



UK Tentative List of Potential Sites for World Heritage Nomination: Application form

Please save the application to your computer, fill in and email to:
UKTL.Application@culture.gsi.gov.uk

The application form should be completed using the boxes provided under each question, and, where possible, within the word limit indicated.

Please read the [Information Sheets](#) before completing the application form. It is also essential to refer to the accompanying [Guidance Note](#) for help with each question, and to the relevant paragraphs of UNESCO's *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, (OG) available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines>

Applicants should provide only the information requested at this stage. Further information may be sought in due course.

(1) Name of Proposed World Heritage Site

The Flow Country

(2) Geographical Location

Name of country/region

Scotland, UK

Grid reference to centre of site

NC 786453 Long. 3o59'93"/ Lat. 58o20'53"

Please enclose a map preferably A4-size, a plan of the site, and 6 photographs, preferably electronically.

(3) Type of Site

Please indicate category:

Natural Cultural Mixed Cultural Landscape

(4) Description

Please provide a brief description of the proposed site, including the physical characteristics. 200 words

The Flow Country is widely considered to be the largest area of blanket bog in the world. Together with associated areas of heath and open water it is of international importance as a habitat and for the diverse range of rare and unusual breeding birds it supports. It encompasses an exceptionally wide range of vegetation and surface pattern types, including numerous pool systems. These features are usually rare and localised but here they are widespread and a high proportion of the ground remains undisturbed. The range of mire types varies from those of the lowland Caithness plain in the east, with their continental affinities, through to those of the mountainous oceanic west. Extensive areas of active blanket bog, where bog moss Sphagnum and other bog species ensure continuing peat accumulation, occur in intimate association with a range of open water, wet heath, grassland and fen communities. This provides the diversity of habitats necessary to support a wide range of wetland and moorland species. Of particular importance are the birds, many of which are typically northern species found here towards the southern limit of their range. These include red-throated diver, black-throated diver, golden plover, greenshank, golden eagle, merlin and short-eared owl.

(5) History

Please provide a short summary statement of any significant events in the history of the site. 200 words

Until the 20th century this site had a largely unrecorded history, the only significant changes being in response to changes in the climate over the past 7000 years, as informed from palaeoecological studies. The introduction of, and changes to, the management of domestic livestock undoubtedly had a local effect, as would the introduction in the 19th century of game management in some areas. In the mid-20th century some areas were drained to improve livestock production, but even this had limited impact due to the prevailing oceanic, damp climate. The latter part of the 20th century saw the most significant changes with large areas of peatland drained and converted to forestry. In some of the drier areas this established successfully, but elsewhere tree growth was much more limited. Subsequently many areas of trees have been felled and restored back to bog, much of it with support from the EU Life Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

(6) Why do you think this site should be inscribed as a World Heritage Site?
Give reasons. 200 words

Some habitats are characteristic of some parts of the world and some are almost synonymous with certain countries, for example; Nepal – mountains, Namibia – deserts. Scotland's geology, location and climate combine to give it two natural heritage assets which are probably not bettered anywhere else in the world; its seabird cliffs and its blanket bog. And of it's more than 1.5 million hectares of blanket bog the Flow Country stands out as the jewel in the crown. It is the largest continuous expanse, around 4% of the world's blanket bog, with extensive areas in near-pristine condition and the most diverse range of surface pattern types. It also supports a unique assemblage of breeding birds; particularly waders, waterfowl and raptors, at unusually high densities. While some areas have undoubtedly been damaged, the overall integrity of the site remains and considerable resources have been invested in restoration in recent years.



(7) Please say why the site has Outstanding Universal Value and specify the main features which underpin its importance. 200 words

Blanket bog is a globally rare habitat, perhaps extending to some 10m ha. It is confined to the most oceanic areas of mid-high latitudes (45 - 60 degrees). Although no site could represent the full range of species and forms occurring throughout the global range, this site does demonstrate some remarkable diversity in response to altitude and longitude over relatively small distances. It thus captures the essence of the habitat in a way which few, if any, other sites could.

In addition to the extent, continuity and diversity of peatland habitats, the size and composition of the bird population contributes to the outstanding international importance of this site. Raptors, waterfowl and waders are particularly abundant and diverse and for many this is a stronghold set against declines elsewhere and predicted restrictions on range in response to climate change.

Another important aspect of the Flow Country is that not only did its study contribute to some early ideas on the development, form and function of blanket bog, but it is now a key site in developing our understanding of a wide range of peatland issues, from the ecology of individual species to carbon balance and the role of such habitats in climate change mitigation.

(8) Outstanding Universal Value

Please state which of the [10 UNESCO criteria for Outstanding Universal Value](#) the proposed site meets, and describe briefly why the criteria were chosen. Please see criteria note at the end of the form.

UNESCO criterion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Why was this criterion chosen? 100 words
(i)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(ii)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(iii)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(iv)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(v)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(vi)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(vii)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(viii)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(ix)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The outstanding importance of the Flow Country lies in its extent and continuity, the diversity of mire and vegetation types and the size and range of the bird population it supports. As a peatland system, its history is recorded as micro- and macrofossils in the peat deposit. These demonstrate the habitat's development in response to climate change and the influence of man since the last Ice Age. This in turn can be used to assess the resilience of the habitat to various impacts and inform future management.
(x)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The Flow Country is probably the largest, and one of the most intact areas of blanket bog in the world. It supports an unusually diverse system of patterned surfaces with a unique floristic composition. The tundra-type breeding bird assemblage shows similarities to, but distinct differences from, that occurring in arctic/sub-arctic areas. It also supports significant fractions of the breeding populations of certain bird species. There is evidence that more southerly examples of the habitat, and populations of some of these species, may not survive current climate change projection scenarios, emphasising the importance of the Flow Country as an ecosystem stronghold

(9) Authenticity (for cultural or mixed sites only)

Authenticity concerns the current state of conservation of a cultural or mixed site; especially whether its importance, its Outstanding Universal Value, is still obvious from its physical condition. Please outline the condition of the site. 200 words

N/A

(10) Integrity

For cultural or mixed sites, please state how much original fabric is included in the proposed site, and its condition. For guidance on how the test of integrity is met for natural sites under criteria (vii) – (x), please refer to the OG 90-94. Information Sheet 6 also provides help on this point. 200 words

The blanket bogs of the Flow Country have developed in the presence of human activity more or less since the end of the last glaciation. However it is probably only in the last 200 years that there have been any significant impacts. In chronological order these have arisen through sheep farming, sporting management for red deer, forestry and wind farms. All of these activities have had some impact on the peatlands, but there has been no loss of species or structural diversity.

Grazing impacts generally avoid the wettest, most sensitive ground. Improvement of pasture adjacent to the peatlands has provided rich feeding ground for migratory species such as dunlin and golden plover which breed on the bogs. Drainage, to improve the grazing in some areas has had only limited success and programmes of drain-blocking have targeted key areas. Commercial forestry has contributed to the loss of some of the original peatland area. This is restricted to a number of discrete areas, so the overall integrity of the peatlands is largely unaffected. Large areas are now being restored back to blanket bog. Wind farms around the edge of the peatlands are designed to be sensitive to habitat and species requirements.

(11) Are there other examples of this kind of site already on the World Heritage List?

Yes No

If yes, please list. 100 words



(12) What distinguishes this site from other similar sites?

150 words

Although several existing World Heritage Sites contain peatland, none is listed primarily for its peatland habitat and/or the species it supports. This site is widely considered to be the best, and certainly the best known, site in the world for the globally rare peatland formation known as blanket bog.

(13) How does the site contribute to meeting UNESCO’s priorities for a balanced World Heritage List?

200 words

As a natural heritage site and a wetland site the Flow Country satisfies two of UNESCO's priorities for a balanced list. The site is not one that has been specifically identified in any of the strategic studies, nor indeed has blanket bog more generally. This is perhaps not surprising given blanket bog's global rarity and relatively low profile. However, its profile, along with that of other peatland habitats is rising as its value, not just for biodiversity but for other natural services such as carbon sequestration becomes more widely known.

(14) What benefits do you think World Heritage Site inscription would bring?

Please indicate the main opportunities and benefits.

Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Regeneration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conservation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Protection	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please describe. 100 words.

The site is already well protected by statutory designations, development controls and, in part, by RSPB, Plantlife and Forestry Commission ownership. The establishment of a nature reserve and small interpretive centre in the area has already increased visitor numbers and provided opportunities for raising awareness of the site and peatlands generally. World Heritage Site inscription would raise the profile of the area and possibly help draw in additional resources for conservation management. Given the fragility of the local economy in this sparsely populated area, even a modest increase in visitor numbers would bring significant benefits.

(15) Are there any known threats to the proposed World Heritage Site?

Yes No

Please indicate any proposed developments, or other potential impacts on the site.

Impact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Please describe. 100 words for each issue.
Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The only significant current and anticipated near-future development pressure is from wind farms. Due to statutory protection and development controls these are unlikely to affect the peatland or bird interests of the Natura site at the core of the Flow Country. Some have already been built around the edge of the area and more are planned. Their impact is likely to be visual rather than affecting the structure, function and integrity of the site.
Environmental	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The most likely environmental impact will be from climate change. Current projections for the north of Scotland suggest a general increase in average temperatures, with wetter winters and drier summers. Such changes would still be compatible with blanket bog, but there may be minor changes in species composition and possibly changes in land use and management practice. However, any changes here are likely to be considerably less significant than in areas of blanket bog further south.

Other	☒	<p>As commercial forests in the area reach maturity and harvest, any subsequent replanting will only be approved if it will not be damaging to adjacent designated blanket bog. It is also likely that additional areas will be restored to blanket bog and new areas of woodland confined to mineral and thin peat soils.</p> <p>Agricultural use is likely to continue to be relatively low intensity sheep grazing. It also seems likely that given the huge store of carbon in the Flow Country peat bogs future land management support will aim to protect this, to the benefit of the habitat and species.</p>
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(16) Legal Protection

Please list any legal and other protections, including cultural and natural designations, which cover the whole or part of the proposed site. 200 words

A precise boundary for the site has yet to be determined. However, it will be centred on, and may be contained entirely within, the Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands Natura site. That site has the following designations:

- Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation
- Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area
- Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands Ramsar Site
- 39 separate Sites of Special Scientific Interest underpinning the above
- The Flows National Nature Reserve (NNR) covers part of the above area
- The RSPB Forsinard Flows Reserve, which includes the above NNR, extends to about 10% of the Peatlands Natura site
- The Plantlife Munsary Peatlands Nature Reserve extends to a further 1,300 ha

Policy N1 Nature Conservation of the Highland Structure Plan confirms the Local Authority's commitment to safeguarding these areas.

(17) Ownership

Please list the main owners of the site, where possible.

The indicative site boundary encompasses an area of around 145,000 ha and lies within an area extending to some 450,000ha. It includes 87 separate land owners and 55 tenants - of which 23 are Common grazings each with an average of around 20 shareholders. Around 600 people have legal interest in the site. It has not been possible to consult with all these interests in relation to this application.

All are occupiers of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Natura site, familiar with its objectives and restrictions. Many benefit from Management Agreements aimed at safeguarding the peatland interests. While it is likely that not all will support the application, many will with others remaining neutral.

It is, however, worth noting that the Peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland Management Strategy 2005 - 2015 includes an Action to "Undertake preparatory work for a future WHS bid". None of the consultees contributing to this Strategy, which included all owners, tenants, Community Councils and representative organisations raised any objection or concern with this proposal. Indeed, the Strategy reports "There is strong support from a large number of local and national organisations for the proposed nomination of the peatlands as a World Heritage Site. At present many landowners and managers support the nomination in principle, but would like further information on the implications...."

The owner and manager of the largest area of peatland, more than 15,000 ha (> 10% of the site) is the RSPB. A letter of support from them is attached. Plantlife own and manage a further 1.5%.

Do the owners support the application? Yes No

A statement of support from the principle owners of the proposed site should be attached to the application, preferably electronically.

(18) Local Authority support for the site

Please list all Local Authorities with an interest in the proposed site.

The Highland Council,
Glenurquhart Road,
Inverness,
IV1 9DH

Does the proposed site have local Authority support? Yes No

Please attach a statement of support from each one in relation to the application.

Please indicate whether the site is included in the local plan/s by specific policies.

Yes No Partly

Please describe. 200 words.

The site is not specifically mentioned in either of the Caithness or Sutherland Local Plans. Policy 4 'Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage' of the new Sutherland Local Plan refers to proposed developments on Natura and Ramsar sites (the Flow Country is both of these) thus: "Where we are unable to ascertain that a proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a site, the proposal will not be in accordance with the development plan within the meaning of Section 25(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997".

The Caithness Local Plan dates back to 2002 and has still to be revised. It has the following rather non-specific, but relevant policies:

PP2

The Council will favour development, unless this would significantly affect important features.

PP3

The Council will presume against development, particularly where there is significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.

(19) Stakeholders

Please list the main parties with an interest in the site. 100 words

Numerous private land owners and agricultural tenants
The Highland Council
Several Community Councils
The Peatlands Partnership and Forum
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Plantlife International
Scottish Natural Heritage
Forestry Commission Scotland

(20) How will the Site be managed?

Please outline the management arrangements for the proposed World Heritage Site, including where the responsibilities lie. 200 words

The Peatlands of Caithness & Sutherland Management Strategy 2005 - 2015 identifies 4 key objectives for the area and the actions required to achieve these. Responsibility for the implementation of this strategy lies with the Peatlands Partnership, but achieving it comes through cooperative working with a much wider constituency of interests.

Management of the site would be directed through a Management Plan based on the Strategy, taking into account new information regarding habitat condition and management requirements and implemented through currently available mechanisms.

As with the Strategy, development of the Management Plan would be led by a relatively small core of representative individuals and organisations, consulting widely with local communities and land managers as well as a wider constituency of interests. Most of the practical management would be carried out by resident land managers undertaking those traditional activities which maintain the interest of the area. Where specialist restoration management is required this will be carried out under contract by relevant practitioners. Many of the relevant skills are now available locally, having been developed through earlier and on-going restoration projects.

(21) Funding: the nomination

Please indicate how the preparation of the nomination would be funded.
100 words

The preparation of the nomination would be funded, in cash and/or kind, by members of the Peatlands Partnership, specifically: Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Plantlife and The Highland Council.

(22) Funding: management

Please outline how the future management would be funded. 100 words

The pattern of funding of future management would be largely the same as in the recent past and currently. All of the activities necessary to maintain, improve or restore the interest features are eligible for support through the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). On sporting estates this could be complemented by private funds and on land owned or managed by NGOs (RSPB and Plantlife) from their own resources. Any major restoration or interpretation projects would draw on additional resources such as Charitable Trusts, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Agency grants.

Name and Contact Details of Applicant

Name	Mr John Henderson
Status	Chairman, The Peatlands Partnership
Address	
Telephone	
Email	

Completed applications should be forwarded, preferably in electronic format, to the World Heritage Team, Department for Culture, Media and Sport at the following email address: UKTL.Application@culture.gsi.gov.uk

Any material that cannot be sent electronically should be sent to the following address:

World Heritage Team, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1 5DH

The closing date for applications is 11th June 2010

UNESCO's criteria for the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value (para 77 of the Operational Guidelines)

- (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (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;
- (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;
- (iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- (v) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.
- (vii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- (viii) be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- (ix) be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- (x) contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.