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The Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage
Site Draft Management Plan 2025-2035
Strategic Environmental Report
Environmental Report –
Non-Technical Summary 2025

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1. Introduction

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney (HONO) was inscribed as a World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1999. The site comprises a series of discrete, but related, Neolithic monuments which fall into two complexes, 6 km apart. These are: Maeshowe, Skara Brae, the Stones of Stenness, the Watch Stone, the Barnhouse Stone, the Ring of Brodgar, and thirteen mounds and a stone setting, all of which are Scheduled Monuments. The monuments within the WHS are also all Properties in the Care of Scottish Ministers, managed by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) on their behalf. HES therefore has responsibilities as both the manager of this particular WHS and as the State Party under the terms of the World Heritage Convention 1972.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) requires that appropriate management systems are in place at WHS's. Management Plans specify how the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Site will be protected and managed for future generations. The draft Management Plan provides a framework for the management of the WHS over the next ten years, identifying key issues that affect or are likely to affect the Site and lays out how these will be addressed.

WHS Management Plans are periodically reviewed, monitored and implemented. The last Management Plan was published in 2014. Although technically past this period, dates for Management Plans are indicative only and the 2014-2019 Plan continues to be active. HES reviewed the current Management Plan in consultation with our partner Orkney Islands Council (OIC), advisory Partners on the Steering Group and stakeholders, and have now prepared a draft Management Plan for public consultation.

The draft Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan 2025-2035 ("the Management Plan") sets out the overarching framework and aspirations to conserve and protect the site, defining a new extended period of a shared vision (2025-2050), its six long-term aims and strategic objectives.

A suite of strategic objectives are designed to deliver on the long-term aims throughout the ten-year cycle of the Management Plan, delivered through more detailed actions set out in a regularly updated Action Plan. Many of the objectives relate to awareness-raising and partnership working activities but some may result in changes on the ground. For example, there are objectives to address the following:

In providing a strategic framework, the draft Management Plan cannot include detail on how these issues will be/will begin to be resolved nor is the preferred solution always known during review of the Plan. In most cases options will be developed as the Management Plan is implemented and actions will be reviewed as part of a cycle of annual monitoring.

2. What is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

When public bodies are preparing plans, programmes and strategies, an assessment of their effect on the environment is undertaken. The public bodies preparing plans, programmes or strategies are the 'Responsible Authorities' for those documents.

The purpose of SEA is to ensure that information on the environmental effects of a plan, programme or policy are gathered and made available to plan-makers and decision takers as it is prepared and implemented. The overarching aim of SEA is to provide a high level of protection for the environment, to reduce environmental impact and to enhance environmental outcomes. It also ensures that policies and proposals are informed by relevant environmental information and provides further opportunities for people to get involved in the process.

In doing so, SEA aims to:

- integrate environmental factors into plan preparation and decision-making
- improve plans and enhance environmental protection
- increase public participation in decision making
- facilitate openness and transparency

The key stages of SEA for the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Draft Management Plan 2025-2035 involve:

Stage	Activity
Screening	Determining if the Management Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects and whether an SEA is required.
Scoping	Deciding on the scope and level of detail for the assessment and the consultation period. This is done in liaison with NatureScot (NS) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).
Assessment, mitigation & enhancement	Testing the contents of the Management Plan as it is developed, identifying mitigation measures and looking at ways to enhance positive effects.
Environmental Report	Publishing an Environmental Report on the findings of the assessment and consulting on that report and the Management Plan.
Adoption & monitoring	Providing information on the adopted Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site Management Plan, how consultation comments have been taken into account and methods for monitoring any significant environmental effects arising from its implementation.

The assessment process is structured around SEA topic areas. These topic areas are the range of environmental issues which should be explored through the assessment. They include biodiversity, flora and fauna, population and human health, water, soil, air, climate, material assets, cultural heritage and landscape.

The Environmental Report:

- Describes the environmental and policy context of the Management Plan
- Describes the relevant aspects of the environmental baseline
- Explains how the environmental assessment was carried out and which parts of the Management Plan were assessed
- Sets out the findings of the environmental assessment
- Discusses options for improving the positive effects and mitigating the negative effects of the Management Plan where appropriate

SEPA and NatureScot were consulted on the approach taken to the environmental assessment. **Appendix A** of the full report demonstrate how their comments have been taken into account.

3. Context

One of the early stages of the SEA process is to consider the relationship of the Management Plan to other relevant policies, plans, strategies (PPS) and their environmental objectives. This allows key environmental objectives to be identified for consideration during the preparation process. It is also important to identify both the plans, programmes and strategies that will influence the Management Plan and those that will be influenced by the Management Plan itself. **Appendix B** of the full report sets out our review of the legislation, policies, plans and strategies that are considered to be of most direct relevance.

In order to help consider the effects of the draft Management Plan we gathered information about relevant aspects of the environmental baseline. **Appendix C** of the Environmental Report provides a detailed environmental baseline.

4. Assessment Methodology

SEA objectives were developed for each of the environmental receptors scoped into the assessment. These are supported by more detailed assessment criteria, as shown below. This approach helps to make the assessment systematic and consistent. The environmental objectives come from our review of plans, programmes and strategies that we talked of above, and the performance of our activities against these objectives is tested by a series of questions that help to focus the assessment.

Environmental Topic	SEA Objective	How will the Management Plan affect...
Climatic Factors	Reduce the causes of climate change Contribute to effective adaptation to the predicted effects of climate change	CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions? Effective adaptation to the effects of climate change?
Population and Human Health	Promote celebration, understanding, enjoyment and access to the natural and cultural heritage	Access to the historic environment? Understanding of the value of the historic environment?

	Support healthy living and working environments To reduce inequalities	Community involvement in decisions affecting their places and spaces? The condition of the historic environment as a place to work and live? The reduction of inequalities?
Landscape (including seascapes, urban and suburban landscapes)	To safeguard and enhance the distinct identity, the diverse character, and the special qualities of Scotland's landscapes as a whole.	Landscape character, local distinctiveness, and scenic value?
Cultural Heritage	Safeguard and where appropriate enhance the historic environment	Designated tangible features of the historic environment? Undesignated / unknown tangible features of the historic environment? Intangible features of the historic environment? Elements of the historic environment which have been identified as at risk? The consequences of climate change for the historic environment?
Biodiversity, flora and fauna	To safeguard and enhance biodiversity	Species and habitats? Green / blue networks? Woodland (including ancient and semi-natural)? Opportunities for increased biodiversity?

5. Consideration of alternatives

At the scoping stage we noted that we would assess the environmental effects of the alternatives that were considered during the plan preparation process. For example, alternative wording for the vision and aims, or more detailed alternatives for the objectives that are taken forward into the finalised management plan.

The draft Management Plan has been prepared in consultation with the Partners and the vision, aims, and objectives have been refined through this process. The plan making process did not identify any significantly different or additional reasonable alternatives to the vision, aims and objectives presented in the draft Management Plan.

We have not assessed strategic alternatives i.e., the 'no plan' option or strategic options for the overall direction of the Plan because these are largely defined by the UNESCO guidance and are not considered to be reasonable alternatives.

6. Summary of assessment findings

We assessed all outcomes and aspirations in the Management Plan for environmental effects. The detailed findings of how these affect the environment are contained within **Appendix D, E and F** of the full report.

We found that the Management Plan vision has a generally positive relationship with climatic factors, population, human health, and cultural heritage, and will have no effect on other environmental topics. No recommendations were made to improve the vision.

We considered whether the Plan is likely to generate cumulative effects on any of the environmental topics scoped into the assessment or cross cutting effects as a result of inter-relationships between topics areas. It has been concluded that this will not result in any significant additional effects.

Overall, our assessment shows that the outcomes, and aspirations that underpin them, will generally have positive effects across those environmental topics that have been scoped into the assessment.

We have identified one potentially negative effect at this level - while the aims had generally positive or neutral relationships for all environmental topics and no clear negative issues were identified some uncertain effects were identified for landscape. However, mitigation measures have been identified to address this. The outputs of our assessment will inform the detailed delivery of the Management Plan. The assessment methodology incorporates a cumulative assessment of factors, which has contributed to the findings for the overarching outcomes. This is outlined in the summary above, and in the detailed assessment matrices in the full report.

We also considered whether delivery of the outcomes in combination would have cumulative effects and have concluded that this will not result in any significant additional effects.

7. Mitigation and enhancement

One potential negative environmental impact has been identified. Existing mitigation measures can help to address this.

There are areas where consideration should be given to approaches that would enhance the positive effects identified, and where care should be taken in delivery of the Management Plan, in order to balance the different factors and interests on the historic environment and their impacts, to ensure a sustainable future.

In strategic environmental assessments, mitigation can be achieved in a number of different ways. Mitigation will be done by developing a number of more detailed mitigation measures that aim to ensure that the findings of this environmental assessment are followed through.

The proposed mitigation measures are included in Table 7 of the full report as a schedule of commitments. These will be finalised following the public consultation and included in the SEA Post Adoption Statement.

8. Monitoring

Although no significant environmental effects have been predicted, it will still be important to understand how the Management Plan is affecting the environment over the next ten years of its implementation. This will help to identify any effects arising which were not predicted through the assessment and allow appropriate mitigation to be sought.

Monitoring of the environmental effects will be incorporated into overall monitoring strategy for the Plan. The HONO Steering Group will produce an annual monitoring report on the progress of the Management Plan which will focus on the Action Plan, key projects and report on the delivery of the finalised SEA commitments.

9. Next steps

The public consultation period on the draft Management Plan ends on 13 May 2025. A final version of the Management Plan will be prepared following the consultation period to take into account comments made. All changes will be screened to consider if they raise significant environmental issues that have not already been taken into consideration in the environmental assessment. If the potential for significant environmental effects is identified, an assessment will be undertaken of their impact, and reported in the SEA Post Adoption Statement. This will be published along with the finalised Management Plan. The SEA Post Adoption Statement, which will be published along with the final version of the Management Plan, will show how the ER (and all the comments expressed on it) has been taken into account in the adopted Management Plan.

10. Consultation

The Environmental Report accompanies the draft Management Plan for an 8-week public consultation between 18 March and 13 May 2025. Any comments that you would like to make on either document are welcomed. A number of questions are listed in the Response Form which you are encouraged to use to help structure your response to the draft plan and this Environmental Report. With regards to the Environmental Report the main questions to consider are:

- **Has our environmental assessment identified the likely environmental effects of the options?**
- **Do you think there are any additional mitigation, enhancement, or monitoring measures that should be considered?**
- **Do you have any other comments on the environmental assessment?**

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