Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast

2020 Conservation Outlook Assessment

SITE INFORMATION

Country: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK)
Inscribed in: 1986
Criteria: (vii) (viii)

The Giant's Causeway lies at the foot of the basalt cliffs along the sea coast on the edge of the Antrim plateau in Northern Ireland. It is made up of some 40,000 massive black basalt columns sticking out of the sea. The dramatic sight has inspired legends of giants striding over the sea to Scotland. Geological studies of these formations over the last 300 years have greatly contributed to the development of the earth sciences, and show that this striking landscape was caused by volcanic activity during the Tertiary, some 50–60 million years ago. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2020 Conservation Outlook

GOOD WITH SOME CONCERNS

Finalised on 02 Dec 2020

Because of its inherent robustness against anthropogenic impact and the effective management of the site itself, the conservation outlook for the site's geological values is good. At the same time, the conservation outlook for the exceptional natural beauty of the site, which depends on of the integrity of the surrounding landscape, is of concern, mainly because of pressure for development projects in the future. Past plans for large-scale development in the immediate vicinity of the site showed that threats to its Outstanding Universal Value might emerge, because its outstanding natural beauty depends not only on the site itself, but also on its wider landscape setting. While the planned development did not proceed, the site may come under additional threats from other development projects in the weakly-protected surroundings.
FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► Extraordinary geological complex formed by basaltic lava flows

The property, with the Giant's Causeway itself (a sea-level promontory of almost entirely regular polygonal columns averaging 45 cm in diameter and numbering approximately 40,000 columns), the Giant's Organ (about 60 regular columns, 12 m high, and Chimney Tops (a number of columns separated from the cliffs by erosion), together with a number of associated features, form an exceptional example of geological activity with successive lava flows and inter-basaltic beds, and hence extraordinary testimony to Tertiary geological events. The extremely regular columnar jointing of the Tholeiitic basalts is a spectacular feature that is displayed in exemplary fashion at the Giant's Causeway. The Causeway itself is a unique formation and a superlative horizontal section through columnar basalt lavas (World Heritage Committee, 2013b; UNEP-WCMC, 2011). The site is a classic locality for the study of Tertiary basalts and has played a fundamental role in the historical development of geological interpretation. Its value for scientific research, which has made important contributions to petrogenesis over a period of nearly 300 years, marks it as a site of international significance in the history of earth science (World Heritage Committee, 2006; 2013b).

► Geological spectacle of exceptional natural beauty

The cliff exposures of columnar and massive basalt at the edge of the Antrim Plateau, within their spectacular landscape setting, present a spectacle of exceptional natural beauty. The extent of visible rock sections and the quality of the exposed columns in the cliffs and on the Causeway combine to present an array of features of international significance (World Heritage Committee, 2013b).

Other important biodiversity values

► Significant coastal ecosystems with their associated biodiversity

This relatively small site nevertheless harbors valuable coastal ecosystems with their associated flora and fauna, including seashore, cliff, scree, grassland, scrub, heathland and marsh habitats. Noteworthy examples of the 200 plant species at the site include Red Broomrape (Orobanche alba), Sea Spleenwort (Asplenium marinum), and Frog Orchid (Coeloglossum viride). Avifauna is represented by 50 resident and 30 migrant species, including Razorbill (Alca torda), European Storm Petrel (Hydrobates pelagicus) and Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus) (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). The coastal waters bordering the site are part of the WWF priority global 200 ecoregion “North-east Atlantic Shelf Marine” (WWF, 2012).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

The inherent robustness and effective management of the site so far have controlled threats to its values. However, plans for large-scale development in the immediate vicinity of the site showed that threats to its
Outstanding Universal Value might emerge, because its outstanding natural beauty depends not only on the site itself, but also on its wider landscape setting. The coastline is noted as hosting a prevailing undeveloped character with a strong sense of remoteness and panoramic views of the open sea towards County Donegal and Scotland. Increased pressure from tourism, traffic and noise also impact on the natural beauty and visual experience.

▲ Tourism/ Recreation Areas
(Potential infrastructure development in the immediate vicinity of the site)

A preliminary notice (Proposal of Application Notice (PAN)) was submitted for a large scale development involving car parking and road realignment adjacent to the entrance to the site in a greenfield site in January 2017. There are currently no updates regarding the status of the Application. The adjacent area is under development pressure and subject to various development proposals that have potential to impact the site. The cumulative impact of development in the surrounding area may impact negatively on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the site (IUCN Consultation, 2020).

▲ Tourism/ visitors/ recreation
(Road congestion, noise, path and vegetation erosion, littering due to heavy visitation)

Following the opening of the new visitor centre in 2012 and high profile shows such as Game of Thrones, visitor numbers has continued to rise, reaching over one million since 2017, compared to approximately 400,000 in 2005. Cruise ship tourism has also developed quickly with 128 ships docking in 2018, an increase of nearly 90% on the previous year (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027). At peak times there is an increasing issue with tour coaches causing congestion on the rural roads and nearby villages and impacting negatively on the landscape character. Large tourism clusters heightens the impact of footfall, visual presence and noise within this area noted as hosting a prevailing undeveloped character with a strong sense of remoteness. A sustainability study has been commissioned to better understand the impacts of visitors on four areas (physical, ecological, experiential and socio-cultural). With the study the Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast wishes to be recognised internationally as leader in the sustainable management of dynamic natural World Heritage sites (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027).

Potential Threats

There is a potential threat to the landscape setting of the site from further onshore development, as well as offshore wind farm developments and petroleum exploration. However, this threat is considered low because there appear to be no immediate plans to go ahead with any development. Other potential threats include climate change, which needs to be studied further.

▲ Storms/Flooding
(Climate change impact on coastline)

Climate change might in the long term affect coastal stability and ecosystem distribution (Zacharioudaki and Reeve, 2011). It may also increase rates of coastal erosion and the extent and frequency of marine flooding. Sea level rise will increase the hazards associated with access to parts of the site and may render some areas inaccessible (Orford et al., 2008). The potential threat climate change poses to the overall slope stability of the various cliff elements making up the site, was identified in the 2008 National Trust Report (Orford et al., 2008) and further made explicit in Smith et al. (2009), but requires better monitoring and baseline information to underpin effective shoreline management (Cooper and Jackson, 2018). The geomorphological activity of the cliffs is increasing and the potential risk from various slides, slumps and falls is rising with increasing seasonality and changing precipitation patterns. The ‘sea/landscapes’ making up the Causeway Coast need to be more central to the future visitor experience, as access to the cliff face paths may be reduced by increasing activity of cliff face and debris slopes with time. This could cause a major change in management of visitors.
**Renewable Energy**  
*(Development of offshore windfarms)*

There was a discussion about a proposed offshore wind farm in 2003. IUCN and the World Heritage Centre then recommended to carefully assess possible impacts of such developments on the property and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty surrounding it (UNESCO and IUCN, 2003). A 2009 Strategic Environmental Assessment for potential offshore renewable energy installations in Northern Ireland, which was commissioned by the EC’s European Regional Development Fund and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment of Northern Ireland, follows this recommendation (AECOM and Metoc, 2009). Although it may be difficult to accommodate renewable energy proposals without detriment to the region’s heritage assets, a low threat of offshore wind farm development affecting the site remains.

**Tourism/ Recreation Areas**  
*(Further large-scale infrastructure development adjacent to the site)*

A plan to construct a large hotel/golf course and auxiliary infrastructure between Bushmills and the site, and inside the Causeway Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, was approved by the Northern Ireland Environment Minister early in 2012 based on the expected economic benefits of the development (National Trust, 2012a). The National Trust challenged the approval of the plan in court, because it would compromise the landscape setting of the property and therefore its Outstanding Universal Value (criterion vii), as well as additional biodiversity values, such as at the Bushfoot Dunes Site of Local Conservation Concern (National Trust, 2012b). The challenge was rejected by the court in February 2013.

The State Party Report of November 2015 states that consent was granted taking full account of potential adverse impacts and in accordance with relevant planning legislation, policies and procedures. For permission to remain active, development works relating to the golf resort must have begun on or before 29th March 2017 (State Party of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2015). This did not happen and the permission has now lapsed.

The lands involved were subsequently sold to another party and no development has taken place. The planning consent for the project expired in March 2017 (State Party of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2017).

The history of the Runkerry Golf Resort development, however, shows that the vicinity of the property is generally under threat from large-scale development that may have implications for protection of the site’s values and integrity.

**Oil/ Gas exploration/development**  
*(Petroleum exploration)*

The north coast of Northern Ireland has received some interest from those wishing to explore the potential of the area’s resources. A license was issued for petroleum exploration in an area that included the site. The license terminated in February 2016. No intrusive site works took place within the WHS. Potential future petroleum exploration remains a low-level threat to the site. In its latest report, the State Party reassured that no oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities will be permitted within the site (State Party of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2017).

**Overall assessment of threats**

While geological values of the site are highly robust against anthropogenic threats, its outstanding natural beauty is under a threat from potential development projects in the site’s vicinity, as well as impacts from tourism related pressures, such as traffic and noise. Past plans for large-scale development in the immediate vicinity of the site showed that threats to its Outstanding Universal Value might emerge, because its outstanding natural beauty depends not only on the site itself, but also on its wider landscape setting. Other potential threats include climate change, which needs to be
Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Management system  Highly Effective

The site has many layers of statutory and non-statutory protection. The National Trust holds most of the land in inalienable ownership, with approximately 5% of the World Heritage site remaining in private ownership. A World Heritage Steering Group comprising relevant stakeholders provides the framework for implementation of the site’s Management Plan and represents conservation, tourism, recreation and the local community interests. A new Management Plan for the World Heritage site for 2020-2027 is currently being developed by the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. The Management Plan “provides an agreed framework and important actions for the sustainable management of the Site and its environment” (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan 2020-2027).

► Effectiveness of management system  Mostly Effective

No formal management effectiveness assessment has been conducted for the site. Management of the World Heritage site itself by the National Trust is considered highly effective, while the management of the surrounding landscape is of some concern (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in the management of the site could be further enhanced (IUCN Consultation, 2020).

► Boundaries  Mostly Effective

The boundaries of this very small (70 ha) site reflect the distribution of its values under criterion viii, but are very narrow to effectively protect its scenic landscape values, the additional biodiversity values of the area and to account for the possibility of coastal erosion. A clearly defined buffer zone to achieve this was recommended by the 2003 Reactive Monitoring Mission (UNESCO and IUCN, 2003), and further by the 2013 IUCN Advisory Mission (IUCN, 2013). In 2016 the World Heritage Committee approved a minor boundary modification of an approximately 5 m increase running for most of the landward boundary to address the concerns that, should there be significant erosion, the cliff faces, which are key attributes of OUV, would no longer lie within the inscribed boundary (IUCN, 2016). The World Heritage site is noted in the wider Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan. Site Management process needs to work interactively with the local planning to ensure that future commercial developments in any defined buffer zone are rebuffed on protected heritage grounds.

► Integration into regional and national planning systems  Some Concern

The management framework for the World Heritage site is integrated with 13 key policies and plans at different levels, including regional development, tourism development and spatial planning documents (Environment and Heritage Service, 2005). However, this has not prevented permission for a large-scale tourism development in the immediate vicinity of the site, which may compromise its Outstanding Universal Value.

In the UK, World Heritage sites are not statutory designations and stronger recognition would aid implementation of the Management Plan. The 2013 IUCN Advisory Mission advised the State Party to strengthen the position and recognition of World Heritage sites in national law, including in all regions of the State, so that developments that create negative impacts on Outstanding Universal Value are not permitted (IUCN, 2013).

A specific section in the Regional ‘Single Planning Policy Statement (SPS)’ published in Sept 2015 is devoted to the WHS. This states:

“6.6 Development that would adversely affect the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage Site (WHS) or the integrity of its setting must not be permitted unless there are overriding exceptional circumstances.”
6.7 Inclusion of a WHS on a list published by UNESCO highlights the outstanding international importance of the site as a material consideration in the determination of planning and listed building consent applications, and appeals. Planning authorities must carefully consider applications affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of such sites, particularly taking into account the safeguarding of critical views to and from the site, the access and public approaches to the site and the understanding and enjoyment of the site by visitors."

It also notes that:

"WHSSs are designated under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972 on the basis of their acknowledged ‘Outstanding Universal Value’. The Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site is currently the only WHS in Northern Ireland inscribed on the World Heritage list. It is inscribed because its natural and geological features are held to be of Outstanding Universal Value. Given their acknowledged international importance, it will be appropriate for a LDP having a WHS within the plan area, to identify the site and its broader setting and to include local policies or proposals to safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value of such sites and their settings from inappropriate development."

**Relationships with local people**

The site is uninhabited, except for the Causeway Hotel, and mainly owned by the National Trust. However, there are a number of local communities close by. During the course of the last Management Plan (2013-2019), progress was made to involve the local community through, for instance, the addition of a community elected representative to the Steering Group and development of interpretation materials outlining the OUV and significance of the World Heritage site (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway WHS Management Plan 2013-2019). Free admission is provided to locals and the National Trust run Community Open Days, training programmes and fund youth engagement. However, it is recognised that more needs to be done to increase understanding and awareness with the general public, especially communities local to the site. One of the five goals that the Steering Group hope to address through the lifetime of the 2020-2027 Management Plan is to better engage local communities and enable them to gain greater socio-economic benefits from the WHS designation (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway WHS Management Plan 2020-2027). A Community Plan has also been developed by the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CC&GBC, 2017), which provides a ‘key over-arching framework for partnerships and initiatives’ for the Borough until 2030.

**Legal framework**

The coastline at the World Heritage site has been legally protected since 1987 as a National Nature Reserve, and partly as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (since 2000). The entire Causeway Plateau is designated since 1989 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In addition, the site has been designated a Special Area of Conservation and thereby given greater protection under the European legislation of the EU Habitats Directive (Protected Planet, 2012; UNESCO and IUCN, 2003). On 31st January 2020 the UK withdrew from the European Union and although the UK Government has committed to upholding current environmental legislation, much of which was developed and agreed at EU level, it is still unclear how this may impact the WHS. Despite this, the overall legal framework of the site itself is still considered highly effective, while some concern exists about the protection status of its surrounding landscape. There is, however, a management plan for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – first written 2003 and updated in 2008 and a new one (for 2013-2023) is now in preparation (Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2013-2023).

**Law enforcement**

The site is patrolled by wardens, contains information and warning signs and is difficult to access other than by approved routes. Measures appear effective in enforcing regulations.

**Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations**

The 2003 a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission recommended to “…carefully review all zoning arrangements in order to preserve the landscape values of the Area of Outstanding
Natural beauty surrounding the World Heritage site. No developments, which could potentially threaten these values, should be allowed”. The mission also recommended the establishment of a clearly defined buffer zone for the site (UNESCO and IUCN, 2003). These key recommendations, which were adopted by the Committee in its Decision 27COM 7B.21, were not followed (see National Trust, 2012a) in regard to the Runkerry Golf Resort development. Other requests and recommendations contained in Decisions 27COM 7B.21, 29COM 7B.27 and 32COM 7B.28 of the World Heritage Committee relating to information about the management plan and visitor centre redevelopment have been implemented by the State Party (World Heritage Committee, 2003, 2005, 2008).

**Sustainable use**

Highly Effective

This very small World Heritage site consists of mainly coastal cliffs and foreshore, and is not important for sustainable use other than tourism (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Sustainable finance**

Some Concern

Funding was assessed as insufficient by the State Party in 2006 (WHC, 2006). Additional funds were since raised for the construction of a new visitor centre, which opened in July 2012 (National Trust, 2012c). Sufficient resources proved a challenge through the lifetime of the 2013-2019 Management Plan as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency withdrew project funding in 2015 due to nationwide funding cuts. Thought has been given to resourcing the new 2020-2027 Action Plan while maintaining an ambitious outlook. The Steering Group and Project Manager will work to secure the necessary resource for delivery where it has not been identified (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027).

**Staff capacity, training, and development**

Data Deficient

**Education and interpretation programs**

Mostly Effective

The National Trust runs a wide range of education and interpretation programmes at and around the site, including a website and newly designed visitor centre with interactive exhibitions (National Trust, 2012c), school and student visits, guided tours and interpretative trails, and interpretation publications for a wide range of target groups and in eight languages.

**Tourism and visitation management**

Mostly Effective

The site received over one million visitors in 2018, an increase by an average of 250,000 since the beginning of the previous Management Plan cycle in 2013. Facilities include a new visitor centre with interactive exhibitions and cafeteria, a hotel run by the National Trust, parking and shuttle bus, trails and related facilities (National Trust, 2012c). Tourism remains seasonal with peak months being May - August. Increasing the quantity of visitors throughout the year and dispersing them better across the area continues to be a focus of the local council as reflected in the Tourism and Destination Management Plan 2015-2020; Key Objective ‘Generate more visitors, motivate them to spend longer in the area and visit throughout the year’ (CC&GBC, 2015). As a means to reduce the concentration of visitors on the site and create a more diverse and sustainable tourism sector, diversification of the tourism offering has been advocated by the Steering Group (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027).

An overall coordinated tourism management strategy was recommended in 2003 (UNESCO and IUCN, 2003) and a Causeway Coast and Tourism Masterplan was published in 2004 (Northern Ireland Tourism Board, 2012).

**Monitoring**

Data Deficient

A comprehensive monitoring strategy and framework including 22 indicators on geology/geomorphology, landscape, ecology, cultural heritage, socio-economic and visitation trends, and the management of the wider setting of the site, was included in the 2004 management plan of the site (Environment and Heritage Service, 2005). However, no monitoring results appear to have been published.
It has been concluded that the site is vulnerable to impacts caused by climate change and the 2013 IUCN Advisory Mission recommended that “Natural threats (sea water rise, frequency of storm events) due to expected climate change should be carefully monitored...” (IUCN, 2013). Better monitoring and baseline information are also urgently needed to underpin effective shoreline management (Cooper and Jackson, 2018).

The National Trust recognise the need to better understand the impacts of visitors to the site and so have commissioned a pioneering sustainability study. A wide range of data is being collected across the WHS to inform the study including air quality, habitat mapping, visitor mapping (numbers, trends, dwell times), monitoring of parking, review of paths including desire lines as well as gauging visitors’ feelings of their visit (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027).

**Research**

The site has been studied intensively over the last 300 years, and has contributed significantly to the current understanding of the origin of igneous rocks, and Tertiary geology (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). It continues to support research in these fields. The National Trust welcomes researchers onto the site and facilitates a variety of research projects. The Queen’s University Belfast has had a long tradition of significant involvement with the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site. Researchers are invited to present on their research to the World Heritage Site Steering Group (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027). In September 2018, the Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS entered into a Sisterhood Agreement with Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes World Heritage site in South Korea and it is hoped that the Agreement will foster some collaborative research. Some areas, such as climate change impacts and potential responses merit further research. The NI Evidence Report indicates that there are risks to habitats & heritage in the coastal zone from sea-level rise and that action and research are required to address this. National Trust, among others, are calling for strategic shoreline management and the development of a coastal observatory to support research and management (Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast WHS Management Plan 2020-2027).

**Overall assessment of protection and management**

The site has many layers of protection and the management of the site itself is highly effective. A new Management Plan for the World Heritage site for 2020-2027 is currently being developed by the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. While ensuring appropriate levels of financing remains a concern, possible sources of funding are being considered to ensure implementation of the new management plan. However, there remain concerns about the management and protection status of the surrounding landscape of the site, which is crucial for the preservation of the site’s Outstanding Universal Value and particularly its scenic value.

**Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site**

The effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site, mainly development of tourism infrastructure and potentially offshore wind farms, is the main area of concern in relation to the overall management of the site because this might seriously compromise its Outstanding Universal Value. The immediate surroundings are also under development pressure and subject to various development proposals. Large-scale developments or the cumulative impact of several developments may result in degradation of critical views from and approaches to the World Heritage site.

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**State and trend of values**

**Assessing the current state and trend of values**
IUCN World Heritage Outlook: https://worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/

Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast - 2020 Conservation Outlook Assessment

**World Heritage values**

- **Extraordinary geological complex formed by basaltic lava flows**
  
  The geological values of the site are very robust against anthropogenic impact and well managed. The 18th/19th century practice of removing/damaging basalt columns for ornamental use has long ceased (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Therefore, their current state is assessed as good and stable.

- **Geological spectacle of exceptional natural beauty**
  
  In contrast to the geological values of the site, which can be effectively managed within its boundaries, the exceptional natural beauty crucially depends on the wider landscape setting. This was under serious threat from planned development of a Golf Resort at Runkerry (National Trust, 2012a). Through a combination of circumstances, including a change of ownership of the site of the planned development, this threat has now receded. The site may, however, come under additional threats from other development projects in the weakly-protected surroundings.

  Increased pressure from tourism, traffic and noise might also impact on natural beauty and visual experience.

**Summary of the Values**

- **Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values**
  
  The current state of the geological values of the site is good and stable, whereas its scenic and aesthetic values have the potential to be threatened by future development in the site’s vicinity and increasing pressures from tourism related factors.

- **Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values**
  
  The site includes sections of two Special Area of Conservation (SAC), the North Antrim Coast SAC and Skerries and Causeway Marine SAC, as well as Giant’s Causeway National Nature Reserve (NNR) and the Giant’s Causeway & Dunseverick Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - data is recorded and reported for these designations. SACs are given greater protection under the EU Habitats Directive and been designated because of a possible threat to the special habitats or species which they contain and to provide increased protection to a variety of animals. These species and habitats might be vulnerable to changing weather patterns caused by climate change and irreversible landscape damage caused by large-scale unsustainable or smaller cumulative developments.

**Additional information**

**Benefits**

- **Understanding Benefits**
  
  - **Direct employment**
    
    The Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast has long been a premier tourism attraction in Northern Ireland. This contributes significantly to income generation and the socio-economic development in the property’s vicinity. There are 12 permanent and 15 seasonal staff employed by the National Trust in 2003 (Rössler and Zupancic-Vicar, 2003). In addition, a significant number of jobs (tens or even
hundreds of jobs in tourism) indirectly benefit from the attractiveness of the property, which draws over one million visitors annually. Some local providers offer sightseeing boat tours of the coast. Increased business opportunities, development of outdoor recreation offerings and increased accommodation provisions has real potential to offer socio-economic benefits for local residents.

Factors negatively affecting provision of this benefit:
- Climate change: Impact level - Low, Trend - Continuing
- Overexploitation: Impact level - Moderate, Trend - Continuing
- Habitat change: Impact level - Low, Trend - Continuing

Outdoor recreation and tourism

The Giant’s Causeway has been a popular tourist attraction for over 200 years with people travelling to view the striking features from both near and far. Visitor interest remained high and the Causeway held the title of premier visitor attraction in Northern Ireland for many decades. Nature based tourism is practiced at a high intensity (UNEP-WCMC, 2011) and visitor numbers have since 2017 reached over one million per year. The site offers a unique opportunity to experience not only its OUV, but also the coastal landscapes of Northern Ireland.

Factors negatively affecting provision of this benefit:
- Climate change: Impact level - Moderate, Trend - Continuing
- Pollution: Impact level - Low, Trend - Continuing
- Overexploitation: Impact level - Moderate, Trend - Continuing
- Invasive species: Impact level - Low, Trend - Continuing
- Habitat change: Impact level - Low, Trend - Continuing

Importance for research

The site has critically contributed to the scientific understanding of igneous rock formation and Tertiary geology since the early 18th century, and continues to support extensive scientific research and publications (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Contribution to education

Based on the site’s immense importance for geological knowledge generation and its new visitor and educational facilities, it also functions as a hotspot for scientific education and interpretation, which helps people understand how Earth has evolved (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

History and tradition

In the 18th Century, the myth of the prehistoric hero Finn MacCool emerged, which links the Giant’s Causeway with Staffa Island in Scotland and gained considerably international popularity, in connection to the epics of Ossian (J. Macpherson), thereby becoming an international literary reference (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Summary of benefits

The main benefits of the site are knowledge generation, education and nature based tourism, together with the socio-economic benefits that depend on them. However, the property also offers significant nature conservation benefits.

Projects

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<th>Brief description of Active Projects</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>National Trust</td>
<td>Several projects directly contributing to the management of the property</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Tourism NI</td>
<td>Causeway Coast &amp; Glens Tourism and Destination Management Strategy 2015 - 2020</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust</td>
<td>Several projects on communication, education and awareness raising in relation to the property, and promotion of sustainable environmental management and sustainable development in the region</td>
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## REFERENCES

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<td>Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (2010),The Causeway Coast &amp; Glens Tourism Area Plan 2010-2020</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan 2020 – 2027 (In preparation) Draft</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>IUCN Consultation (2020). IUCN Confidential Consultation – Giant’s Causeway and Causeway Coast (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)</td>
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