
Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland (Sweden) No 1282rev

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland

Location

Gävleborg County
Hälsingland Province and Dalarna Province
Sweden

Brief description

A selection of seven large timber farmhouses with richly decorated interiors are part of a concentration of over a thousand surviving timber structures in the Hälsingland area, dating mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries, that reflect a timber building tradition that originated in the Middle Ages (12th-16th centuries AD). The farmhouses, set in long fertile valleys within the Taiga forest landscape, display the peak of prosperity for this building tradition between 1800 and 1870, and reflect the prosperity of independent farmers who used economic surplus from their exploitation of flax and woodland to build substantial new houses with entire buildings or suites of rooms used solely for festivities. The owners commissioned artists from Hälsingland or itinerant painters from neighbouring Dalarna to provide highly decorative interiors to reflect their social status. These decorated houses combine local building and local folk art traditions in a highly distinctive way that can be seen as the final flowering of a folk culture with deep roots in north-west Europe.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of 7 sites.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

12 December 2005

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

24 January 2007

27 January 2011

Background

This is a deferred nomination (33 COM, Seville, 2009).

The World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision (Decision 33 COM 8B.28):

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Documents WHC-09/33.COM/8B and WHC-09/33.COM/INF.8B1,*

2. *Defers the examination of the nomination of the Farms and Villages in Hälsingland, Sweden, to the World Heritage List in order to allow the State Party to:*

a) *Reformulate the nomination to select a few exceptional decorated farmhouses that maintain their agricultural setting and could be said to be exemplars of the specific and local tradition of decorated farmhouses of the late 18th and 19th centuries in Hälsingland and possibly neighbouring regions;*

b) *Provide a more detailed comparative analysis of the best surviving decorated houses of the genre in order to demonstrate how the nominated ones compare to these;*

c) *Produce an overall management plan or system for the serial nomination, including emergency response procedures;*

d) *Ensure all nominated sites have legal protection for their interiors and that settings are adequately protected;*

3. *Considers that any revised nomination with revised boundaries would need to be considered by a mission to the site.*

On 27 January 2011 the State Party submitted a revised nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Cultural Landscapes, on Vernacular Architecture and on Wood and several independent experts.

For the first nomination, ICOMOS also consulted IUCN who provided comments on 19 January 2009.

Technical Evaluation Missions

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 16 to 19 September 2011.

Additional information requested and received from the State Party

For the first nomination, ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 7 October 2008 on the issue of comparative analysis, selection of sites and the inclusion of flax mills and the Trogsta Valley. The State Party responded with supplementary information on 17 November 2008 and on 2 December 2008.

For the revised nomination, ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 26 September 2011 requesting further information on the overall management of the serial property. The State Party responded on 21 October 2011 with details of the composition and responsibilities of a Coordinating Site Council. This information has been included in this report.

ICOMOS sent a further letter to the State Party on 12 December 2011 requesting further information on the composition of the proposed Management Committee, details of its responsibilities towards the Management Plan, and when the Committee will be inaugurated. It also requested information on the scope and protection of the buffer zone for Bommars, on Emergency Fire Response Plans, as requested by the World Heritage Committee, and on Monitoring Indicators.

The State Party responded on 27th February 2012. This supplementary information has been included in this report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

14 March 2012

2 The property

Description

In a comparatively small area of north-eastern Sweden, bordering the Gulf of Bothnia and known as Hälsingland, are a concentration of large richly decorated, wooden farmhouses and associated farm buildings reflecting the peak of prosperity for the farming landscape in the 19th century and the social status of its farmers.

In response to the request of the World Heritage Committee at its 33rd session, the nomination has been re-formulated and the number of sites reduced from 15 (including 20 farmhouses, a flax mill and summer pasture) to 7 farmhouses. The seven sites are, spread across an area 100 km from east to west and 50 km north to south. Six of these are in Hälsingland Province with a seventh just across the border in Dalarna Province – although this area was culturally part of Hälsingland in the 1800s.

The farmhouses are seen as the best and most representative of the decorated farmhouse tradition, and have been selected from some 400 surviving decorated rooms.

Hälsingland is mountainous and fairly densely afforested province with the small amount of cultivable land (approximately 5% of the total) in long narrow, flat, valleys alongside lakes and rivers.

The rural landscape of small villages and scattered farmsteads has evolved over at least seven centuries. The landscape reflects the comparative independence of the farmers, traditional communal use of pasture, and mixed farming based on cattle breeding, arable cultivation, forestry, flax growing and hunting.

In the 19th century, communal use of woodland and pasture and traditional sharing of valley fields was replaced by a legal apportionment of land to farmers, part of a national land regularisation scheme (see *History and development* below). This change brought

considerable prosperity to the farmers who invested their new wealth in large buildings.

A particularly distinctive feature of the new or enlarged farmhouses was the provision of either a separate house, a *Herrstuga*, or rooms in the main house, set aside for festivities, special occasions or assemblies, and hardly used for the rest of the year. These rooms were usually the most highly decorated in the farmstead.

In the 18th century, most farms had houses and farm buildings arranged around a courtyard with a *Portlider*, or access building on one side. During the 19th century, the layout was often changed to a more open arrangement of house with side wings. Gradually during the hundred years from around 1800 many houses also changed from one storey to either one and a half or two storeys.

Most buildings were constructed of jointed horizontal timbers of pine or spruce from the village's forests. By the 18th century, the face of the timbers was planed smooth and in the 19th century many buildings were faced first with broad, hand-sawn, vertical timber boards, and later machine cut ones, often painted, to make the houses look more similar to those constructed of brick. Dark red paint using pigments from the Falun copper mines was also used in Hälsingland (and all over Sweden) and came to be seen as a symbolic of Swedish rural life. Later in the 19th century lighter pastel colours were also introduced. The traditional roof covering was birch bark, held in place by thin split rods. This was supplanted in the 19th century by nailed shingles and in the 20th by tiles for dwellings and tin sheets for outbuildings.

A distinctive feature of the 19th century houses is their elaborate decoration, a fusion of popular art and contemporary landed-gentry styles, such as Baroque, Rococo and "le style gustavien". On the outside, this elaboration is commonly found in carved decoration around the main entrance door or porch, the work of local cabinet makers. Within, the houses were decorated with canvas or textile paintings affixed to the walls, or with paintings directly onto the wooden ceilings or walls, some supplied in the 19th century by itinerant painters from neighbouring Dalarna (Dalecarlia), and known as Dalecarlian paintings. The subjects were often biblical but with the people depicted in the latest fashions of the time.

Four hundred painted interiors have been recorded, the majority from the 19th century. The names of ten painters are known, although the majority of the work remains anonymous.

The seven sites selected consist of farmhouses with a number of decorated rooms for festivities (between four and ten), with largely intact ranges of farm buildings, and sited within a landscape context that has the capacity to reflect their agrarian function.

In detail, the property consists of the following farms. Only the main decorated rooms are described:

1. Kristofers farm, Stene, Järvsö

Kristofers farm, with two houses and service buildings arranged around three sides of the courtyard, is on the outskirts of the village of Stene. It was reconstructed in the early 19th century. The larger of the two houses was used solely for festive occasions and both its banqueting house and other domestic rooms have been richly decorated with freestyle and stencilled floral paintings, created by Anders Ädel in the 1850s, and which are typical of the upper Ljusnandal area.

The festivities room in the banqueting house – where the most important celebratory meals were served – has a free-hand painting of landscape views, divided into panels and framed by columns, wreathed in red and blue drapery. The central panel has a cross crowned with an eye, a symbol of God's all-seeing eye that marked the place for honoured guests.

The guest room also has decoration divided not panels. These have a stencilled edge and within the centre are bouquets of flowers.

The nominated buildings are the core of the farm that was reconstructed in the 19th century. Farm buildings from 1900 and later are in the Buffer Zone.

2. Gästgivars farm, Vallstabyn

In the 1860s this farm, at the edge of the village of Vallsta, had an enclosed plan – four buildings around a courtyard. The fourth side was later removed and a further group of farm buildings constructed around a yard to the south.

The farm has two dwellings. The residential building was constructed around 1800 but refaced with smooth wooden panels in 1882. The second building, which was reserved for festivities, was constructed in 1838.

The building for festivities was decorated throughout by Jonas Wallström over a period of some years. On the ground floor the main room is still in its original state, whereas some of the others have been partially repainted since the 1950s. The unrestored room has stencilled paintings on stretched linen fabric in a vertical design in imitation of silk brocade that is characteristic of Wallström's work. Around the paintings is a printed wallpaper border.

On the upper floor, all the rooms are stencilled with hand-painted borders. In the main festivities room, the decoration is divided into panels, each framed with a design that imitates the gilded wooden frames around silk hangings. Within all but one of the panels is a repeated pattern of diamond shaped stencilled flower medallions, motifs that occurs nowhere else in Hälsingland. A central panel between two windows is crowned by two neo-classical winged figures in white on

a blue ground that imitates Jasperware pottery produced by the English firm Wedgwood. Beneath, painted in a free form, is an idealised landscape of a mill next to a waterfall, framed by trees and with a boat in the foreground. The ceiling is edged with an acanthus motif in grisaille, and a garland of white roses with green leaves.

3. Pallars farm, Långhed

Långhed village is characterised by large farmhouses often of two and a half stories and impressive complexes of farm buildings.

Pallars has three houses, dating from the 1850s or slightly earlier, grouped around a courtyard. Both the main house and a house reserved for festivities in the east wing have Dalecarlian paintings. Pallars represents the time when large residential buildings had reached their zenith in Hälsingland.

The main central house is of two and a half storeys with a mansard roof. Its façade is finished with smooth wooden panels now painted white and presumably originally painted to imitate pale stone. The house has a large richly carved porch. Within, two rooms retain their painted decoration. On the ground floor a living room has landscape paintings by Svärdes Hans Ersson. The paintings executed in oils, together form one overall panorama of trees and bushes.

The festivities house was constructed in 1853 and decorated throughout at that time by one unknown Dalecarlian painter. The whole building has been preserved intact. The main room has landscape paintings within arched panels; what differentiates it from other landscape paintings is its subject matter which depicts actual Swedish towns such as Stockholm, Västerås and Gävle and images of Sami dwellings and sleighs pulled by reindeer, the latter being a unique image with no counterparts in Sweden or indeed in other Nordic countries.

The main farm buildings were reconstructed between 1930 and 1958.

4. Jon-Lars farm, Långhed

Jon-Lars is the largest of all the Hälsingland farmhouses with seventeen rooms over two and a half storeys. Built for two brothers and their families in 1857, its empire-style porch shelters two doors that lead to two separate residential quarters. The house is unusual in that all the rooms for domestic functions were within one roof and there is thus no separate festivities building. There are also no flanking farm buildings, the main group of farm buildings dating from the mid-19th century being a short distance away.

While one half of the building has been modernised, the other half is well preserved. This was decorated by the Dalecarlian painter Svärdes Hans Ersson in 1863. One of the upstairs guest rooms has wall paintings of

landscape motifs of idealised towns and wispy trees, with vines twining around the intervening frames.

5. Bortom åa farm, Gammelgården

Bortom åa is a remote forest village in the border district between Hälsingland and Dalarna, an area that was colonised in the 1600s by Finnish immigrants. Its main farmhouse, built in 1819 and extended in 1835, was originally enclosed by a second house and farm buildings but these were moved further away at the end of the 19th century.

The entire old house has been preserved with its fittings and fixtures so that it now reflects a complete farmer's house from the mid-19th century. Some of the rooms were decorated in the 1820s and 1830s and others between 1856 and 1863. The lower of the two festivities rooms was decorated in 1825. The main image is of Sweden's Crown Prince in a covered carriage, flanked by soldier. Around the rest of the room are flower motifs on the walls and landscapes with buildings and figures above windows and doors. On the first floor, a festivities room was decorated in 1856 by the Dalecarlian painter Bäck Anders Hansson with stylised flowers in strong colours within simple frames.

6. Bommars farm, Letsbo, Ljusdal

Bommars farm consists of winter and summer houses built in the 1840s at right angles to each other, of two and one and a half storeys respectively. Both have late 19th century porches.

The rooms for festivities take up the entire upper storey of the winter house. The main room has walls covered with hand printed wallpaper, the design copied from wallpaper preserved at Ekebyhof Castle near Stockholm. Two other chambers were decorated at the same time, one with painted, marbled panels framed by a stencilled border and the second with a factory produced Renaissance revival style wallpaper.

7. Erik-Anders farm, Askesta village, Söderala

Construction of Erik-Anders farmhouse was begun in 1825 and, with its originally yellow painted facades, and hipped and gabled roof with classical moulding, it resembled a small manor house. Its one multi-purpose farm building was constructed in 1915.

There are festivities rooms on both of its two floors and these were decorated in 1850 by members of the Knutes family from Dalarna. The ground floor room now has wallpaper from the 1890s, while the decorations in the upper rooms survive. The largest room has restrained decoration with marbled dados, below marbled panels with patterned border, and with garlands of flowers over the doors.

On the first floor, the large parlour was decorated by the Knutes Olof Ersson family painters from Rättvik. In

recent years, the paintings in several other rooms have been restored to reveal marbling.

History and development

The first farmers started to work Hälsingland's coastal areas around 400 BC and they gradually spread inland. They kept cattle, grew barley and organised themselves in family groups with communal rights to land and the surrounding forest. They succeeded in retaining these rights even after the country was Christianised in the 12th century and Sweden became a central power with a strong monarchy. The *Hälsingelagen* [Hälsingland's own laws], written in the 1300s, gives a clear picture of the society of the time as a somewhat independent part of the Swedish realm. Feudal structures were never established in the province.

The Crown, however, did own some of the woodlands and in the 16th century parts of these were settled by people from Finland who were granted tax exemption. They developed smallholdings in the forest, a few of which have survived to the present day.

During the 17th century, when Sweden developed as a military power, the crown entered into a contract with the farmers to provide soldiers to the armed forces. The farmers were obliged to build smallholdings or crofts for their soldiers and in Hälsingland these holdings could be inherited by the soldiers' widows. In due course there was a surfeit of such crofts which could be used by people without property of their own, such as craftsmen. This helped develop building craftsmanship in Hälsingland during the 18th and 19th centuries.

From the mid-16th century onwards, the farmers in Hälsingland grew in prosperity, through trade in flax and hides, the gradual mechanisation of agriculture and flax production.

The great Redistribution of Landholdings, introduced in 1757 and implemented in many Hälsingland villages from the beginning of the 19th century, made it possible for farmers to move their farms from the heart of the village in order to achieve a more rational property division and to apportion farm and woodlands to individual farmers. In many villages this brought to an end the old communal system of working. It did however also allow individual farmers to profit from the exploitation of woodland produce.

This new freedom combined with increasing mechanisation of farming, flax and woodland production and the growth of enterprise and also population, led, first of all to the expansion of farmhouses to reflect new wealth and status – so prominent in Hälsingland – and to the development of enterprises and risk taking, and then later to migrations of people to North America and other countries as within changing economic climate many businesses failed and farms were abandoned.

The increased mechanisation in the early 20th century made sawn timber and machine planed panels readily

available and this had a pronounced effect on house construction. After the 1870s the craft traditions of timber building and painting can be seen to have started to disappear. The large decorated houses of Hälsingland thus remain as examples of the final prosperous flowering of long-standing traditions of timber building and folk art.

3 Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The detailed comparative analysis provided in the revised nomination dossier states that no other property with vernacular buildings that has been inscribed on the World Heritage List includes a wealth of decorated domestic interiors in rooms used for festivities as are found in Hälsingland farms, nor reflects the type of agrarian landscape that fostered these large prosperous farms. It is acknowledged that the Agricultural Landscape of Southern Öland, Sweden (2000, criteria (iv) and (v)) has a similar socio-economic background but it is noted that the farmhouses have not preserved their interiors to any noteworthy extent.

In considering other properties, not inscribed on the World Heritage list, nor on Tentative lists, the analysis sets out comparisons with European regions which developed timber building techniques and more specifically with the traditions of the Nordic Region where peasant farmhouses decorated with fixed wall paintings are most common.

The analysis mainly considers Finland, Russia, Switzerland and Norway and also the various regions of Sweden where decorative wall painting traditions prevailed in combination with timber building techniques

In Finland, over 80% of buildings have been constructed since the 1940s. Although a few large farmsteads survive in Ostrobothnia, there are only slight examples of painted decoration on doors and one noted example of stencil painting.

In Russian Karelia, although there is a timber building traditions and rooms that were only used at certain times of year were built, there is no tradition of elaborate painted decoration.

Although painted decoration existed in the northern European part of Russia, this was generally confined to stoves and wooden panelling and few decorated buildings of high quality survive.

The large farmhouses of Switzerland and the independent farming class that produced them can be said to reflect certain similarities with the farmsteads of Hälsingland. There is however no strong tradition of decorative wall painting.

The closest comparators outside Sweden to the Hälsingland tradition of elaborately painted rooms are to be found in Norway where there is a 350 year old tradition in interior decorative painting in timber buildings.

Furthermore it is often regarded that Norwegian and Swedish decorative painting are a part of a common tradition. In Norway, the decorative paintings from the same period as the paintings in Hälsingland, are to a large extent free-hand paintings with floral and tendril patterns and figurative images. In some districts however, decorations were carried out in linseed oil paint, based on cut out stencils forming illusions of contemporary wallpapers. The decorations were usually painted in one or two rooms, the guest room and in addition the main living room. The decorative painting in Norway shows a great variety between the different regions. The difference between Norway and Sweden appears to relate to the large amount of preserved decorative interiors located in a relatively small region of Hälsingland and the lack of large suite of rooms for festivities in Norway.

Within Sweden the tradition of wall-painting is considered in relation to houses in 14 areas. There are said to be three acknowledged traditions of wall-painting: painted wall-hangings of southern Sweden, Dalecarlian paintings and paintings in Hälsingland.

The wall-hangings of southern Sweden are portable paintings, most created between 1750 and 1850 and put up for special occasions. The surviving fixed paintings are mostly found in the provinces of Hälsingland, Gästrikland, Västerbotten and Dalecarlia with a few in Ostergötland and Västergötland but only involving one painted room.

The Dalecarlian painters were mobile and painted houses in their own region and also in Hälsingland, Gästrikland and Västerbotten between 1780 and 1870. They appeared to have adapted their images to the tastes and preferences of their customers.

Although some Dalecarlian paintings are said to survive in Dalecarlia, the majority are said to be found outside the region, as the comparatively small Dalecarlian houses have been enlarged and modernised. Nevertheless two houses with painted rooms remain that have many similarities with Hälsingland. However they cannot be said to reflect the same traditions as Hälsingland nor can they be seen to be part of a widespread phenomenon in Dalecarlia.

Gästrikland, like Hälsingland flourished in the 19th century but on the basis of iron mining rather than flax and forestry. Dalecarlian painters were very active but few complete rooms survive. However Gästrikland also produced their own painter, Hans Wikström, who worked between 1775 and 1830 and one interior of his has been preserved.

The most extensive survival of painted rooms outside Hälsingland, appears to exist in Västerbotten where an inventory of 1998 recorded 100 rooms including some by Dalecarlian painters. However it is stated that no complete decorated houses survives as they do in Hälsingland.

Within Bergslagen (an iron-working region that covered several provinces), some painted rooms survive and also one complete house, with paintings probably done by Hans Wikström.

What emerges clearly from this detailed analysis is that it is within Sweden that painted houses exist in the greatest numbers, and specifically in Hälsingland but that the pictorial painting tradition spills over into neighbouring regions and there has been considerable interchange of artists and ideas between the regions of Sweden.

ICOMOS considers that the analysis has emphasised the final, very rich flowering of the local farmhouse style in Hälsingland in the late 18th and 19th century, when interiors were highly decorated by local painters and where the greatest number of complete decorated houses survive in their agricultural and landscape context. Although some painted interiors exist in other areas, Hälsingland has the largest share of all Dalecarlian paintings to have survived in Sweden and in buildings that are well preserved. The farmhouses of Hälsingland combine rich decorative paintings with a highly developed building tradition that reflects the considerable prosperity of the farmers. As a group they do not have a parallel.

The seven sites selected to represent this combination of decoration and building traditions have been selected from some 400 examples to represent the finest and most complete examples still in their agrarian context. This selection has been based on surveys of 1,000 farms carried out between 2002 and 2004 and a register compiled in the 1990s of preserved wall paintings in some 400 rooms.

The selection has been based on the following criteria:

- Farmhouses with a sufficient number of decorated rooms for festivities related to the period 1800 to 1870.
- All dwelling houses on the farm must be preserved – in order to understand the relationship between the main dwelling and buildings for festivities.
- Different decorating techniques are present in each site.
- Farmhouses should have a well preserved agrarian context; the surrounding agricultural land should be open and a sufficient number of farm buildings present to place the domestic buildings in their context.
- The landscape setting is preserved by the buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis in the revised nomination dossier that concentrates on the combination of decorative rooms and timber building traditions, as requested by the World Heritage Committee in decision 33 COM 8B.28 item 2b, has shown that this combination exists to an extent in Hälsingland that cannot be paralleled elsewhere. The criteria for selection of the sites are well articulated and justify the selection of sites, as well as an overall serial approach.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The selected decorative farmhouses of Hälsingland represent an outstanding collection of some 1,000 well preserved farmhouses with around 400 decorative rooms still in situ.
- The density of intact preserved decorated rooms is unparalleled within the entire Northern Taiga.
- The seven selected farms, dating from 1800 to 1870 which constitute the peak of this cultural expression, are outstanding examples of how independent farmers within a small geographical area combined a highly developed building tradition with a rich folk art tradition in the form of decoratively painted interiors in rooms used for celebrations.
- These decorated farms bear witness to a culture that has disappeared today but has been preserved in an exceptional way.

ICOMOS considers that this justification is appropriate and that the serial approach has been justified.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The criteria for selection of the seven sites have been related very clearly to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. Thus each site contributes strongly to the overall value in terms of displaying highly decorated festivities rooms in timber buildings, within the context of an overall farmstead and within an open landscape that reflects its agrarian origins. Also each farmstead reflects slightly different aspects of the way farmhouses incorporated rooms for festivities and the types of decorations that were applied by different artists. Together the seven sites display all the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value.

None of the attributes can be said to be vulnerable.

Authenticity

All the farmhouses have been selected to show the relationship between the festivities rooms and the rest of the farmstead, for their good state of preservation and for their ability to display the full range of responses in architectural and decorative terms.

Together the seven sites can be said to include all the attributes necessary to convey fully and truthfully Outstanding Universal Value. The repairs and restoration of individual elements have been undertaken by skilled professionals using mostly traditional materials and techniques. The exception is the roofing of farmhouses and farm buildings where traditional roofing material has been replaced by more modern materials in order to ensure the protection of the decorative rooms. In a very few cases, wall decoration has been reconstructed but these do not relate to the key decorated rooms between 1800 and 1870. Five of the sites are still directly associated with farming activities. The exceptions are Gästgivars and Bortom åa but these retain their agricultural surroundings.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (v).

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use of sea use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

ICOMOS considers that this criterion is fully justified for the way the large, impressive farmhouses with their highly decorative rooms for festivities reflect the extraordinary combined timber building and folk art tradition, the wealth and social status of the independent farmers, and the final flowering of a long cultural tradition in Hälsingland.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the serial approach is justified and the selection of sites is appropriate.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criterion (v) and the conditions of authenticity and integrity and that Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated.

Description of the attributes

Outstanding Universal Value is conveyed by the rich ensemble of large, well preserved timber farmhouses, their highly decorated rooms for festivities, the range of

decorative responses these rooms display, their associated farm buildings and their agrarian context.

4 Factors affecting the property

Development pressures

Currently development pressure is not high around the nominated sites and the protective and planning regulations both for the properties and the buffer zones are strong. Nevertheless the expansion of wind power is mentioned in the nomination dossier as a potential issue. It is stated that municipalities would have the right to veto inappropriately placed systems. ICOMOS considers that wind turbines would clearly have a highly detrimental impact on the scale and openness of the landscape setting. Great attention has been paid to choosing sites where the agrarian context is still in place, and it will be of the utmost importance to sustain their appropriate settings.

Tourism pressures

Gästgivars is partially let to a handicraft group and Bortom åa is owned by a municipalities. Both of these are opened regularly to the public. The remaining five sites are privately owned and their owners do open their houses to groups of visitors by appointment, usually only during the summer months.

Currently visitor numbers are relatively low, but there appears to be a belief at local level that the World Heritage inscription would help increase tourists and could support the local farming economy. The nominated farms are already within a *Stora Hälsingegårdars Väg* farm trail.

Environmental pressures

There is no evidence of serious problems. The main issue is keeping the four sites that are still active agricultural enterprises as working farms in order to maintain the open cultural landscape that constitutes the settings of the farmhouses and farm buildings. These have small areas of arable land and larger areas of forest. Grants are paid to farmers for the extra work needed to maintain meadows and pastureland. ICOMOS considers that this support is needed in the current economic climate in which farming in this area is no longer a profitable occupation.

Natural disasters

The main threat is from fire – either from forest fires or from electrical or other problems within the buildings. This is acknowledged in the nomination dossier where it is made clear that the reasonability for putting in place adequate fire protection plans is the responsibility of the owners who must take appropriate measures. The nomination dossier also states that to achieve appropriate protection, a fire protection policy, fire protection documentation, risk inventory, fire protection rules, organisation and training as well as appropriate

controls and follow up will be put in place for the nominated property as a whole, with advice from the emergency services. Such a system, as part of an emergency response procedure, was requested by the World Heritage Committee in decision 33 COM 8B.28, item 2c. However this system is not yet in place.

In its supplementary information the State Party stated that during 2012 work will be undertaken to comply with this decision. Each farmhouse will be provided with an individual fire protection plan and fire protection installations as well as a plan for maintenance and control. The County Administrative Board will also initiate course in collaboration with the Rescue Services for house owners.

Impact of climate change

The buildings could be vulnerable to changes in humidity or heavier snow falls.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are fire and possible pressure for wind turbines in the wider landscape. Formal fire protection plans for all sites need to be finalised and made operational.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundaries of the sites are adequate. At Bommars, the boundary excludes the third residential building of the farm (built in 1900 and subsequently sold off from the farm) but access to the main nominated area is through the yard of the third house which is currently not entirely satisfactory.

Buffer zones

For all except Bommars, the boundaries of the buffer zones are adequate and have been drawn to encompass visible village landscape, many of which have considerable number of traditional farm buildings.

At Bommars, the buffer zone is small – only slightly larger than the nominated area and does not extend to the visible village landscape.

In its supplementary information, the State Party stated that this Buffer would be enlarged to bring it into line with the others. A decision to undertake this enlargement was taken in January 2012 and it is anticipated that the process will be complete by the autumn of 2012.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of all seven of the nominated sites are adequate and the buffer zones will be adequate when the buffer zone of Bommars has been extended to encompass the visible village landscape.

Ownership

Bortom åa is owned by a municipality; the remaining six sites are privately owned and the owners still live on the property.

Protection

Legal Protection

All nominated sites are protected as cultural heritage buildings under the Cultural Heritage Act, 1988. Four sites (Gåstgivars, Bortom åa, Bommars and Erik-Anders farmhouses) have been designated in the past three years, and this ensures protection of the fabric and decorated interiors, as requested by the World Heritage Committee in decision 33 COM 8B.28 item 2d.

All the buffer zones, except Bommars, have been designated as areas of national interest for the conservation of the cultural environment under the Environmental code, 1988.

For all the buffer zones, special protection measures have been draw up, under the Planning and Building Act, 1987. These allow for building permits to be required even where these are not mandatory.

The protective measures afforded by the buffer zone are included in the Municipal Plans. All municipalities have given assurances that all measures at their disposal will be used to protect the areas from unsuitable development.

Traditional Protection

All but one of the nominated sites is in private ownership and relies on their owners for on-going maintenance, conservation and protection. Where there is a long standing tradition of local craftsmanship, as in Hälsingland, this protection works well. The owners are interested in the buildings and some have some conservation knowledge. Training has also been organised – see below.

Effectiveness of protection measures

Overall the protection measures are good. For the main houses, the protection in place protects both interiors and exteriors of the houses. There is a high reliance on private owners having the resources and competences to carry out maintenance and on-going conservation of buildings and to keep agricultural practices alive in the surrounding farmland.

The integration of protective measures for the buffer zones into local municipal plans means there is commitment by local authorities to their implementation.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate and the overall protective measures for the property are adequate.

Conservation

Inventories, recording, research

Surveys of the Hälsingland buildings have been undertaken on several occasions during the 1990s. Around a thousand farms have general data and more detailed material has been assembled for 80 farms. This more detailed inventory, the Hälsingland Farm Register, is available to authorised users through a website maintained by the County Administrative board.

An inventory of paintings was carried out in the 1990s and part is available on the Hälsingland Farm Register. The houses are associated with substantial archives.

What has not yet been achieved are measured drawings for each of the main buildings that would allow an understanding of their construction and evolution; nor a compilation of detailed records of the decorated interiors, including their state of conservation and records of conservation work to the fabric. However it is understood that some of this work has been started.

ICOMOS considers that the aim to achieve an overall more detailed level of documentation needs to be added to the Management Plan.

Present state of conservation

The state of conservation of the nominated sites is currently mainly at a high level. Conservation interventions, mainly at a small scale, undertaken during recent years have been undertaken with skill.

For every farm, a Conservation plan has been drawn up during the last ten years by the same consultant architect. Mainly these are quite general. The exception is Bortom åa where the plan has more detailed drawings.

At Bortom åa there are problems with rising groundwater. At Bommars the condition of the farm buildings is very good.

Active Conservation measures

Gävleborg County officials have focused remarkable effort in Hälsingland during the last ten years. A report of the work is included in the nomination dossier.

An extensive capacity building programme has fostered a new generation of carpenters and other tradesmen mainly from the area.

Conservation of the interiors and especially the paintings has been undertaken by specialists. This has entailed mainly small detailed repairs. Only in a few cases has a small amount of re-painting been undertaken (vestibules in Erik-Anders and Bommars).

In Sweden there are currently sources of finance for cultural heritage conservation, such as state grants for national heritage objects. There is also a network of expertise and advice spanning national, regional and local levels.

Effectiveness of conservation measures

Overall the state of conservation of the sites, the approach to conservation and the support involved for the whole process in terms of expertise and resources is good and effective. The one area that could be strengthened is documentation in terms of compiling a conservation history of each property.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation of the property is satisfactory as are the on-going conservation measures; however it considers there is a need to strengthen the documentation of the conservation history of each property.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The management of individual sites is the responsibility of owners with advice from conservation experts.

The overall management of the series will be undertaken by a World Heritage Management Committee. This is in the process of being set up. It will consist of the farmhouse owners and authorities with a supervisory responsibility (the County Administrative Board and the municipalities) as well as other actors which have a vested interest in the development and continued existence of the property, such as local and county museums, the local development agency and the University of Gävle. The partners in the management committee will make decisions on measures to protect the World Heritage property's values in accordance with Swedish legislation. The management committee will also function as a forum for raising important and current issues related to conservation and preservation, educational initiatives, sustainable development as well as participation and collaboration.

In its supplementary information, the State Party stated that the members of the Management Committee will be chosen in the spring of 2012 and the County Administrative Board will convene the first meeting in August 2012. The Committee will report annually to the National Heritage Board.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

A management plan for the property has been prepared. It sets out over-arching objectives and four areas for priority work. These are:

- Protection and Conservation
- Developing Knowledge
- Work with Public Exhibition
- Participation and Cooperation

Under each priority area, goals are set out.

The supplementary information provided by the State Party stated that the Management Plan will be approved by the County Governor if the property is inscribed.

The Management Plan will be implemented by the World Heritage Management Committee when it is established.

This implementation will be facilitated by a World Heritage Coordinator. The supplementary information provided by the State Party stated that such a person had been appointed.

ICOMOS considers that management system will be adequate once the Management Committee is set up to coordinate management across all the sites of the serial property, in accordance with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines*, paragraph 114.

6 Monitoring

Twenty-three monitoring indicators are set out in the nomination dossier. These cover basic statistics such as number of buildings, changes of ownership, number of permits issued etc. and most are not directly related to the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value, in terms of ensuring that they are maintained. Where they are, the indicator is recoding changes, and includes for instance number of torn down buildings.

What was missing was an indicator related to the state of conservation of the decorated interiors, the single most important attribute of the property.

In its supplementary information, the State Party has stated that any additional indicator has been adopted and that a baseline survey of the wall paintings was carried out in September 2011.

The County Administrative board is responsible for carrying out monitoring.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system is adequate.

7 Conclusions

The revised nomination has addressed the concerns of the World Heritage Committee and has put forward a fully justified selection of seven sites that represent the extraordinary concentration of large, well-appointed and highly decorated houses in the Hälsingland region. They have been chosen against a clear set of criteria to reflect

the apex of the timber building traditions when the independent farmers achieved great prosperity through their exploitation of flax processing and woodland exploitation and used their wealth to create houses to reflect their status. The distinguishing features of this final flourish of timber building traditions were the creation of complete houses or suite of rooms to be used only for celebrations and the commissioning of local artists to decorate the walls of these rooms in a style that merged folk art with the fashions of the capital.

The seven sites have well preserved houses with a significant number of decorated rooms, still retain a range of farm buildings and have a setting that reflects their agrarian context. Each site shows different response to the way rooms were decorated. All but one farm is still lived in and most are still farmed or associated with farming activities.

To sustain this extraordinary ensemble will require great collaboration and support for the owners who are those responsible for their conservation. Although a Management Committee has been appointed it has not yet become functional – this is due to happen in August 2012. Further although a management plan has been prepared, its implementation has not yet started, as it will be the responsibility of the Committee.

The value of the seven houses is conveyed by the smallest details of the decorated interiors. Although the state of conservation of the decorations is currently good, there is a need to benchmark what is there now and to document conservation history to underpin future monitoring.

The greatest threat to the seven sites is fire and there is an urgent need for fire protection policies to be in place for all sites, within the context of overall emergency response policies. This process has now been started and will be enacted during 2012.

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of Decorated Farmhouses of Hälsingland, Sweden, be **referred back** to the State Party in order to allow it to:

- Confirm that the World Heritage Site Management Committee has been set up to coordinate management across the seven sites, in line with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines*, paragraph 114, and that the Management Plan is operational;
- Confirm the extension to the buffer zone for Bommars and provide a revised plan;
- Confirm that Fire Protection plans and equipment are in place for each site as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- Paying specific attention to the expansion and location of wind power turbines which could impact adversely on the scale and openness of the landscape setting;
- Strengthening documentation of the conservation history for each site and add this aim in the management plan.