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## Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre: Options Appraisal and Preliminary Feasibility Review

Seaton Project Group  
September 2005

**CONFIDENTIAL**



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## STATUS OF THIS REPORT

This report is written by Locum Consulting and defines a feasible world-class project capable of being implemented by current project partners and others. However, no statement in this report is intended to imply a financial or asset commitment by any of the current partners at this stage since all investment by partners and others has yet to be formally considered.

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## Executive Summary

1. The intention is to create a “World-Class” Visitor Gateway Centre within the context of the Jurassic Coast WHS Interpretation Action Plan. The Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre (SVGC) project has two themes - the Jurassic Coast and the Axe Estuary. This project includes the “gateway” site (adjacent to the Seaton Tramway Terminus and TIC), and two satellite interpretation points at the Chine (a key interpretation point for the Jurassic Coast) and at the Axmouth Harbour and Valley (a key interpretation point for the Axe Estuary).

2. A site options appraisal has resulted in the “preferred option” for the SVGC being placed on the Gateway site adjacent to the Seaton Tramway Terminus and visitor car park which the majority of visitors to Seaton already pass through. This project needs to be integrated into a regeneration scheme with a large retail / supermarket component and with the Seaton Tramway Terminus.

The Gateway site needs to be tied into the urban fabric of the town and other visitor destination components in order to achieve the planned-for economic benefits for Seaton. We have illustrated how this can occur with respect to the grain of the town and with economic and development benefits arising for adjacent landowners. Other site options are weaker in relation to economic and operational effects. The Axmouth Harbour site is not a prominent ‘Estuary’ site; the site to the north west corner of the regeneration area would not connect well to the Town Centre and Promenade or as well as other sites to the Jurassic Coast.

3. This study compiles an options appraisal that results in a defined project of world-class status befitting the world-class Jurassic Coast brand proposition. The project scale and cost are justified by the market forecast. The operational plan shows how a sustainable project can be developed and funded by private / voluntary and public partnership. This is a preliminary project feasibility plan and will need iteration of each facet at each stage of project development.

4. The assessment of potential market demand supports a headline visitor forecast of around 230,000 - 270,000 visits per annum (for a stabilised year in operation) for a “world-class” SVGC - focusing on the two core themes. Product development planning for the desirable content of the SVGC indicates a scale of around 1,500sq.m (including



exhibition(s), education suite, tourism information centre, retail, catering, public support spaces and back-of-house spaces). A "capacity check" has been undertaken to support this scale of facility based on the forecast level of demand i.e. the 1,500sq.m scale of visitor centre is considered large enough to support the forecast annual number of visits.

5. A total project cost of around £7.5millions is envisaged, including a large 20% contingency to reflect inflation and an allowance for potential relocation of the Seaton Tramway.

6. The initial and notional operational business planning exercise shows that a range of annual revenue outcomes (including the provision for a renewals fund and programme investment) within £50,000 each side of a break-even position are likely depending upon the level of market performance and the competence of management. This project should be capable of sustainable operation without subsidy.

7. The completed project will not be operated by the public sector and so various voluntary and private / voluntary / public partnering arrangements need to be considered. It is essential at a relatively early stage to market test whether there is private sector interest in the ongoing operation of the project so that the current partners can proceed accordingly. The market testing exercise is not mandatory for a public interest project but clearly at this early stage it would be unwise to resist dealing with this now. Moreover, public sector intervention funding is more readily defined if this market testing has been completed and issues of public funding of visitor economy projects in a competitive private sector market-place are also dealt with in this way.

8. Around 10% of the project costs will need to be expended before the project proceeds into practical delivery and construction. Around £180,000 (3%) at Stage 1, and £420,000 at Stage 2 of detailed development planning (covering design development, costs, legal, land, business planning, funding bids). The funding of this stage is difficult to define for most partners, but an early commitment of initial funds in 2005/6 is essential for the project to proceed over the next 3 years and to achieve opening by 2008.

9. A proposed funding hypothesis for the project can be offered by the Consultants, after initial partner discussion, for detailed negotiations between the partners. EDDC have already agreed to facilitate the capital development by securing the site at nil cost, but will not be able to provide substantial capital sums or to underwrite on-going revenue costs. SWRDA needs to see demonstrated project outcomes that provide economic benefits commensurate with the scale of the funding bid. Devon County Council has a positive attitude to investment in the Jurassic Coast, but this is a 'discretionary' service and funds are subject to many competing projects and will need to demonstrate positive wider community benefits. Lottery fund bids and private sector investment appear essential to the development of the project.

The hypothesised "cocktail" of potential capital funding is likely to comprise the following sources and relate to the appropriate project elements.



<i>Potential Partner</i>	<i>Comment / Investment rationale</i>
SWRDA / Jurassic Coast WHS	Undefined percentage of project costs; subject to negotiation & SWRDA appraisal.
EDDC	Site and infrastructure
Devon County Council	Undefined percentage of project costs
Trust, Sponsors	Exhibition & Building
HLF	Exhibition, interpretation and education components – bid for 75% of eligible costs
The Big Lottery	Bid for percentage of project costs
Private Sector	Commercial operational elements – build and fit-out; Potential Section 106 contribution
Potential shortfall & risk	From partners and sponsors
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	Development Costs £6m. Total of £7.2m Includes 20% £1.2m contingency sum
<b>Total Funding Required</b>	<b>Initial Hypothesis for Discussion</b>
Interim Funding for Feasibility & Development Stages	Capital Required (10%) to progress the project prior to completion of capital funding negotiations (within figures above)

10. It is essential that the wide thematic scope of this project is supported by organisations that represent these themes. The Jurassic Coast WHS Steering Group is likely to receive substantial funding from SWRDA on the grounds of the Jurassic Coast brand impacts. The Axe Estuary scope needs to be supported from other specialist, voluntary and corporate resources. It will be necessary to put in place a funding plan and an operating and business plan that demonstrates such commitments. Early completion of an advocacy document and grant bids are needed.

11. It is probable that this project can move forward relatively early given a prior approval of the supermarket development as a “path finder” development for the regeneration area. An early development of the SVGC could materially assist in the marketing of the wider regeneration properties and an area of the completed SVGC could be used in the short term as a “Seaton Regeneration Marketing Suite” to support the developers.



12. A single purpose vehicle company is needed to develop the full-scale visitor centre effectively with competent project management and clear financial responsibility. The partnership interests in the strategic direction of the project could be brought together in this company. The structure for the operational stage is likely to respond to the level of private sector interest, and particularly the interest of the Seaton Tramway. The “market testing” exercise would engage the Seaton Tramway (who have indicated a positive interest in further investment given more trading opportunities and commensurate security of tenure), and provide evidence that any public investment partnering with that company, and / or other private sector interests by the public sector funds had been as the result of a formal and proper public procurement process.

13. Ongoing revenue support for the project should not be required. Investment in activity programmes by the partners would ensure the delivery of the programmes of activity that represent the world-class purposes of the project. A formal commitment to such programmes will underpin the business plan and the attainment of the objectives of the Project and help secure other funding.

14. The economic impact of both the Exmouth and Seaton projects together is estimated at a net additional impact of £5.3m, supporting 170 jobs. It is unrealistic to forecast the effect of either project independently of the other since both are justifiable to achieve the Jurassic Coast effects. The additional economic effects of the Jurassic Coast brand as a whole can only be optimised if there is a tangible expression of the brand in the form of physical investment in visitor and interpretation facilities, activity programmes and strong plans to engage private enterprise.

15. The critical next steps include:

- Completion of the consultants report - August 2005
- Completion of initial project discussions regarding scale, site options, funding and management - September 2005
- Partner discussions and decisions on next stage of project - October 2005
- Commencement of the market testing exercise including publishing the offer document and responses - Autumn 2005.
- Initial public announcements about the project - September 2005.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Locum Consulting's Appointment

Locum Consulting was commissioned in April 2005 by East Devon District Council, on behalf of the *Seaton Project Steering Group*, to carry out a feasibility assessment for the development of an interpretation / education centre in Seaton (referred to as the Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre or SVGC).

Locum Consulting engaged the services of Form Design Group to provide specific master planning and urban design related inputs.

## 1.2 Seaton Project Steering Group

The Seaton Project Steering Group consists of representatives from the following organisations:

- Seaton Development Trust
- Seaton Town Council
- Seaton Tramway
- East Devon District Council
- Devon County Council
- Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site Steering Group
- South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA)



## 2. Background and Context

### 2.1 The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site

Though the Jurassic Coast is a relatively new World Heritage Site, inscribed in 2001 as England's first World Heritage Site of natural import, it has already been recognised by the World Travel and Tourism Council as a leading example of best practice for sustainable tourism, and was recently a runner-up in the National Geographic and Conservation International World Legacy Awards. As a brand and visitor proposition, however, the Jurassic Coast is at an embryonic stage in its development, but it has aspirations to become an internationally recognised product, with visitor facilities to match. Individual visitor facilities will therefore be crucial in supporting and developing that brand.

#### 2.1.1 The Jurassic Coast Interpretation Hierarchy

The importance of consistent branding across the Jurassic Coast WHS was first outlined in the Natural History Museum Scoping Study on Interpretation (July 2003), and has been enshrined in the projects of the IAP. The IAP outlines a system for the interpretation of the site delivered through a string of interpretation facilities. These are ranked into an 'Interpretation Hierarchy', with different characteristics and levels of facilities appropriate at each level. Seaton is identified in the highest tier as one of a string of up to eight Primary Interpretation Gateways. The IAP states that these should each act as a hub to tell the globally important story of the whole site, as well as put across key local messages. Below the Primary Gateways are Local Interpretation Gateways, sites of "Unique Insight" and "Local Outposts". As the IAP sets out the strategic framework for the entire Jurassic Coast WHS, it is unlikely that large-scale funding will be invested in projects that the IAP identifies as being of 'lower' priority (i.e. those which fit least well with the WHS management strategy). The IAP hierarchy is also complex. It does not necessarily follow that a Primary Interpretation Gateway needs to have a large centre - the idea of it being a 'hub' (that may be a destination in its own right but will also encourage people outwards to other locations) is of primary importance.

In Seaton, the primary themes include the ability to experience the three Eras in one place and access to the geologically active Undercliff, as well as the possibility of linking to a number of strong secondary and additional themes including the local nature reserve and birdlife of the Axe valley and estuary, Roman and Stone-Age archaeology, the Wessex cycleway and the Seaton Tramway. Thus Seaton plays a very important part in the Jurassic Coast story, and as one of the Primary Interpretation Gateways the SVGC will be an important element in reinforcing the wider Jurassic Coast brand.



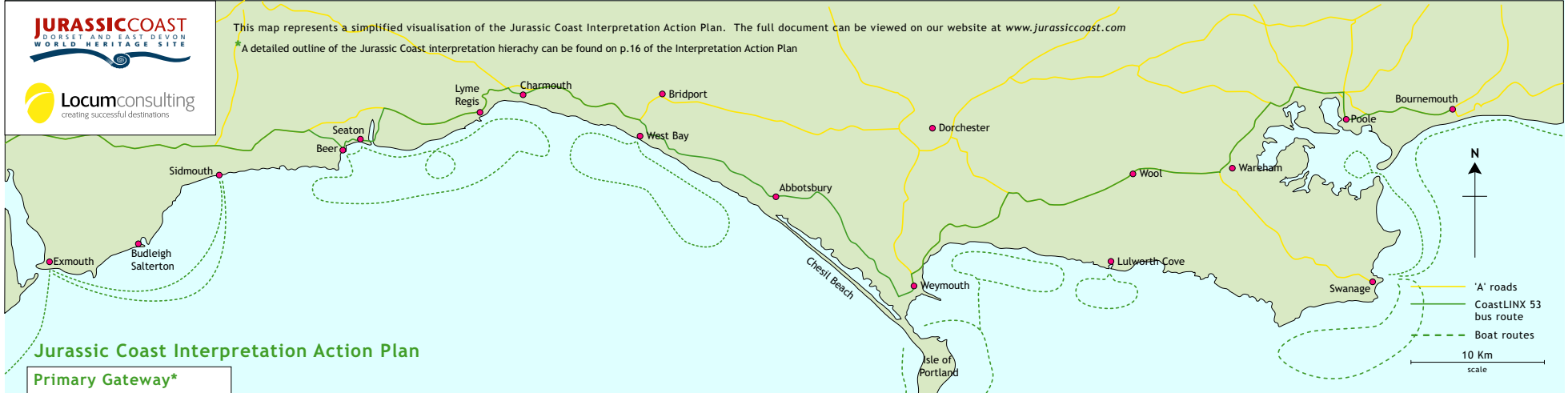
<p><b>Primary Interpretation Gateways</b></p> <p>e.g. Exmouth, Seaton, Dorchester, Weymouth, Wareham, Swanage &amp; Durlston</p> <p><b>Local Interpretation Gateways</b></p> <p>e.g. Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth, Beer, Lyme Regis, Bridport &amp; West Bay</p> <p><b>Unique Insight</b></p> <p>e.g. Chesil Beach Centre, Beer Quarry Caves</p> <p><b>Local Outpost</b></p> <p>e.g. The Geoneedle and the Studland Landmark, Kimmeridge Marine Centre, Devon Cliffs</p>
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### 2.1.2 Why 'World-Class'?

In line with the global importance of the Jurassic Coast WHS, the stated ambition of the Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre is to offer a world-class experience. This ambition is consistent with the FFA's vision for the Jurassic Coast as a whole, which underlines the global importance of the site. The IAP specifically calls for 'first-class facilities' that will 'inspire people to celebrate, appreciate and enjoy' the World Heritage Site. The IAP also states that 'interpretation actions must be first class, produce a high quality experience, stem from strong partnerships and adhere to the principles of sustainability'. The values and opportunities of sustainability - environmental sustainability through strong development principles, economic sustainability through supporting local enterprise and social sustainability through education and lifelong learning opportunities - are key to supporting the world-class nature of the SVGC. A key question for this study, therefore, is: if the SVGC did not exist, or was low-scale as opposed to the stated world-class aspiration, would the WHS as a whole under-perform, and would this damage the Jurassic Coast brand? Locum's opinion is that Seaton's unique position on the Jurassic Coast, supported by the potential enterprise clustering with other visitor facilities and businesses, and the community and economic benefits of a prominent and iconic facility in the regeneration area, would mean that the SVGC will indeed be key to supporting the wider Jurassic Coast brand. The Jurassic Coast is world-class and the visitor experience at the Primary Gateways must reinforce this. The excellence of, and investment in, the Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre should act as a catalyst to drive up the quality of tourism product in the wider area.



This map represents a simplified visualisation of the Jurassic Coast Interpretation Action Plan. The full document can be viewed on our website at [www.jurassiccoast.com](http://www.jurassiccoast.com)  
\* A detailed outline of the Jurassic Coast interpretation hierarchy can be found on p.16 of the Interpretation Action Plan



## Jurassic Coast Interpretation Action Plan

### Primary Gateway\*

#### Exmouth

Western Gateway Town of the Jurassic Coast  
Start of the 'Walk Through Time' and potential location for interpretation of the whole World Heritage Site and hinterland  
Adjacent to the Exe Estuary - a site of major natural & environmental significance  
Focal point for interpretation of climate change illustrated by physical landscape, bio-diversity & wildlife - potential for hands-on-science visitor attraction  
Links the Jurassic Coast with the geological and environmental story to the west of Exmouth  
Key transport node with convergence of railway, road links, boat cruises, potential Jurassic Coast bus extension & South West Coast Path

#### Seaton

Transition area between rocks from three different geological periods  
Easy walking access to dramatic Jurassic Coast scenery (including the Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliff)  
Axe Estuary and Undercliff provide rich primary education source for geography and geology field-study  
Links to a range of other local and regionally designated nature sites (AONB, Undercliff, NNR etc)  
Convergence of tramway, SUSTRANS, South West Coast Path and CoastLINX 53 bus route and close to rail links. Potential boat trips

#### Dorset County Museum Jurassic Coast Gallery, Dorchester

Showcase for the rocks and fossils underlying the whole Jurassic Coast  
Key site for interpretation of the geology of Dorset and East Devon  
Important location for increasing the access of visitors to science provision  
Important access hub for visitors to Dorset

#### Weymouth Pavilion Site

Largest coastal Gateway Town throughout the Jurassic Coast  
Key site for gaining an overview of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site  
Good links to the rest of the coast and hinterland  
Potential to increase awareness and knowledge of the whole site, in one location mid-way along the Jurassic Coast

#### Purbeck Information and Heritage Centre, Wareham

Important location for access to the Jurassic Coast in Purbeck and Dorset  
Important and sensitive surrounding countryside  
Acts as the gateway to Purbeck and the local area

#### Swanage Museum and Heritage Centre

Part of the 'Swanage Gateway'  
Centre to act as an information hub for the Jurassic Coast in Swanage & Purbeck  
Key site for discovering the story of the entire Jurassic Coast  
Good links with other local centres relating to the WHS, including Lulworth Cove. Particularly important links to Durlston

#### Durlston Project

Part of the 'Swanage Gateway'  
Eastern Gateway to the Jurassic Coast  
Key site for interpretation of the Jurassic Coast, linking to other sites and other local centres  
Major visitor attraction potential  
Lower Cretaceous fossils, geomorphology and concordant / discordant coastline demonstrates its geological significance  
Local history links relating to the discovery, collection and study of fossils (Samuel Beccles)  
Dramatic walks and views of the coastline and landscape scenery  
Link to other sites of historical interest e.g. Purbeck quarries  
Important location for wildlife

### Local Gateway\*

#### Sidmouth Museum

Important for interpreting local rocks and fossils

#### Beer Heritage Centre

Exhibition focusing on local marine life  
Queens Drive  
Fairlynch Museum, Budleigh Salterton

#### Lyme Regis Museum

Interpretation of the Jurassic Coast in Lyme Regis, and local geology

#### Lyme Regis Cultural Quarter

Interpretation of the role of Lyme Regis and the surrounding area in the 'Walk Through Time' of the Jurassic Coast

Lyme Regis Tourist Information Centre

#### Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre

Key site for interpretation of Jurassic Coast geology; excellent site for hands-on experience and fossil collecting

Bridport Tourist Information Centre

#### Chesil Beach Centre

Interpretation and education centre focusing on the Fleet ecosystem, bird life and Chesil Beach

#### Lulworth Cove Heritage Centre

Prime site for interpretation and education, including focus on Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door, coastal geomorphology & erosion, and fossils

### Unique Insight\*

#### Ladram Bay

#### Beer Quarry Caves

Norman Lockyer Observatory

#### West Bay

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre

#### Independent Quarry Park & Learning Centre

Chesil Beach Centre  
Portland Quarry Park

#### Lulworth Cove Heritage Centre

Fine Foundation Marine Centre, Kimmeridge  
Landers Quarry

#### Swanage Geological Exposure Site

Durlston Project

### Local Outpost\*

#### Geoneedle

East Devon Pebbled Heaths

#### Seaton Labyrinth

#### Southwell Business Park/

Jurassic Coast Cinema, Portland  
Portland Museum

#### Museum of Jurassic Marine Life

#### Fine Foundation Marine Centre

Studland Landmark

### Education Facilities\*

Bicton College (proposed education centre)

Lyme Regis Field Study Centre (proposed field study centre)

Lesson House Field Study Centre

All sites will have educational facilities

### 3. The Market Context of a Seaton Project

#### 3.1 Market Assessment

We have researched and summarised below the market context within which a potential interpretation / education / Visitor Gateway Centre will operate in Seaton. Based on this market assessment, the Locum team forecasts that the annual number of visits to the SVGC will be in the region of 230,000 (for a stabilised year in operation).

<i>Visitor Category</i>	<i>Approx. Population</i>	<i>Penetration %</i>	<i>Visitors</i>	<i>Repeat Visit Factor</i>	<i>Total Annual Admissions</i>
<b>Independent Visits</b>					
<i>Resident Population</i>					
Seaton	6,798	5.00%	340	2.00	680
East Devon	125,520	3.00%	3,766	1.40	5,272
South West (within 90 min drivetime)	3,020,875	2.00%	60,418	1.40	84,585
<i>Domestic Tourists (Originating in the UK) Visiting</i>					
East Devon	817,000	4.00%	32,680	1.00	32,680
South West	6,400,000	1.00%	64,000	1.00	64,000
<i>Overseas Tourists Visiting</i>					
East Devon	42,000	5.00%	2,100	1.00	2,100
South West	424,000	1.00%	4,240	1.00	4,240
<b>Total Independent Visits</b>	<b>10,836,193</b>				<b>193,556</b>
<b>Group Visits</b>					
<i>Education Groups</i>					
Devon Primary Schools			55,320	8.00	4,426
Devon Secondary Schools			42,300	10.00	4,230
UK school visits (particularly from 1.5hr catchment)					12,000
<i>Other Groups</i>					
Tour operator groups			20	200	4,000
Special interest groups			40	200	8,000
Other			20	200	4,000
<b>Total Group Visits</b>					<b>36,656</b>
<b>Base Estimate Annual Admissions</b>					<b>230,000</b>

#### 3.2 Negligible Market Competition effects in Seaton

The SVGC is planned as a 'free admission' centre. Its income to achieve sustainability comes from trading activities available at the centre. The centre will be a natural focal point and 'hub' for Seaton visitors.

The SVGC will not compete for a share of existing visitors' spending on attractions, but will add a substantial increment to levels of visitation by providing a focus for the Jurassic



Coast brand. This 'Jurassic Coast brand effect' is reinforced by the development of other visitor centres in the WHS Interpretation Action Plan. We do not expect facilities in Exmouth to limit Visitor Centre activity in Seaton (or vice versa) since Exmouth is to be a paid admission attraction and has a very strong additional estuary bird-watching component in its product offer.

### 3.3 Market Summary

The market context in Seaton is reasonably positive. Even though tourism is not exhibiting rapid growth, the tourism market appears to be relatively stable at a high level. Committed visitors to the region fall into the ABC1 socio-economic categories, and are high-spending visitors. a number of specialist visitor markets, including the education sector and special interest groups, are likely to be important visitors to a Jurassic Coast Visitor Gateway Project in Seaton. Based on this assessment, the forecast estimated annual base rate for admissions shows good penetration and frequency rates.

The quality of the SVGC product will be an important component of the South West and Devon's tourism portfolio and product offer which is required to sustain and grow tourism markets. The level of demand is susceptible to good quality management and to the success of Jurassic Coast and Devon brand marketing.



## 4. Concept and Product Development

### 4.1 An Opportunity to 'rethink' Seaton

The development of the SVGC gives Seaton an important opportunity to 'rethink' itself, and the way that it is perceived by visitors and investors, as well as by local residents. In particular it will act as a new Gateway to the town and to the surrounding coast and countryside. It could also play a crucial role in tying the townscape together - particularly the link between the historic town centre and the new regeneration area - and linking together businesses, services and transport that serve the town and the region beyond.

### 4.2 Central "Themes" of a Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre

In order to understand how the SVGC can meet the over-arching objective of delivering a world-class visitor experience for Seaton, it is necessary to keep sight of the two individual, but interconnected, themes that will drive the experience. These themes have been identified in the Interpretation Action Plan, which says: "Seaton is significant as the only Gateway town where visitors can walk relatively quickly to parts of the World Heritage Site with rocks from all three Geological eras". The themes are:

- 1 The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site - interpretation and communication of the whole of this 95-mile WHS inscribed in 2001 and England's only site of global natural importance as well as Seaton's particular place in it;
- 2 Natural sites of international and regional importance - including the Axe Valley, and the wider Devon countryside.

Both of these themes will need to be addressed in developing the Product Offer.

### 4.3 What are the Product "Petals" which Connect with the SVGC?

#### 4.3.1 Petals and the whole 'flower' - greater than the sum of the parts

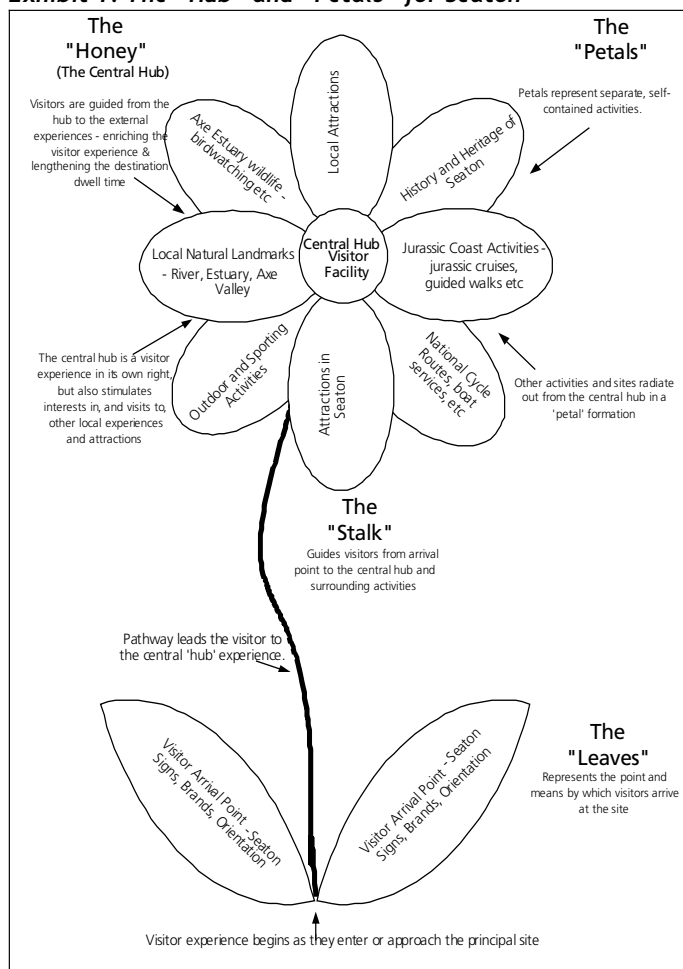
Locum's "hub and petals" model, illustrated in Exhibit 1 below, offers a concept and structure for the product. Broadly, it shows an interconnected relationship between a range of related products and facilities, which like the 'petals' of a flower connect to a central 'hub' - in this case the SVGC. This ensures the maximisation of the visitor offer (and, by extension, its economic benefit) in Seaton: the dispersal of a variety of attractions, activities and facilities, linked by the interconnecting themes and interests, leads visitors to participate in activities across a relatively broad local area. It makes the whole set of visitor activities coherent and greater than the sum of the parts.



### 4.3.2 Economic role of the petals model

The petals are linked to one other and to the SVGC that would act as a central 'hub', to stimulate visitor participation and encourage visits to as many of the surrounding attractions as possible, lengthening visitor dwell time and increasing visitor expenditure in the town. The economic benefits are thus dispersed throughout Seaton. The benefits of the petals are not limited to the visitor economy, however; the dispersal of high quality facilities throughout the town and beyond will also bring considerable benefit to the local community, enabling the provision of broader education and community facilities for the resident population.

**Exhibit 1. The "Hub" and "Petals" for Seaton**



The existing and potential "petals" in and around Seaton are described in the following paragraphs and have been illustrated on the map *Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre and Linkages to Related Activities*.



#### 4.3.3 Summary of Existing “Petals” in and around Seaton

Not all of Seaton’s petals are the same ‘size’. Some may be small individual activities or installations, while others may be facilities or activities that resonate across the local region.

Seaton already benefits from a wide variety of established products that would be ‘petals’ of the future SVGC:

- Jurassic Coast WHS
- Sites of environmental significance, e.g.
  - Hooken Landslip
  - The Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliff
  - Seaton Marshes
  - East Devon AONB
- Bird watching and nature pursuits in the Axe Valley
- The ‘Walk Through Time’ labyrinth
- Sporting activities
  - Water-based - sailing, windsurfing etc
  - Land-based - running, walking, hiking
  - Seaton’s annual ‘Grizzly’ run
- Transport petal - CoastLINX 53 (Jurassic Coast bus route)
- Boat trips to the Jurassic Coast and other locations in the area
- Regional ‘petals’
  - National Cycle Network
  - South West Coast Path
  - East Devon and Dorset AONBs
  - Designated Nature Reserves and other special nature sites
  - Other local and regional sites of importance for bird life
  - The proposed Exmouth Visitor Gateway Centre
- Cliff Field (views of Seaton and the coast)
- Seaton Tramway
- Other attractions in & around Seaton



- Seaton Museum
- Beer Quarry Caves
- Seaton history and heritage
- Education and learning provision in Seaton (for example, St Clares College Adult Education Centre)
- Petals also include other local businesses (such as local sports facilities, catering establishments or specialist retail outlets, for example) and community organisations in Seaton that work with the SVGC.

This is an exceptional set of attractions and visitor economy 'drivers'. If the SVGC connects positively to these 'petals' it can make an outstanding contribution to the Devon visitor economy.









#### 4.3.4 Potential future petals in Seaton

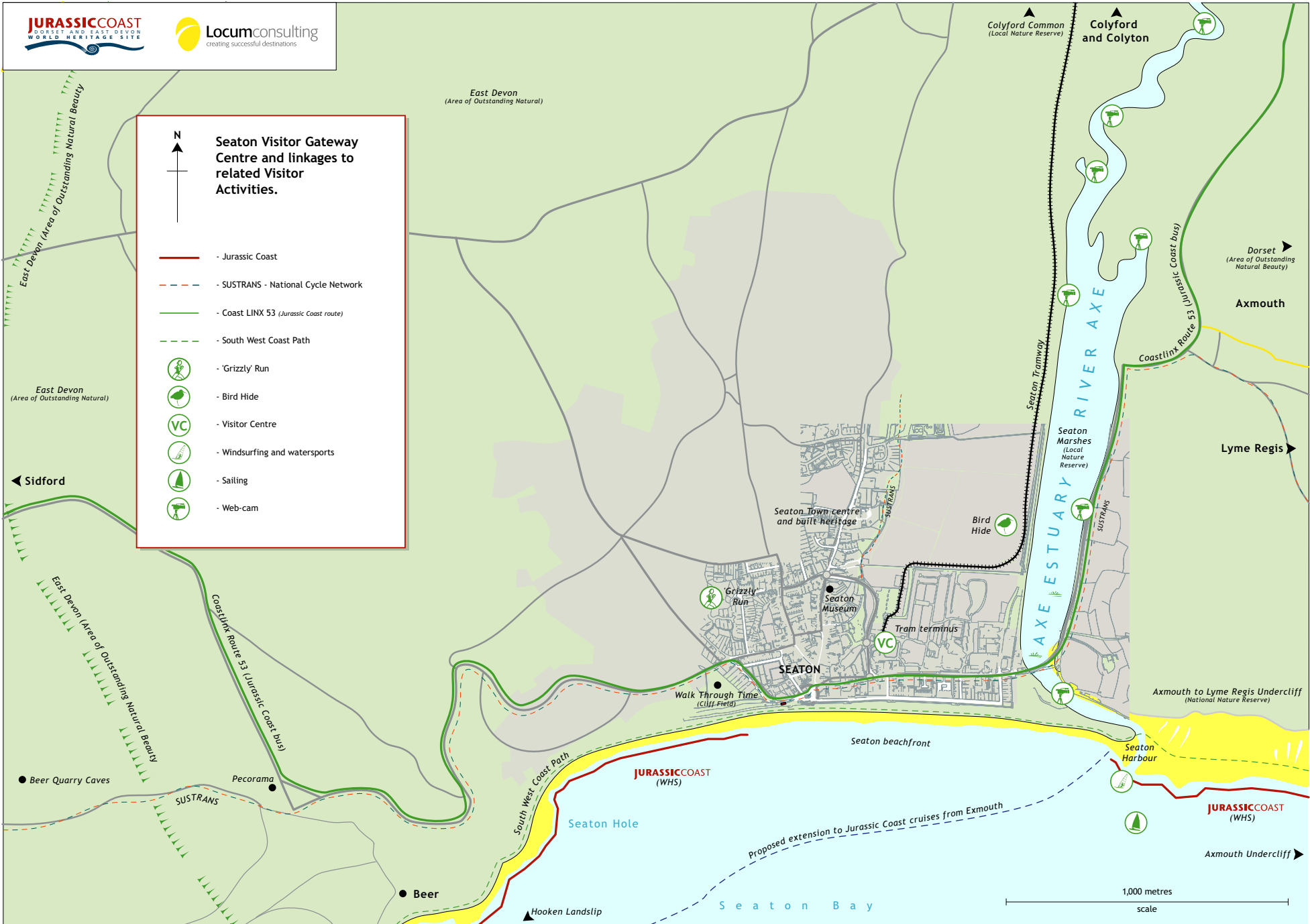
In addition to those amenities that already exist in the town, Seaton has aspirations to complement the development of a world-class visitor facility with new, high-quality facilities that bring benefits to visitors and the local community. These future product "petals" could include a field studies centre, a specialist library, and extended Stuart Line cruises to serve Seaton (and beyond).



**Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre and linkages to related Visitor Activities.**

N ↑

-  - Jurassic Coast
-  - Sustrans - National Cycle Network
-  - Coast LINX 53 (Jurassic Coast route)
-  - South West Coast Path
-  - 'Grizzly Run'
-  - Bird Hide
-  - Visitor Centre
-  - Windsurfing and watersports
-  - Sailing
-  - Web-cam



#### 4.4 The World-Class significance of the project

As a WHS Primary Interpretation Gateway, Seaton will offer a gateway to the whole of the Jurassic Coast, as well as presenting key local messages, such as the unique opportunity to visit all three eras of geological rocks from this one place. The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site is, of course, of world-wide importance, but there are other 'jewels in Seaton's crown', including the surrounding wildlife and countryside, which are widely recognised as a most valuable resource, but have never had a centre for interpretation and education. These two "themes" together will underpin the SVGC, but as well as its world-class aspirations as an interpretation centre, it will also create a dynamic link between local arts, business and educational communities and will offer a year-round resource to organisations and residents as well as visitors. There is a great potential to work in partnership with wildlife organisations to develop observation and interpretation through guided walks, webcams, and hands-on displays, so that the product offer variety throughout the year as well as evolving from one year to the next.

Although Seaton does not have direct access to mainline rail services (though Axminster station is 20 minutes' away), the juxtaposition of Seaton Tramway, the long-distance cycle routes, the South West Path and the Jurassic Bus, as well as the possible extension of boat services along the coast, also make Seaton important as a key point for the sustainable exploration of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. The wide choice of transport infrastructure at Seaton, as well as the opportunity to create a building of iconic design and environmental standards, could be a significant thrust both in the wider promotion of the visitor economy and in the regeneration of Seaton town centre, creating a new landmark and 'knitting' the townscape together.

The combination of all these factors within the World-class Jurassic Coast means that this project has "world-class" potential and therefore that the aspirations of the project partners to create a world-class development and operation are plausible.

#### 4.5 Form follows Function

Building on the research undertaken and set out above with respect to the functionality and scale of the SVGC components, Locum has set out the essential set of functions that are required to support connection and linkages between the various "petals" in Seaton.

These include exhibition & interpretation, education facilities, tourist information centre functions, a potential youth hostel development, and retail and catering facilities.

#### 4.6 How these functions will meet other project objectives

The visitor gateway itself will also contribute to meeting the other objectives of the project in the following ways:



- Providing a multi-purpose facility for tourism and education provision in the town;
- Stimulating and encouraging the growth of the visitor economy in Seaton by:
  - Lengthening overall visitor dwell time
  - Encouraging visitor participation at the SVGC, before moving out to the surrounding petals
  - Encouraging visitation to other sites in the surrounding area, for e.g. local nature reserves, local towns (such as Beer and Budleigh Salterton)
  - Providing a link to the rest of the Jurassic Coast visitor infrastructure
- Bringing a range of social benefits to Seaton and its communities by:
  - Providing a central location from which a range of community services could be co-ordinated, and that can be used by the local community as well as by visitors;
  - Establishing a central location for the provision of education facilities and lifelong learning opportunities in the town;
  - Fostering links with educational establishments in the region and further afield;
  - Creating a focal point for the community;
  - Improving the quality of the built environment of the town;
  - Creating an iconic building and town landmark that could stimulate the social and economic regeneration of surrounding areas of Seaton and foster civic pride in the town and environment of Seaton.
- Bringing a range of economic regeneration benefits to Seaton by:
  - Encouraging the development of a cluster of local businesses around the SVGC;
  - Bringing employment benefits for local residents
  - Linking with the businesses of the town centre;
- Contributing to the development of a clear identity for Seaton through:
  - The development of an iconic building
  - Incorporating the highest environmental standards of construction.



## 5. Appraisal of the Potential Development Sites

### 5.1 Introduction to the Site Appraisal Process

Locum supports the concept that the development of a new Visitor Gateway Centre, viewed as a stimulus for the Regeneration Area, could indeed be used to assist in creating critical linkages between the town centre and the Regeneration Area - which are currently separated by the "Underfleet" roadway. Importantly, our appraisal of the potential Visitor Centre development sites has not been carried out in isolation, but has considered the broader development context - as this not only informs the current state, but also the potential future operation and integration of the sites. We have therefore explained the historical development of Seaton and reviewed the Regeneration Framework in detail, before appraising the development site options.

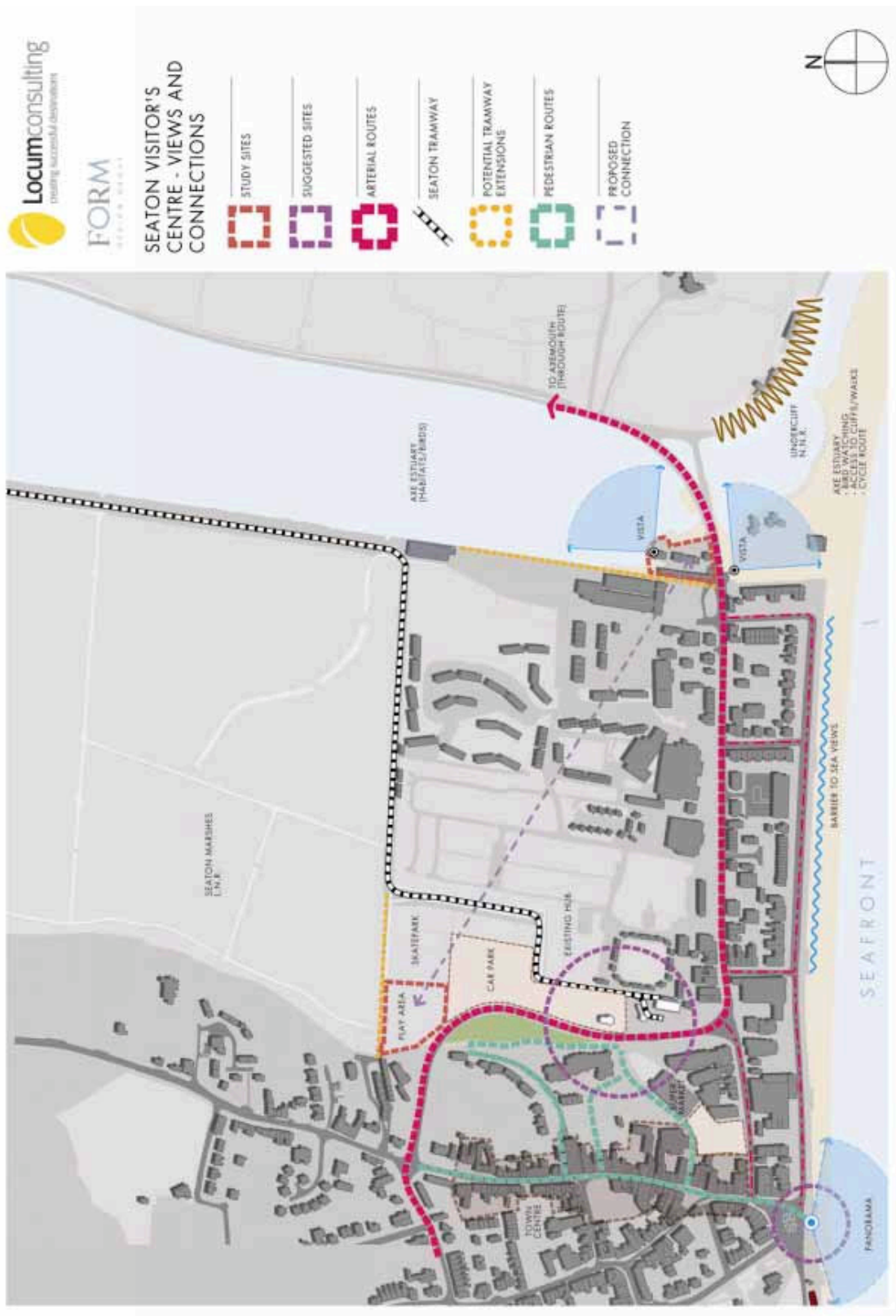
### 5.2 The Seaton Harbour Regeneration Area and the Wider Context

The Regeneration framework identifies two potential development sites (described as "activity hubs") located at the north-west and south-east corners of the Regeneration Area, but neither delivers the optimum solution for the development of a Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre. The development of a Visitor Gateway Centre at either Activity Hub site would only serve to compound the existing problems of accessibility, orientation and movement. These issues were raised with the project Steering Group during the course of the study and possible alternative site solutions considered. In this situation, Locum has advised that a successful Visitor Gateway Centre could only be achievable if the wider destination context was fully integrated and if the regeneration scheme were adjusted.

The analysis of the linkages of the SVGC to the Jurassic Coast, the Axe Estuary and the town centre is a key factor in appraising site options. This is illustrated overleaf. The Visitor Centre / Gateway site needs to be tied into the urban fabric of the town and other visitor destination components in order to achieve the planned-for economic benefits for Seaton. We have illustrated how this can occur with respect to the grain of the town and with economic and development benefits arising for adjacent landowners. Other site options are weaker in relation to economic and operational effects. The Axmouth Harbour site is not a prominent 'Estuary' site; the site to the north west corner of the regeneration area would not connect well to the Town Centre and Promenade or as well as other sites to the Jurassic Coast.



Exhibit 2. Proposed use of Development Sites, Views and Connections



### 5.3 The Preferred Solution

The preferred proposal is to develop the south-west corner of the regeneration area and to integrate a series of complimentary and different schemes that relate to each other and to the town in different ways. This main site connects well to the Town Centre and has the best focus of visitor activity. Themed, connected and designed to respond to the inherent qualities of Seaton, it will thereby strengthen the profile of the town by making it a prime destination along the Jurassic Coast. The offer is distinctive and coherent and we believe that it could be deliverable within a relatively short time-frame. It does not inhibit a properly designed strategy for growth as set out in the draft Planning Brief prepared by East Devon District Council.

The key tenets and assumptions relating to the proposal of this site option are summarised below:

- The SVGC should be located on the site broadly near the existing Seaton Tramway Terminus and Tourism Information Centre (in the south west corner of the Regeneration Area)
- The location will provide a necessary connection between the existing town centre with the broader Regeneration Area
- The location will provide for an effective solution to visitor arrival, movement and orientation in and around Seaton, and critically link to the product “petals”
- The existing TIC and some community facilities (the youth centre) could be absorbed within the SVGC, thus freeing up additional land
- The Tramway Terminus may need to be relocated northward, but it is recognised that its proximity to the main visitor arrival point and maintaining adequate visitor car parking capacity is crucial to its ongoing operational viability. The HM Railway Inspectorate has been consulted regarding the issue of a potential pedestrian or vehicular crossing of the tramline. A positive written response has been received and although a new vehicular crossing in Seaton is unlikely to be achievable, their initial view is that pedestrian crossing would almost certainly be achievable.
- Development at this location is believed to be possible in a relatively short time-frame, relative to the other site-options

Two additional ‘satellite’ facilities would be developed at Axmouth Harbour and the Chine. However, the success of this preferred option is not conditional on the development of these additional satellite facilities. A more detailed proposal of these additional facilities is offered below.

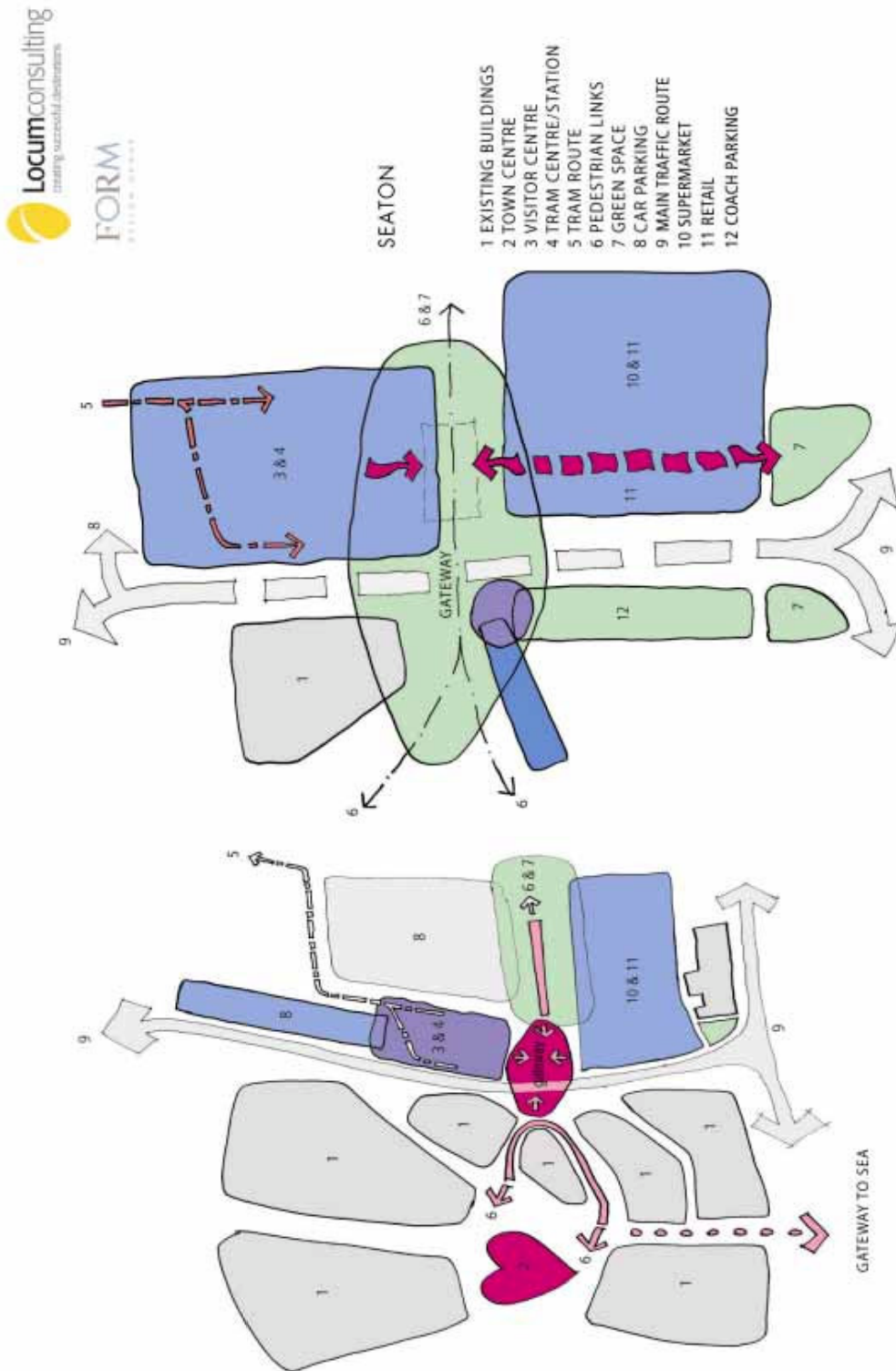


### 5.3.1 Site Utilisation - Preliminary Exercise

A site utilisation exercise shows the Seaton Visitor Gateway Centre with the prominent frontage at the Underfleet road. Seaton Tramway have expressed concerns about business disruption and costs relating to the relocation of the terminus that need detailed study and negotiation at the next stage, when market testing results are available. Seaton Tramway have, however, indicated their interest in further investment and operational involvement, provided that their land tenure and development issues can be resolved satisfactorily. At the next stage of detailed development planning, the consideration of all co-located elements would usually be considered in detail and a detailed solution achieved. We believe that this can be achieved.



Exhibit 3. Proposed Visitor Gateway Concept and Diagrammatic Linkages



### 5.3.2 Satellite Facility at “Axmouth Harbour”

Though attractive, the Harbour site is not well-suited for the provision of a Primary Gateway, given its distance from the town centre. However, the location does present a good opportunity to provide a satellite facility - acting as one of the significant ‘petals’ connecting with the main Visitor Gateway Centre. This site, which has a more informal and rural character, would demand a more organic solution that relates to the existing maritime uses. The proposal would be to remotely link the satellite facility to the main hub at the town centre and focus activity on the specific attributes of the estuary, the harbour and the Undercliff.

This facility could provide an opportunity for private enterprise and investment.

### 5.3.3 Satellite Facility at the “Chine”

The unfolding panorama at the Chine is one of Seaton’s most memorable experiences for visitors. It is also one of the most significant vantage points for the Jurassic Coast. This could easily be enhanced and made more meaningful by improving the public realm and the ability to enjoy the views.

This area could incorporate a series of devices to enhance the visitor experience including more imaginative urban landscaping, public art, contemporary / themed street furniture including shelters for the CoastLINX 53 bus route, sculpture, viewing platforms, shelters, kiosks and so on.

More specifically at the Chine, there is an opportunity through the installation of a new viewing platform to capitalise on the first-hand coastal interpretation and views and deliver a worthy climax to visitors arriving from the town centre. This could also have the effect of transforming the Chine into a local iconic landmark and providing a focus for private enterprise and investment.



## 6. Summary of Current Capital Cost Assumptions

The “preferred” option has a cost of around £4m for building and basic fit out of the central “gateway” building. This is based on around 1,500sqm of building to a good standard of design and external presentation so that it is representative of the Jurassic Coast Brand and sets a quality benchmark for the Seaton regeneration sites. This budget includes basic level building fittings and furniture but not the exhibition and its origination nor the satellite viewing and interpretation points, for which we have made an allowance of £1m. In the preferred option the Seaton Tramway is relocated northwards so that the SVGC is given a prominent site connects strongly to the regeneration scheme and the existing built areas.

Locum Consulting’s experience suggests that these costs would convert to an out-turn total project cost of around £6.6 to £7.2millions, depending on a number of project risks.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Detail</i>	<i>Costs £</i>
1500m <sup>2</sup> Visitor Gateway Centre Building	£2500 per m <sup>2</sup> & related costs	£4m
Exhibition and thematic fit out and satellite viewing points	Visitor Gateway Centre and 2 viewing points Chine and Harbour	£1m
Land and Infrastructure contribution	Assumed to be nil because of associated commercial development	£0m
Project Initiation & Pre-Development costs	Planning & Development Feasibility; Design and Cost management, Business Planning, funding, legal	£0.6m (within costs above)
Pre-Operational Costs and Opening Costs	Capitalised pre-operational costs – staff, marketing, Initial estimate without feasibility study or negotiation	£0.1m (within costs above)
Seaton Tramway Relocation Costs		£1m
Subtotal		£6m
Estimated Total Project Costs (excluding infrastructure changes)	Includes inflation allowance Excludes admin costs of clients Include 20% contingency	<b>£7.2m</b>

The scale and costs will be based on partners’ aspirations and the indications of scale and cost are not intended to limit or exaggerate such aspirations.



## 7. Next Steps

### 7.1 A Medium Term Project

The Seaton Project Group aims to create a world-class project commensurate with the status of the Jurassic Coast brand. It is possible that the preferred site may be able to be progressed in the reasonably near future because associated retail development could proceed in advance of the remainder of the Seaton Harbourside Regeneration Framework.

### 7.2 Critical Next Steps

However all journeys begin with very important initial steps. The following critical next steps include:

- Adoption of the Options Appraisal Report and its strategic conclusions - September 2005
- Completion of initial project discussions re scale, site options, funding and management - September 2005
- Initial public announcements about the project - September 2005
- Partner discussions and decisions on current stage of project - October 2005
- Commencement of the market testing exercise including offer document and responses - Autumn - Winter 2005

We wish to emphasise three points:

- a. That the critical next steps need to be undertaken by the partners under an agreed confidentiality protocol;
- b. That the market testing process is not mandatory for a public interest project, but clearly at this early stage it would be unwise to resist dealing with it now, as it could come back later. The market testing will also need to be undertaken through a formal public tendering process;
- c. Issues of policy concerning the relationship between the Regeneration Framework and the Gateway Visitor Centre and the Seaton Tramway (as far as is appropriate) need to be resolved before the market testing process begins. In this context it should be noted that Seaton Tramway are likely to offer to invest in the Gateway Visitor Centre given greater security of tenure and a continued presence of the terminus near to the existing position.

