



the National Trust
for Scotland
a place for everyone

St Kilda World Heritage Site

Introduction

St Kilda is a place apart. Isolated in the Atlantic Ocean, these tiny islands are one of the most remote and inaccessible parts of the British Isles, but their modest size belies their outstanding heritage. The intensely dramatic landscape of towering cliffs and sea stacs, formed from the rim of an ancient volcano and the seas that surround the islands, support seabird colonies of unequalled size in the north-east Atlantic¹. Its underwater cliffs, reefs and caves support marine life of almost unparalleled richness and colour. Its cultural landscape and remarkable associated documentary evidence provide a tangible and powerful link to the islands' past history, to a people isolated and adrift 'at the edge of the world'. It is a place which gives an overwhelming sense of the power of nature and provides testament to the resilience of a people in a hostile environment, who harnessed nature for their very survival. The poignancy of the islands' history and the remarkable fossilised landscape, its spectacular natural beauty and heritage, and its inaccessibility and remoteness all combine to make this one of the most prized of places to visit.

St Kilda is the United Kingdom's only mixed World Heritage Site (WHS) and today, one of only 25 worldwide, inscribed for both its outstanding terrestrial and marine natural heritage and its cultural landscapes.



¹ The seabird colonies include 20% of the world population of Northern gannets (*Morus bassanus*); the biggest colony in western Europe of Northern fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*); the major breeding station in the north-east Atlantic of Leach's storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*); and the most numerous of all seabirds on St Kilda, the Atlantic puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), also found in biogeographically important numbers.

What is a World Heritage Site?

A World Heritage Site is a site of natural and/or cultural heritage that is considered to be of outstanding universal value and as such belongs to the peoples of the world, irrespective of where in the world it is located. A site is only inscribed on the World Heritage List after a rigorous assessment by UNESCO² and its advisors – ICOMOS³ for cultural sites and IUCN⁴ for natural sites.



Ownership and management



St Kilda has been owned by the National Trust for Scotland (Trust) since 1957, and management since that time has been one of partnership and close co-operation between the Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Historic Scotland (HS), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and their agents. Management has always worked towards sympathetic integrated management of all interests of the archipelago, with a clear priority given to conservation, and will continue to do so.

World Heritage Site Management Plans – why have one?

In order to ensure the ongoing conservation and management of all WHSs, UNESCO requires that a suitable management structure is in place. It is best practice and UK policy that all World Heritage Sites should have a Management Plan.

2 UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

3 ICOMOS – International Council on Monuments and Sites

4 IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature

What is a Management Plan?

The Management Plan sets out what is most important about the place, particularly its heritage, but also the opportunities it provides for access and education and its economic and social importance to local communities and wider communities of interest. The Management Plan provides a mechanism for bringing together all communities of interest, to balance and integrate differing views, ultimately providing the framework within which all partners will work to secure the agreed long-term aims of the property. As such the Management Plan is not just for the Trust as owners, it is for all stakeholders. To see the last Management Plan, go to the St Kilda website at www.kilda.org.uk.

Why does it need to be reviewed?

A Management Plan should outline both the long-term vision for the property, setting the direction for management over the next 20-30 years, and the medium-term objectives that will focus work over the ensuing 5 years. The last St Kilda WHS Management Plan covered the period 2003-2008. The process to review it was put on hold until after the MOD's decision on the future of its operations on St Kilda. With this now known, the review of the Management Plan has once again become a priority.

Have your say

This is the first of two opportunities for you to have your say in the future management of the archipelago. This consultation is to find out what makes St Kilda special to you; to find out what issues you think need to be addressed in the coming years and also to help the Trust find solutions to issues that we and our partners have identified. Please let us know your ideas on the reply form attached, answering as many or few questions as you wish.

Please email your response to:

StKildaConsultation@nts.org.uk

or post them to:

Vicky Cairns
St Kilda WHS Management Planner
The National Trust for Scotland
28 Charlotte Square
Edinburgh EH2 4ET



The second opportunity to have your say will be in the spring of 2010 when we will be consulting on the full draft plan.

What will happen to the consultation responses?

All consultation responses will be collated and analysed and a report summarising the findings published on the National Trust for Scotland's website www.nts.org.uk (go to the St Kilda pages on the Visits section of the website) and also on the St Kilda website www.kilda.org.uk. The findings will be used to inform the next St Kilda WHS Management Plan.

Consultation

Please answer as many or few of the following questions as you wish.

1. What makes St Kilda special to you?

St Kilda means many things to many people. For the Trust it is about the heritage and ensuring it is conserved and made as accessible as possible, for present and future generations to enjoy. For others it might be a particular aspect of the archipelago that is important, eg the seabirds; the puffins; time spent on the archipelago whilst stationed there in the army; the stories of those who lived there before the islands were evacuated in 1930; the dramatic landscape or sense of wildness, etc.

1.1 What makes St Kilda important to you?

2. Biosecurity – introduced species

One of the highest risks to the natural heritage of St Kilda, particularly the seabirds, Soay sheep, St Kilda wren and St Kilda mouse, is the introduction of species not native to the archipelago. Those that pose the greatest threat are rats, cats, dogs and mustelids (mink etc), and that is why we do not allow boats to come alongside the pier or allow cats and dogs to be brought ashore. It is very important that we get this message across to all who visit the archipelago. We would like to hear from you who you think we need to work with to convey this message to potential visitors and what are the sources of information that potential visitors consult before setting out on their journey.



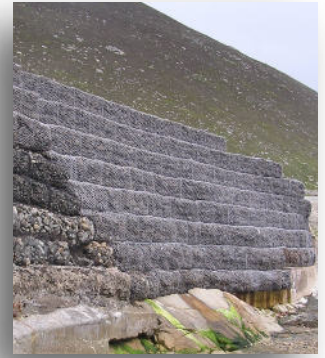
- 2.1 How best do you think we can convey this message?
- 2.2 What information sources should we ensure it is included in?
- 2.3 Who should we be working with to convey this message?

3. Coastal erosion



Coastal erosion is a natural process that has been affecting St Kilda for millennia. However, activities in Village Bay over recent years have perhaps accelerated this process and we are now faced with some difficult choices. Gabion baskets have been used to protect the base, however they are visually intrusive. It is also not yet known whether they are protecting the pier, which is so vital for visitor access or whether they are in fact accelerating its erosion. Further round the bay, coastal erosion threatens the monuments close to the sea such as the Featherstore and field dykes. Do we let nature take its course and potentially lose these elements of the islands' cultural heritage or should we try to protect them with more gabion baskets and more concrete, in the process possibly causing further coastal erosion elsewhere in the bay? The Trust normally allows natural processes to continue without intervention and undertakes minimal intervention to retain the significance of the cultural heritage. Where these two are in opposition, we look at them on a case by case basis.

- 3.1 What do you think of the existing coastal defences in Village Bay?
- 3.2 Do you think we should reinforce the existing coastal defences to prevent any further loss of the cultural heritage from coastal erosion or allow nature to take its course?
- 3.3 If the Featherstore cannot be saved, should it be left to be destroyed by the sea or should we move it?



4. Marine environment

The sea around St Kilda is a natural resource of outstanding significance, as recognised in the extension of the World Heritage designation to incorporate the marine environment in 2004. It provides vital feeding grounds for a million seabirds; the nutrient-rich waters support marine life of exceptional richness and there is potential to learn more about the people of St Kilda from now submerged cultural landscapes. The seas around our coasts are also vital to the economies of our coastal communities and provide an exceptional recreational resource.

- 4.1 What do you see as the major threats facing the marine environment around St Kilda?
- 4.2 How do you think they should be protected, if at all?
- 4.3 Who should be involved in reviewing and potentially enhancing the protection of the seas around the archipelago?



5. Visitors

St Kilda is one of the remotest parts of the British Isles, a place many would like to see but few have had the opportunity. Have you visited the archipelago? Did you visit as part of an organised day trip or on a cruise; as a member of a St Kilda Work Party; were you stationed there in the army or did you work there as a civilian contractor?

- 5.1 Have you visited St Kilda? Yes/No
- 5.2 If yes, was it:
 - On a day visit from the Western Isles
 - On a cruise ship
 - On a private yacht
 - As a member of a Work Party
 - For work reasons, eg stationed there with the army or employed as a civilian contractor
 - Other, please specify
- 5.3 If no, do you have any plans to visit the archipelago?

6. Visitor numbers

Increasing visitor numbers over recent years have brought new challenges to those working on St Kilda, whether for the Trust or QinetiQ or Amey. Balancing the needs of conservation, visitors, and those who live and work on the islands is vital to ensure that the heritage is properly protected, visitors have a memorable and enjoyable experience, and all staff, including contractors and researchers, can carry out their business as necessary. Visitor numbers are not yet at a level that appear to be affecting the natural or cultural heritage, or impacting on the work of those who work on St Kilda, but this is something the Trust and its partners will continue to monitor in the coming years.



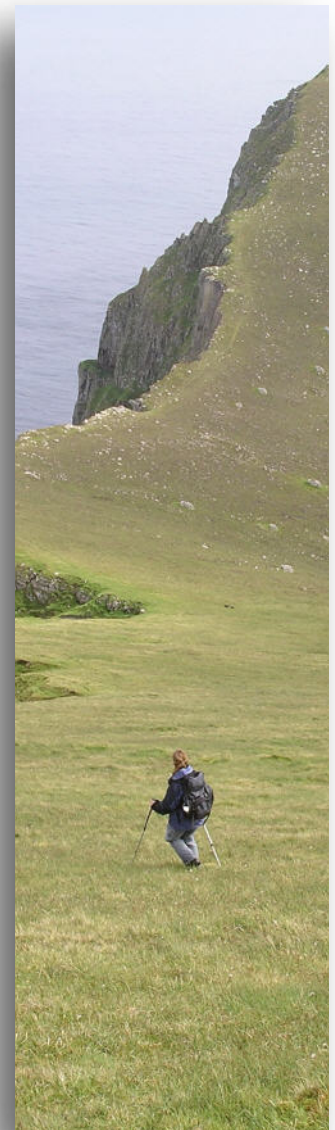
6.1 How do we make sure that an increase in visitor numbers does not impact on the visitor experience nor the natural nor cultural heritage?

7. Access

We know that St Kilda is a place that many people would like to visit. Although access has changed dramatically in the last 6 years, with day-trip boats coming from the Western Isles and more cruise ships visiting, only a small number of people have been lucky enough to get there, and it remains for most an impossible dream. The Trust and its partners would like to make the islands and their history and heritage more accessible. We feel that one way of bringing the St Kilda experience to more people is through the proposed St Kilda Centre in the Western Isles. Plans are still at an early stage, however the Trust will continue to work closely with partners to move this proposal forward.

A further way that the Trust feels provides great potential is through the St Kilda (www.kilda.org.uk) and Hiort (www.hiort.org.uk) websites. As is so often the case, resources dictate how much we can do to improve the websites, but we would like to know if you think the website could be improved or whether you feel it provides all you are looking for. In what other ways could access to the islands be improved?

In places such as the Scottish Seabird Centre web-cams are used to give visitors a close-up view of some of nature's wonders. There are a number of technical concerns and issues to do with the privacy of those who work on St Kilda, and visitors, that would need to be addressed before a similar scheme could be introduced on St Kilda, but we would like to know whether this is something you would welcome or if you feel this would be too much of an intrusion? What elements of the natural and cultural heritage would you like to see via a live web-cam?



- 7.1 Have you visited the St Kilda websites – www.kilda.org.uk or www.hiort.org.uk?
Yes/No
- 7.2 What information were you looking for and did you find it?
- 7.3 How could the website be improved?
- 7.4 Would you welcome a web-cam or do you feel that it would detract from the islands sense of isolation and remoteness?
- 7.5 If yes to 7.4, what elements of the natural and cultural heritage would you like to see on the web-cam?
- 7.6 What other ways could access to the islands be improved?

8. Facilities

Due to the nature of the place, there are only very modest facilities for visitors on Hirta ⁵ the museum which conveys the story of St Kilda and provides a dry place in the event of bad weather, toilets and the shop. With the refurbishment of the Manse, the toilets and shop will be more accessible as they will be located at the head of the pier.



- 8.1 What do you think of the visitor facilities at present?
- 8.2 What visitor facilities would you wish to see on Hirta?

9. MOD buildings

The Trust and its partners view the recent military history of St Kilda as an integral part of the archipelago's past. One of the most visible signs of this are the MOD buildings in Village Bay. This summer the MOD consulted on proposals to withdraw all personnel from St Kilda. This prompted the Trust and Historic Scotland to look at the MOD buildings in Village Bay to ensure that the significance of the buildings would be fully understood and recorded before their future was decided upon, should the proposals go forward. Even though the proposals have now been abandoned, we would still like to understand the value these buildings have to the wider community. Some consider them a blot on the landscape, others value them as an important reminder of the Cold War. We would like to hear what these buildings mean to you so that we can assess their wider significance.

Whether these buildings remain or are removed in the future, the MOD and the Trust will still require accommodation, work space and storage for their staff, contractors and researchers. Therefore it is likely that there will always be some modern buildings within Village Bay, either the existing ones or new ones.



- 9.1 What significance do the MOD buildings within Village Bay hold for you, if any?
- 9.2 What do you think should happen to the present buildings if the MOD and their contractors no longer require them?

⁵ The largest of the islands within the St Kilda archipelago and the focus of human occupation

10. Funding

As mentioned above, St Kilda is one of the most remote and inaccessible parts of the British Isles and as a result it requires considerable investment to ensure its ongoing conservation and management. The Trust has been very fortunate in the support provided by its partners, both in terms of grants and practical help, which has enabled us to conserve and manage this exceptional archipelago over the years. However, to continue to maintain present standards and to fulfil the potential that is there in terms of providing greater access, enjoyment, education and further research opportunities, the Trust must try and find more resources. In what ways do you think the Trust could raise money for the ongoing management of these islands? To date, suggestions include charging a modest fee for use of the pier, and launching an appeal to raise funds to cover operating costs, not just one-off projects. What do you think of these suggestions and do you have any other ideas?



- 10.1 What do you think of the idea to charge a modest fee for use of the pier?
- 10.2 What ideas do you have about ways in which the Trust could raise the necessary funds for the ongoing conservation and management of the islands' heritage and enabling greater access to it?

11. Wider benefits

St Kilda is not only a part of the Western Isles in location but also through its shared culture and heritage, and the bonds of its people today and in the past. The archipelago is a great asset to Scotland and the Western Isles, bringing international attention to this part of Scotland. More tangibly, it provides a moderate economic resource for some of those who live and work in the Western Isles. Are there ways in which the communities of the Western Isles could gain greater economic and social benefit from our management of St Kilda?

- 11.1 How could St Kilda be of greater economic and social benefit to the communities of the Western Isles?

12. Other Issues

- 12.1 What other issues do you have concerning St Kilda? We are keen to hear everyone's opinions and suggestions about how we could improve our management of the islands in the future.

If you have any views on these or any other issues, please send them to Vicky Cairns, St Kilda Management Planner, the National Trust for Scotland, 28 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh EH2 4ET or email StKildaConsultation@nts.org.uk. Views are welcome at any time and comments received by 18 January 2010 will help the Trust and its partners write the first draft of the new St Kilda Management Plan.