

Non-Technical Summary Environmental Report for the Dorset & East Devon Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
and Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

Prepared by



For the World Heritage Site Steering Group
March 2009

Non-Technical Summary

Introduction

In 2001 the Dorset and East Devon Coast was designated as England's only natural World Heritage Site by UNESCO¹. More commonly known as the 'Jurassic Coast' it extends from Exmouth in East Devon to Studland Bay in Dorset. Its Outstanding Universal Value is that it has the most complete and near continuous record through the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods anywhere in the world, showing 185 million years of Earth History and evolution in 95 miles of coast. Put simply, a walk along the coast represents a walk through time.

The Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site Management Plan Consultation Draft is a review of the current management plan. The purpose of the Management Plan is to help ensure the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site is protected and managed in an appropriate way.

Purpose of the Environmental Report and the Assessments

The Environmental Report describes the likely environmental effects of implementing the World Heritage Site (WHS) Management Plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) helps to provide a high level of protection for the environment. The process contributes to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of certain plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has a broader remit and considers impacts on environmental, social and economic issues.

A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) has also been carried out on the Management Plan. This type of assessment is concerned solely with impacts on 'European sites' designated for their nature conservation importance. The findings of which are detailed in a separate report, but the recommendations for policy or delivery changes are incorporated into the recommendations presented in the Environmental Report.

Scope of the Assessments

A Scoping process was carried out in December 2008 to help ensure the assessments covered the key environmental and sustainability issues relevant to the World Heritage Site and its setting. The main bodies with environmental responsibilities were engaged in the Scoping process, these were Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency, and their responses helped to shape the assessment framework.

Other plans and programmes were reviewed to help develop a wider understanding of the issues and priorities relevant to the Site and its setting as well as the wider South West. Key environmental problems and issues facing the World Heritage Site identified through the scoping process were identified as coastal defence, climate change and its associated impacts, development within the Site and its setting, inappropriate rock sampling and fossil collection, land and marine mineral extraction, the growing population and the associated recreational pressures.

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (www.unesco.org)

Environmental Baseline and Context

This section briefly describes the environment and the most significant environmental features of the World Heritage Site.

The World Heritage Site covers 95 miles of coast and is important for its geomorphology and geology. It is important in a World context because it shows the most complete and near continuous geological record through the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods anywhere in the world, showing 185 million years of Earth History and evolution in 95 miles of coast. The Site also has 66 geological sites that are important in a national context. Natural coastal processes, particularly erosion, maintain the Site and its interests and these need to be allowed to continue in order to preserve its interests.

Climate change poses direct and indirect threats to the Site. Rising sea levels will lead to a loss of current visible foreshore exposures, and may also damage infrastructure used by people to access the Site (such as the South West Coast Path). Indirectly the actions that may be taken to prevent climate change impacts on communities and assets can potentially have significant effects on the Site. For example coastal defence to protect settlements from flooding can damage or obscure geodiversity features or interfere with the natural coastal processes needed to maintain the Site's international interests. The effects of increasing erosion rates can have positive impacts for the knowledge and understanding of the Site's Outstanding Universal Value.

The Site and its setting are recognised as some of England's finest landscapes and are protected by 2 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designations; East Devon AONB and Dorset AONB. The AONBs are also considered to form the setting of the Site, providing an appropriate buffer zone where similar protection exists.

Large areas of the Site are also important for nature conservation. These include international designations of Special Areas of Conservation (to protect important habitats and species), Special Protection Areas (to protect birds) and Ramsar Sites (to protect important wetland areas, especially where they are important feeding, breeding or overwintering areas for waterfowl). Many of these important habitats and species rely on the continual disturbance provided by the natural coastal process of erosion. There are 2 National Nature Reserves, Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs, and Durlston, which is also a Country Park.

There are around 20 Scheduled Monuments landward of the Site. These include hillforts, lynchets (ridges and furrows caused by ploughing), field systems, barrows, a Romano-Celtic temple, an Alum works, a Romano British farm, a 17th C duck decoy, fishpond, tramway, batteries and searchlights, site of an early warning radar station, a citadel and Portland Castle.

There are about 10 people who actually live within the Site boundary. The Site is owned or leased by more than 80 different landowners ranging from private individuals, local authorities, the National Trust and the Ministry of Defence. Sizes of landholdings range from less than 100metres to the 30miles owned by the National Trust.

There are several Gateway towns adjacent to the Site, Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer, Seaton, Lyme Regis, Charmouth, West Bay and Bridport, Portland, Weymouth (including Preston and Bowleaze Cove), Swanage and Wareham. Weymouth has a population of approximately 50,000 whereas Lyme Regis has around 3,000.

The South West Coast Path National Trail runs the length of the Site, either along cliff tops or beaches. Some locations it runs inland of the Site. The National Trust owns around 35miles of coastline and a large majority of this has public access for recreation. There are also 2 National Nature Reserves with areas of public access for quiet enjoyment of wildlife.

Mineral extraction poses a threat to the Site. There are no marine aggregate permissions along the Devon section of the coast, but there are consents for areas in outer Poole Bay. The finite resource of the raised beach at Portland may be damaged by proposals to excavate between the old Lower Lighthouse to Southwell.

Threats to the Site

The most significant environmental issues facing the World Heritage Site are considered to be;

- Climate change and its associated impacts
- Coastal defence (exacerbated by climate change and population impacts)
- Development within the Site and Setting
- Inappropriate rock sampling and fossil collection
- Land and marine mineral extraction
- A growing population and the associated recreational pressures

Summary of Findings

Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Strategic Environmental Assessment has found that overall the Management Plan is not likely to have significant negative effects on the environment. In general, policies are largely supportive of environmental objectives. There are some policies which when taken in isolation could allow negative impacts to occur, and these have been identified in the Environmental Report and recommendations made to avoid and mitigate their impacts.

Sustainability Appraisal

The Sustainability Appraisal for this draft stage in the development of the Management Plan has highlighted that the majority of effects will have a neutral influence or make a positive contribution to the achievement of the sustainable development.

Where it was considered that there were opportunities to enhance the sustainability or environmental performance of emerging policies, recommendations were made and these were primarily with respect to specially protected sites and species, landscapes, and also the design and location of new visitor facilities and park and ride provision.

How to comment on the Environmental Report or this Non-Technical Summary

The WHS Steering Group welcomes your views and comments the Environmental Report or this Non-Technical Summary. The consultation period is for 10 weeks, from 1st April to 9th June.

Comments should be directed to:

Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team
c/o Dorset County Council
Dorchester
DT1 1XJ

Email: consult@jurassiccoast.com

Telephone: 01305 225101, ask for the Jurassic Coast Team.

Your comments should reach the Jurassic Coast Team by Tuesday 9th June 2009.

Below are some consultation questions to help guide your response.

Questions to think about

1. Do you agree with our understanding of the baseline environment of the World Heritage Site?
2. Are there any other plans, policies (in addition to those listed in Appendix 2 of the Main Environmental Report) or wider environmental objectives that should be taken into account?
3. In your opinion have we identified the most important or significant environmental problems facing the World Heritage Site?
4. Do you disagree with any of the assessment findings? If so, please identify which ones and tell us why. (Please back this up with additional baseline data and explain your reasoning)
5. Do you have concerns about significant or cumulative environmental effects on particular areas within the World Heritage Site or its setting, or on particular environmental features?
6. Are there further, relevant, positive aims and aspirations for the environment that the Management Plan could deliver in the long term?

These questions can also be downloaded as a SEA consultation questionnaire from the Jurassic Coast website www.jurassiccoast.com/plan

What happens next?

All comments on the Environmental Report, received during the consultation period, will be reviewed and taken into account during the preparation of the final Dorset and East Devon Coast Management Plan 2009-2014. An 'Adoption Statement', which will be published alongside the final version, will set out how the assessment findings and the consultation responses have been taken into account in the final Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan 2009-2014.