A special place...

One of the most spectacular water gardens in England

A world away from the hustle and bustle of modern life
Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal is a special place for many people for lots of different reasons.

For some it’s a place of peace and tranquillity, somewhere spiritual and a world away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. To others it’s a fun place to come with the family and have adventures. It’s a place of work, a place to volunteer and for some a place of learning, whether that be dressing up as a monk or conducting painstaking research for a PhD thesis.

It’s also a business, attracting on average 350,000 visitors each year who all contribute towards raising the necessary funds for essential conservation work. A source of pride for the local community, and an icon in Yorkshire and further afield, this place we all commonly call ‘Fountains’ is a World Heritage Site, recognised internationally as such by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The eighteenth-century water garden, incorporating some of the largest Cistercian abbey ruins in Europe, shares the landscape with a deer park, Jacobean mansion and a magnificent Victorian church designed by William Burges.

Together with our partners, it’s our role to ensure that this exceptional landscape is looked after, so that future generations may also experience this inspirational place.

Every World Heritage Site must have a management plan, which guides its sustainable management for every six year period. This is an important document which needs to be approved by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. After consulting with a wide range of stakeholders including visitors, the local community, regulatory bodies and landowners we have written the 2015—2021 Management Plan.

This summary document explains the process we have followed in reviewing the plan and some of the actions in the plan. It is by no means comprehensive — the full plan is 63 pages long and available to download from our website.

I hope you enjoy reading this summary document; I’d be delighted to hear your thoughts.

Best Wishes,

Sarah Parkinson
World Heritage Site Coordinator & Conservation Manager at Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal
What is a World Heritage Site?

World Heritage Sites are special places considered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to be of outstanding universal value to mankind. World Heritage Sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of where they are located. By identifying these special places of great cultural and/or natural value UNESCO aims to safeguard them so that they can be passed to future generations.
Why is Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal a World Heritage Site?

To be inscribed as a World Heritage Site, a place must not only demonstrate ‘outstanding universal value’, it must also fit at least one of ten criteria established by UNESCO.

The name of the estate on our World Heritage Site inscription is ‘Studley Royal Park, including the ruins of Fountains Abbey’, rather than the name we’re usually known by, ‘Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal’. You may be surprised to know that the eighteenth-century garden, and the way that the Aislabies incorporated the abbey ruins into their forward-thinking garden design is the main reason we’re a World Heritage Site. UNESCO considers this designed landscape to be a feat of ‘human creative genius’ which is one of the ten World Heritage Site criteria.

When most people think of gardens, they think of colourful borders filled with flowers. As an outstanding example of the ‘English’ garden style Studley Royal is very different. The early parts of the garden constructed by John Aislabie from 1718 are influenced by earlier formal French and Dutch geometric designs though moving in a more naturalistic, English, direction. Later in the eighteenth century this move towards a more natural approach progressed further. Instead of imposing a design upon nature, this style worked in harmony with it — especially the natural shapes of the landscape. This was a uniquely English art form that always considered the ‘genius of the place’ — that special atmosphere that makes a place distinctive. Inspired by and leading such ideas, William Aislabie further developed the garden while maintaining much of his father’s earlier designs at its core. In one landscape Studley Royal demonstrates, perhaps uniquely, the evolving garden tastes of the eighteenth century.

The fashion for ‘English’ gardens spread across Europe and further afield and the name which became most commonly associated with the style was ‘Capability Brown’.

Follies, statues and eye-catchers were a common feature in gardens in the eighteenth century. The Aislabies built many of these features, but there could be no finer eye-catcher than the grand ruins of Fountains Abbey, which happened to be in their neighbour’s garden. So that the Aislabies and their guests could enjoy the magnificent ruins, viewpoints were created in the garden, with the majestic sight of the Abbey a highlight of an eighteenth-century tour. John Messenger, the owner of Fountains Abbey, finally agreed to sell his estate to William Aislabie in 1767 meaning that the Abbey could be formally integrated with the rest of the garden, rather than just simply viewed at a distance from it.

Of course there are other significant buildings and landscapes on the estate which also contribute towards our World Heritage Site status, fulfilling another of the UNESCO criteria. The Abbey is more than an eighteenth-century romantic folly; it is of international importance in its own right, ruins of one of the select group of Cistercian houses to survive from the twelfth century. There are also Fountains Hall, St. Mary’s Church, Fountains Mill and the deer park. Together with the Water Garden, these buildings and landscapes combine to make a harmonious whole which UNESCO considers to be ‘an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble which illustrates significant stages in human history’ another of the ten World Heritage Site criteria.
Creating our new management plan

Writing the draft plan

UNESCO recommends that each World Heritage Site has a management plan. Our plan contains the following:

- An updated vision for the WHS
- 30 year management objectives, grouped under four themes
- A six year action plan which delivers the long term objectives
- Key partners who will help us to deliver the action plan

To create our new management plan we began by reviewing our old plan. We looked at what we had delivered and how we had performed against our key performance indicators. Before we put pen to paper we spoke with stakeholders and partners and held consultations with staff and volunteers so that they could shape the plan at an early stage. In 2014, together with our partners we held a public consultation event at Ripon Town Hall so that the local community could also have their say, and encouraged visitors to our World Heritage Day event in April to get involved.

These consultations helped us when we were looking at the 30 year management objectives to see if they were still relevant today. We found that the objectives still rang true, however we have tweaked the wording of them in places. From talking to stakeholders we also found that some of the issues affecting the site had either diminished or increased in prominence. Taking into the account the issues and the suggestions gathered during the consultations, we’ve thought carefully about the six year actions we’re committing to in the 2015–2021 plan.

We’re still grouping the management objectives, and their accompanying actions, under the following four themes:

- Theme 1: Overall Management Approach
- Theme 2: Conservation & Environmental Performance
- Theme 3: Access, Enjoyment & Understanding
- Theme 4: Local Community Links & Partnerships

The next four pages contain a summary of these themes so that you can get a flavour for the content of the plan.
Vision for the World Heritage Site

Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal is a special place, loved for generations. It is a place of calm reflection, of delight and exploration for those who come to discover it now and in the future. Taking the eighteenth-century pleasure gardens as its core and inspiration, the site possesses many layers of an extraordinary history that has shaped the Abbey, the parkland, the rural landscape and extended further afield to other landscapes.

The designed landscape was inscribed as World Heritage Site in 1986 and since that time the National Trust and partners have undertaken an ambitious programme of conservation work to restore the gardens to their former splendour, ensuring the outstanding universal value of the WHS is sustained for future generations to enjoy. At the same time, facilities for visitors such as the Visitor Centre and Porter’s Lodge interpretation centre have been developed as part of our mission to present and transmit the outstanding universal value of the site to as many people as possible.

Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal World Heritage Site will be:

- Conserved and enhanced for future generations to enjoy, the genius of the place will be celebrated through delivery of our conservation work
- A place which is accessible for all and brought to life for everyone to understand and enjoy
- A place cherished by the local community and further afield and an iconic symbol of Yorkshire
- A place where sustainable management sits at the heart of all we do
- An exemplary WHS which aims to make a significant contribution to the purposes and functions of UNESCO
Management policy for the World Heritage Site

The main purpose of our plan is to ensure the outstanding universal value of the WHS is maintained for present and future generations to enjoy and this will guide all our conservation and management strategies.

Running a large visitor attraction and World Heritage Site can be a complicated business, with lots of different elements that must work together for the good of the estate. While we have an ambition to continue to grow our visitor numbers, we must ensure the delicate balance between conservation and access is maintained.

Finance and people

Everyone who pays us a visit, every cup of tea and every purchase in our shop helps us to look after the WHS. The income we generate enables us to run as a visitor attraction and helps to look after this special place. As a complex and large site there is a long list of conservation projects we need to deliver and our income is not sufficient to address all of them.

To ensure people still continue to visit us we must deliver an inspiring visitor experience. Over the next six years we will deliver a number of projects which will improve visitor enjoyment and attract new visitors to the estate.

Key actions in this section include:

- Review the National Trust’s ‘Conservation for Access Toolkit 2013’ and implement recommendations
- Continue to develop the zoning and programming approach to visitor management on site
- Develop a set of attributes of the outstanding universal value of the WHS

Key actions in this section include:

- Develop and deliver new visitor offers and visitor facilities
- Identify fundraising opportunities and available grants to support conservation work
**Climate change**

The world’s climate and weather patterns are changing. We need to understand the potential impacts of these changes on the site. Possible risks to the site include damage to or loss of historic features, landscapes and buildings due to extreme weather conditions and an increased risk of flooding.

**The Pheasant Shoot**

When the National Trust acquired the site in 1983, the sporting rights had already been sold separately into private ownership. According to their legal rights the Shoot must be allowed access to parts of the estate at all times. This means that sections of the gardens must remain closed to visitors. The management of the Shoot also impacts on conservation of the garden.

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Seek to acquire the shooting rights that cover National Trust land should they become available
- Produce a new Shoot/National Trust Management Agreement including visitor access and a programme of conservation works

**Research and archives**

A range of research is carried out which supports the care and conservation of the site and informs learning and interpretation initiatives. We’d like to make this research more widely available during this plan period.

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Deliver a programme of research to inform restoration of the water garden
- Develop an archaeological research framework for the WHS, with a specific focus on the abbey precinct area
Conservation of the World Heritage Site

In 2011 a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) was produced for the site which informs how we prioritise and allocate resources for our conservation projects. The maintenance of the outstanding universal value of the WHS is a principal aim of the CMP.

The plan covers how we care for the gardens and parkland, the built heritage and archaeology, the natural environment and our collections. It is an important document. The focus for us during the next six years is to share the vision, objectives and programme of work in the Conservation Management Plan with all our stakeholders, including visitors.

Although the site is inscribed as a ‘cultural’ World Heritage Site, the natural values of the site are very important. Experiencing the natural world is a joy for everyone and we’re lucky at Fountains to be blessed with the best that nature has to offer including magnificent ancient trees, seasonal wildflowers, wildlife and water fowl. We will continue to monitor and record all habitats and species on site to make sure we can protect them for everyone to enjoy.

While the monks arrived over 800 years ago, the rocks have been here a lot longer and have shaped the natural, designed and built elements of the landscape. Many of the materials for the buildings were quarried from local rock faces and the Aislabies garden designs incorporated rocky outcrops and cliff edges. Together with Natural England we’ve produced a Geodiversity Audit for the site and we’ll deliver the recommendations during the next six years.

The English Heritage Trust is responsible for the conservation of the Abbey under a Guardianship Agreement, and for St Mary’s Church which they care for on behalf of the State. The English Heritage Trust regularly examines the condition of the ruins and creates a programme of work that deals with identified defects.

Over five thousand objects from the Abbey including tiles, belt buckles and large pieces of stonework are looked after by the English Heritage Trust at a large store in Helmsley. The collection can be accessed by request or through tours. We’d like more people to be able to see and understand these fascinating objects by making the entire collection accessible online.

We’re keen to share our enthusiasm for conservation by actively encouraging everyone to get involved in our work. This can be through our heritage and gardening apprenticeships, inviting local schools and universities to learn from the conservation work taking place on site and involving volunteers in our practical gardening and building work. We will continue to develop opportunities for visitors to engage in the interesting work that we do.

Key actions in this section include:

- Continue the programme of conservation and enhancement of the eighteenth-century garden and parkland
- Repair historic buildings and structures in a poor condition including the High Seat, sections of the monastic precinct wall and deer park wall and Chinese Wood pillars
- Carry out a condition survey and conservation works at Fountains Hall and develop options for its future use
- Complete the monitoring programme of archaeological sites and implement management measures for their conservation
- Deliver the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme in the deer parks to maintain and enhance their wildlife, ancient and venerable trees, historic features and landscape character
- Prepare a Heritage Partnership Agreement for works in the Abbey
Water management

The River Skell running through this valley made this an excellent location for the Abbey. It was tamed by the monks to suit the needs of a medieval monastery, and then by the Aislabies to create their landscape garden. Managing the water course presents constant challenges including dealing with the damage caused by flooding and the build-up of silt.

Environmental performance

We know that the use of fossil fuels for energy has a severe detrimental effect on the environment. Our priority areas for improving our environmental performance include reducing energy and water usage, and our production of waste.

Key actions in this section include:

– Achieve our energy reduction targets for each year of the plan period
– Plan and implement works to improve the energy efficiency of all buildings on the site
– Increase opportunities for recycling across the estate
– Investigate feasibility of a ground source heat pump at Studley Tearoom
– Work with partners and land owners directly upstream of the site to continue to reduce the speed and amount of run-off in the upper catchment through a series of land management initiatives
– Deliver the dredging projects for the Half Moon Reservoir and the Moon Ponds and Upper Canal
– Continue to engage with York and North Yorkshire and the Northern Upland Chain Local Nature Partnerships including delivery of the River Ure Priority Programme and the Yorkshire Peat Partnership Project
We've developed a Visitor Experience Project which incorporates a number of smaller projects. We will develop a vision for Fountains Hall and re-interpret our Swanley Grange Learning Centre to explain its agricultural past. A programme of temporary art installations will take place in the Water Garden, to bring to life the playful and surprising spirit of that space. We'll also consider how we can improve our Visitor Centre and Studley entrances to give a better welcome experience. How we explain the history of the site, the conservation work we do and our World Heritage Site status will continue to be a focus for us.

**Theme 3: Access, Enjoyment & Understanding**

**Access for everyone**

It's important that as many people as possible can experience the WHS and have a great day out when they're here. The National Trust has recently completed an Access Audit which has made a variety of recommendations to improve the experience on site for visitors with a wide range of disabilities. Working with disability groups in the area will help us to improve our facilities, welcome and information.

**Visitor experience**

We'd like our visitors to have a really enjoyable day out when they visit and recommend us to their friends and family. A great day out means different things to different people therefore we must plan our visitor programme carefully.

**Learning**

Education is a common thread which runs throughout the visitor experience here at Fountains. In its broadest sense it includes formal learning offered to schools, informal visitor activities such as bug box making and interpretation. Around 12,000 students visit the site each year as part of an educational group and we'd like to ensure they have a rich and rewarding experience when they're here.

**Volunteering**

The site couldn't operate without the commitment and enthusiasm of over 400 volunteers. From catering to gardening, school visit guides to archaeological monitoring, the number of volunteer roles continues to grow. We'll continue to focus on creating inspiring volunteer positions, a great induction to the estate and more comprehensive ongoing training.

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Deliver the recommendations of the National Trust Access Audit
- Improve pre-visit and on-site information for disabled visitors
- Maintain free entry days such as Heritage Open Days

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Deliver interpretation in the Abbey and Water Garden
- Deliver the National Trust’s Visitor Experience Project
- Update the interpretation in the Mill
- Continue to develop interpretation and events, such as World Heritage Weekend, which promote understanding of the WHS

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Develop a formal learning programme that has broad appeal including online resources, self-led activities, outreach activities and led visits
- Work with local partners such as the Harrogate and Ripon Education Visits Network
- Develop educational activities to share best practice in the care and management of heritage sites

**Key actions in this section include:**

- Continue to identify opportunities to develop new volunteer roles that support the needs of the site
- Invest in volunteer training, both role specific and general, including the development of a volunteer estate handbook
Partnership working

The WHS is a special place for many people, particularly those communities in the Ripon area, many of whom have grown up visiting the site. We will continue to host community groups and provide opportunities for people to use the site in a way that suits them, for example at sporting events and community bike rides.

We will continue to work closely with partners from a range of specialisms including economic development, tourism, conservation, education and statutory bodies such as Natural England to help us deliver the objectives in the World Heritage Site plan.

Key actions in this section include:

– Promote the World Heritage Site as a place to improve health and wellbeing for example through community bike rides, park run and outdoor volunteering opportunities
– Explore new ways to engage the local community with the site
– Maximise international links and partnerships through Welcome to Yorkshire and opportunities presented by other Destination Management Organisations and through sharing management expertise with sites in the UK, Europe and further afield

Local & regional economy

As one of the most visited tourism attractions in Yorkshire the estate plays a key role in the local and regional economy. During this plan period, together with Saltaire, we’d like to commission research which would show how the site benefits the local and regional economy and wider community so that we can optimise this effect.

Key actions in this section include:

– Explore opportunities to research and evidence the value of the two World Heritage Sites in Yorkshire
– Engage with the Local Enterprise Partnerships to explore ways to optimise the positive impact of the WHS on the economy
– Continue to provide high quality apprenticeships and internships in building skills such as joinery and masonry, landscaping and horticultural skills and in events and volunteer management

Green transport

As we’re located in a rural area it can be difficult to travel to the WHS other than by car. During this plan period we’d like to investigate broadening opportunities to travel to the site by bus, bike or on foot.

Key actions in this section include:

– Work with partners to explore opportunities to expand bus provision to the estate
– Monitor current use of the public bus service and develop a programme of measures to promote its use
– Explore options for an off-road cycle route between the site and Ripon
– Continue to develop a network of walking routes that link the site with local places of interest
Find out more

We hope that this summary document has given you an insight into the plan, and the wide range of topics it covers.

If you’d like to find out more information then please visit our website: nationaltrust.org.uk/fountainsabbeywhs

Here you can download the full plan and read it at your leisure.