

HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY



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

World
Heritage
Site

A Short Guide

April 2023



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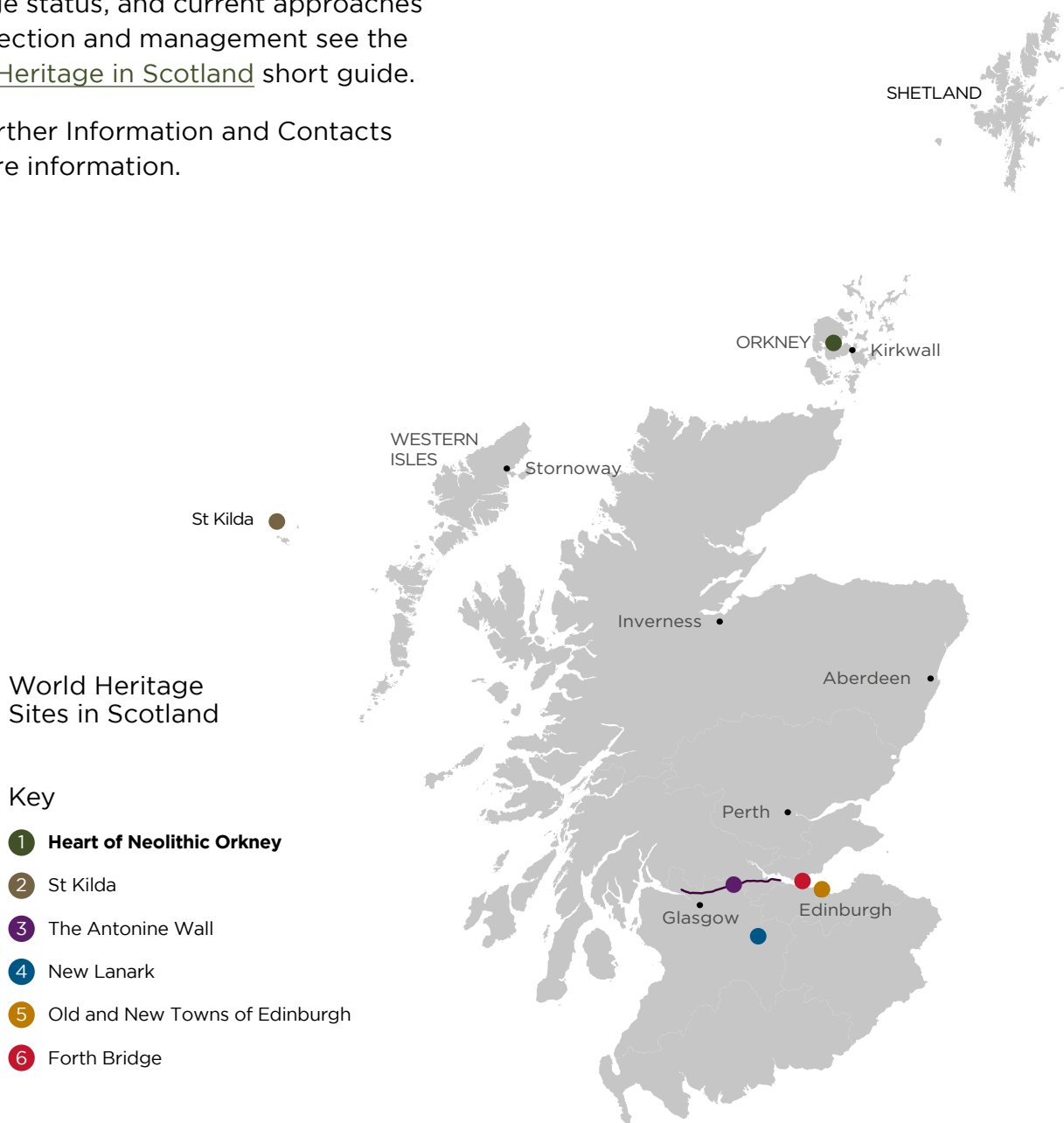
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INTRODUCTION

This short guide is an introduction to the Heart of Neolithic Orkney (HONO) World Heritage Site (WHS), its inscription on the World Heritage List, and its management and governance. It is one of a series of Site-specific short guides for each of Scotland’s six WHS.

For information outlining what World Heritage status is and what it means, the responsibilities and benefits attendant upon achieving World Heritage status, and current approaches to protection and management see the [World Heritage in Scotland](#) short guide.

See Further Information and Contacts for more information.



THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY WHS: KEY FACTS

- Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1999 as a cultural WHS.
- The 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.
- All of the sites are cared for by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) on behalf of Scottish Ministers.
- The WHS and its buffer zone are managed in partnership with Orkney Islands Council (OIC), NatureScot and the RSPB.
- The WHS plays an active and important role in the lives of the people of Orkney, providing economic, cultural, educational and spiritual benefits.

Maeshowe



Stones of Stenness.

Skara Brae



Interior of Maeshowe.



Aerial view of the Ring of Brodgar;
© Keiran Baxter.

THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE AND BUFFER ZONE

THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY

HONO comprises a series of domestic and ritual prehistoric monuments that are unquestionably among the most important Neolithic sites in Western Europe. They lie in a wider archaeological landscape rich with remains from both the Neolithic and many later periods of Orcadian history. The monuments are located in two areas, some 6.6km apart on the island of Mainland, the largest in the Orkney archipelago.

Skara Brae is a 5,000 year old domestic settlement whose stone walls, passageways and stone furnishings, such as beds and dressers, survive to the present day. It is situated on the Bay of Skaill on the west coast of Mainland.

Maeshowe, a chambered tomb, is an extraordinary example of Neolithic architectural genius. It was designed to allow the setting sun at the winter solstice to shine up the passageway and illuminate the chamber.

The Stones of Stenness circle and henge is a very early example of this type of monument. The surviving stones are enormous, standing up to six metres in height.

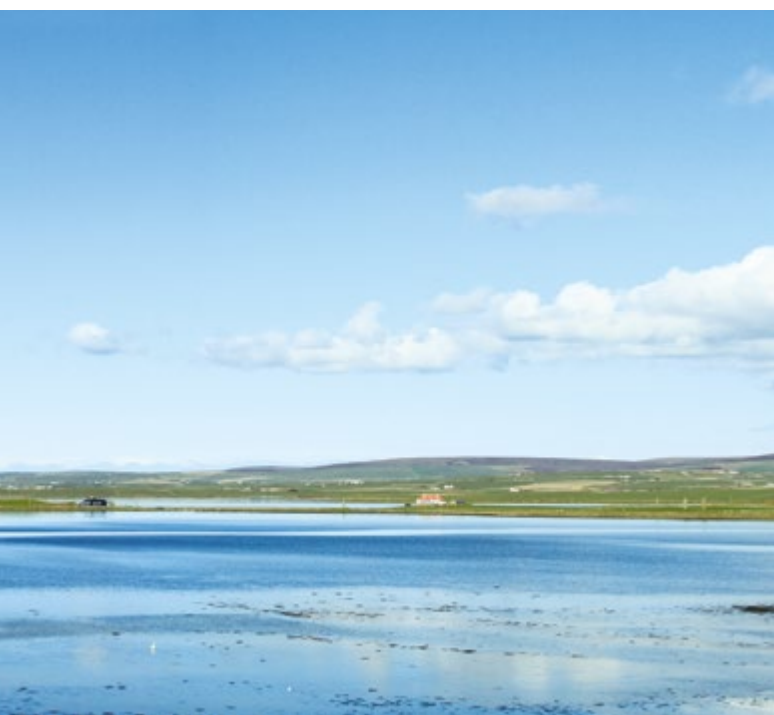
The Ring of Brodgar is a great stone circle 130 metres across. Surrounded by a rock-cut ditch, it is set in a spectacular natural amphitheatre of lochs and hills.

Panorama of the Brodgar-Stenness isthmus seen from across the Loch of Harray; © www.theorcadianphotos.co.uk.

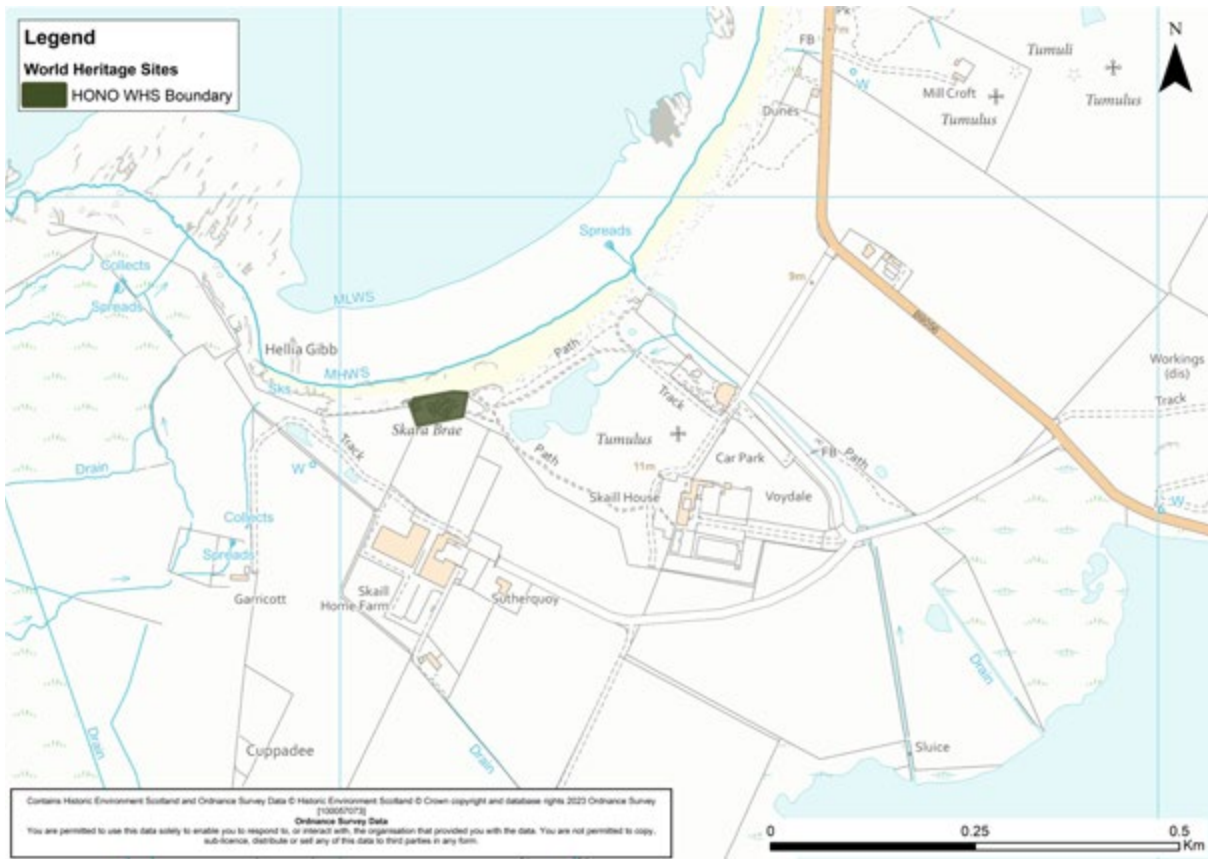


The monuments on the Brodgar and Stenness peninsulas were deliberately situated within a vast topographic bowl formed by a series of visually interconnecting ridgelines stretching from Hoy to Greeny Hill and back. They are also visually linked to other contemporary and later monuments around the lochs. They thus form a fundamental part of a wider, highly complex archaeological landscape which

stretches over much of Orkney. The 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. The boundaries of the WHS conform to those of the designated Properties in Care managed by HES on behalf of Scottish Ministers.



Stones of Stenness.



Skara Brae on the Bay of Skail, west Mainland.



Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness and the Watch Stone, Maeshowe and the Barnhouse Stone, central west Mainland.

THE BUFFER ZONE

The WHS boundary does not include the wider landscape setting that provides the essential context of the monuments, nor other monuments that support the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Site. Consequently, part of this wider landscape is included within a two-part buffer zone, centred on Skara Brae and on the central west Mainland monuments.

The buffer zone is designed to comply with UNESCO guidance that buffer zones should include the immediate setting of the inscribed Site, important views, and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the Site and its protection. Large-scale or tall development outwith the buffer zone has the potential to impact adversely on the sensitive setting of the WHS. To address this, a wider, indicative ‘sensitive area’ has also been defined in local planning guidance.

The purpose of the buffer zone and sensitive area is to indicate areas where development proposals require careful consideration by developers and decision-makers to determine whether they are likely to significantly impact the WHS, its OUV, or its authenticity and integrity.



*Axehead from Skara Brae;
© National Museums Scotland.
Licensor www.scran.ac.uk.*



*The location of the WHS,
buffer zone and sensitive area.*

STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Each WHS has a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). This provides a clear understanding of the reasons for the Site's inscription on the World Heritage List, and details what needs to be managed in order to sustain the OUV for the long term.

The SOUV describes the WHS and its importance, lists the Criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List, explains how the WHS satisfies UNESCO's requirements for Authenticity and Integrity, and summarises the management approach.

CRITERIA

To be included on the World Heritage List, Sites must meet at least one out of ten selection criteria, as explained in UNESCO's [Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention](#). The Criteria under which HONO is inscribed on the World Heritage List are:

Criterion (i): *Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.*

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): *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.*

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 north-west Europe.

Criterion (iii): *Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.*

Through the combination of ceremonial, funerary and domestic sites, the Heart of Neolithic Orkney bears a unique testimony to a cultural tradition which flourished between about 3000 BC and 2000 BC. The state of preservation of Skara Brae is without parallel amongst Neolithic settlement sites in northern Europe.

Criterion (iv): *Be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.*

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble and archaeological landscape which illustrate a significant stage of human history, that is, when the first large ceremonial monuments were built.

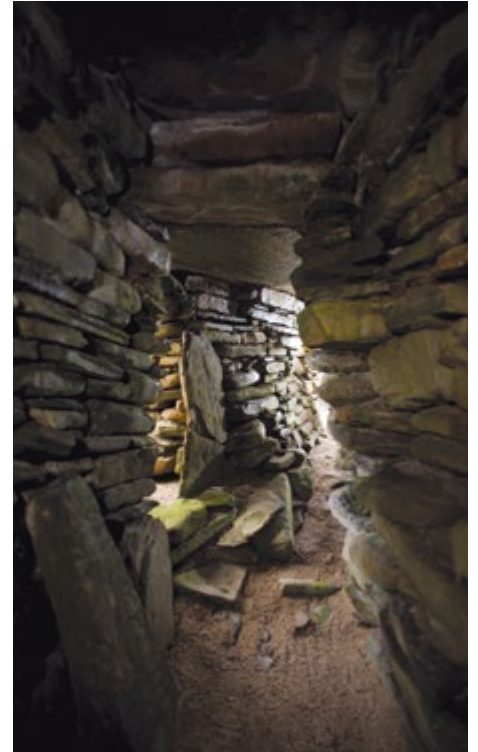
MANAGING THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY

KEY MANAGEMENT PARTNERS

The Partners in managing HONO WHS are [Historic Environment Scotland \(HES\)](#), [Orkney Islands Council \(OIC\)](#), [NatureScot](#) and the [RSPB](#).

Historic Environment Scotland manages the individual monuments that make up the WHS, while the other partners are involved in the wider management of the WHS and buffer zone.

A WHS coordinator: ensures effective liaison between the partners; drives forward the implementation, monitoring and revision of the Management Plan and associated action plan; promotes the OUV and public benefit of the WHS; increases awareness and understanding among partners stakeholders and the public; and serves as a central point for advice.



Skara Brae: connecting passageway.

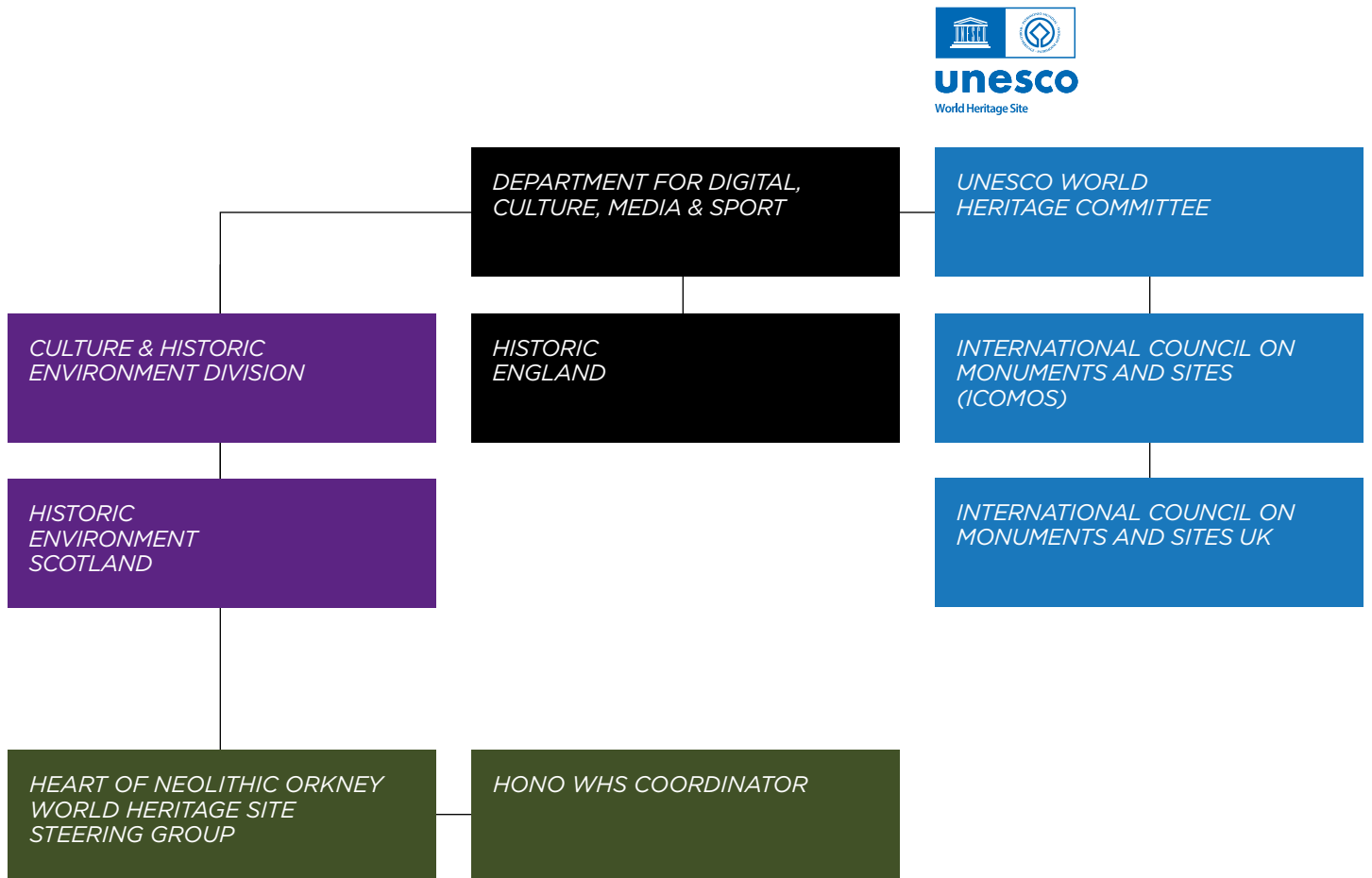
Maeshowe entrance passageway.



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

A Steering Group composed of representatives of all the partners coordinates and implements the aims and objectives set out in the WHS Management Plan. Specific projects and activities are agreed and delivered through delivery groups.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The HONO WHS Management Plan is a framework document for the preservation of the OUV of the WHS. It sets out how the Site will be managed by identifying a series of key issues and devising specific objectives or actions to address these issues.

The plan is developed collaboratively by the partners, bodies who have a role in actively managing the Site and access to it. It sets out objectives designed to help address the issues identified in the Management Plan and describes the methods for monitoring the objectives.

ICOMOS advises that Management Plans for WHS should be based on a strategic view over 30 years. The Vision provides the basis to develop long term aims.

The Management Plan sets out six long term aims to guide future decision making for the period 2014–44, considers some of the key issues for each of them and identifies medium term objectives to meet the longer term aims. These medium term objectives form the core of management of the HONO WHS.



Polished whalebone and bone pins from Skara Brae; © National Museums Scotland. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk.

THE VISION

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney is a World Heritage Site that is effectively protected, conserved, enhanced and enjoyed in ways that safeguard its Outstanding Universal Value. Its global importance as an exceptional testimony to the cultural achievements of the Neolithic peoples of northern Europe and its status as a world-class visitor experience are widely recognised. It is a focus for achieving sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits for locals and visitors alike. It is a resource for inspiring research and learning and widening engagement through participation and discovery.

PLANNING AND THE HEART OF NEOLITHIC ORKNEY

World Heritage designation does not result in additional direct legal protection. Instead, HONO is protected through the planning system and designation as scheduled monuments.

Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 requires planning authorities to only support development proposals where the Outstanding Universal Value of a WHS or its setting is protected and preserved.

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

A series of thematic Managing Change Guidance Notes produced by HES provides best practice advice to help guide changes to the historic environment. One of the guides focuses on World Heritage. It should be used to inform planning policies and help with decisions relating to planning applications affecting the WHS.

In addition to protection under planning legislation, the monuments that comprise the HONO WHS are scheduled as monuments of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Most works carried out within the boundaries of the monuments require Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC): the prior written consent of Scottish Ministers, obtained through HES.

POLICY 8 HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

B. SPECIFIC POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

i. Heart of Neolithic Orkney

World Heritage Site

Development within the Inner Sensitive Zones will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that the development would not have a significant negative impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site or its setting.

Development will not be permitted where it breaks the skyline at the sensitive ridge lines of the World Heritage Site when viewed from any of its component parts, or where it will be sited in any location where there is the potential to impact upon the World Heritage Site, unless it is demonstrated that the development will not have a significant negative impact on either the Outstanding Universal Value or the setting of the World Heritage Site.



Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The Orkney Local Development Plan establishes the main principles of the policy to protect the WHS and its setting from inappropriate development:

Further guidance is provided in OIC's HONO WHS Planning Policy Advice. This is a material consideration in the planning process. The scope of the Advice encompasses the wider setting of the WHS, which is critically significant to the OUV.



SUMMARY OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE:

- Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland (March 2014)
- The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006
- National Planning Framework 4 (2023)
- Planning Advice Note 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology
- Historic Environment (Amendment) Scotland Act 2011, which amends three pieces of primary legislation
 - The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953;
 - The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979; and
 - The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997
- Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) (2019)
- Managing Change in the Historic Environment Guidance Notes, HES.
- HONO WHS Planning Policy Advice, 2011
- Orkney Local Development Plan

Ring of Brodgar.



*Skara Brae village
in the sun*

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

HEART OF NEOLITHIC
ORKNEY COORDINATOR
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND WORLD HERITAGE TEAM

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KEY LINKS

UNESCO World Heritage Centre
- World Heritage List: HONO WHS:
whc.unesco.org/en/list/514

HONO WHS on the HES website:
[www.historicenvironment.scot/
heart-of-neolithic-orkney](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/heart-of-neolithic-orkney)

For planning policies and guidance related
to the WHS see the relevant Orkney Islands
Council web pages: www.orkney.gov.uk



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