



IRISH LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE
Institiúid Tírdhreacha na hÉireann

World Heritage Site – Brú na Bóinne

A New Management Plan

Submission to Consultation Paper

2011



1.0. Introduction

The Irish Landscape Institute (ILI) was formed in 1992. The Institute, as the professional body representing landscape architects in Ireland, has a Constitution and a Code of Professional Conduct. ILI is recognised by the European Federation of Landscape Architects (EFLA) and affiliated to the International Federation of Landscape Architects and landscape architecture is a recognised professional service by the European Union in procurement legislation. The Institute has a membership of 160, made up of full members, graduate members, student members, and well as honorary members and Fellows. The ILI aims to:

- Set standards of excellence in the fields of landscape planning, landscape architecture and landscape management.
- Encourage and facilitate the Continued Professional Development of its members.
- Increase public awareness of landscape professionals and their work.
- Support the interaction of landscape architecture with related disciplines such as engineering, architecture and planning.
- Support the development of landscape education at all levels in Ireland, including accreditation of a degree course at NUI on behalf of EFLA.

The Irish Landscape Institute (ILI) is pleased with at the opportunity to respond to the invitation for submissions in response to the Draft New Management Plan for the World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne currently advertised for Public Consultation.

In summary, the new management plan seeks to address the following:

- visitor management and public awareness
- research
- education
- nature conservation
- liaison with the local community and
- sustainable tourism.

In particular the new management plan would like:

- to protect the values which makes this Site one of Outstanding Universal Value
- to ensure the sustainability of the landscape and setting of the monuments
- to ensure that management of the Site is compatible with the management of the River Boyne and River Blackwater Special Area of Conservation (a natural heritage designation)
- to increase public awareness of and interest in the Site
- to promote the educational and cultural value of the Site
- to develop a programme of actions which balances the need for the conservation of the Site and the needs of the local community



- to contribute to the visitor enjoyment of the Site
- to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the area

Our main commentary below is in relation to the core activity of landscape architects working in the public and private sector in Ireland in the design, management and care of the Irish Landscape - new landscapes, existing landscapes and heritage landscapes – and its constituent elements - natural (geology and ecology), cultural (patterns and built elements) and uses.

Our submission below relates primarily to landscape and visual issues and aspects of the World Heritage Site and related aspects of visitor management, tourism and community gain. We will leave it to the relevant experts in their fields to comment on the core archaeological significance, potential and management of the site, and nature conservation and ecology.

2.0. Defining Landscape Issues

2.1 The World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne

Brú na Bóinne was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1993 having met three of the criteria set by UNESCO:

- the Bend of the Boyne monuments represent the largest and most important expression of prehistoric megalithic plastic art in Europe,
- the concentration of social, economic and funerary monuments at this important ritual centre and the long continuity from prehistory to the late medieval period make this one of the most significant archaeological sites in Europe, and
- the passage grave, here brought to its finest expression, was a feature of outstanding importance in prehistoric Europe and beyond.

The World Heritage site at Brú na Bóinne is divided into a Core area and a Buffer Zone. The Buffer Zone was drawn to protect the *setting* of Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth from inappropriate development. The WHS Core and Buffer Zone boundaries run along natural and modern landscape divisions and the monuments are sited at high points along the topography of the site. The area both within the Core area and Buffer zones have a range of archaeological features (Souterrains, Timber Circles, Stone Circles) along with the main and related burial chambers and mounds. Some of the archaeological features within the core and buffer zones have been obliterated or severely damaged by farming practices particularly with the advent of larger field patterns and use of machinery. Reference can be made to Plate 8 and associated text pp 10 – 11 of Stout (1997)¹.

'On the slopes below Newgrange are two henge monuments which have been largely ploughed out'. Stout (1997)

¹ *The Bend in the Boyne – An Archaeological Landscape. Geraldine Stout (1997). We also note that this reference is missing from the Bibliography of the Bru na Boinne management plan 2002.*



The WHS designation is primarily a *management tool*. It is essential that World Heritage Sites have an inscribed protection (development control) zone that is appropriate. The protection zone should not be too large (which renders it inefficient) or too small (which renders it ineffective). The protection zone should ideally be used to enhance the Monuments, Ensembles and Sites with Outstanding Universal Value and enable visitors to fully appreciate and understand the value of what they are experiencing.

It is the responsibility of Meath and Louth County Councils to control developments both inside and outside the WHS. Protection of monuments within and outside the WHS falls under the remit of the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG).

It is accepted that Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth and their immediate monuments form part of a vast landscape of archaeological clusters stretching across most of Meath, South Louth and parts of Fingal. Although this is a separate issue to the definition of the World Heritage Site, and its management, and the obligations such designations place on the state management body, the protection of the wider archaeological landscape requires consideration and should be addressed at Government level rather than being the responsibility of the individual authorities. This ensures the landscape is addressed as a continuum and not as discrete administrative areas.

2.2. The Current Management Plan

The current Management Plan was produced in 2002 and will require to be updated to account for changes to legislation in the interim period including the National Monuments Act 2004, National Monuments Bill 2010 and the 2010 Planning Act.

On a general note the figures and drawings in the current plan are not numbered so cross referencing with the text is difficult. The text refers to figure 1, figure 2 and so on but individual figures are not titled.

In section 7 dealing with the protection to be afforded to the area, we would ask what actions have been completed. Of particular note would be Action 1 (Section 7.1) which requires that consideration be given to the registration of Recorded Monuments within the WHS². Reference to Prof G. Eogan's maps show many significant archaeological features within the 'Bend of the Boyne' and also within the wider area which should be recorded and afforded protection. Many of the actions listed in Section 7 would benefit the protection and management of the site and we assume they have been implemented in the intervening 9 years since the inception of the management plan.

There is a need for the revision of the current management plan due to the period of time which has lapsed from its initial publication in 2002. There is also a need for the management plan to be

² World Heritage Site



specific in terms of the management practices which are to be implemented rather than aspirational. The management plan should be prescriptive in this regard.

2.2. Landscape Issues

The landscape setting of Brú na Bóinne is classified as being of very high value and the River Boyne valley is deemed as being of “exceptional” value in the Meath County Council Development Plan. As well as the World Heritage Sites of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth there are many historic monuments and buildings and castles and demesnes, and other structures within the wider landscape. The nearby town of Slane itself is a heritage town with a distinctive character and its surroundings may be considered as part of the historic landscape.

Overall this area is a very sensitive environment with a rich high quality landscape resource. The landscape of the WHS itself is protected through the development plan by a range of measures controlling development, and views along and across the Boyne valley, to and from the main WHS monuments, are also protected.

Whilst certain views such as that south from Newgrange towards the rising winter solstice sunrise need to be protected to appreciate the authenticity of the monument, the landscape is more generally the “setting” for the monuments within and adjacent to the WHS. Although the landscape setting may not in itself be a key aspect of the Outstanding Universal Value from which Brú na Bóinne derives its WHS designation, it is part of the experience and enjoyment of the World Heritage Site and can contribute values of timelessness, a sense of connection to the past and a feeling of continuity. Changes to that landscape both within and adjacent to the WHS can have an impact on that experience and its enjoyment. The key issue in establishing the effect of changes to the landscape is whether that impact or change is complementary to or enhances the intrinsic values of the landscape, or whether the change erodes such value.

It is important in articulating landscape policy for the World Heritage Site Management Plan and supporting policy for the local development plan that it is recognised that the landscape of Brú na Bóinne and its environs consists of a modern, working rural area **in which surviving cultural heritage monuments exist**. It would be important therefore for a new management plan to carefully articulate what it is about the landscape of the WHS itself and its wider Boyne Valley setting that is unique and distinctive and contributes to the WHS setting, and set out appropriate management objectives and actions.

In recent years a number of planning and development issues have arisen in relation to the setting of Brú na Bóinne:

- The proposed Slane by-pass and river crossing
- The M1 Boyne Bridge to the east of the WHS
- The Indaver Ireland waste management facility and electricity generating station south of the WHS



- A number of one off and estate type Housing Developments
- Wind farm on hills north of Slane Village.

Although well outside the boundaries and buffer zone of the WHS, individually and cumulatively these developments have raised question in terms of their impact on the World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne. There has been one monitoring mission from ICOMOS in relation to developments and concerns regarding the potential delisting of the WHS status raised. Most recently the Slane By Pass Oral Hearing was presented with the results of a Heritage Impact Assessment by an expert appointed by Meath County Council at the instruction of An Bord Pleanála.

This Heritage Impact Assessment specifically raised the issue of the landscape setting – ambiance and the totality of sights, sounds and other sensory input - as a major contributory factor to the Outstanding Universal Values of the WHS. It highlighted the setting of the monuments on an elevated position at the Bend of the Boyne, the materials of the landscape being part of the monuments, the generally green setting and the increasing number of intrusive or contemporary elements which cumulatively threatened the understanding and experience of the monument.

The Heritage Impact Assessment methodology used, introduced a new assessment process for World Heritage Sites³. Based on the systems of landscape and visual impact assessment familiar to landscape architects, however the process puts considerable weighting on *any* impact arising, reflecting the sensitivity of the sites in question so that relatively minor changes to setting can generate comparatively large significance of impact. Whilst such a high bar or test is to be welcomed, the proposed management plan and the local development plan protections for landscape need to be more specific about the role and extent of setting for the World Heritage Site, and what constitutes acceptable change. The Heritage Impact Assessment for the Slane By Pass set out that the position that just the *visibility* of contemporary elements / infrastructure had an adverse impact on the WHS. This included the award winning and much admired landmark M1 bridge over the Boyne near Drogheda⁴. The management plan needs to be clear and articulate about protecting and defending this landscape setting but equally it must acknowledge that contemporary development or change is not in itself adverse or in conflict with the WHS.

The landscape visible and present around the WHS is not ancient, other than its topography and geology. It is made up of elements that reflect it's 5,000 years of continued habitation – that includes the medieval monastic management practices⁵, the relatively recent field patterns and woodlands and both 19th century and more recent industrial development. What is consistent however, is the predominantly rich, rural character and high or exceptional quality. There is an

³ ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*. 2011

⁴ In the 2004 report ICOMOS – UNESCO stated that the M1 motorway and bridge undoubtedly had a significant impact on the WHS. However, it adds that since the bridge was considered a local landmark, and thus an acceptable element of the Boyne Valley landscape, there was no reason to take any action.

⁵ discrete management of Granges reflected in townland names



ongoing evolution of the landscape and at issue is whether the development of obviously contemporary buildings / structures is in conflict with that or is it part of such ongoing evolution. There is a need for this question to be debated to ensure appropriate policy objectives are set out protection of the monuments and their setting in the surrounding landscape.

The challenge for the management plan is ensuring that character is maintained into the future and its quality protected and enhanced whilst facilitating ongoing modern human habitation and its contemporary needs. This should include an enhanced role for this major tourist attraction in the local economy of the area, delivering a local dividend for people in return for restrictions on development which would erode the attraction and cooperation in landscape management initiatives.

3.0. Recommendations / Suggestions for the Management Plan

Actions need to be developed and delivered to ensure the management plan is effective. This will require that studies, research, surveys and other appropriate mechanisms are taken forward as part of the implementation of the management plan. The development of these mechanisms must be done in partnership with other public bodies stakeholders and appropriate NGOs.

We would recommend the following actions

- Define more accurately the “landscape setting” and its role/contribution to the Outstanding Universal Values of the WHS. This should include lands within the Core Area and the Buffer Zone and distinguish if appropriate between these areas and define more clearly their role. It is also considered necessary to address the wider setting beyond the current defined boundaries. The setting may be considered to be broadly formed by the visual horizons. It should also be noted that there are potentially a series of linked landscapes along the Boyne valley including Slane Village and Castle, Hill of Slane and Beauparc Demesne, and the Battle of the Boyne site.
- Develop a strategy for these linked landscapes, building on the longstanding concept of an archaeological / 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. 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.
- Within the lands directly covered by the management plan ensure actions to:
 - Identify what are the features in the landscape to be maintained, managed and protected e.g trees, hedgerows as well as monuments and buildings. Use GIS and related digital systems to survey, audit and map these features.



- Ensure appropriate monitoring and management strategies put in place and agreements with private landowners where necessary. Use agricultural support systems as appropriate.
- Consider what aspects of views and vistas both long distance/panoramic and short need to be protected and preserved? Consider what actions are needed to manage these? Adopt proactive approaches to mitigating the cumulative impact of recent developments e.g.

The long term decommissioning of the cement works, chimneys and incinerators to east / south east of the WHS and their replacement with visually more acceptable uses,

The potential undergrounding of the Eirgrid lines/pylons crossing the Boyne west of Knowth by incorporating them within the proposed new by pass and bridge - consideration at least to the provision of appropriate ducting to allow for future work to remove the existing structures/wires and/or accommodate similar infrastructure. This would combine two "contemporary" infrastructure corridors in one.

The management of vegetation around key locations to mitigate current adverse impacts and control/manage the visual experience for visitors.

- 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 and an appropriate development and management strategy..

We trust the above comments and observations are of use to you and would be delighted to meet with you to discuss some of the ideas further.

On behalf of the Irish Landscape Institute

Yours sincerely

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Convenor Landscape Policy Working Group

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