Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site Management Plan

Public Submissions

In April 2011 submissions were invited from the public as part of the preparation of a draft new Management Plan for the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site. A consultation paper and a draft framework document for the plan were uploaded to the World Heritage Ireland website www.worldheritageireland.ie and a public meeting was held at Brú na Bóinne on 23 June 2011. The final closing date for submissions was 30 September 2011.

Fifty seven submissions were received by the Department. It should be noted that most of the submissions addressed more than one issue relating to the World Heritage Site. Issues have been extracted from the submissions and are presented below. They have been placed under the relevant headings which are based on UNESCO recommendations. Some of the comments are no longer relevant with actions having been implemented since the submissions were made in 2011. All submissions have been considered in the drafting of the new Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site Management Plan.

Factors affecting the property

Marine Transport Infrastructure – Boyne Canal

- To facilitate the preservation and the restoration of the Boyne Canal and its Navigation where it passes through the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its Buffer Zone (BZ)
- To maintain public access to and on the existing tow path which runs alongside the Boyne Canal
- To facilitate the provision of a walking and cycling track on the tow path along the Boyne Canal
- To facilitate navigation along the Boyne Canal and relevant sections of the River Boyne where the Navigation passes through the WHS/BZ
- To facilitate access to and along the Boyne Canal and Navigation for the purpose of restoration
- To maintain close co-operation and levels of consultation with An Taisce, as owners of the Boyne Navigation in all matters relating to same
- Development of the Boyne Canal would greatly improve the local amenity and allow the unique atmosphere and natural habitat of the area to be better experienced, improve tourist retention within the area and reduce current leakage to Dublin and the alternative access to the Brú Na Bónne facility would potentially increase visitor numbers to the centre.

Comments:

This is an issue that is not just relevant to the management plan but to An Taisce and Louth and Meath County Councils. Any action to be included in the plan must take cognisance of this. Liaison between all parties should be encouraged in the management plan.
**Transport Infrastructure**

- Allow admittance to Newgrange from both sides of the river or correct the road signs. Regular maintenance of the area should be a priority in order to ensure a positive image of our WHS thus increasing the likelihood of repeat visits.
- Serious consideration should be given to the possibility of working with landowners to open up access to the wealth of other monuments and places in WHS.
- A walkway was created in Roughgrange with a car park at the West End but none at the East End, this must be addressed at it is leading to dangerous road traffic conditions.
- A shuttle bus service should be implemented, starting from Drogheda out to Battle of the Boyne Centre at Oldbridge, and on to Donore, Brú na Bóinne, Slane Castle & Village, the Hill of Slane, the Francis Ledwidge Museum and back to Drogheda.
- A new management plan, and team, should take cognisance of the potential to develop routeways through the WHS such as a cycleway along the towpath of the Boyne Canal. Such potential developments would mean that new ways of accessing the WHS have to be considered and planned for.
- They could also include a relaxation of the access policy to encourage pedestrian or cycling access to the State owned monuments. The use of IT booking systems to manage this could add a measure of control. Such a move would also open the possibility of sustainable local businesses e.g. Bike rental, walking tours.
- If all visitor traffic is encouraged to travel via the M1 and Donore it will lead to less people staying in local accommodation and less economic benefits for the local community. There may also be an opportunity to develop an alternative route.
- A developed walking route would create opportunities for local accommodation providers in providing B&B, lunches and luggage forwarding etc. The developed route would need to have signage and information boards, picnic areas, parking and litter facilities, map guides etc.
- It would seem to make sense to develop a car park area on the north side of the river near the pedestrian bridge. This would allow visitors to come into the centre from the north side of the river (by parking and walking across the bridge to the centre) and participate in the various tours etc. from there.

**Comments:**

Any actions arising out of this issue will require close co-operation with the OPW, Louth and Meath County Councils, Fáilte Ireland, the NRA and the local community.
Interpretation/Signage

- Directional signage to Junction 9, along the R152 from the exit ramp of the M1 at Junction 8 to the exit ramp/roundabout at Junction 9 of the M1 and continuing at every junction on the L1601 towards the Brú na Bóinne visitor centre, in Drogheda at all major junctions along an axis between Drogheda McBride train station to the N51/M1 (Junction 10) roundabout – including R132 / Donore Road, R132/ Trinity Street/ R168, R132 / Patrick Street/ R166, R132/ Cement Road/ Cross Lane/ R166, R132/ R168 roundabout and R168/ Mell roundabout, at all junctions along the N51 between the M1 Junction 10/ N51 and the M3 Junctions 8 and 9, on the N2 and N51 at all approaches to Slane village, at the N2/N51 Junction in Slane village, on the M3 at Junctions 8 and 9, in Navan at all road junctions along the rivers Boyne and blackwater (ie. N3/ N51 R147/ R153/ R161/ R162) & Navan from R147 at all junctions along the L1600 to the Brú na Bóinne visitor centre.

- Please address the removal of the sign to Dowth. Nobody knows where L1607 leads to?

- A clearer signage system needs to be put in place. It needs to highlight the difference between travelling to Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre and travelling to Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth and other townlands

- Signage must be accurate, correct and legal. Slane Village should be centre point on any new plan.

- High definition webcams should be installed at all three sites and be freely available on the World Heritage Ireland website in real time. These cameras should be placed in the passage and chamber of Newgrange and Dowth and in each passage of Knowth, in addition to a wideangle view of the exterior of each site. This has the potential to bring the magic of the solar alignments and the sites to a worldwide audience and could be a valuable educational tool throughout the rest of the year.

Comments:

The provision of an appropriate standard of visitor access and interpretation is an essential requirement for the WHS. It is crucial that visitor numbers are actively managed so that visitor numbers do not impact negatively with Brú na Bóinne. There will be objectives and actions relating to this heading in the management plan.
**Tourism/Economic Impacts**

- Any future plan will look to breathe life and energy and positivity into our most historic area, and that tourists can experience a true hearty Irish welcome and see our culture and heritage thriving.
- The operation of the World Heritage Site must be accepted as a tourism resource – rather than only as a monument conservation resource as at present – and must operate as part of a wider targeted tourist resource – encompassing the wide Boyne Valley Area.
- As a matter of urgency, the Department should establish a working relationship with all paper/online mapping companies and travel guide publishers to ensure that all their respective products direct visitors to the visitor centre and not the individual sites.
- Re-establishing Slane as a tourist hub is of the utmost importance to create local jobs and stimulate the local economy
- Increase efforts in the promotion of local accommodation, facilities and related or alternative activities in the area and thus greatly improve the retention of visitors within the area

**Comments:**

Tourism may cause damage if defined capacities are exceeded or if resulting facilities and traffic threaten the authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage site in its spatial context. Therefore the extent of tourism-related use a World Heritage site can tolerate, the necessary infrastructure to do so and limits to tourism development and marketing have to be determined. There will be objectives and actions in the management plan relevant to this heading.
**Research**

- It is recommended that the Draft Management Plan would be underpinned by an up to date understanding of the World Heritage Site as set out in the Research Framework and by current research.
- The new management plan will hopefully create an explicit link between the research carried out in the WHS and environs and the management plan.
- The plan might include measures to allow for the implementation of at least some of the recommendations of the Research Framework document including some mechanism for the funding or at least active facilitation of ongoing research incorporating new technologies.
- The lack of action on the refurbishment of Knowth House as a research and education centre, despite planning permission being sought and granted is most disappointing.
- Remote sensing techniques like Lidar survey, monitoring of aerial photographic imagery, monitoring of multispectral and hyperspectral imagery could be considered. This could be integrated with terrestrial geophysics and field inspection.
- A research group be formally set up under the aegis of the emerging management plan to advise on the implementation of the Research Framework, and on how new research findings can be reflected in management and interpretation.
- Maintain support for the Knowth publication project, now in its final stages, and for a publication aimed at the general public
- Geoarchaeology should to be included in the new Management plan. There is still much that can be achieved in terms of sourcing the lithic materials utilised in megalithic passage tomb construction at Brú na Bóinne
- Engagement with the local community and landowners, focus on landscape not just monuments, dedicated research programme, remote sensing and digital recording and dissemination
- Any plan should be dynamic, taking into account the requirements and potential benefits of ongoing research and tailoring where appropriate visitor experiences to these.

**Comments:**

UNESCO recommends that science and research are identified as objectives of a management plan. A number of actions should then be easily adapted from this objective. Actions can be extracted from the above submissions and should be included in the new management plan.
Core Area/Buffer Zone

- As set out in the Research Framework it is recommended that under the new Management Plan previous work on the boundaries and buffer zone needs to be revisited and built upon to provide a robust setting and landscape use strategy to aid future planning and management of the WHS. Such a review should be informed by an examination of definitions in existing policy documents, legislation and case studies.

- The Core Area should be expanded to include at least the north facing slopes of the south valley of the River Boyne and preferably the entire current Buffer Zone.

- Through engagement and agreement with the local community, the designation of the Core and Buffer areas and an appropriate extent of the surrounding landscape as an Archaeological and Ecological National Park with appropriate regulation and protection measures.

- Define more accurately the “landscape setting” and its role/contribution of the Outstanding Universal Values of the WHS. This should include lands within the Core Area and the Buffer Zone.

Comments:

The Core Zone and its buffer zones formed part of the original inscription of the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site. There are no plans to increase or decrease the designated zones. However, there is a need to protect them from the negative impacts of development. The Department should continue to monitor the effectiveness of the existing core and buffer zones in protecting the OUV. There will be objectives and actions in the management plan relevant to this heading.
Planning and Development

- To integrate protective measures with development plans and other infrastructural development plans.
- The new management plan should include specific and explicit reference to this community and to the planning requirements that exist within same.
- A radical overhaul of our planning structures and procedures is required. The common good of a living community is dependent on an all-inclusive fair-minded process.
- A Local Area Plan should be prepared for the area following the completion and endorsement of the new (WHS) Management Plan.
- Planning issues should be resolved so people can live in their community. By working together we can increase tourism in the area for the benefit of Brú na Bóinne and the local community.
- Planning issues in the area need to be as fair as possible.
- There needs to be balance and fairness for local planning applications.

Comments:

Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention states the responsibility ‘to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes’.
Land Conversion, e.g. Agricultural (crops and livestock)

- Agriculture is the main source of income and in many cases the only source of income to people in the core and buffer zones. Any proposed activities which are currently in use and acceptable elsewhere could cause less income to the farming community.
- Large-scale routine assessment of plough damage within the WHS should be undertaken at regular intervals with appropriate measures taken to deal with problems where identified.
- Reservations were expressed in relation to restrictions that will be placed on farming that would threaten the viability of farming enterprise.
- While being mindful and respectful of the important historical site in our midst, local farmers need to be allowed to progress and modernise their farms and farming systems appropriately.
- There needs to be more encouragement for farmers to develop their lands so as the area on a whole can be enhanced.
- Identify what features in the landscape must be maintained, managed and protected. Ensure appropriate monitoring and management strategies are put in place and agreements with private landowners where necessary. Use agricultural support systems as appropriate. Adopt proactive approaches to mitigating the cumulative impact of recent developments.

Comments:

There are currently several sources of potential activities with the WHS that could have impacts on the OUV of the WHS, including agricultural practices such as livestock erosion, tree planting, hedgerow removal, levelling, deep ploughing and farm building renewal and extensions. There will be objectives and actions in the plan relevant to this heading.
**Identity, social cohesion, changes in local population and community**

- One of the key requisites for the designation must be recognition of the local people and communities. Planning must not be any more restrictive that in other areas as the importance of having a living countryside must be a key element of the designation.
- Donore Village should be acknowledged in this plan and promoted as a destination and Heritage Village under public/private auspices. Incorporate the Battle of Boyne centre in the overall plan.
- Having a World Heritage site in our midst should be a positive thing. It should benefit the local community in lots of ways. Many people feel that there is little or no benefit for the local community at present and in fact for many people there are disadvantages, inconveniences and barriers to development.
- The local community must have an ongoing involvement in the operation of the Management Plan.
- A sea-change in attitude is needed on the part of officialdom (OPW, tourism bodies, Department, County Council etc) i.e. Rather than seeing it as an archaeological area only it should be recognised for what it is – a living landscape that has been farmed.
- Include a specific section in the Draft Plan for the Local Community, recognising at least the importance of partnership in designing and effecting the Draft Plan.
- The Management Plan must have at its core the building of bridges with the surrounding communities and Slane Village. These communities must be given a sense of ownership of this unique, ancient landscape.
- The villages and rural communities in and around the World Heritage site of Brú na Bóinne have not benefitted in any real way from the World Heritage status bestowed on the area. This is the most important aspect of any new plan that can be adopted.
- The protection of local heritage, landscape, waterways and flora and fauna becomes redundant should there be no similar protection of the interests of the people.
- The consultation, consideration and reflection envisaged as an integral part of the formulation of the plan cannot focus only on the stones and earth which make up the assorted monuments in the area but must also take real account of the people who live there.
- It is recommended that other measures to explore greater community involvement in the Brú na Bóinne WHS could be considered. This should include ongoing community involvement in the management structures emerging from the new Management Plan. Dialogue with Meath Partnership (Leader Company) should be initiated over the possible funding of sustainable local businesses to maximise the value of the WHS and to thereby build community support by demonstrating WHS status as a resource.
- Creation of a historic park, with access improvements, walks and related amenities and ensure that there is a synergy between the heritage of the area and its management as a living/working landscape and benefits for the local community/economy.

**Comments:**
Account needs to be taken of the desires, wishes and needs of the local community while maintaining the protections of the OUV of the site. Actions can be extracted from the above submissions and may be included in the new management plan.

**Visitor Centre**

- The OPW should be allowed to protect and maintain the monuments, which is what they excel at, and a tourist agency or private company be given the opportunity to run the Interpretive Centre, thus providing employment to local people.
- The current time allowance for visitors has been noted as being overly restrictive.
- The various opening times which exist throughout the year should be consolidated into two categories: summer and winter.
- The village of Slane and its people are crying out for a Heritage Centre.
- By focusing on the megalithic art, especially on the exterior of the tombs, visitor numbers to the sites could be managed and facilitated in a different way, particularly if combined with new and sustainable modes of access to the sites, i.e. cycleways.

**Comments:**

All the employees of the OPW at the site live locally - those employed in the Tea Rooms, the shop in the Visitor Centre, the Guides who work at the monuments and the OPW staff based in Knowth Sub Depot. There are 37 permanent staff and 65 seasonal staff currently employed by the OPW.

In peak season, there is a maximum time allowed to be inside the chamber at Newgrange. This is to facilitate all the visitors equally. In off season, there is much more flexibility and fewer restrictions. The opening times have evolved over many years to best suit visitors. In November, December and January, the Centre closes at 5.00pm as the evenings are dark. However in February, the opening hours are extended by 30 minutes and continue to extend our opening hours until in high season the centre is open from 9.00am until 7.00pm.
Technical

- The local community engagement is pivotal to the future of the WHS and without a dedicated onsite manager this engagement will not be possible.
- To include specific qualitative and quantitative metrics within Chapter 5, including deadline dates.
- In order to promote consistency and clarity for all stakeholders, a single term should be used to describe the World Heritage Site and I would suggest “Brú na Bóinne”.
- The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht should engage with the Department of Transport and the Irish Aviation Authority to re-classify airspace in the Archaeological Park/World Heritage Site to prohibit movements below 3,000ft.
- The various activities and strategies need to be actively managed. It is also considered necessary to ensure strict regulation and provide guidance as to acceptable change and new development.
- It is our view that there are considerable existing assets within the area that are not being optimised with detrimental results to both the visitor experience and the economic benefit and sustainable development within the local area.

Comments:

The official name of the World Heritage Site is now ‘Brú na Bóinne – Archaeological Ensemble of the Bend of the Boyne’. All points raised above will be considered during the drafting of the management plan. The above submissions are varied and some are outside the scope of the management plan.

The following comments are outside the remit of the Department:

Policy HER67 of the current Meath County Development Plan which implements the aforementioned Policy and Regulations is in my opinion discriminatory and in breach of the constitutional rights of the people in this area.