

Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site

State of Conservation report

June 2011

Statement on Site condition.

Twelve of the thirteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in 'favourable' condition. Sixty one of the sixty six GCR sites remain in 'favourable stable' condition while the remaining five are 'declining' or in 'unfavourable' condition, representing 7.5% of the GCR interests or 2% of the physical Site. In other words, there are only a number of small, specific problem areas relative to the whole Site. These sites were in this condition before designation as a World Heritage Site and many represent a major challenge if they are to be improved.

Summary table for SSSI condition for geological interest:

	Condition	Notes
Exe Estuary	Favourable	
Budleigh Salterton Cliffs	Favourable	
Otter Estuary	Favourable	
Ladram to Sidmouth	Favourable	
Sidmouth to Beer Coast	Favourable	
Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs	Favourable	
West Dorset Coast	Favourable	
Chesil and the Fleet	Favourable	
Isle of Portland	Favourable	Many of the inland quarry sites that also make up the SSSI are unfavourable and/or declining
Portland Harbour Shore	Unfavourable	Earth science units in the cliff are unfavourable in places
South Dorset Coast	Favourable	
Purbeck Ridge (East)	Favourable	Areas of the SSSI outside the World Heritage Site boundary are unfavourable.
Studland Cliffs	Favourable	

The detailed monitoring data based on individual ENSIS units and biological/geological interests can be accessed on line at www.natureonthemap.org.uk.

Unfavourable Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites are:

CGR number and interest	Description and reason for unfavourable status
GCR 51 Aalenian – Bajocian (Inferior Oolite)	Relates to Burton Cliff Lane outside the Site and which is suffering from vegetation growth.
GCR 636 Albian – Aptian (Lower Greensand)	Punfield Cove , north end of Swanage Bay. Interest obscured by vegetation due to a decline in erosion rates.
GCR 724 Portlandian – Berriasian (Purbeck Beds)	Durlston Bay, Swanage interest obscured due to coastal defences that pre date designation. Defences cover a small proportion of the overall interest and therefore most of the site is favourable.
GCR 828 – Oxfordian – Oxford Clay and Corallian Beds	Sandsfoot/Portland Harbour Shore . Decline of coast sections due to construction of the breakwaters together with <i>ad hoc</i> development, coast defence structures and failed buildings/garden debris on the foreshore.
GCR 1297 Kimmeridgian	Ringstead Bay interest obscured due to coastal defences that pre date designation. The interest is partly obscured by a recharged beach, held in place by terminal groyne.
GCR 1298 Kimmeridgian	East Fleet to Smallmouth Sands Debris on the foreshore.

The appendix summarises the 2006 to 2011 period. What follows below is an account of what has taken place over the last year; June 2010 to June 2011.

Issues measured against Aims 1 and 2 of the World Heritage Site Management Plan

WHS Management Plan (WHS MP) Policy No. 1.1. Planning frameworks. The **Local Development Frameworks** are progressing but no further discussions have been held. The emerging LDF's across the coast vary from district to district in many ways, including the consideration of the WH site.

(WHS MP) Policy No 1. 2, 1.3, 1.6: The **Shoreline Management Plan** review for both the South Devon and Dorset SMP and the Poole and Bournemouth Bays SMP have now been completed and adopted by the operating authorities, the Environment Agency and DEFRA. The plans define coastal management policy for the next 100 years and therefore, by definition, the principal threats to the Site. In many areas previous 'Hold the Line' policy will change to 'Managed Realignment' or 'No Active Intervention' which will favour the natural interests in the long term. In a few areas developing SMP policy may be at odds with the objectives of the Management Plan. Below is a summary of where the conflicts have been identified:

SMP Unit	Location	Policy: short	medium	Long	Notes (MR: Managed Realignment, HtL: Hold the Line, NAI: No Active Intervention)
6a35	Pennington Point Sidmouth	MR	MR	MR	The unit extends some 400m east of the river
6a19	East Cliff Lyme Regis	HtL	HtL	MR	Involves the construction of a new sea wall and slope stabilisation measures. Planning Permission approved 2010
6a10	East Beach, West Bay	HtL	HtL	MR	Short term continued beach management moving towards a flood defence barrier in the longer term
6a02	Chesil Beach	HtL	HtL	HtL	Extended area of managed realignment in response to major storm events
5g18 (c)	Dowmans Place to Castle Cove	MR	MR	HtL	Despite the SMP policy, consultant engineers for W&PBC indicate that there will be a need for some form of engineering intervention shortly
5g07	Lulworth Cove (defended length)	MR	MR	MR	Hold the line of existing amenity
5g03	Kimmeridge Bay (defended length)	MR	MR	MR	Hold the line of existing amenity. Not a big issue.
Areas where site condition may well improve over time as a result of SMP policy:					
	Charmouth	HtL	MR		The current defences will no longer be maintained after 25 years and therefore more natural processes are likely to re establish
6g14	Seatown	HtL	NAI	NAI	As above
5g10	Ringstead	HtL	NAI	NAI	As above
5g01	Durlston Bay	NAI			As above

HtL: Hold the Line, MR: Managed Realignment, NAI: No Active Intervention

The **Coastal Pathfinder** project led by Dorset County Council has been exploring the issues around changing SMP policy, particularly where that will lead to a change from 'Hold the Line' to 'Managed Realignment' or 'No Active Intervention'. They have been looking at six study sites along the Jurassic Coast; Pennington Point (Sidmouth), Charmouth, Seatown, Preston Beach Road, Ringstead and North Swanage and will make its report to DEFRA shortly.

The **Strategic Monitoring Programme** has been supported for a further five years and will continue to develop a long term management tool for the coast. Monitoring is to a common standard that will deliver valuable information that will better inform future management. The way rider buoys in particular have proved useful in correlating storm/swell wave events with observed change on the Site.

Specific issues and/or actions in 2010/11

The Pines Hotel, North Swanage; Application no. 6/2011/0333. Application for cliff stabilisation works directly in front of the hotel but outside the WHS boundary. The cliff lies within the Purbeck East SSSI and forms part of GCR site 2629 for Wealden stratigraphy which extends into the WHS. No objection on the grounds that the site is compromised by existing coastal management. Construction may create opportunities for study.

28 Burlington Road, Swanage; Application no. 6/2011/0333 (outside the Site but part of the same GCR for the Wealden stratigraphy). Planning application for construction of beach huts turned down. No objection from WHS team or Natural England.

Belle View Road, Portland Harbour Shore; Application No. (10/000547/FUL). W&PBC granted planning permission for slope stabilisation works in front of the property. No objection from WHS team because the works lie outside the WHS boundary.

Chesil Cove sea wall; W&PBC application to refurbish the base of the sea wall granted. No objection from WHS Team to the works which were undertaken between March and May 2011.

West Bay beach management plan and recharge. Beach recharge from Freshwater completed in the autumn of 2010. The EA have completed their plan which includes the option to import shingle from Chard Junction gravel pits under emergency conditions/Emergency Powers Act. WHS has expressed concerns and suggested that the flood defence barrier, currently identified as a medium to long term defence within the SMP should in fact be happening now and at a location far enough back to allow the beach to continue to migrate onshore.

Charmouth, construction of a slipway across the foreshore. Informal discussions with Charmouth Parish Council over the idea. No formal application made to date.

Spittles tip slip (Lyme Regis) clean up operations. WDDC commissioned clean up of the beach in December 2010 and May 2011.

Fossil collecting. Digging *in situ* along Stonebarrow cliffs challenged four times in the autumn. Natural England wrote informal warning to a person seen removing large boulders from Monmouth Beach (may not have been a fossil collector).

Monmouth Beach huts, Lyme Regis; Planning application (1/D/10/001891) to move beach huts forward further onto the beach. Advice to Natural England; no impact to the Site. Early ideas to move the powerboat and/or sailing club forward have been opposed by NE and the WHS team at an informal level.

Ware Fields, Lyme Regis. Informal meeting (June 2011) to explore possibility of installing drainage above failing cliff threatening beach huts on Monmouth Beach.

Branscombe; continued unconsented maintenance of rock armour in front of beach huts to the west. NE to write an informal letter highlighting the requirements to follow planning procedure.

Sidmouth Pennington Point coast defence; planning application (11/0904/FUL) for 240m of rock armour, 12m wide and 6m high along the beach east of the Sid, made by residents of Pennington Point. Objection made by WHS team and NE in May 2011.

Developments in the setting of the Site

(WHS MP) Policy 1.9. A licence has been granted to explore the potential for an **offshore wind farm** off the Purbeck coast and the developer has been consulting widely on the options. A preferred site has been identified towards the middle of the licensed area.

(WHS MP) Policies 1.3, 1.4, 1.5

November 2010: **East Devon Golf Club:** Informal views sought for realignment of fairways nearest the coast further inland.

June 2011; **23A Northview Road Budleigh Salterton** (11/1267/FUL). Application to demolish and rebuild existing property near cliff edge. Questions raised on sustainability and long term conflict with coastal erosion but no objection. Application probably reduces visibility of existing building.

June 2011: **Ladram Bay Holiday Park** extension on their inland boundaries. No objection. Landscape issues should be through the East Devon AONB

February 2011: **Holmside**, Higher Sea Lane, Charmouth, (1/D/10/002095), demolition of existing property and construction of two more on cliff top locality.

January 2011: **Anchor Inn, Seatown**, 1/D/10/001957, Comments and questions on sustainability of planning application

June 2011: **Old Coastguard Caravan site**, Burton Bradstock (PRE/11/00159) pre planning opinion. Drainage onto the cliffs is a minor but direct WHS matter, the rest; conversion of caravans into log cabins and moving back from the coast, are landscape matters.

December 2010: **27a Old Castle Road**, Portland Harbour Shore; a second application to construct two properties rather than one. Identical response to previous; sustainability concerns of developing so close to an unstable cliff plus concerns of intervention in the slope.

Pleasure Pier, Weymouth 11/00512/FUL Construction of 53m high observation tower and temporary facilities for the Olympics 11/00429/FULMAJ.

(WHS MP) Policy 1.14, 1.15 and 1.16. Quarrying

The **Coastal Strip, Portland.** The modification order remains in place and discussions are ongoing regarding the impact of that order on the companies ability to work the resource.

Site improvements

The planned removal of the WWII lookout on **Peveril Point, Swanage** supports WHS MP Policy 2.4. Swanage Town Council has received match funding from the WHS and NE and subject to planning approval, will remove the structure this year.

(WHS MP) Policy 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 – Fossil collecting

The **fossil collecting code of conduct** for West Dorset has been in operation for twelve years now and a review and consultation period commenced from June until September 2011. Responses to the consultation will be considered by the SCAG and fossil code working group prior to the development of a reviewed code.

The West Dorset code does not apply to the **Undercliffs National Nature Reserve** but the interests and site are very similar. Concerns regarding a possible decline in the large ammonites on Monmouth Beach are the subject of a specific monitoring programme. Recent discussions suggest that the large ammonites come from specimens typically exposed near the surface of beds such as Grey Ledge (Lang's bed 47) whereas the large, well preserved *Coroniceras* are contained within the middle of the bed. It is now suggested that the well preserved *Coroniceras* are not the main source of the large, visible ammonites because the boulders that they are contained in break up before the ammonites are worn through and therefore their collection is not so significant. Early work commissioned from Exeter University studying the movement of boulders on the beach has already shown a considerable break up of large boulders. The decline is more likely to be 'tourist collecting' and the natural balance of supply (i.e. cliff fall) and collection. A new sign has been placed at the entrance to Monmouth Beach requesting that the larger ammonites are left. Natural England has also requested that all large ammonites should not be removed from the beach.

Also on **Monmouth beach**, the very large **ichthyosaur** discovered as a result of a cliff fall in December 2009 remains in the cliffs. Discussions as to the pros and cons of excavation have split virtually every group down the middle. The SCAG advocates a precautionary approach. We are now waiting for full engineering drawings of the proposed excavation and may take a second opinion before making a decision.

The **fossil warden** has been employed again, now for the fourth year in a row. The post continues to be well received although some comments are emerging suggesting that he should spend more time on the cliffs and less on guided walks.

(WHS MP) Policy 2.8 Work to implement the management plan at **Horn Park Quarry**, near Beaminster has continued with clearance of vegetation and rubble from the quarry surface. The ambition remains to open the site to the public in some form or other. Beaminster museum are putting together a display about Horn Park Quarry with the help of Sam Scriven and using fossils donated by Bob Chandler and Alan Holiday.

(WHS MP) Policy 2.9 The Collecting Cultures '**Jurassic Life**' Project led by the Dorset Museum Service and supported with funding from the Heritage Lottery and Dorset and Devon County Councils, is complete. Eight museums have received improved displays and specimens. Highlights include the large pliosaur skull which has gone to Dorset County Museum, a rare turtle donated by Albion Stone to Portland Museum, two partial plesiosaur specimens, a huge fossil fish and a rare Triassic reptile jaw. The expansion of Lyme Regis Museum remains on hold while funding is continued. The temporary fossil exhibition planned for the Lyme Regis Fossil Festival did not take place due to the high cost and lack of funding.

The Fine Family Foundation donated an Epic PRO **Gigapan** robotic head to the Jurassic Coast Team in the spring of 2011. This follows the units and course funded in 2009 for a number of people in Dorset. Gigapan is a panoramic photographic system capable of capturing huge detail and the JC Team has been using it to capture change and record the site. The new system uses a digital SLR and is capable of much higher resolution, making it applicable for longer/more distant viewpoints. In the long term the images will be used to promote the site and capture change.

Conclusions

The Site remains in a favourable condition, similar to the condition when it was included on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in December 2001. Specific management initiatives are working well and some spectacular and challenging discoveries have been made (the Weymouth Bay Pliosaur and the Monmouth Beach ichthyosaur for example). The planning application at Pennington Point represents a major challenge to the WHS team and its partners. There appears to have been an increase in planning applications within or adjacent to the Site and a key piece of work this year is in defining how 'we' respond to applications that may or may not affect the setting.

Key achievements:

The World Heritage Team and its partners have broken new ground in Earth science conservation and management;

- A fossil code for West Dorset; review under way
- The Collecting Cultures project; completed
- SMP completed

The tasks for the future:

1. Ongoing monitoring of SSSI's through ENSIS and GCR World Heritage Site team systems.
2. Complete the review of the West Dorset fossil code
3. Develop a position on development that may impact on the setting of the site
4. The ongoing maintenance and development of management initiatives
5. Catalogue of specimens from the Site in museum/university collections
6. Promotion of acquisition of key scientifically important specimens.
7. Mapping the interests and maintaining up to date data

Appendix 1 contains a site by site summary of key threats, opportunities or developments along the length of the Site over the last six years.

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