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Your Ref  
Our Ref

1 February 2010

Dear Francesco

**State Party Report 2010: State of Conservation of Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast (United Kingdom) (N 369)**

I refer to your letter of 12 August 2008 to H.E. Mr Peter Landymore and the World Heritage Committee's Decision **32 COM 7B.28** following examination of the state of conservation of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage property at its 32<sup>nd</sup> session (Quebec City, Canada, 2008).

In accordance with paragraph 5 of Decision **32 COM 7B.28** I am pleased to submit to the World Heritage Centre a progress report of the issues raised by the Committee, specifically relating to the planning and design for the new visitor centre, and on the state of conservation of the property. The report is presented in the indicative format, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 34<sup>th</sup> session in July of this year and is attached at **Annex A** to this letter.

The UK wishes to reassure the World Heritage Committee that the State Party and other key stakeholders with an interest in the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast will continue to work closely to ensure the continued protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of this unique and important World Heritage property and its setting.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Peter Marsden  
Head of World Heritage

Cc H.E Mr Matthew Sudders, UK Permanent Delegate to UNESCO  
UK National Commission for UNESCO  
ICOMOS  
IUCN  
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

## Annex A

### STATE PARTY REPORT 2010: STATE OF CONSERVATION OF GIANT'S CAUSEWAY AND CAUSEWAY COAST (UNITED KINGDOM) (N 369)

1. Response from the State Party to the World Heritage Committee's Decision, paragraph by paragraph  
[Note: this information has to refer to developments over the past year or since the last decision of the Committee for this property]

*Decision: 32 COM 7B.28*

*The World Heritage Committee,*

*1. Having examined Document WHC-08/32.COM/7B,*

*2. Recalling Decision 29 COM 7B.27, adopted at its 29th session (Durban, 2005),*

Noted.

*3. Takes note of the detailed report provided by the State Party on the developments concerning the visitor centre and improved planning processes and management of the property;*

Noted

*4. Welcomes the involvement with stakeholders in implementing the decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 27th (UNESCO, 2003) and 29th (Durban 2005) sessions and the recommendations of the 2003 joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to build a new visitor centre and notes that planning permission was not granted for a private investor development proposal;*

Noted.

*5. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2010, an update report on the situation of the planning and design for the visitor centre, for review.*

Noted.

In accordance with paragraph 5 of the Decision, the State Party wishes to report progress to Committee on the planning and design of the visitor centre.

#### Background

In my letter to the World Heritage Centre of 2 March 2009, I reported that Northern Ireland's Minister for the Environment had authorised a Notice of Opinion to approve a planning application from the National Trust for a new visitor centre at the World Heritage Property. Details of the National Trust's proposals had previously been notified to the World Heritage Centre in Mandy Barrie's letter of 30 January 2008.

The National Trust assumed responsibility from the Department of Environment, Trade

and Investment, Northern Ireland (DETI) in February 2008 and with the support of the local authority, Moyle District Council, is leading on the project to build new visitor facilities at the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage property. The proposals, based on a design by Dublin based architects, Heneghan Peng, winners of an International Design Competition for a visitor centre in 2005, aim to improve visitor experience and provide new opportunities for people to learn about the heritage of the area.

The new facility will contain visitor orientation information, interpretation, retail, catering and other visitor services. The building is designed to integrate into the landscape and is limited in size to 1815m<sup>2</sup> within the footprint of the previous visitor centre which burned down. The plans include an increase in the level of car parking available at the site and in the wider area. Further details can be seen at <http://agiantcause.nationaltrust.org.uk/>

### Planning Application

The Trust entered into a contractual arrangement with the Heneghan Peng led design team and submitted a planning application to Department of Environment for Northern Ireland in June 2008 which was approved in January 2009 subject to a number of planning conditions to be met by the National Trust including the provision of a transport management plan and off-site parking arrangements. A number of minor supplementary planning applications relating to these conditions have been submitted.

### Funding

The project is expected to cost £18.5m. The National Trust has already pledged £4m towards this. Applications for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund and Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) have been submitted. The Heritage Lottery Fund confirmed a £3m award in January 2010 and a decision on the NITB bid is expected in the coming weeks. The National Trust has launched an appeal to bridge a £2.25m gap that it has agreed to underwrite to allow work to commence as soon as possible.

### Current Position

Appointment of contractors for enabling works and the main visitor centre build will be completed shortly following a publicly advertised procurement process in line with EU legislation. It is expected that enabling site works will begin in May 2010 with the main build commencing in September 2010. The project is expected to be completed by June 2012, subject to relevant planning consents being received, the full funding package being in place and final agreement being reached with Moyle District Council regarding the transfer of its holdings at the site to the National Trust.

### State Party View

The State Party believes that the current proposals for this development will not have an adverse impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the world heritage property and that, as all new parking will be contained on brown field sites, this will not impact on the integrity of the property or its setting. The World Heritage Site Management Group will continue to advise on the design, interpretive content and integration of the visitor centre within the World Heritage property and keep the State party informed of progress.

2. **Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party**  
[Note: conservation issues which are not mentioned in the Decision of the World Heritage Committee or any information request from the World Heritage Centre]

There are currently no other conservation issues.

3. **In conformity with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, please describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) within the protected area (core zone and buffer zone and/or corridors) that might be envisaged.**

Policies for the protection of UK World Heritage properties are in place but we still look for opportunities to reinforce, enhance and clarify this level of protection. The Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland is currently the Planning Authority (though this function is proposed to devolve to new Local Authorities in 2011). The Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast is currently the only World Heritage Site in the region and the Regional Development Strategy<sup>1</sup> identifies the need to protect the site and its setting. Chapter 4.0 of Planning Policy Statement 6, Planning, Archaeology and the Built Environment<sup>2</sup>, provides policy on World Heritage Sites. Policy BH 5 states that; 'The Department will operate a presumption in favour of the preservation of World Heritage Sites. Development which would adversely affect such sites or the integrity of their settings will not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances'.

The draft Northern Area Plan,<sup>3</sup> in which the current World Heritage Site lies, was published in May 2005 but has been subject to two judicial challenges. It includes policies that provide for strict protection of the World Heritage Site and its Distinctive Landscape Setting confining development to essential facilities within the World Heritage Site and modest facilities necessary to meet visitor needs within the Distinctive Landscape Setting. It also curtails the extension or replacement of dwellings within the Distinctive Landscape Setting. Although the plan has not been finalised its proposals remain material considerations.

In relation to development proposals at the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage property, a planning application was submitted to the Department of Environment Northern Ireland in December for a tourism development in the buffer zone of the property and is currently under consideration by the Department. The proposed development includes a golf resort including 18-hole championship golf course, clubhouse, golf academy and a 120 bedroom hotel. We are currently seeking the views of our professional advisors on the proposals and any potential impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The application will be considered within the context of development plans and planning policies including those relating to the World Heritage Site and its setting and we will keep the World Heritage Centre informed of progress.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/dev\\_plans/devplans\\_az/northern\\_2016/northern\\_countryside/northern\\_countryside\\_causeway.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/dev_plans/devplans_az/northern_2016/northern_countryside/northern_countryside_causeway.htm)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/policy\\_publications/planning\\_statements/pps06-archaeology-built-heritage.pdf](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/policy_publications/planning_statements/pps06-archaeology-built-heritage.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/news/news\\_devplans/news\\_devplans\\_northern2016.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/news/news_devplans/news_devplans_northern2016.htm)