

Report to: Cabinet



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Jurassic Coast Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Mitigation Study

Report summary:

Along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site (WHS), there are many locations where existing coastal flood and erosion defences are adjacent to undefended sections of cliff and coast that form part of the WHS. As sea levels rise and these natural lengths of coast continue to erode landwards, the existing coastal defences will be at risk of outflanking. In order to manage these risks, the Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) that set out the long-term policy for Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) along the coast identify the need to modify and/or build new defences to manage the transitions between defended and undefended sections of coast.

As schemes are then developed to implement SMP policy and manage these transitions, the risk arises of adverse impact to the WHS's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). When adverse impacts cannot be avoided, and when it seems likely that the impacts will be significant, a process called a '172 notification' (referring to paragraph 172 of "The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention"; available online at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>) should be followed to inform UNESCO. This is done in collaboration with the UK Government (in this case DCMS) and should happen as early as possible during development planning. 172 notifications are used so that UNESCO and their technical advisors can input into the process and provide comment. In the case of Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme, the impacts on certain features of the WHS are likely to be significant and therefore a 172 notification is required, but so far this has not been actioned.

Inviting comment and input from UNESCO for any scheme of this type inevitably carries a degree of risk either to the delivery of the scheme or the WHS designation itself. However, it should be noted that UNESCO may be notified by any party at any time (as per paragraph 174 of "The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention" referred to above) of the likely impacts of the scheme to the WHS, and therefore it is prudent to be proactive with these matters.

The project outlined here not only takes this proactive stance but does so in the context of a forward thinking and strategic sense, seeking to apply UNESCO's own guidance for impact assessments and World Heritage and using Sidmouth as a case study and test site for tailored approaches that can be applied the length of the Jurassic Coast and potentially beyond. This project will help resolve longstanding issues with FCERM processes dealing with a designation unique in England – a natural World Heritage Site – and increase assurance for the successful delivery of FCERM projects on the Dorset and East Devon Coast and greatly reduce the risk of WHS status being withdrawn by UNESCO.

To seek to manage this risk to the WHS designation along the Jurassic Coast, and demonstrate the UNESCO that it is being proactively managed, this project will investigate how to apply UNESCO's toolkit and guidance on WHS Impact Assessments in relation to FCERM projects in order to;

- a) create a more tailored yet widely applicable framework for how to deal with the OUV of the Jurassic Coast WHS as a receptor when conducting impact assessments – including a mechanism for identifying WHS-wide cumulative impacts, and
- b) establishment of methodologies that seek to avoid and minimise risks to the OUV of the Jurassic Coast WHS whilst also mitigating risks to FCERM project deliver.

As part of the project, testing of the approach as it develops will be undertaken utilising the Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme, as this is an active scheme in delivery by EDDC on the Jurassic Coast and the risks to the WHS have already been identified in the [Sidmouth East Beach Joint position statement](#) agreed between EDDC, Natural England and the Jurassic Coast in April 2022. This will include identifying and trialling mitigation measures to be implemented in advance of the Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme construction getting underway (currently planned for 2027), and potentially during and after construction; it is intended to be complimentary to the scheme work and support environmental appraisal and consenting of the scheme.

The project is estimated to cost £495k and full funding has been secured via joint funding-bids submitted at the same time in late 2024 to South West RFCC (£120k Local Levy), Wessex RFCC (£345k Local Levy) and the Environment Agency (£150k FCERM Grant in Aid) to deliver the project over the next 3 years (from April 2025 to March 2028).

It has been confirmed with the Environment Agency that the full project budget (£495k) will be claimed and administered by BCP Council, with South West Flood & Coastal managing the income/expenditure for the duration of the project.

The project will be led and managed by Alan Frampton from the South West Flood & Coastal team (through the BCP Council-EDDC shared service agreement).

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

It is recommended that:

- 1) Cabinet note the commencement of the project and support EDDC officer involvement in its development.

Reason for recommendation:

Supporting the project will help reduce the risk of adverse impact on the World Heritage Site from future coastal defence works along the Jurassic Coast, including East Devon and the forthcoming Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme.

Officer: Alan Frampton, alan.frampton@bcpcouncil.gov.uk Tel: 07342 060090

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☒ Environment - Nature and Climate

- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
- ☒ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☐ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Report in full

1. Background

- 1.1 The Dorset and East Devon Coast UNESCO World Heritage Site, also known as the Jurassic Coast, is a 95-mile long stretch of coastline in southern England, situated within the counties of Dorset and Devon (Fig 1). The Jurassic Coast was inscribed by UNESCO in 2001 as a World Heritage Site, recognised for its outstanding rocks, fossils and landforms. It is also unique in England as the only natural World Heritage Site (WHS). The attributes of the Site are largely maintained by ongoing dynamic coastal processes, with erosion playing a key role in continuing to expose the geology and fossils along the cliffs and foreshore as well as acting as a driving force for a range of coastal geomorphological systems.

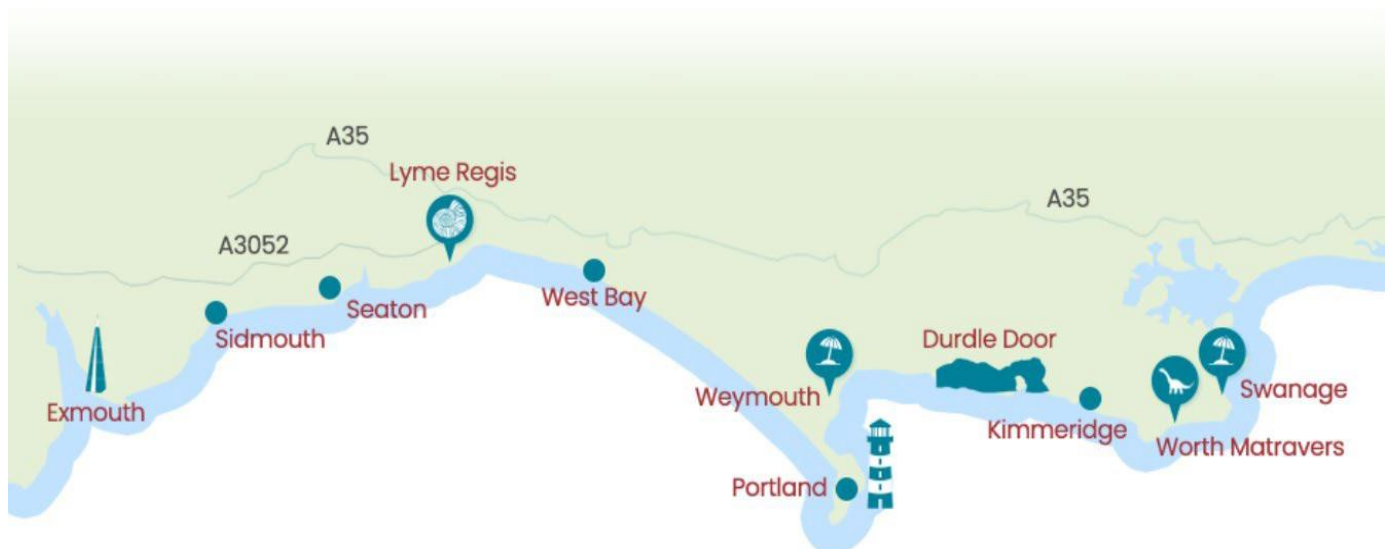


Figure 1. The Jurassic Coast UNESCO World Heritage Site

- 1.2 Over recent years, flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) schemes delivered by risk management authorities in line with the adopted Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) have begun to increasingly conflict with the statement of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Jurassic Coast, principally by constraining or preventing the

continued erosion of the coastline and other natural coastal processes through coastal defence measures.

- 1.3 Furthermore, it has been recognised that there are FCERM projects within the current 6yr capital investment programme and many more identified in the future pipeline of works with the potential to have adverse impacts on the Jurassic Coast OUV. This is further recognised in the SMP15 and SMP16 action plans that both contain an action that all projects taken forward to deliver SMP policy intent must support the Dorset & East Devon UNESCO World Heritage Site (Jurassic Coast) management policies and objectives as set out in the Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan, and that this should include engagement with the Jurassic Coast Trust and following UNESCO best practice for considering the potential impacts of FCERM activities on the OUV of the World Heritage Site.
- 1.4 It should be noted that prior to any FCERM scheme development, exhaustive exploration of feasible alternatives that avoid or minimise adverse impact should precede the consideration of mitigation measures, with all possible precautions taken to prevent damage to SSSIs. Mitigation should only be considered as a last resort. As outlined in policy R2 of the Jurassic Coast Trusts (JCT's) Partnership Plan, any adverse effects on the OUV should be contemplated only "if it is both essential and unavoidable."
- 1.5 Establishing a transparent methodology for identifying projects as "essential and unavoidable" would help demonstrate thorough consideration of all feasible alternatives.
- 1.6 The UNESCO Toolkit
- 1.7 To assist with management of WHS's, UNESCO have developed generic guidance and a toolkit for impact assessments for nations around the world to use on any WHS.
- 1.8 This study will develop a tailored version of this specific to the Jurassic Coast under a strategic enabling project, and specifically in relation to FCERM schemes, in order to mitigate the risks that required FCERM schemes are not delivered, are delayed or they cause unmitigated impacts to the OUV of the coast which puts the WHS status under review. The overall guiding principle throughout the project is not just to examine mitigation impacts on OUV but to identify foremost how it might be possible to avoid and/or minimise those impacts whilst also addressing the risk associated with coastal change.
- 1.9 The UNESCO Guidance and Toolkit does not accept the principle of offsetting damage hence the requirement to focus on opportunities to avoid and minimise impacts on OUV both in isolated sections and cumulatively across the whole WHS.
- 1.10 The intention is to test this approach on one or two recently completed projects along the WHS to identify how the toolkit would have performed in this scenario (e.g. West Bay Coastal Improvements 2019), as well as to apply it directly to a project currently in delivery i.e. the Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme.
- 1.11 The learning from this project will thus produce Jurassic Coast specific guidance and a number of case studies that can then be applied at other locations along the WHS where FCERM projects and schemes in the current Wessex & DCIS 6-year programme and beyond including:
 - Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme
 - West Weares Seawall Scheme at Chesil Cove
 - Portland Underhill to Wyke Regis FCRM Strategy
 - Portland Harbour North West Shore
 - Swanage Beach Renourishment
 - South Devon & Dorset SMP Policy Review Project
 - North Swanage & Durlston Bay Cliff Management Strategy.

- 1.12 From discussions with RMA colleagues in other parts of the south-west where they face similar geodiversity challenges to future delivery of FCERM schemes, it is also likely that the outputs of this project will be beneficial beyond the Jurassic Coast WHS area.

2. The Project

- 2.1 The primary objective for this project is to investigate how to apply UNESCO's toolkit and guidance on Impact Assessments in relation to FCERM projects in order to (a) create a more tailored yet widely applicable framework for how to deal with the OUV of the Jurassic Coast WHS as a receptor when conducting impact assessments – including a mechanism for identifying WHS-wide cumulative impacts, and (b) establish methodologies that seek to avoid and minimise risks to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Jurassic Coast WHS whilst also mitigating risks to FCERM project deliver.
- 2.2 The secondary objective is to test a real world example of (b) and establish a 'menu' of measures to avoid and minimise risk to the OUV of the WHS as part of the mitigation measures identified. This menu system will not be limited to simple recommendations, as the project will also aim to affirm pathways to fund / invest in the mitigation required to offset damage to the WHS, where damage is unavoidable, so that FCERM schemes remain deliverable.
- 2.3 These objectives and outcomes will ultimately lead to;
1. the UK Government, as the state party to the World Heritage Convention, will have more confidence that the OUV of the Dorset and East Devon Coast WHS is safeguarded and that it is benefiting from investment where mitigation is needed.
 2. The Jurassic Coast Partnership, including the Jurassic Coast Trust, the EA, NE and FCERM authorities, will have a more robust and shared understanding of how to align their work with the expectations of UNESCO in regard to FCERM projects.
 3. FCERM projects will have a clarified, more confident and streamlined approach to dealing with the WHS OUV as they are developed. The approach developed may also then be helpful (possibly with additional work) to other sectors delivering projects along the WHS.
- 2.4 The outcomes of applying the best practice created by this project should also benefit local communities, partners and future planning by enabling more effective geological conservation and assurance around FCERM schemes. There is the additional potential for any mitigation work to create new research / engagement / education outputs as well – addressing other policies set out in the Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan 2020-2025.
- 2.5 The proposal is to split the project into 3 phases of investigation and delivery, this will ensure a structured and systematic approach.
- 2.6 Phase 1 will develop a tailored approach to applying the UNESCO impact assessment framework for FCERM projects along the Jurassic Coast, including the mechanism for co-ordinating / identifying cumulative impacts across a range of FCERM-WHS interactions/settings/situations across the 95-miles of coast and then a range of potential mitigation options that address those.
- 2.7 This phase will also include an analysis of potential mitigation measures. It is currently not known what kinds of mitigation outcomes can be achieved for impacts on coastal geodiversity, and whether an acceptable level of mitigation is possible. Potential mitigation actions will be identified in collaboration with partners (e.g. Natural England) and assessed for their viability, cost, methodology and outcomes. An outline basis for mitigation includes: compensation pre-works (unlikely to be achievable for geological sites); mitigation pre-works (e.g. preservation by record, etc.); and onsite mitigation during works (e.g. watching briefs during construction works to record etc. if/when features are identified during works).
- 2.8 As part of Phase 1, we will also test the approach as it develops on the Sidmouth Beach Management Scheme, as this is an active scheme in delivery on the Jurassic Coast that

requires a 172 notification to be raised to UNESCO (though this has not yet been actioned) This will allow for active learning as the approach is developed from applying it on a live project, providing opportunity for critical reflection and refinement of the approach for further testing in Phase 2, including the number of case studies that can be developed given the available budget. In doing so the project outlined will enable a 172 notification to be raised that demonstrates a proactive and forward thinking strategic approach is being taken by seeking to apply UNESCO's own guidance for impact assessments and World Heritage and using Sidmouth as a case study and test site.

- 2.9 Phase 2 will involve further testing / case study development using range of recent / in progress FCERM projects from across the Jurassic Coast.
- 2.10 Phase 3 will produce the final reporting & dissemination (to include how this might be embedded in FCERM project guidance across Jurassic Coast). The reporting will comprise of a technical report and accompanying Jurassic Coast WHS guidance document for the assessment of OUV implications and identification of mitigation measures (if required) as part of FCERM projects.

3. Key Partners

- 3.1 The project will be delivered by South West Flood & Coastal (SWF&C), a new shared-service partnership between East Devon District Council and BCP Council.
- 3.2 Delivery will involve extensive engagement and consultation with statutory stakeholders and experts such as Natural England, the Jurassic Coast Trust, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), Historic England, UNESCO (via Historic England / DCMS), Environment Agency, East Devon DC, Dorset Council, Devon County Council, Dorset National Landscape, East Devon National Landscape, MMO, British Geological Survey.

Financial implications:

The costs involved are covered from external funding.

Legal implications:

As this report is for note only, there are no substantive legal issues to be added.