

Agenda Item

Executive Board

2 September 2009

CP/WHS



World Heritage Site Management Plan – Consultation Draft

Summary

The Dorset and East Devon Coast between Orcombe Point, near Exmouth and Studland Bay near Poole was inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO on the 13th December 2001. The Site was granted WHS status for its Earth history and geological features. The story behind the inscription is a “walk through time” from Exmouth to Studland covering some 185 million years of the Earth history. It is England’s only Natural World Heritage Site and its boundary is from mean low water mark to the top of the cliffs and excludes the man-made frontages of the coastal towns. This document is the second revision of the Plan first submitted to UNESCO in 1999 and is a formal requirement (not statutory) of both UNESCO and the UK Government for managing a WHS. East Devon DC is a key partner in the management and support of the WHS as a landowner and local planning authority and therefore its comments are a high priority for the WHS Steering Group which co-ordinates the site’s management. There are some sensitive issues for East Devon DC within the Plan in respect of suggested policies for coastal sea defences and also the Council’s role for delivery in areas such as monitoring, visitor management, community engagement and upgrading Council assets such as car parks. Historically East Devon DC has played a low key yet supportive role for the WHS recognising it is the primary responsibility of both Dorset and Devon CC’s to resource and drive forward its actions and wider tourism promotion. This revised Plan however does suggest a potentially greater role for East Devon DC in a number of its policy areas which are listed in the report.

Recommendation

That Executive Board considers the comments laid out within the report and recommends that they be adopted for consideration within the revised final WHS Site Management Plan 2009-14.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

The partners within the WHS boundary have been requested to make comments on the Consultation Draft of the WHS Management Plan and the final Plan will be presented back to Executive Board for adoption later on this year.

b) Alternative Options

None identified

c) Risk Considerations

Failure to engage in the Consultation process would undermine opportunities for the Council to influence policy developments and future work programmes as a key partner within the Site’s management.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The proposed recommendation accords with the corporate priority to “Take care of and improve our environment”. There is no specific budget for delivering WHS objectives though

the work being undertaken to deliver two Gateway Visitor Centres at Seaton and Exmouth will help to significantly raise the profile of the “Jurassic Coast” within East Devon. The Council supports the work of the wider WHS Partnership with the Countryside Manager representing EDDC on its Management Steering Group.

e) Date for Review of Decision

The final WHS Management Plan will be brought back to Executive Board at a later date for adoption by Executive Board.

Main Body of the Report

1 Description of the document

1.1 The Plan is a public document which outlines aims and policies for managing the Site over the next five years with a range of activities for achieve them. It is open to wide public consultation so that community engagement in the management is achieved.

1.2 The structure of Plan is as follows :

- Chapter 1 - brief overview about the WHS
- Chapter 2 - overview of the process for being inscribed as a WHS
- Chapter 3 – overview of management arrangements
- Chapter 4 – discussions of each of the major new or existing issues and opportunities that may have a bearing on the management of the Site
- Chapter 5 – long term vision and aims for the Site, detailed policies and actions.

1.3 The Plan has been considered internally by Officers within the Countryside Service and Planning Policy as well as the Portfolio Holder for the Environment and the Rural Champion.

2 Review process for the Plan

2.1 The review process is intended to bring the policy context up to date. It is not a statutory plan however operational guidelines for the WH Convention require strong partner and stakeholder engagement. The Plan recognises that management of the Site is only possible through a collaborative approach.

2.2 As part of the Plan a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Assessment will be undertaken, as well as an Equality Impact Assessment during the consultation period.

3 Comments on the Draft Plan

3.1 Overall

- The Plan is an ambitious and extensive set of policies and actions for which it covers a wide range of environmental, social and economic issues that seek to safeguard the Site’s ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ which summarises for UNESCO’s benefit the reasons for inscription. There are a number of policies which East Devon DC has been identified as responsible for delivery and these will be identified within the report.

3.2 Specific Comments :

Chapter 3 – Site protection & management

- 3.2.2 Buffer Zone : There is support for not setting up such an arrangement as a “buffer zone” as described on p18 for the Site as the whole of the WHS coastline within East Devon falls within the East Devon AONB which has robust policies protecting this nationally important landscape within the Local Plan. Therefore an identified “buffer zone” would seem not only irrelevant but also add another layer of confusion over boundaries and the role of AONB designation in protecting the proposed “buffer zone”. The LDF process will look at coastal landscape policy in the round.

Chapter 4 – Issues & opportunities

- 4.2 Coastal erosion & sea defences: It is recognised that natural processes of erosion are desirable for the sake of the WHS designation and this is reflected in the Shoreline Management Plan Consultation work that is ongoing for South Devon & Dorset. However East Devon DC endorses the statement that “there are a number of locations along the WHS which might warrant coastal defences now or in the future” (para 2/p23). A report was taken to Executive Board on 1 April 2009 on Pennington Point and issues around cliff erosion.
- 4.9 Business Engagement: It is recognised by Economic Development Service that the Jurassic Coast “brand” can help to create awareness of the East Devon coast and therefore provide opportunities for new business development. This would be expected from such a high profile designation and associated media/publicity coverage. However further analysis is required to understand the actual benefits in terms of new business development, visitor spend, job creation etc (key economic indicators) that the WHS has brought into East Devon’s business community and coastal towns. What specific programmes have the WHS Team been developing in east Devon to help existing businesses develop new products and services? Has there been enough focus on developing business opportunities in East Devon as opposed to Dorset?
- 4.11 Community Engagement: Clearly there has been considerable interest within East Devon’s coastal communities and its hinterland in and around the WHS with the work carried out recently to develop a Big Lottery bid (Living Landmarks) for the development of Gateway Visitor Centres in Exmouth and Seaton. This highlighted the need for ongoing support within these communities for future activities, such capacity building requires the ongoing support of the WHS Team to remain a presence and focus for new programmes whether culturally, economically or educationally driven.

Chapter 5 - Vision, Aims & Policies

- ***Aim 1 (To protect the Site’s Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and Integrity by allowing the natural processes which created it to continue):*** Planning Policy to consider whether to develop a single WHS policy within the LDF for the WHS or address matters on it through a number of policies under a wider Coastal Policy reflecting WHS, AONB, landscape etc.
 - Policy 1.4: Query – Does the LDF require a policy to “oppose developments in the Site’s setting that may warrant a future need for coastal defence structures...”?
 - Policy 1.5: Query - Planning Policy query if AONB policy goes far enough or is WHS so special it warrants double protection for the Site?

- Policy 1.25: Query – View is that a “buffer zone” is not required as AONB policy is robust enough to ensure suitable protection of the WHS site. Recommend amendment of wording.
- **Aim 2 (To conserve & enhance the Site and its setting for science, education and enjoyment):** Overall this Aim is welcomed however caution should be noted on the ability for East Devon DC to undertake some of the monitoring that would be required under ‘Key Indicators’. Recommendation to include a Key Indicator based around assessing public enjoyment.
 - Policy 2.3: Query – This policy requires challenging and clarification. The SMP is the mechanism and policy maker that would deal with this specific issue for “removing redundant coastal defences”. Clarification is also required for a definition of when and what “redundant” is – at what point does such a structure become redundant?
- **Aim 3 (To strengthen understanding in the OUV of the Site):** There is support for this Aim and its policies are welcomed – no comments on the section.
- **Aim 4 (To support communities in realising the economic, social and cultural opportunities and benefits that World heritage status can bring):** Query targets laid out – where have these been derived from, are they realistic? What is the evidence base for such projections being achievable? Clarification required on level of support from WHS Team in helping to deliver these ambitious targets within East Devon – is there a target for East Devon to work towards? There is a significant requirement for monitoring the proposed policies throughout the Aim and East Devon DC recognises there is limited capacity for it to carry out this function – it is therefore a role to be undertaken by Devon CC.
 - Policy 4.3: Specify time allocated by WHS Team to help enable plethora of outputs identified in policy - how targeted and what on going support is provided to local businesses to achieve accredited schemes? Clarification required.
 - Policy 4.4: Ambitious target as will require considerable amount of ongoing support from WHS Team to help deliver – specify likely level of support allocated and how much time within East Devon’s communities will be expected as opposed to Dorset?
 - Policy 4.6: Support policy aspiration – query need for time allocation from WHS Team. To provide an effective and robust volunteering framework across the WHS will require a huge amount of time, resource and co-ordination. WHS Team role of facilitate will not be enough to achieve target.
- **Aim 5 (To improve appropriate and sustainable access to the Site and its setting):** No comments on the Aim and its policies – all are broadly welcomed.
- **Aim 6 (To enable visitors to the Site and its setting to enjoy a welcoming experience and high quality facilities) :** Welcome targets laid out
 - Policy 6.4: Welcome policy and its target to improve car park infrastructure. East Devon DC recognises these are important gateways to the WHS and therefore there is need for more joined up working between EDDCs Car Parks Service and the WHS Team.
- **Aim 7 (To raise public awareness of the Site, its OUV, and of the values of World Heritage, locally to globally):** No comments on this Aim and its policies.

- **Aim 8 (To support and demonstrate exemplary WHS management etc...):** Welcome this Aim – no comments.
 - Policy 8.7: Broaden policy to include East Devon DC so that there is a clear understanding of the role, resource allocation of the WHS Team into supporting and developing initiatives and programmes benefitting the communities and businesses within East Devon. East Devon DC would welcome a greater presence of the WHS Team within a number of initiatives that are proposed within the Plan, without which it will be difficult to progress within the Plan timeframe.

4 Summary

4.1 The global importance attached to the WHS is not disputed and it brings welcome focus to East Devon's coastline and the benefits that flow from such international standing. The future development of WHS based initiatives will rely on the strengthening of partnership working, as East Devon DC does not have the resource or capacity to take forward a number of the policy actions in isolation of support particularly from the WHS Team and Devon CC.

4.2 Therefore it is proposed that the WHS Team Leader meets with the Environment Portfolio Holder and talks through the future working arrangements, resource implications and priorities of East Devon DC so that the Council can help to meet some of the policy requirements outlined within the Plan.

Legal Implications

There are no legal issues requiring comment on this report.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendation.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

N/A

Background Papers

- Dorset & East Devon WHS Management Plan 2009-14 Consultation Draft

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Executive Board
2 September 2009