



**Meeting of the Science and Conservation Advisory Network
held on Wednesday 12th July at the Natural History Museum, London**

Present

Vince May (Chair), Jeremy Young (NHM), Richard Edmonds (World Heritage Team), Jackie Skipper (NHM), Andy Fleet (NHM), Kevin Page (ISJS and Devon RIGS), Bill Wimbleton (Countryside Council for Wales and ISJS), John Whittaker (NHM), Malcolm Hart (Plymouth University), Jonathan Larwood (English Nature), Paul Davis (NHM).

VM, by way of introduction, summarised the wider setting for the Research Strategy including the broad, ambitious and integrated nature of the work relating to the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site in terms of conservation, education, tourism, arts and economic regeneration. A monitoring database has been established and it is now timely to look at the role that the Site could take in supporting and promoting research.

An outline draft of the research strategy has been tabled at the World Heritage Steering Group. It has deliberately developed a wide view to 'research' including areas of the social sciences but the meeting today is to focus on the specific earth science research and identify more specific aims and objectives together with a timetable for actions in both the short and long term

The Science and Conservation Advisory Group have received the strategy and a range of views have been received from people unable to attend this meeting. VM ran through the core points of the strategy and then opened the meeting for discussion.

KP asked who would pay for the work and expressed a concern that scientists could not always afford to contribute without receiving payment. He also felt that this should apply to scientific input into aspects of site monitoring. JL agreed and suggested that the purpose of this meeting was to facilitate research projects that delivered funding to support science.

MH felt it important that the strategy, and the research that it aims to support, should be focused, applied and worthwhile. BW felt that management and research should be integrated together with education. He felt that there were very different management criteria that need to be applied to different parts of the Site. He felt that what was needed was a 'Scientific Committee' to manage research.

KP felt that relatively small amounts of money were required to enable specific research and that the provision of this funding could be used as a mechanism to gather documentation about research on the Site. He also felt that access was a key issue and a stumbling block for some researchers as it is difficult to obtain information about landowners and the necessary permissions to undertake field work.

JY felt that there was an opportunity to develop a 'scientific infrastructure' that should also aim to integrate the coast and collections from it. JS suggested that this could, in

part, be web based. RE reported that a catalogue of specimens from the site and held in museums has been identified as a desirable goal for quite some time, both from the WH Team and the World Heritage Museums Working Group. He has discussed the idea with the Geological Curators Group but has been unable to determine the scale of the task but it is likely to be considerable as different museums hold their data in different systems and therefore collecting all the information into one database that can easily be updated is an issue.

GENERAL AGREEMENT: TO COLLATE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS THAT ORIGINATED FROM THE SITE. LOOK AT UPDATING BIBLIOGRAPHY AND POSSIBILITY OF A SINGLE 'INFORMATION POINT'

PD felt that the vision for the strategy should be at the very beginning of the document. He also felt that there is an issue of 'measurability', particularly with demonstrating improvements in site quality. Goals must match those established by the funding agencies. He felt that there were opportunities relating to increased access to collections and data under the HLF/Big Lottery Fund.

KP felt that the issue was that the core scientific interests of the WH Site were simply not funded. PD agreed and included that this information is the 'primary dataset' on which all other work is based. JL said that we clearly need to find a mechanism to fund this work.

VM felt that intellectual access to the Site and access to the specimens represented an opportunity to draw in funding. He used the example of Bournemouth University's Dorset Coast Digital Archive, developed under the banner of lifelong learning. Similar project(s) could be developed for the Earth sciences. Access, both physical and intellectual, is a key area for the HLF. An additional strength is the strong history of geology associated with the Site and simply needed a mechanism to draw in research money as part of a bid for funding.

GENERAL AGREEMENT: FUNDING PROPOSALS THAT FOCUS ON 'ACCESS' IN THE WIDEST SENCE PROVIDE A KEY OPPORTUNITY. COULD BE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NHM.

BW felt that there were no adequate funds available to improve key scientific exposures, especially when groups of researchers wished to visit specific parts of the Site. KP asked where money had come from in the past to support work such as that undertaken at Redcliff Point. RE replied that this was core funding money from Dorset and Devon County Councils but that this could not always be relied upon as different sections of the Authorities move in and out of favour. There was funding available last year which went to specific, small scale projects but we face budget cuts this year. VM pointed out that the World Heritage Trust has been established to provide a fund to support conservation and education along the Site. Income from 'official' publications is one source of income. There is a meeting of the Trust in August, specifically looking at conservation and education projects for the future and both RE and VM will be there to express proposals, including the research strategy. JS thought that English Nature did have funding for site improvements. JL confirmed this; EN does have funding for site improvements and increasingly these funds have been made available to support scientific excavations. VM thought that there was clearly a communication problem in this area. BW suggested that perhaps a 'one shop stop' was the answer, where people can access all information about a site,

landowners, physical access, funding opportunities and related research work. JL noted that there was a need to forward plan such site improvements and research projects. RE noted that there were also issues with allocating and spending budgets within the tight controls of the financial year. KP felt it important that a 'science committee' is involved with this work.

GENERAL AGREEMENT: CLEARER ROUTES TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITE. LIST THE SITES WHERE IMPROVEMENTS ARE REQUIRED.

VM suggested a further area of work relating to the designation of the Site. In some places the GCR descriptions are already out of date and there are no mechanisms to maintain the information (he has been talking to JNCC on this matter in relation to geomorphological sites). They are willing but there is no funding. With the impending completion of the GCR volumes, there is an opportunity to demonstrate how the GCR can be reviewed. KP noted that some sections of the coast do not contain any GCR sites and in a few cases, are not protected by SSSI designation. BW suggested that this is a reflection of where the science is rather than being a reflection on the quality of any one site.

JL proposed a specific project relating to the maintenance of the GCR documentation. KP added that he felt it important that there was a process of scientific validation of the process and the quality of the sites. BW considered that management and monitoring are one of the same thing. RE noted how difficult it was to gain a consensus about the condition of a site; some people express concerns about the quality of a site while others get on and do their work and do not express the same concerns. KP felt that scientists should be involved in the detail of the site monitoring; 'science informing conservation'. VM asked if English Nature consult scientists if there is an issue. JL considered that was why the SCAN was established. DS felt that it was up to individuals to approach SCAG and or English Nature. BW felt that this was too ad hoc an approach and lacked a focus. He felt that the lack of response from the SCAN to this meeting reflected that lack of focus. RE felt that it was a lack of ambition and/or a resignation that things were 'too difficult' that was the problem. VM felt that the SCAN has worked in some areas but not in others.

GENERAL AGREEMENT: THERE IS SCOPE FOR SOME FORM OF PROJECT LOOKING AT ONGOING GCR DATA. THE UNRECOGNISED TRIASSIC SECTIONS COULD BE A FOCUS.

VM suggested looking at 'the big areas' of work. BW felt that some very important sections of the Site were in poor condition; particularly the Portland Harbour Shore.

MH felt that there were five main objectives:

1. Advancing knowledge of the earth sciences
2. Interdisciplinary studies between the onshore and offshore environment
3. Research evaluating site condition/monitoring etc
4. Education and interpretation
5. Social research; how people learn from the Site and how that improves their quality of life. There is a lot of this work going on but without a focus such as the WH Site.

In addition, there are lots of learning and funding agencies about and we need to communicate what we are about to them. Need to develop links with universities and promote research ideas that will produce useful results. This has been done by John Hopkins at English Nature; he contacted universities offering Masters Degrees and promoted research ideas. This could be done between the WHS and the NHM. Measuring success is difficult but could partly be based on how many people are involved. We need a strategy with small steps and achievable targets.

GENERAL AGREEMENT: NEED TO MAKE CONTACT WITH UNIVERSITIES OFFERING MASTERS COURSES AND PROMOTE RESEARCH PROPOSALS TO THEM.

JS asked how do we attract the money/what are the funding opportunities. She also felt that it was not just about projects as sites degrade. We need a continuous strategy. MH suggested that the quickest way to get things going is through students. JS suggested that we should start with a 'seed' of an idea but also felt it important that individual projects were integrated.

MH felt that the network could be much more about sharing information. BW felt that the SCAN was not the natural place to do that as there were other established networks. RE pointed out that the network was not set up to do that, it had a specific purpose to canvass opinion on planning issues and site monitoring. RE asked if our role could be about promoting specific meetings to encourage collaboration and the development of research proposals. There is an issue of capacity as RE had already suggested this to KP and Bob Chandler regarding an ammonite workshop but in the end people were reluctant to commit without being able to see a clear benefit.

VM talked about coastal management work and pointed out that the second generation of Shoreline Management Plans are about to be prepared. They will require a large input of work and may offer opportunities for specific research projects. Keith Cole, Technical Secretary to the Lyme Bay and South Devon SMP Group has been invited onto the SCAG. VM also noted that there will be new developments in Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the near future. RE noted that the new Strategic Monitoring programmes for the Channel and south west coasts will generate a vast amount of data. The focus of the groups is monitoring rather than interpretation, so there are opportunities here. KP felt that there should be money built into the SMP for research.

VM felt that there were some very big geomorphological questions such as how Chesil Beach is changing or how increased storminess is creating more incidents where overlapping storms impact on the coast before the natural beach recovery process takes place.

VM also reported that there is an issue with a minerals planning permission to work the coastal strip south of Southwell on Portland. The permission dates back to the early 1950's and the owners, The Stone Firms, have now submitted their Environmental Statement detailing how they intend to quarry the site. VM to send details to BW.

VM asked if there were any other questions. There were none so VM summarised the next stage; to fill out the aims and objectives, take comments on the Research strategy and produce a framework for action.

VM thanked everyone for their contribution and to the Museum for providing lunch and the accommodation.

The meeting ended at 4pm