

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

ANNUAL REPORT 2013

STATE: UNITED KINGDOM

NAME OF AREA: PURBECK HERITAGE COAST

CENTRAL AUTHORITY CONCERNED:

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I General information

1 Natural heritage - State of conservation

The Purbeck Heritage Coast (PHC) is 127 km² of dramatic and beautiful countryside along a 52km length of coastline in the County of Dorset. It sits entirely within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB - <http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/>), an IUCN Category V Protected Landscape. It was defined in 1981 for its varied landscape and rich biodiversity and geodiversity. The PHC's coastline includes the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

1.1 Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated

There have been no reported environmental changes of any significance. Bathing water quality, river water quality and air quality indicators are monitored.

1.2 Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetation cover; presumed causes

Flora and faunal changes of designated sites are monitored through Site of Special Scientific Interest condition assessments and Site of Nature Conservation Interest assessments. There has been no significant loss in condition, nor any reported areas for concern.

The area's alien population of Sika (*Cervus nippon*) which have a detrimental effect on the area's semi-natural vegetations are being managed by a collective of large landowning organisations across the area, with novel approaches being considered through land tenure arrangements.

1.3 Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

All designated sites are subject to assessments; there has been no significant loss in condition, nor any reported areas for concern.

2 Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

The landscape of the Purbeck Heritage Coast has been marked and influenced by continual human activity since the Mesolithic period. It has also inspired its inhabitants and visitors to artistic endeavour.

Mining and quarrying are important economic activities within the PHC: the area is home to the largest onshore oil field in Western Europe operated by Perenco. Tourism and related services are also a significant contributor to the area's economy. Agriculture covers the vast majority of the land area, so is important to the area's landscape and biodiversity, but is a lesser contributor to the area's economy.

2.1 Cultural heritage

There has been no recorded deterioration of the area's designated cultural heritage.

2.2 Socio-economic context

There have been no apparent changes in the area's socio-economic status. Further empirical evidence will be forthcoming following publication of the National Census in forthcoming years.

3 Education and scientific interest

The PHC's coast and countryside offer an 'outdoor classroom' for many. The area's geology, geomorphology, coastal processes, biodiversity and human geography are frequent topics for visiting education groups, from the youngest schoolchildren to postgraduate researchers.

3.1 Visitors – Information policy

3.1.1 Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)

Durlston Castle continues to be a significant site for information and interpretation since its re-opening in November 2011 following significant investment in modernisation.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are working up plans to develop a visitor centre at the Arne reserve, and the Lulworth Estate and National Trust continue to provide significant visitor information for the Purbeck Coast.

3.1.2 Frequentation by visitors and behaviour (number, distribution in time and space)

The Purbeck Heritage Coast remains very popular with tourists; no significant changes were recorded in 2013. The latest published tourism figures (2009) for the whole Purbeck administrative area (larger than the Heritage Coast) recorded 2.2 million visitor nights and 2.0 million day visitors.

3.2 Scientific research

3.2.1 Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)

Research continues as part of the Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area, including a Purbeck biodiversity report available from this page:

<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/wildpurbeck/189-monitoring>

3.2.2 Scientific publications

The AONB Partnership is not aware of any published research concerning the natural history of the area in 2013.

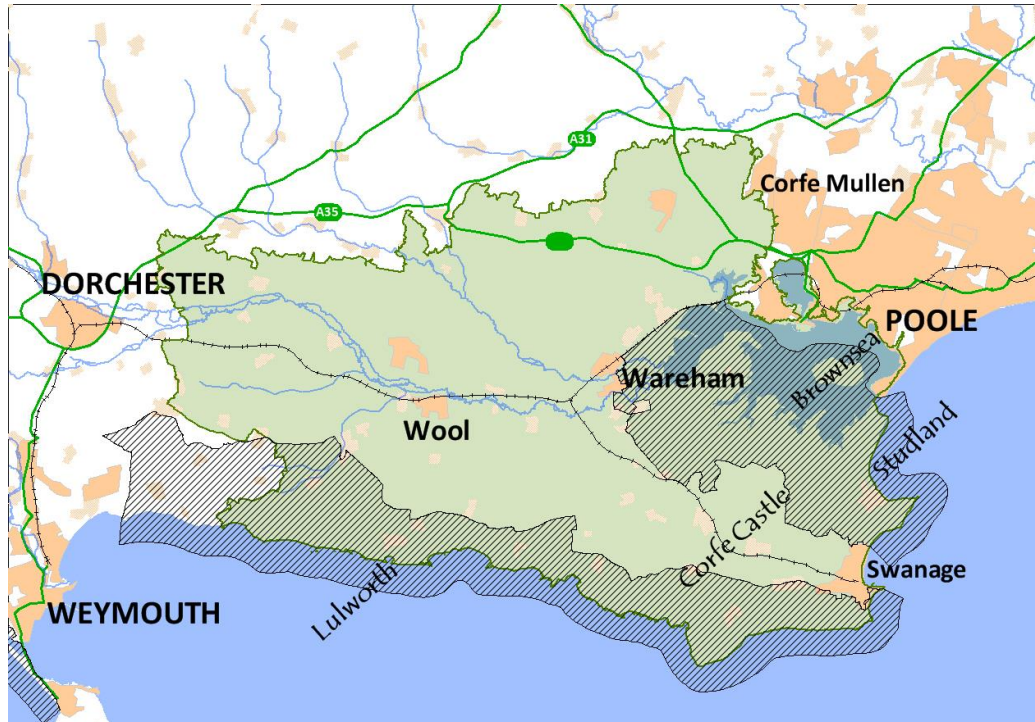
4 Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

There have been no significant changes regarding changes in legislation/regulation, ownership title, extension, transfer or new uses.

5 Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

By November 2013 we are half-way through the 3-year business plan for the Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area (NIA). Significant additional UK Government investment has been made to biodiversity, connectivity and landscape quality in the NIA - the boundaries of which cover the majority of the Purbeck Heritage Coast. The full business plan and annual updates are available on the Dorset AONB website (<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/wildpurbeck>). All improvements detailed in 5.1 are under the auspices of the Wild Purbeck project.

Links to detailed quarterly newsletters can be found via the link above.



Map showing close correlation between the Purbeck Heritage Coast (diagonal shading) and the Nature Improvement Area (green shading)

5.1 Improvements made

5.1.1 Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna

Significant efforts continue with the area's farmers and landowners to improve the ecological status of their landholdings without compromising their economic returns, including 5 ponds being restored, 26 hectares of heathland restoration, 31 land owner advisory visits and 85 hectares of woodland creation.

5.1.2 Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)

A number of organisations are collaborating on a climate change adaptation plan and the Environment Agency is making significant progress in plans for the adaptation of coastal land around Poole Harbour and the River Frome.

5.1.3 Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)

The Norden Park & Ride group continue to meet to improve the provision of visitor parking at Corfe Castle (on the edge of the PHC area). Work to improve the walking routes between Norden and Corfe and sign links between bus stops and train stations between Norden and Swanage have now been completed.

5.1.4 Field equipment (hides and study facilities)

As part of the saline lagoon project, public viewing facilities are still being planned for installation in the next few years.

5.1.5 Waste management: There has been no significant change in 2011.

5.1.6 Use of renewable energy systems

The area has seen an increase in the installed capacity of renewable energy, both on public and private sites.

5.2 Management

5.2.1 Administrative department: changes made

Strategic environmental management of this area remains the individual responsibility of member organisations of the Dorset AONB Partnership; nature improvement work is being carried out by the Wild Purbeck Partnership (of which Dorset AONB is the lead partner).

5.2.2 **Wardens' department: changes made:** n/a

5.2.3 **Internal policing measures:** There has been no change in policing arrangements in 2011

5.2.4 **Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action**

The Dorset AONB Partnership is not aware of any legal actions concerning environmental issues in the Purbeck Heritage Coast in 2013

II. Influence of the award of the European Diploma of Protected Areas

The international recognition provided by the award of the Diploma continues to support both Dorset County Council and Purbeck District Council in their pursuit of effective planning control and co-ordination, with partners, of positive management action.

Recognition through the Award also provides encouragement to all the organisations and individuals who contribute toward the protection and enhancement of the outstanding qualities of the Purbeck Heritage Coast. The comments and observations of the Group of Specialists are valued, and are used to guide progress.

III. Conditions and recommendations for award or renewal

Renewal of the European Diploma was granted in October 2009 for until the 20th June 2019 with the following **conditions**:

1. The terms of the agreement between Dorset County Council and British Petroleum are being strictly adhered to, and BP continues to work to the highest standards.
Perenco have been granted permission to extend the operation of the oilfield for another 25 years. The strictest operation criteria have been applied and a significant compensation fund has been committed to ensure positive impact on the area's biodiversity and landscape quality.
2. The extension of existing quarries or the opening of new quarries conforms to the 'exceptions' principle that they should not be permitted unless they do not impair the character of the Heritage Coast as a result of any one or a combination of the following:
 - their scale and length
 - their negative impact on the landscape, wildlife, the enjoyment of the area by the public or local communities
 - the practical impossibility of achieving satisfactory restoration and aftercare within a period of five years following the cessation of work.

A new minerals plan has been prepared by Dorset County Council, the competent authority. All quarrying policies and proposals within this document strengthen controls which will benefit the Heritage Coast.

In addition, renewal is subject to the following **recommendations**:

1. Attention should be paid to ensure that the scheme for restoration of the site after gravel extraction at Wareham is completed.

2. Work should continue on the inventory of Natural Areas calling for more adequate protection and research on these sites, particularly in the marine reserves where the periodic inventories of fauna and flora should be continued.
3. Any progress will be welcomed to reduce intensive arable use on the immediate edge of the cliffs.
4. Work should continue to restore eroded paths by using local stone in an innovative way as done at Lulworth Cove.
5. Efforts to promote the use of more sustainable methods of transport to visitors (bus and train usage, improved use of cycling and walking and riding) should be increased.
6. Measures should be taken to address risks of oil pollution from shipping.
7. New resources should be made available to ensure the integrity in perpetuity of the newly designated World Heritage Site and its effective presentation to the public.
8. Appropriate management should be exercised and sufficient resourcing for this should be ensured, for the proposed South Purbeck National Nature Reserve.
9. The Heritage Landscape Management Plan for the Lulworth Estate should be implemented.
10. Co-operation and the establishment of partnerships in management planning, action and exchange of information between all major bodies involved with conservation and management should continue as it is a key method for future management of the Coast.

We believe that these conditions and recommendations have met during 2013 (see text).

Tom Munro
November 2013