Performance Framework National Outcomes, the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Management Plan Long Term Aims.



Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF) and the Sustainable Development Goals share the same aims. The NPF localises the SDGs. For this Management Plan the key NPF Outcomes and the most relevant of the SDGs they link to are shown below. They also connect through to the long-term Aims of this Management Plan (see Section 5.1 for the full Aims).

## 4.6 Research and Learning

### 4.6.1 RESEARCH

Most of the current research relating to the WHS is focused on archaeology and climate change. There is therefore an opportunity to broaden research into other fields.

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Research Agenda 2005 continues to serve as a key resource for guiding research linked to the HONO WHS. However, The HONO Research Strategy 2013-2018 is currently due for renewal. Scotland's Islands Research Framework for Archaeology (SIRFA) presents an opportunity to ensure the research needs of the WHS are embedded into a wider, more comprehensive framework. SIRFA is a project to develop and disseminate a regional research framework for the Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney, set within a broader, island-wide archaeological research framework for Scotland. The third and final SIRFA was held in Orkney in March 2023. The completed Framework will inform future research at and around the WHS.

Opportunities exist to continue wider research on social context, community value, wellbeing, natural environment, and longer-term climatic factors to both deepen knowledge and improve the management of the WHS. This should include research into visitor motivations, experience and satisfaction, given the importance of the WHS to the Orkney economy.

Involving local communities in the research process can incorporate traditional knowledge, oral histories, and cultural perspectives, enriching interpretations and fostering collaborative relationships which can be addressed through Aims 2, 3 and 4 (see Section [5.1](#)).

### 4.6.2 LEARNING

The WHS has the potential to be developed further as an exceptional resource for educational institutions. Schools, universities and further education organisations could include HONO as part of their learning programmes, as many of those in Orkney already do. To further a broad range of learning and research, there is a need for improved and better access to the associated collections and archive material, and to accurate information about the WHS. It is crucial to raise awareness with learning institutions about the research and learning opportunities made possible through the WHS.

The existing education and outreach programme delivered in the community by the HES Ranger Service is highly valued by the community and it is worth investigating ways to expand engagement with school pupils and young people, particularly secondary schools and youth groups. There is potential to increase engagement with young people and increase their involvement with the WHS and its future management, for example through partnerships with educational institutions.

## 5.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES









### 5.1 Long-Term Aims

To deliver the agreed Vision the management partners agreed six long-term Aims. These are a revised version of the Aims that form the past two management plans (2008 and 2014). These Aims expand on the shared aspirations for the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site and look beyond this ten-year management plan period to 2050.

Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site  
Management Plan consultation at the Dounby Show



<p><b>Aim 1</b></p>	<p>Protect and conserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site for present and future generations.</p>	
<p><b>Aim 2</b></p>	<p>Inspire and engage people with the Heart of Neolithic Orkney and deepen their understanding of the Site's values.</p>	
<p><b>Aim 3</b></p>	<p>Benefit people and communities in Orkney and elsewhere.</p>	
<p><b>Aim 4</b></p>	<p>Interpret and present the Heart of Neolithic Orkney to the highest standard.</p>	
<p><b>Aim 5</b></p>	<p>Enhance access to and experience of the World Heritage Site responsibly, sustainably and equitably.</p>	
<p><b>Aim 6</b></p>	<p>Facilitate a diversity of research connected to the Heart of Neolithic Orkney and draw on the results to pursue the Long Term Aims.</p>	

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## 5.2 Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives outlined below are intended to achieve the long-term aims throughout the ten-year duration of this Management Plan. Further details on how these objectives will be accomplished can be found in Chapter 6 Monitoring and Delivery.

The Objectives will be delivered through an Action Plan agreed, reviewed, and updated every year by the management partners. This will allow us to respond to new opportunities and issues as they come up and to focus our resources where they can have the greatest effect.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

<b>01</b>	The WHS is protected, conserved, and maintained in accordance with national guidance and legislation, and international conservation charters; including both historic environment and natural environment considerations.
<b>02</b>	The boundaries of the Buffer Zone are suitable for purpose and included in future iterations of the Local Development Plan.
<b>03</b>	Policy and guidance produced by the partners that affects the protection and management of the WHS, Buffer Zone and wider setting is up to date and fit for purpose.
<b>04</b>	Governance of the WHS is robust and transparent and is periodically reviewed (see Section 6. Monitoring and Delivery).
<b>05</b>	The Management Plan remains relevant, is fit for purpose, and allows the partners to respond to new understandings and challenges.
<b>06</b>	Decision makers and communities can access what they need to know about the WHS and Buffer Zone, understand the opportunities and obligations that come with WH status, and are engaged with the management of the WHS.
<b>07</b>	Management of the WHS prioritises adaption to the effects of the Climate Emergency on the WHS and Buffer Zone, and mitigation of climate impacts by reducing emissions and contributing to a sustainable low-carbon society.
<b>08</b>	A programme of monitoring is in place for both the state of conservation and the implementation of actions for the WHS and Buffer Zone and the results are used by the Partners to inform decision making and future management.



Short-eared owl

<b>09</b>	The Partners are collaborating to identify and access new sources of funding to support new projects and programmes to deliver shared Objectives.
<b>10</b>	Management and interpretation (onsite and offsite, including digitally) enhance awareness and understanding of the archaeological and historical heritage, the natural environment, the Buffer Zone and the WHS in its wider context, geographically and through time. All based on robust research and understanding.
<b>11</b>	The WHS and its associated sites and assets, materials and records (physical and digital) are easily accessible for use in research, education and training and are used by a range of community and special interest groups and projects.
<b>12</b>	Key stakeholders are involved in, informed about, and engaged with the decision-making process for managing the WHS and its associated infrastructure.
<b>13</b>	Tourism at and around HONO offers a world class responsible visitor experience while benefitting Orkney communities.
<b>14</b>	Strong connections between HONO and other WHSs and UNESCO designations are maintained and developed enabling development of shared solutions to common issues.
<b>15</b>	Research needs for the understanding, interpretation, protection and management of HONO WHS are identified and integrated with relevant research frameworks at a regional, nation and international level.
<b>16</b>	The WHS delivers a wide range of measurable benefits – social, economic, cultural, environmental, wellbeing – to Orkney's communities.

## 6.0 MONITORING AND DELIVERY



### 6.1 Governance

A Management Plan Steering Group has been established to guide the future management of HONO WHS (see Section 3.2 for details).

The Steering Group meets at least twice per year, and an annual summary and set of recommendations will be produced to highlight priorities for action and / or funding requirements (see Section 6.2.2). The terms of reference, membership, governance and code of conduct will be set out in the HONO WHS Steering Group Governance Agreement.

### 6.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is a responsibility that comes with the inscription on the World Heritage List and to ensure continued management and partnerships are upheld. It includes the monitoring of the condition of the WHS and its OUV (see Section 6.2.1), the monitoring of the implementation of the Management Plan and associated Action Plan (Section 6.2.2) and a mid-point Management Plan evaluation (Section 6.2.4).

#### 6.2.1 MONITORING THE CONDITION OF THE WHS

UNESCO monitors the condition of World Heritage Sites through the Periodic Reporting Process. Every eight years all WHSs participate. The 3rd Cycle of Periodic Reporting for Europe and North America took place in 2022-23. Periodic Reporting is one of the core conservation monitoring mechanisms of the World Heritage Convention. Each State Party reports on the application of the World Heritage Convention in their territory. As part of this process each individual WHS submits a detailed Periodic report. The HONO report gives us a baseline to ensure the OUV of the Site is being properly protected and conserved.



Crested dog's tail grass.

Monitoring of key aspects of the physical Site and processes that affect it, and other related information. This includes the outcome of ongoing and one-off conservation actions, environmental and climate change impacts, proposed and active development proposals, and collection of data about visitor numbers, behaviour, impacts. The below provides an overview of what is monitored as part of the Periodic report:

- Physical site conditions: monitoring the structural integrity of buildings, monuments, and natural features. It involves assessing any signs of deterioration and damage due to environmental factors or human activities. Special attention is given to critical elements that contribute to the OUV.
- Environmental and climate change impacts: focused on understanding how environmental factors, including climate change, affect the components of the WHS and its OUV as well as assessing changes in biodiversity, habitat quality, water and air quality.
- Proposed and active development proposals: reviewing proposed development projects within or near the WHS boundaries to assess their potential impact on its OUV.
- Conservation related actions: monitoring the progress and effectiveness of ongoing conservation related actions (see Action Plan) and their impact on the WHS.
- Visitor data including visitor numbers, behaviours, and associated impacts: monitoring to understand the impacts of changes in visitor movements and behaviour, including tracking visitor demographics, patterns of visitation, visitor satisfaction levels, and the potential impact of tourism activities on the WHS.

Every four years a monitoring report will be produced by the Steering Group, addressing the above and informing the longer-cycle of Periodic Reporting and the mid-point evaluation of the Management Plan.



Visible signs of erosion at the Ring of Brodgar and the interpretation panel explaining to visitors why access to the interior of the site is prevented to protect it against erosion.

## 6.2.2 MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN AND ACTION PLAN

Monitoring the progress of the Management Plan and associated Action Plan is a core function of the Steering Group. The following standing actions in the Action Plan will address this:

Action	Outcome / Measure	Timetable	Frequency
<p><b>1.1</b> ANNUAL ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REVIEW:</p> <p>Dedicated session to assess and drive forward progress of the Action Plan and to review governance approach. Short report from each responsible party required before commencement of the review by way of update.</p>	<p>Memo and actions document and updated Action Plan.</p> <p>Annual bulletin</p> <p>Updated memo when new actions area added and agreed.</p>	<p>March 2026</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p><b>1.2</b> BIENNIAL ACTION PLAN DELIVERY REPORT:</p> <p>Summary report on progress including key updates, Action Plan progress etc for wider interest and for transparency.</p>	<p>Action Plan Delivery Report and Revised Action Plan</p> <p>Event for Elected Members and public.</p> <p>Social and local media updates.</p>	<p>March 2028</p>	<p>Two-yearly</p>
<p><b>1.3</b> CAPACITY AND RESOURCING REVIEW:</p> <p>To identify any gaps in capacity that might impact the delivery of the Management Plan and fulfilment of UNESCO obligations.</p>	<p>Gap Analysis and action document.</p>	<p>Spring 2026</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p><b>1.7</b> MID-POINT EVALUATION:</p> <p>Evaluation at the mid-point of the Management Plan cycle to formally review the Management Plan, review and respond to challenges and changes in conservation and management practices.</p>	<p>Reviewed and updated Management Plan in place.</p>	<p>Autumn 2031</p>	<p>Once</p>



Aerial view of Skara Brae Neolithic village and Skail Bay

The Steering Group will meet annually to carry out an Action Plan Progress Review (Action 1.1) to discuss the progress of actions, including a progress overview, action responsibility, successes and challenges. As part of this process the Steering Group will confirm and agree any changes to the Action Plan, and agree new actions as needed. A Capacity and Resourcing Review (Action 1.3) will identify gaps in resources and capacity available to enable the delivery of Management Plan Action and UNESCO obligations.

- Annual summary and Recommendations Report will be provided to the organisations represented on the Steering Group, with a focus on key recommendations for funding and action.
- Every second year an Action Plan Delivery Report will be published online with key updates for local residents, the wider public and other stakeholders. This report will include a summary of conservation works, visitor management updates, and highlight upcoming plans, projects and events.

This ongoing review process will allow the Partners to react to changing circumstances and priorities over the ten-year period of the Plan.

### 6.2.3 MID-POINT EVALUATION OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

A mid-point evaluation of the plan will be carried out in 2031. This will be a formal review and reflection of the overall progress of the Management Plan progress to date, though stopping short of a full renewal of the Plan. Considering the progress on the Action Plan and State of Conservation reporting, this will review the validity of the Objectives and update them if appropriate, responding to the results of new research and changes to our understanding of the WHS, and to any changes in conservation and management practices. It will also identify any new challenges in need of a high-level response.

### 6.2.4 REACTIVE MONITORING

In addition to the above programmed monitoring, there is a World Heritage Convention obligation to report to the World Heritage Committee whenever a major restoration or new construction project is proposed that could affect the OUV of the WHS. This process of Reactive Monitoring is required so that the Committee may assist in seeking appropriate solutions to ensure that the OUV of the property is fully preserved.

This reporting is the responsibility of the State Party (see Section 1.2.1), advised by HES and the Culture and Historic Environment Division in the Scottish Government.



Neolithic pottery vessel.

Bay of Skail below the Skara Brae sea wall  
(© Colin Keldie)



Stone of Stenness WHS Ranger tour  
(© Orkney.com)



Curlew can be seen and heard around the WHS.

Setting midwinter sun casting a ray of light onto the stone block at the back wall of the tomb at Maeshowe Chambered Cairn, during the Winter Solstice.



## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

CHED	Culture and Historic Environment Division (Scottish Government)
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (UK Government)
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
HONO	Heart of Neolithic Orkney
ICOMOS	The International Council on Monuments and Sites
ICOMOS UK	The International Council on Monuments and Sites: UK National Committee
NS	NatureScot
OIC	Orkney Islands Council
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SDGs	The UN Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SIRFA	Scottish Islands Research Framework for Archaeology
SOUV	Statement of Outstanding Universal Value
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
UNESCO	United Nations Environmental and Scientific Organisation
WHS	World Heritage Site(s)

## APPENDIX 1: KEY DOCUMENTS AND LINKS

### Key Policy and Guidance

**Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (2023)** is Scotland's national spatial strategy and sets out spatial principles, regional priorities national developments and national planning policy. The policy requires that Development proposals affecting a WHS or its setting will only be supported where their OUV is protected and preserved.

**The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) (2019)** sets out a series of principles and policies for the recognition, care, and sustainable management of the historic environment.

**Scheduled Monuments Consents Policy (2019)** sets out the HES policy for making decisions about consents at scheduled monuments and supports HEPS.

**Managing Change in the Historic Environment** is a series of guidance notes produced by HES give best practice advice to help guide changes to the historic environment. One of these focuses on World Heritage and should be used to inform local planning policies and to help make decisions about planning applications that could affect a WHS.

**The Orkney Local Development Plan (2017)** and Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (2023) form the current Local Development Plan for Orkney. Together they establish policy to protect the WHS and its setting from inappropriate development in order to protect and preserve the OUV.

Presently Orkney Islands Council is reviewing the Local Development Plan and by 2028 will have produced a new Local Development Plan to sit alongside **Scotland's National Planning Framework 4**, that will include policy to protect the WHS and its OUV. Progress on the review of the Local Development Plan can be found at [www.orkney.gov.uk](http://www.orkney.gov.uk).



Great yellow bumblebees are found at the Ring of Brodgar

**OTHER RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY, AND GUIDANCE:**

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006, and the Town and Country Planning (Neighbouring planning authorities and Historic Environment) (Scotland) Direction 2015

Historic Environment (Amendment) Scotland Act 2011

Our Past, Our Future – Scotland’s Strategy for the Historic Environment (2023)

## **Key Supporting Management Documents**

Climate Vulnerability Index Assessment for Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Property (2019)

Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan 2014-2019

Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Research Strategy 2013-18

SIRFA participants at the Neolithic Dwarfie Stane on Hoy



## APPENDIX 2: STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value is a formal document written for each WHS as a key reference for effective protection and management. This Statement was submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and approved in 2013, and it can only be updated through a formal mechanism. As a result the text contains some references to policy and guidance that have since been superseded..

### HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE: STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Adopted by UNESCO World Heritage Committee Thirty-seventh session, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, June 2013

<b>Property</b>	Heart of Neolithic Orkney
<b>State Party</b>	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
<b>Id. N°</b>	514rev
<b>Date of inscription</b>	1999

### BRIEF SYNTHESIS

The Orkney Islands lie 15km north of the coast of Scotland. The monuments are in two areas, some 6.6 km apart on the island of Mainland, the largest in the archipelago.

The group of monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney consists of a remarkably well-preserved settlement, a large chambered tomb, and two stone circles with surrounding henges, together with a number of associated burial and ceremonial sites. The group constitutes a major relict cultural landscape graphically depicting life five thousand years ago in this remote archipelago.

The four monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney are unquestionably among the most important Neolithic sites in Western Europe. These are the Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, Maeshowe and Skara Brae. They provide exceptional evidence of the material and spiritual standards as well as the beliefs and social structures of this dynamic period of prehistory.

The four main monuments, consisting of the four substantial surviving standing stones of the elliptical Stones of Stenness and the surrounding ditch and bank of the henge, the thirty-six surviving stones of the circular Ring of Brodgar with the

thirteen Neolithic and Bronze Age mounds that are found around it and the stone setting known as the Comet Stone, the large stone chambered tomb of Maeshowe, whose passage points close to midwinter sunset, and the sophisticated settlement of Skara Brae with its stone built houses connected by narrow roofed passages, together with the Barnhouse Stone and the Watch Stone, serve as a paradigm of the megalithic culture of north-western Europe that is unparalleled.

The property is characteristic of the farming culture prevalent from before 4000 BC in northwest Europe. It provides exceptional evidence of, and demonstrates with exceptional completeness, the domestic, ceremonial, and burial practices of a now vanished 5000-year-old culture and illustrates the material standards, social structures and ways of life of this dynamic period of prehistory, which gave rise to Avebury and Stonehenge (England), Bend of the Boyne (Ireland) and Carnac (France).

The monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas were deliberately situated within a vast topographic bowl formed by a series of visually interconnected ridgelines stretching from Hoy to Greeny Hill and back. They are also visually linked to other contemporary and later monuments around the lochs. They thus form a fundamental part of a wider, highly complex archaeological landscape, which stretches over much of Orkney. The current, open and comparatively undeveloped landscape around the monuments allows an understanding of the apparently formal connections between the monuments and their natural settings. The wealth of contemporary burial and occupation sites in the buffer zone constitute an exceptional relict cultural landscape that supports the value of the main sites.

**Criterion (i):** The major monuments of the Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, the chambered tomb of Maeshowe, and the settlement of Skara Brae display the highest sophistication in architectural accomplishment; they are technologically ingenious and monumental masterpieces.

**Criterion (ii):** The Heart of Neolithic Orkney exhibits an important interchange of human values during the development of the architecture of major ceremonial complexes in the British Isles, Ireland and northwest Europe.

**Criterion (iii):** Through the combination of ceremonial, funerary and domestic sites, the Heart of Neolithic Orkney bears a unique testimony to a cultural tradition that flourished between about 3000 BC and 2000 BC. The state of preservation of Skara Brae is unparalleled amongst Neolithic settlement sites in northern Europe.

**Criterion (iv):** The Heart of Neolithic Orkney is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and archaeological landscape that illustrate a significant stage of human history when the first large ceremonial monuments were built.

## INTEGRITY

All the monuments lie within the designated boundaries of the property. However, the boundaries are tightly drawn and do not encompass the wider landscape setting of the monuments that provides their essential context, nor other monuments that can be seen to support the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Part of the landscape is covered by a two part buffer zone, centred on Skara Brae in the west and on the Mainland monuments in the central west.

This fragile landscape is vulnerable to incremental change. Physical threats to the monuments include visitor footfall and coastal erosion.

## AUTHENTICITY

The level of authenticity in the Heart of Neolithic Orkney is high. The state of preservation at Skara Brae is unparalleled for a prehistoric settlement in northern Europe. Where parts of the site have been lost or reconstructed during early excavations, there is sufficient information to identify and interpret the extent of such works.

Interventions at Maeshowe have been antiquarian and archaeological in nature; the monument is mostly in-situ and the passageway retains its alignment on the winter solstice sunset. Re-erection of some fallen stones at Stones of Stenness and Ring of Brodgar took place in the 19th and early 20th century, and works at Stenness also involved the erection of a 'dolmen', now reconfigured. There are, however, many antiquarian views of the monuments attesting to their prior appearance, and it is clear that they remain largely in-situ.

The central west Mainland monuments remain dominant features in the rural landscape. Their form and design are well-preserved and visitors are easily able to appreciate their location, setting and interrelationships with one another, with contemporary monuments situated outside the designated property, and with their geographical setting. This relationship with the wider topographic landscape helps define the modern experience of the property and seems to have been inextricably linked to the reasons for its development and use in prehistory.

## PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

World Heritage properties in Scotland are protected through the following pieces of legislation. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 provide a framework for local and regional planning policy and act as the principal pieces of primary legislation guiding planning and development in Scotland. Additionally, individual buildings, monuments and areas of special archaeological or historical interest are designated and protected under The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.

The Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) is the primary policy guidance on the protection and management of the historic environment in Scotland. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) sits alongside the SHEP and is the Government's national planning policy on the historic environment. It provides for the protection of World Heritage properties by considering the impact of development on their Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity and integrity.

Orkney Islands Council prepared the Local Development Plan that sets out the Council's policy for assessing planning applications and proposals for the allocation of land for development. The Plan contains policies that address the need to put an appropriate level of protection in place for the property and its setting. Supplementary Planning Guidance for the World Heritage Site has also been produced. These policies and guidance establish a general commitment to preserving the integrity and authenticity of the property. They also seek to manage the impact of development on the wider landscape setting, and to prevent development that would have an adverse impact on its Outstanding Universal Value through the designation of Inner Sensitive Zones, aligned with the two parts of the buffer zone and the identification of sensitive ridgelines outside this area. The Rural Conservation Area at Brodgar includes Maeshowe, the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar, and it is envisaged to establish a Rural Conservation Area at the Bay of Skail.

The property is in the care of Historic Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers. A Management Plan has been prepared by Historic Scotland in consultation with the Partners who share responsibility for managing the sites and access to them: Orkney Islands Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Management Plan is a framework document, and sets out how the Partners will manage the property for the five years of the Plan period, together with longer-term aims and the Vision to protect, conserve, enhance and enjoy the property to support its Outstanding Universal Value. It does so by identifying a series of key issues and devising specific objectives or actions to address these issues. The Steering Group responsible for implementing the Management Plan comprises representatives of the Partners. Stakeholders drawn from the tourist industry, local landowners and the archaeological community participate in Delivery Groups reporting to the Steering Group with responsibilities for access and interpretation, research and education, conservation and protection, and tourism and marketing.

Condition surveys have been completed for each of the monuments. These documents record previous interventions and include a strategy for future maintenance and conservation. Conservation and maintenance programmes require detailed knowledge of the sites and are managed and monitored by suitably experienced and qualified professionals. Conservation work undertaken at the sites follows national and international policy and seeks to balance minimum intervention with public accessibility to the monuments. Any intervention is given careful consideration and will only occur following detailed and rigorous analysis of potential consequences. In conservation work, local materials have been used where appropriate.

Management of tourism in and around the World Heritage property seeks to recognise its value to the local economy, and to develop sustainable approaches to tourism. Key approaches include improved dispersal of visitors around the monuments that comprise the property and other sites in the wider area. A World Heritage Ranger Service supports this approach and allows for on-the-ground education about the issues affecting the site. The relationships and linkages between the monuments and the wider open, almost treeless landscape, and between the monuments that comprise the property and those in the area outside it that support the Outstanding Universal Value are potentially at risk from change and development in the countryside. The long-term need to protect the key relationships between the monuments and their landscape settings and between the property and other related monuments is kept under review by the Steering Group. Policy HE1 as well as the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site in the Local Development Plan and the associated Supplementary Guidance require that developments have no significant negative impact on either the Outstanding Universal Value or the setting of the World Heritage property.



## APPENDIX 3: STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND OTHER ASSESSMENTS

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

In Scotland, public bodies are required to assess, consult on, and monitor the likely impacts their plans, programmes and strategies will have on the environment. This process is known as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

**A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** carried out by HES found that the Plan's vision and long-term aims were overall positive or neutral for environmental factors. No negative issues were identified, though some uncertain effects were identified for landscape.

The SEA makes these recommendations:

- Consider how people can have an increased awareness and understanding of the effects of climate change on the WHS to allow them to have a deeper understanding of the Site's values.
- Consider the way that the World Heritage status could benefit the landscape which the WHS sits in, especially the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area.
- Consider if clearer recognition of landscape interests and their role in interpreting and presenting the WHS should also be included within this aim.
- Consider whether the presentation and interpretation of the WHS could be affected by or used to better understand, climate change.
- Look into possibility of including a research objective specifically around sustainable tourism effects on climate change.

An SEA Post-Adoption Statement is published on the HES website. This explains how the environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan; how the Environmental Report has been taken into account; how the opinions expressed by consultees have been taken into account; the reasons for choosing the plan, programme or strategy as adopted, in light of the other reasonable alternatives considered; and measures to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan, programme or strategy.

The Schedule of Commitments lays out how we will take the SEA into account when we are carrying out the Management Plan.

SEA Schedule of Commitments	Relevant environmental topic
Any proposals to alter the WHS Buffer Zone boundary will be developed in consultation with Partners and a public consultation exercise undertaken.	Population, human health, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna
Environmental assessment will be integrated into the development of options for both short- and long-term large scale physical measures to identify in detail the potential environmental effects on environmental parameters.	Climatic factors, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna
Steps taken to address carrying capacity issues should be sustainable in the long term and include natural heritage interests.	Population, human health, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna
The sustainability checklist should be applied to actions from all objectives within the detailed assessment, to ensure that a holistic environmental approach is taken in their delivery.	Climatic factors, population, human health, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna
Ensure careful consideration in proposals for any potential development or improvements to facilities at sites which may impact the sensitive heritage, landscape and natural environment.	Landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna
Suggest actions to encourage landowners or managers to contribute to the monitoring and management of the WHS Buffer Zone.	Cultural heritage
Integrate environmental assessment and archaeological investigation of any new interpretive, digital or management services or infrastructure.	Population, human health, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna.
Any new physical measures for digital, interpretive or management infrastructure should be sensitively located and designed to avoid effecting environmental parameters.	Landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna.
Active operational monitoring of the active travel and path networks is required to allow areas to be temporarily closed off if sensitive habitats shift in the future (bird nesting, seasonal growth etc).	Biodiversity, flora and fauna
Wider environmental issues will be included in interpretation plans.	Climatic factors, population, human health, landscape, cultural heritage, biodiversity, flora and fauna

## Other Assessments

**An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)** is required when a new or updated policy, project or decision is likely to impact on people. It checks whether there is likely to be a disproportionate impact on people protected under the Equality Act 2010. HES carried out a formal screening for the draft Management Plan. The result was that the plan is unlikely have a significant negative impact on any of the groups who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act. This means that a full Assessment of the Plan was not required. It is possible that future projects associated with the Plan might need their own Equalities Impact Assessments.

**An Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)** is required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 to consider how a planned or revised policy, strategy or service might affect islands communities. OIC carried out an ICIA screening which concluded that a full ICIA was not required. As the plan-making process evolves, the need for an ICIA will be reviewed, as outlined in Step 4. Once the Management Plan is completed, ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review will include reviewing the assessment status.

**Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA):** This is a legal obligation protecting natural heritage sites with a European-level designation. The process considers whether any plan or project could affect one of these sites. This process is known as Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA); and uses the technical language associated with the regulations.

The HRA concluded that the Management Plan will not adversely affect the integrity of the Loch of Stenness Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and its “qualifying interests and conservation objectives”. This means that the Plan will not negatively impact the important natural heritage of the Loch of Stenness SAC. It is possible that future projects associated with the Plan might need an individual HRA.



Twig runes found carved inside Maeshowe

The Watchstone



## APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY ACTION PLAN 2026-2028

The Action Plan is the working delivery document that will be used and updated by the Steering Group over the life of the Management Plan. Actions will be revised, added and retired as necessary. All the Actions should aid the delivery of the Management Plan, and external projects that are included here should contribute to the delivery of the Management Plan and the achievement of its Vision, Aims and Objectives. The Steering Group will draft and agree a sustainability checklist to sit alongside the Action Plan to form part of the ongoing mitigation and monitoring commitments.

This first Action Plan covers the next two years, but it included actions that are always required or that repeat on a multi-year timetable. Timeframe. The Management Plan outlines a 10-year cycle of Action Plan updates.

Progress reports for individual actions will be presented to the Steering Group for an Annual Action Plan Progress Review (Action 1.1) and a two-yearly Action Plan Progress Report will be produced (Action 1.2).

The Actions are organised into three categories, linking to the long-term Aims below:

1. **Monitoring** Actions: Repeated actions that will drive forward the Management Plan. Primarily supporting Aim 1
2. **Essential** Projects/Actions: One-off actions to will improve the WHS over time. Supporting Aims 2-6.
3. **Opportunities**: Desirable projects should resourcing and funding be identified. Supporting Aims 2-6.



## Action Plan Section 1: Monitoring Actions

Repeated actions that will drive forward the Management Plan.

Action	Timetable	Cycle	Linked Aim
<p><b>Annual Action Plan Progress Review:</b> Dedicated session to assess and drive forward progress of the Action Plan and to review governance approach. Short report from each responsible party required before commencement of the review by way of update.</p>	March 2027	Annually	1
<p><b>Biennial Action Plan Delivery Report:</b> Summary report on progress including key updates, Action Plan progress etc for wider interest and for transparency.</p>	March 2028	Two-yearly	1
<p><b>Capacity and Resourcing Review:</b> To identify any gaps in capacity that might impact the delivery of the Management Plan and fulfilment of UNESCO obligations.</p>	Spring 2026	Annually	1
<p><b>Guidance Review:</b> Review local, national and international guidance in relation to the protection and management of the WHS.</p>	Autumn 2026	Two-yearly	1
<p><b>Participate in World Heritage related activities:</b> Team members/partners to attend conferences, workshops and meetings including WHUK, UK National Commission for UNESCO, Scottish WH Coordinators Forum and other opportunities as appropriate and if funding is available.</p>	Ongoing	At least twice a year	1
<p><b>State of Conservation Monitoring:</b> Mid-point State of Conservation review addressing changes in physical site conditions, environmental/ climate impacts, proposed/ active development proposals, and informing the formal Periodic Reporting cycle and Mid-point Evaluation.</p>	Winter 2030	N/A	1
<p><b>Mid-point Evaluation:</b> Evaluation at the mid-point of the Management Plan cycle to formally review the Management Plan, review and respond to challenges and changes in conservation and management practices.</p>	Autumn 2031	N/A	1

## Action Plan Section 2: Essential Projects and Actions

One-off actions to improve and enhance the WHS over time

Action	Timetable	Cycle	Linked Aim
<p><b>Accessibility Audit:</b> Accessibility audit to identify physical and intellectual barriers and identify actions to improve access for all. To include both Ring of Brodgar/ Stones of Stenness/Maeshowe and Skara Brae and connections between the component sites and to local communities and infrastructure.</p>	Summer 2026	Two-yearly	3,5
<p><b>Community Involvement Options Appraisal:</b> Options Appraisal to review and identify how the community could be more directly involved in the management of and engaged with the WHS, with a particular focus on landowners/managers and residents within the Buffer Zone.</p>	Winter 2026	Five-yearly	3,5
<p><b>Maximise the opportunities provided through Orkney World Heritage Site Programme:</b> Steering Group to establish formal terms and communications protocol with the Orkney World Heritage Site Programme to maximise opportunities for the HONO.</p>	Spring 2026 / Ongoing	As agreed	1
<p><b>Skara Brae Climate Change Strategy:</b> Development and implementation of long-term strategy to address the threat to Skara Brae from climate change / sea level rise and associated coastal erosion.</p>	Spring 2027	N/A	1,5
<p><b>Buffer Zone boundary review:</b> Review of the Buffer Zone boundaries in parallel with the development of the new Local Development Plan. Any proposed changes agreed by Signatory Partners and a formal Minor Modification request submitted to UNESCO.</p>	Summer 2027	N/A	1

## Action Plan Section 3: Opportunities

Projects that depend on identifying resourcing and funding.

Action	Timetable	Cycle	Linked Aim
<p><b>Messaging and Interpretation Strategy:</b></p> <p>3.1 Development and implementation of a Strategy (including events, collections, online presence) to establish storytelling approaches and site cohesion and increase awareness of archaeology, geography, natural heritage and biodiversity through onsite and online material</p>	From autumn 2026	Ten-yearly with five-year review	2, 3, 4, 5
<p><b>Digital Media Strategy:</b></p> <p>3.2 Building on Messaging and Interpretation Strategy and enhancing web presence and offer online access to information, news, interpretation and events.</p>	From autumn 2026	Ten-yearly with five-year review	2, 3, 4, 5
<p><b>Research Group and Guidelines:</b></p> <p>3.3 Establishment of a research-focused steering group to develop and promote robust research guidelines, and to encourage and promote research projects across wide range of relevant fields.</p>	From 2027	N/A	2, 3, 4, 6
<p><b>Biodiversity Strategy:</b></p> <p>3.4 Assessment of biodiversity and integration with existing strategies, for safeguarding biodiversity and the environment, for the WHS and immediately associated land and water.</p>	Early 2026 onwards	Five-yearly	1



Orkney vole



Aerial view of Maeshowe  
chambered cairn



## FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

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### CONTACT HES

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

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### CONTACT OIC

[www.orkney.gov.uk](http://www.orkney.gov.uk)

### KEY LINKS

UNESCO World Heritage Centre  
– World Heritage List: HONO WHS:  
[whc.unesco.org/en/list/514](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/514)

Find out more about HONO  
on the HES website:  
[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

For planning policies and guidance related  
to the WHS see the relevant Orkney Islands  
Council web pages: [www.orkney.gov.uk](http://www.orkney.gov.uk)



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