

Looking after the Jurassic Coast for the future: Consultation paper

17/3/2016

This document is to ask for your views about how the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site (WHS) should be looked after into the future. It is produced by Dorset County Council in collaboration with Devon County Council.

1. About the Jurassic Coast

The Jurassic Coast is England's only natural WHS and stretches from Exmouth in East Devon to Studland Bay in Dorset. The spectacular cliffs and fossils found along this 95 mile stretch of the south coast tell an incredible story through 185 million years of the Earth's history; through the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of geological time. For this reason, it was inscribed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site having "Outstanding Universal Value".

But it is not just a story of dramatic cliffs, marine reptiles or dinosaurs - the Jurassic Coast is also a special place for people for many other reasons, in particular for recreation, health, quiet enjoyment, learning, landscape appreciation, as well as providing employment and wider benefits to the local economy. You can find out much more about the Coast at www.jurassiccoast.org

2. What has World Heritage status achieved since 2001?

The Dorset and East Devon Coast's status as a World Heritage Site has brought many things to the area. A few highlights include:

- Improved conservation and recognition of the value and importance of geological heritage
- A new identity – the Jurassic Coast – which links together people and businesses from across two counties, and which has brought international recognition to the area
- Economic prosperity – a recent study suggests it influences up to £111million worth of economic activity per year, which supports up to 2,000 jobs
- New and refurbished visitor centres and other facilities from Swanage to Exmouth
- Improved displays and geology collections at Dorset and East Devon museums
- The Jurassic Coast bus (X53), and other sustainable transport and signage improvements
- Engagement of a wide cross section of the community in volunteering and ambassadorial roles
- Hundreds of schools and teachers, and thousands of children engaged in curriculum-linked Jurassic Coast activities

The management of the Jurassic Coast is also highly regarded locally, nationally and internationally, and has been cited as an exemplar of good practice by other Sites in the UK and overseas.

3. Who is responsible for looking after the Jurassic Coast?

When UNESCO awarded WHS Status to the Dorset and East Devon Coast (Jurassic Coast) in 2001, they handed with it a responsibility, that of "*protecting, conserving and presenting*" the Site and "*transmitting it to future generations*". UNESCO say that this responsibility lies with "*all the peoples of the world*" but in practice it lies in part with national and local Government, and in part with the local communities – the people who live near to and who visit the coast.

On behalf of the rest of the World and future generations, UNESCO expect the Site to be well looked after and safeguarded, particularly in a way that makes it “*a function in the life of the community*”. It should be managed as a “*living designation*” that means different things to different people, and is not to be preserved in aspic. A key feature of the site is that it is constantly changing as a result of natural processes, and it needs to be allowed to continue to do so.

4. How is it looked after now?

Good management of a World Heritage Site is an international obligation, as set out in UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention of 1972, which the UK Government ratified in 1984. The UK Government has great pride in its 29 World Heritage Sites¹ and aspires to be a world leader in their stewardship.

Currently the management of the Jurassic Coast is overseen by the Jurassic Coast Partnership, a body of local, regional and national organisations, and technical specialists, who meet three times a year and collectively make key decisions about looking after the Site. These decisions are mostly done through the preparation, co-ordination, review and monitoring of a **Management Plan**, a document that forms the ‘contract’ between the UK Government and UNESCO. Dorset and Devon County Councils are currently recognised as ‘accountable bodies’ for the Partnership and Management Plan.

The day to day work of the Partnership to coordinate the work set out in the Management Plan is undertaken by the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team. This small professional Team is hosted by Dorset County Council and paid for by the two County Councils and the Jurassic Coast Trust², with additional contributions from Natural England and the Environment Agency, as well as income from a small number of other sources. The collective annual contribution of Dorset and Devon County Councils to the management function is currently £202,000 (2015-16 financial year). The Team cover a very wide range of subjects including Site management, conservation, planning, transport and tourism, participation, learning, interpretation, project development, communication and community engagement.

It has become increasingly apparent that the current management arrangements, while effective for nearly fifteen years, do involve a high degree of complexity and duplication, as there is overlap in the County Council, Partnership and Trust governance requirements. These arrangements might also benefit from some refreshing to respond to the changing way in which communities, organisations and funders work. The structures and systems needed for the WHS during its establishment and formative phases need to change if the potential of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site designation is to be realised and as it responds to the challenges and opportunities around it.

5. Why this consultation?

With extreme and increasing pressure on local authority budgets, the County Councils are finding it more and more difficult to continue funding the ‘management function’ of the World Heritage Site at the same level as in the past. This is particularly so when faced with competing demands from their other obligations, such as social care and education which have a stronger statutory basis.

¹ for more details of the Sites go to www.worldheritageuk.org

² The Jurassic Coast Trust is an independent charity established to support Education and Conservation along the Jurassic Coast, established in 2002. The Trust raises and distributes funds along the Coast as well as delivering engagement and educational activities directly, including publishing the official guidebooks about the Jurassic Coast and running the Jurassic Coast Community project.

However, the Councils do recognise that this is an international obligation whose responsibility lies primarily with them as the originators of the bid for WHS back in the late 1990s. They intend to continue to support the good management of the Jurassic Coast as far as they are able.

The County Councils’ primary objective, therefore, in initiating this consultation, is to ensure more effective and efficient delivery of the Jurassic Coast WHS Management Plan at reduced cost to the public purse. From the perspective of the County Councils, it will be important for any alternative model for looking after the WHS to become progressively less reliant on financial contributions from them as well as maintaining, and ideally improving, Management Plan delivery. It is hoped that, in time, the future arrangements will lead to substantially more resources being available from a much wider range of sources than is currently possible through being embedded in the public sector.

The Jurassic Coast Partnership, which includes the County Councils, Jurassic Coast Trust and other funding partners, have considered a number of options for the future of the management function and their pros and cons. The broad options identified by the Partnership, and its initial view on each option, are set out below, and we would welcome comments on these to inform our decisions about the best way forward.

Option 1: Maintain the status quo, accepting the likelihood of reduced funding

This would involve the Councils agreeing to maintain the current management arrangements, but with reduced funding, continuing to work alongside the Jurassic Coast Trust, but with no change in either organisations’ mandates in respect of the World Heritage Site.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Easy to implement ◦ Existing structures, including Partnership, remain as they are (also a risk) ◦ Current arrangements have worked well to date ◦ Offers a degree of stability (albeit with declining funds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Reduction in public sector funding would continue with less effective management plan delivery – risk of ‘death by a thousand cuts’ ◦ Function would continue to operate within the constraints of a local authority, with fewer external funding options ◦ Does not address current weaknesses and inefficiency in the existing management arrangements ◦ Fails to take advantage of opportunities that an alternative model might offer ◦ Does not respond adequately to public sector funding pressures and direction of travel as Councils face at least 3 years of further cuts

Partnership view – possible but not desirable

Whilst the Partnership recognises that maintaining the current management arrangements in the context of reduced public funding is an option, this is unlikely to be the best arrangement to make up the shortfall in funding which would be necessary to enable the current level of management plan delivery to be maintained. This would lead to fairly quick reductions in service without reducing the complexity of the current arrangements.

Option 2: Externalise all or part of the management function to a third party organisation

This would involve the Councils entering an Agreement for a period of years with an outside body to undertake delivery of the Management Plan whilst continuing to meet their obligations as sponsors of the original case for inscription. It is envisaged that the funding from the Councils would taper over time to a 'base level', and that the external body would be expected to increase fundraising from other sources, to maintain the same or a higher level of service. The Jurassic Coast Trust (JCT) is an existing charitable body which is already part of the managing Partnership, engaged in Management Plan delivery, and whose objectives are partially aligned with those of the Management Plan. It would be the most obvious candidate to perform this role.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ New opportunities for funding and volunteer support ◦ Potential for increased promotion of WHS ◦ Greater potential to grow ◦ Freedom from some Local Authority processes and constraints ◦ Potential access to support from a wider range of organisations ◦ Addresses inefficiencies and duplication in the current arrangements ◦ Provides clarity and a single identity which is currently in danger of becoming confused ◦ Reduced reliance on County Councils' funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ A degree of risk that private funding may not be forthcoming to make up the shortfall in reduced public funding (but also applies to all other options) ◦ Significant organisational challenge for the County Councils, the Partnership and the Jurassic Coast Trust to make transition ◦ Trust is currently a small charity – new responsibilities would be a significant change (though also an opportunity) ◦ May encounter resistance to change ◦ Potential for objectives to diverge and tensions to arise between new body and existing funders/partners

Partnership view – preferred option

Having reviewed the range of options, the Partnership considers this to be its preferred option. If the transition is successfully undertaken, it would provide a solid base for growing the Jurassic Coast management function in the longer term, and realising the opportunities that exist. There are significant practical issues to be overcome requiring collaboration from a range of partners. However, this is a model that is being used throughout the country in one form or another, notably at Ironbridge Gorge and Edinburgh World Heritage Sites, so there is significant experience to be gained from elsewhere.

Option 3: Merge with other Partnerships

This would involve a merger between the Jurassic Coast management function and that of one or more of the other designation-based partnerships within the areas, such as the Dorset or East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Teams. These are also currently hosted within the public sector.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Potential financial savings for County Councils◦ Improved joint working, efficiency, communications and understanding◦ Sharing of resources, costs of administration etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Partnerships have different purposes and cover different geographies◦ Different legal mandates, funding sources etc. could add to complexity◦ Likely loss of identity and reputational risk◦ Significant organisational challenge for the Partnerships involved to make transition◦ Limited desire from other partnerships to develop along these lines◦ Does not capitalise on opportunities that might be available through alternative models◦ Does not address existing inefficiencies and duplication between Team and Jurassic Coast Trust◦ Potentially undermines development of Jurassic Coast Trust

Partnership view – possible but not desirable

The different geographical, thematic and statutory mandates to the respective partnerships are a potentially significant barrier to merger(s), and the continued reliance on public sector funding and hosting mean that on balance, the risks of this option appear to outweigh the benefits.

6. How can you help?

No decision has yet been made by the County Councils. The Partnership have discussed all of the various options in detail, leading to it to recognising the benefits of the externalisation, as reflected in the preferred Option 2 above. Specifically, it has identified that a reconstituted Jurassic Coast Trust under this Option may provide the best model for taking on the future role of the management function.

However, the Councils need to make their decisions based on a sound business case about the best use of future, albeit reducing, public funds to support the World Heritage Site, informed by views from stakeholders and the wider public. Given what has been said here, we therefore welcome your comments. These will be used to help make the final decision, and to help shape the future model, so all ideas and thoughts are welcome.

Finally, it is important to stress that at this stage we are not reviewing the Management Plan for the World Heritage Site, which sets out the substantive policies on how it should be managed, but options around the means by which these policies are delivered.

Please give us your views by completing the survey at www.jurassiccoast.org/consultation.

Alternatively, if you just wish to write to us with your views, please email info@jurassiccoast.org, or write to Jurassic Coast Consultation, Jurassic Coast Team, Dorset County Council, County Hall, Dorchester DT1 1XJ. If you would like a hard copy or large print version of the document or questionnaire, or have any other access or language needs, please call 01305 224132 or email info@jurassiccoast.org with your request.

Closing date is midnight on April 28th 2016, many thanks.