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World Heritage site

# Durham Castle and Cathedral

**Management Plan  
Prospectus 2024-2035**





## Welcome

Since we published the last World Heritage Site Management Plan in 2017 partners have made significant investment in safeguarding this special place for future generations.

We have completed three major capital projects. Durham University reopened the 15th century Exchequer building after a £1.2m conservation. The Cathedral completed a £1.9m project to conserve the central tower, and St John's College officially opened a new Learning Resource Centre, the newest building within the World Heritage Site red line boundary. Together these projects ensure that the site continues as a place of worship and learning which serves a region of some half a million people.

Our work does not stop. We are currently undertaking three more major projects to conserve and enhance the site: (i) conservation and structural works on the Norman Chapel and Durham Castle; (ii) repairs to the Cathedral curtilage; and (iii) public realm on the Baileys which provide access to the site.

Climate change has become a significant challenge. Increased annual rainfall is causing high groundwater levels and accelerating the erosion of the soft Durham sandstone. We are also experiencing more frequent flood events and storm damage.

The financial climate is also challenging. Conservation and energy costs have increased significantly in the last three years and it is difficult to predict the future economic environment. The new North East Combined Authority and Devolution Deal offer hope for increased investment. Durham County Council is the lead for the region's culture portfolio, and as one of three

UNESCO designations in the region we are participating in the Local Visitor Economy Economic Partnership (LVEP) Destination Development Pilot which aims to double the value of the visitor economy.

As stewards of world heritage, the Strategic Partnership Board has engaged in extensive listening to, and consultation with, various communities of interest both locally and further afield through workshops, focus groups and one-to-one meetings. Colleagues are developing the 2024-2035 World Heritage Site Management Plan in tandem with a new Setting Study which will guide future development decisions, a revised Conservation Area Management Plan for Durham City, Durham County Council's Strategic Place Plan for the city and strategic reviews for both Durham Castle and Durham Cathedral.

This prospectus identifies our key themes and projects for the next ten years including anniversaries in 2026 (40 years of inscription), 2032 (200 years since the foundation of Durham University) and 2033 (900 years since the completion of the Cathedral). This is a live document. We will update progress annually and formally review the plan after five years.

World heritage is for everyone. We give thanks to the many people and organisations who together fund, look after and share responsibility for this place. Please visit our website [www.durhamworldheritagesite.com](http://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com) to find out more and send us your feedback.

The Revd Canon Charlie Allen  
Canon Chancellor and Chair of the Strategic Partnership Board

Cover image – Durham Castle, Palace Green and Cathedral by Graeme Hall

Liquid Geometry by Javier Riera at Lumiere, a free-to-enter biennial festival of light. Some 120,000 people attended over 4 nights in November 2023



## Key milestones from our last plan

### February 2017

Launch of World Heritage Site Management Plan 2017-2023  
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/370/documents/>

### July 2017

Durham University reopens the Exchequer Building once the law courts of the Bishop of Durham, after £1.2m conservation supported by the NLHF.  
<https://www.durham.ac.uk/things-to-do/venues/historic-libraries-at-palace-green/architecture/exchequer-building/>

### February 2018

Prince Charles opens the Cathedral's Open Treasure visitor experience and unveils a blue plaque at St John's College.  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/cathedrals/durham/>

### June 2019

Durham Cathedral completes conservation of the bell tower..

### September 2019

St John's College officially opens its new library.

### January 2020

Cathedral Year of Pilgrimage and development of Visit County Durham Northern Saints Trails over 205 miles.  
<https://www.thisisdurham.com/northern-saints>

### July 2020

Learners from over 100 countries sign up for an online course about the Scottish soldiers from the Battle of Dunbar in 1650.  
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/battle-of-dunbar-1650>

**October 2020** The County Durham Plan is adopted.  
<https://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp>

### July 2021

Durham City Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2035 is adopted.  
<https://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/the-plan/the-plan-as-pdf/>

### February 2022

Durham Cathedral installs a new lighting scheme and reduces carbon emissions by 33%.

### April 2022

Bishop Cosin's Library reopens after conservation, digitisation and online access project. New Visitor Centre displays installed.  
<https://cosinlibrary.webspace.durham.ac.uk>

### November 2022

Work begins on conservation of the Norman Chapel at Durham Castle.

### May 2023

Durham Cathedral launches Swift FM radio and nest boxes in the belfry to reverse the decline of this endangered species.

### August 2023

Durham County Council repairs public realm on the Baileys.

### November 2023

Archaeological discoveries at St John's College reveal pre-Norman settlement evidence.

### January 2024

Setting Study commissioned.

### April 2024

Launch of Durham City Spring Blossom Trail with National Trust.

### May 2024

Durham Cathedral Museum achieves Full Museum accreditation.



Durham Castle and Cathedral: the historic castle walls enclose the Cathedral and most of the peninsula. The inscribed area follows the line of the inner Bailey and Cathedral precinct.

UNESCO is reviewing an application to extend the World Heritage Site boundary.





**“The UK National Commission for UNESCO is delighted to endorse the proposals outlined here. We particularly welcome the alignment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and action to address climate change, increase access, improve environmental sustainability and celebrate the site’s living history. The research expertise of Durham University is a clear benefit to the site”.**

**Professor Anne Anderson, Chair**

## What is Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inscribed Durham Castle and Cathedral on the World Heritage List in 1986 - <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/370/> The aim of designation as a 'World Heritage Site' is to recognise, protect and preserve the 'outstanding universal value' of special places for future generations. In some cases whole cities or landscapes are inscribed. In the case of Durham the defined area comprises 83 listed buildings and includes Durham Castle and buildings on Palace Green and Owengate (which are mainly in the care of Durham University), all the buildings within the Cathedral precinct (including the Cathedral church, the Cloister, College and Chorister School owned by the Dean and Chapter), and buildings on the west side of the Bailey including the Chapel of St Mary-the-Less and Cranmer Hall which is part of St John's College and Prebends Bridge.

Durham Cathedral is one of only three cathedral world heritage sites in the UK. It was inscribed before Canterbury Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey. The UNESCO World Heritage List describes the Cathedral (with the Norman Chapel in Durham Castle) as "the most perfect Norman (Romanesque) architecture in England". The universal value of the site includes its innovative vaulted ceilings, its unique, dramatic setting on the peninsula above the River Wear and the relics and material culture of Saint Cuthbert and The Venerable Bede. This has been a place of worship and learning for more than 1000 years.

Although the World Heritage status attracts many visitors, this is not primarily a visitor attraction. It is a living place which today combines a working cathedral church, a chorister school, a Church of England training institution and a university. Like Coimbra in Portugal, Durham University's history is part of the site's inscription. Durham Castle was gifted by the last Prince Bishop Van Mildert to found the first University College which continues today.

The World Heritage Site is managed by a Co-ordinating Committee of the principal owners and stakeholders. This partnership is unincorporated; there is no separate legal entity. The principal landowners, Durham University, Durham County Council, Durham Cathedral and St John's College share executive powers and collectively fund a manager. The position is employed through Durham University to foster internal and external relations, facilitate and fundraise for new projects and report periodically to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris via the UK State Party (Department of Culture Media and Sport with Historic England as technical advisor) and the UK National Commission for UNESCO in London. Decision-making is by consensus.

Since 2023, with UNESCO's consent, we have adopted the official UNESCO inscription title 'Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site' and the UNESCO logo in place of the previous 'Durham World Heritage Site' sub-brand.

Constructed in the 17th century and recently conserved Bishop Cosin's Library on Palace Green is part of the World Heritage Site.



## Purpose of the Management Plan

UNESCO requires all World Heritage Sites to have a management plan which focuses on how partners will collectively ensure that the site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) is sustained for future generations. Our vision is to preserve the OUV of Durham Castle and Cathedral as detailed in eight Statements of Significance in The World Heritage List:-

1. **The property has exceptional architecture demonstrating architectural innovation;**
2. **The visual drama of the Cathedral and Castle on the peninsula and the associations of the site with notions of romantic beauty;**
3. **The physical expression of the spiritual and secular powers of the medieval Bishops Palatine that the defended complex provides;**
4. **The relics and material culture of the three saints buried at the site;**
5. **The continuity of use and ownership of the site over the past 1000 years as a place of religious worship, learning and residence;**
6. **The site's role as a political statement of Norman power imposed upon a subjugate nation, as one of the country's most powerful symbols of the Norman Conquest of Britain;**
7. **The importance of the site's archaeological remains, which are directly related to the site's history and continuity of use over the past 1000 years;**
8. **The cultural and religious traditions and historical memories associated with the relics of St Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede, and with the continuity of use and ownership of the site over the past millennium.**

We preserve the architecture through a continuous programme of conservation, repair and maintenance managed by the Cathedral, University and St John's College estates departments. The architectural significance and priority of works is determined in detailed conservation management plans for the buildings. These are periodically updated.

A new conservation management plan is in preparation for the Castle. Quinquennial inspections have recently been completed on the Cathedral and the Chapel of St Mary-the-Less. Events such as *Lumiere* - <https://www.lumiere-festival.com> and *Lux Muralis* cast a new light (literally) on the architecture and attract new audiences.

The Site is protected through a robust planning framework and development scrutiny via the Local Planning Authority. Large scale developments are referred to Historic England who advise UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. A detailed appraisal of the peninsula is being prepared as part of the Durham City Conservation Area Management Plan - <https://www.durham.gov.uk/DurhamCityCA>. This will be subject to public consultation and includes a new set of non-designated heritage assets.

The story of the Prince Bishops is shared through interpretation, tours and events organised through the World Heritage Site Visitor Centre - <https://www.durham.ac.uk/things-to-do/venues/world-heritage-site-visitor-centre/> on Palace Green which is free to enter 7 days a week. Visitor services, curatorial and education teams at the Cathedral and University host educational visits and produce exhibitions and online resources. The Norman Conquest is on the National Curriculum and Durham is a recommended site visit for schools. Our Youth Ambassadors programme brings together young people from the local community and the University.

The tombs of the saints are preserved within the Cathedral which is free to enter. The most precious artefacts are exhibited in the accredited Cathedral Museum - <https://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/visit-us/things-to-see-and-do/museum>. The Cathedral Archaeologist and Durham University Department of Archaeology monitor works on site. We are planning to publish a new a synthesis of recent archaeological investigations in 2026.

### Strategic partners

City of Durham Trust  
Durham Cathedral  
Durham County Council  
Durham University  
Historic England  
St John's College  
UNESCO

Working in partnership our aims are threefold:

- to conserve, protect and interpret Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site for future generations;
- to be a gateway to increasing intercultural understanding and awareness of world heritage; and in doing this;
- to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals and uphold the strategic objectives (known as the 5 Cs) of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention: credibility, conservation, capacity-building, communication and communities.



Detail of St Cuthbert's coffin which dates to AD698.



## Writing our new plan

This prospectus is the next step in preparing the 2024-2035 World Heritage Site Management Plan. It proposes the key themes and priority projects for the next 10 years and forms part of a case for support for funding applications.

The development process started with reviewing progress against the last plan. This coincided with the submission of the 5-year periodic report to UNESCO in July 2023 and the publication of a progress report online in August 2023. In October 2023 we commenced a series of collaborative conversations with partners, staff, students, visitors and volunteers to see and understand the site from different perspectives. Responding to the call to get 'off the hill and into the community' in the first quarter of 2024 we began meeting with local residents in community settings.

We extended the membership of the Co-ordinating Committee to include the Durham Area Action Partnership and City of Durham Parish Council. Partners agreed collectively to consider a 10-year horizon, looking far enough ahead to be ambitious and realise some major projects, but near enough to be deliverable and to align with other plans and strategies including the County Durham Plan (2020) - <https://durham.gov.uk/cdp>, Durham City Neighbourhood Plan (2020-2035, adopted in 2021) - <https://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/the-plan/the-plan-as-pdf/> and the new County Durham Vision 2035 Inclusive Economic Strategy - <https://countydurhampartnership.co.uk/county-durham-partnership/county-durham-vision-2035/>.

Feedback from this prospectus will be reviewed alongside consultation on Durham Cathedral Strategy, Durham City Strategic Place Plan and Conservation Area Management Plan before being submitted for adoption through the partner governing bodies.



**“Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site is one of the jewels of our rich historic environment in the region. The reinvigorated Strategic Partnership Board’s vision both champions and protects the heritage, and helps this amazing site to deliver economic, social and educational benefit for us all.”**

**Tom Frater, Regional Director, Historic England**

The summary is organised into three areas which reflect the core objectives to: **conserve** the fabric, **share** the story of this place, and **regenerate** the visitor economy of the city and region. We picture this like a honeycomb, a hive of projects buzzing with and centred on people, creative collaborations and research.

## Theme 1: Conserve

The ongoing conservation of the fabric is vital to the site’s survival and its continuing use as a place of worship and learning today. Durham University’s major investment in conserving the **Norman Chapel**, the oldest building in the city is an example of this. Partners are collaborating to find solutions to improve environmental conditions and reverse harm that has been done in earlier generations through inappropriate interventions.

The University is investing in heritage science to find new ways to address the impacts of climate change and increase energy efficiency, as well as test new techniques to understand, record, conserve and interpret the buildings and collections. Affectionately known by student residents just as ‘Castle’, the original University College and buildings on Palace Green provide an international focus for **heritage education and research**.

The **Cathedral cloister**, the heart of the medieval monastery, needs major repairs. Remains of the Saxon church that predated the Norman Cathedral may survive in this area. As Durham Cathedral prepares to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the Cathedral’s construction, archaeologists are seeking to reveal its origins.

**Prebends Bridge** is both a scheduled ancient monument and a vital connection between the peninsula and the south of the city. It is on the Heritage at Risk register. Partners are pursuing all possible solutions to secure the future of the bridge.

Keeping the roof(s) on and water out is a constant challenge. Repair works on Palace Green Library will be complete early in 2025 and then work is planned to begin on **Bishop Cosin’s Almshouses**. The Cathedral is undertaking conservation work on the **Deanery**, College Gate, St Helen’s chapel and clergy houses in the Cathedral College. Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation has a programme of works on the **Chorister School**.

This theme delivers against the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:



Conservation and recording of the Norman Chapel in Durham Castle.





## Theme 2: Share

We want to reach more people both physically and virtually. Last year we counted 373,165 visitors into the Cathedral and 30,000 visitors and 20,000 students into Durham Castle. That's around one tenth of the 4.4 million people who visit Durham city. Durham University has an alumni of some 200,000 people who have an affinity to the place. It is a global diaspora that is actively connected.

We aim to do more outreach, engage more people and support the local visitor economy in several ways. The Cathedral Friends are supporting new Durham city **natural and cultural heritage trails** for visitors and residents to enjoy. Partners continue to collaborate on annual events including World Heritage Day and Heritage Open Days fostering community engagement and opening spaces that are often closed to the public.

New **interpretation in the Norman Chapel**, together with ongoing conservation of **the Castle** and reimagining **Fellows Garden** will enable more people to enjoy access. We are also edeveloping **the Museum of Archaeology** in Palace Green Library, the World Heritage Site Visitor Centre. The building is open daily, is accessible and free of charge.

**“Founded in 1933 and with 3,000 members worldwide, The Friends of Durham Cathedral are one of the oldest, and largest, cathedral-supporting groups in Britain. We are closely integrated into the life of the Cathedral, both in worship, in offering a ‘home’ for those who enjoy finding out more about its archaeology, history, art, architecture, music and literature and in fundraising and supporting Cathedral projects.”**

Caroline Peacock, Chair of the Friends



The University opens the Castle free for Heritage Open Days and World Heritage Day and runs guided tours throughout the year welcoming 30,000 visitors.

This theme delivers against the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:



## Theme 3: Regenerate

Our aim is to foster **heritage-led regeneration** in the city, enabling sensitively-designed development whilst protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site.

We are seeking sustainable ways to increase visitor numbers and income. Working with Visit County Durham we will seek to follow the five North East Regenerative Tourism Framework pathways to: decarbonise and adapt, support local business, invest in people, connect people and communities and restore nature, landscape and cultural heritage.

The Cathedral's mission centres on developing as the pre-eminent place for pilgrimage in the UK. This will involve improving visitor and group facilities, food and beverage, retail and meeting spaces as well as investing in heating, lighting and sound systems.

Partners are reducing the carbon footprint of the site through a fabric-first approach and by better building management. St John's College is installing air source heat in the **Chapel of St-Mary-the-Less**. Improvements to infrastructure and public realm are ongoing.

We want to reconnect the **natural and cultural heritage** of the whole place – the World Heritage Site and its setting. By implementing the findings of the Setting Study we will improve the visual connection with the city, revealing lost views. The Cathedral aims to bring disused buildings on the riverbanks back into use and increase the **biodiversity** by installing a fish pass and improving habitats. Wear Rivers Trust is leading work upstream to reduce flood risk and plastics pollution.

This theme delivers against the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:



**“The City of Durham Parish Council welcomes new proposals to improve the vitality and viability of our city centre, our local visitor economy and the wider region. As custodians of this wonderful medieval city of ours, the Parish Council continues to scrutinise carefully applications to protect the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Site.”**

Adam Shanley, Clerk



The riverbanks form part of the setting of the World Heritage Site.



## Collaborative

The World Heritage Site relies upon an army of volunteers and active participation and support from both local and global communities. Volunteers are involved in guiding, archival research and visitor services. The civic society **City of Durham Trust**, is an active advocate and strategic partner, organising a public lecture series, supporting events and protecting the interests of the site in planning and development. The **Cathedral Friends** has some 3000 members around the world.

Our **Youth Ambassadors** (ages 12-26) are drawn both from the local community and from the University. This makes for a wonderful mix of cultures and experiences. In the next phase we are excited to work with **The Story**, the new home of Durham County Record Office, the Durham Light Infantry Collection, Durham Local Studies, the Historic Environment Record and the Registration Service.

We have reviewed our management structure. We are working closely with the **City of Durham Parish Council** and **Durham Area Action Partnership** to strengthen the community voice in the new management plan. Durham University has an advisory group to draw on expertise across the University.

Collectively we benefit from the expertise of a wide range of partners and agencies including the Cathedral's Fabric Advisory Committee, the Diocesan Advisory Committee, ICOMOS-UK, World Heritage UK and academic colleagues at other universities.

This year has seen our first collaborative projects with the **National Trust** and **English Heritage**. We will develop these relationships and others over the next period as we set up delivery teams on a project-by-project basis.

**“National Trust has recently taken on the stewardship of Crook Hall Gardens in Durham and is bringing its experience in managing world heritage to work with partners to enhance Durham’s visitor experience, connecting new audiences through a Green corridor on the River Wear.”**

Eric Wilton, Manager



National Trust led the Blossom Spring Festival in 2024.

## Research-led

Cross-partner, interdisciplinary research, data collection and analysis underpin our activities. Durham Castle and Cathedral are a research base for a wide range of projects, on both tangible and intangible heritage, and public impact. From cutting-edge heritage science analysis of Cathedral and University medieval manuscripts to modelling the impact of climate change and developing new scientific techniques and Artificial Intelligence to record and understand fabric and collections.

The World Heritage Site provides case studies for masters programmes, hosts educational visits and inputs into architectural conservation, planning and heritage management programmes both at Durham University and at Newcastle and Edinburgh universities.

Amongst current projects is an **Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded Network** led by Cambridge and Durham universities. Hidden Heritage brings together specialists from the arts and humanities, the archaeological, environmental and conservation sciences, heritage management, and museum education. This will feed into a new visitor experience at the Norman Chapel.

Partners are collaborating to update the **World Heritage Site Research Framework**, to link this to the new management plan themes and projects and to establish an evaluation methodology to measure impact. We are also planning to publish a **new synthesis** of recent archaeological fieldwork and discoveries in 2026. We continue to exchange learning and experience with other designations through the UK National Commission for UNESCO and World Heritage UK.

**“Students come here from around the world to undertake archaeological research and to work alongside curators and cultural heritage managers. We are pioneering new digital visualisation techniques to record the buildings and new scientific archaeological investigations to improve our understanding of the site”.**

Professor Tom Moore, Department of Archaeology, ranked 5th in the QS World University Rankings in 2024.



Excavations at St John's College LRC will be the subject of a new display by students. The discoveries, which include evidence of pre-Norman settlement will be published in 2025.



## People-centred

We want to reach more people. County Durham is a rural county with a dispersed population. Limited public transport is a barrier to access, particularly for young people. Both the County and the North East region have left-behind communities targeted by the last government's 'levelling-up' programme. Barriers to access to the World Heritage Site therefore include access, cost and being literally and metaphorically 'outside the walls' of the religious and university resident community. The site is also physically difficult to reach. Durham city is built on seven hills. The Castle is on a natural defensible site. The river makes a natural moat and the principal approach is via a single narrow cobbled street.

Partners are actively working to overcome these barriers in several ways. Durham County Council is planning to increase the frequency of the **subsidised Cathedral bus** (from July 2024) with additional services across the County. Accessible parking is available on Palace Green and in the Cathedral College. Durham Cathedral continues to have a policy of **free entry**. Admission to the World Heritage Site Visitor Centre, Museum of Archaeology and Cosin's Library is free. Durham Castle is free for European Heritage Open Days and World Heritage Day. University College students host an annual community day. Volunteering is vital to our ability to enhance the visitor offer.

In recent years the globalisation of higher education has increased student numbers in Durham to around 20,000 with about one third international students, mainly from Asia. For visiting friends and relations language and cultural difference are barriers. New student-led placements projects address these needs.

**"The blessing of community banners by the Bishop of Durham has been part of the annual Miners' Festival Service at the Cathedral since 1897. Tens of thousands of people gather to watch the Gala procession which starts from Durham Miners' Hall, the home of the Pitmen's Parliament. This tradition is central to Durham people's history".**

Ross Forbes, Chief Executive Officer, Redhills

## Tell us what you think

Durham Castle and Cathedral are icons for the city and play an important part in community life. Once a symbol of the power and authority of the Prince Bishops, now this place welcomes visitors and students from around the world.

We've produced a short film to explain more about what happens at Durham Castle and Cathedral and World Heritage Site today. This is available with our latest news and events at:

[www.durhamworldheritagesite.com](http://www.durhamworldheritagesite.com)

We invite your feedback on the themes and projects outlined in this prospectus. Please send responses by email to:

Anne Allen, World Heritage Site Senior Manager  
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Right image:  
Durham Miners' Festival

Back cover image:  
*Peace Doves*, a mass-participation artwork by  
Peter Walker, Durham Cathedral







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