

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg 20 January 1983

SN-ZP (83) 21 XY



COE166288

AS THIS DOCUMENT WILL NOT BE
DISTRIBUTED DURING THE MEETING
PLEASE BRING THIS COPY

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

PURBECK HERITAGE COAST

(United Kingdom)

Category C

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

by

C de Klem

78.585
09.3

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom has submitted an application for the European Diploma, category C, for the Purbeck Heritage Coast. That application is set out in document SN-ZP (82) 20. At its meeting on 29 and 30 April 1983, the Committee of Experts on Protected Areas recognised the European interest of the area and decided to have an on-the-spot appraisal carried out in accordance with Article 3.4 of Resolution (73) 4 adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 January 1973.

The Council of Europe Secretariat wrote to me on 27 May 1982 asking me to carry out that appraisal.

Mr Peter Baum of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council of Europe accompanied me on my visit as the Secretariat representative.

The on-the-spot appraisal took place on 5 and 6 July 1982 in the company of Mr Roland Tarr, Heritage Coast Officer, and members of his staff, together with the directors of the various reserves included in the Heritage Coast area. We also met Mr Derek Barber, President of the Countryside Commission and its Director Mr Adrian Phillips, and were accompanied for part of 6 July by the Deputy Director, Mr Patrick Leonard.

I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my warmest thanks to all those people who gave us the benefit of their help and co-operation during our visit; they are too numerous to mention individually.

It is also important to stress at this point that, in view of the size of the area covered by the Heritage Coast (more than 160 km², including more than 40 kilometres of coast) and the great diversity of the many reserves included in it, it was not possible to carry out an in-depth appraisal in the space of only two days. Each of the reserves, several of which clearly fall within category A, would alone merit a visit of one or two days in their own right. Only an hour or two could be devoted to them, and there were some which we were not able to visit at all. Consequently, this report cannot do more than give a general picture of the situation and problems encountered along the Purbeck Heritage Coast, insofar as it was possible to form an opinion during so brief a period of time.

The timetable for the visit was as follows:

- 5 July, morning: tour of the Lulworth army ranges, the Kimmeridge marine reserve and the Arne ornithological reserve;
- 5 July, afternoon: tour of the chalk grasslands and coastal cliffs at Worth Matravers, St Aldhelm's Head and Dancing Ledge; visit to Durlston Country Park;
- 6 July, morning: tour of the Studland Heath and Holton Heath national nature reserves and the Ballard Down chalk grassland;

./.

- 6 July, afternoon: visit to Brownsea Island.

2. General description of the site

Purbeck Heritage Coast is situated in the south-east corner of the English county of Dorset. It covers some 164 km² and 40 km of coastline.

The geological features are described in relative detail in the British authorities' application for the award of the European Diploma (SN-ZP (82) 20), and it would therefore be superfluous to describe them again here. It is nevertheless important to underline the very great scientific and aesthetic value of the Purbeck coastal cliffs and the paleontological importance of certain mammal and reptile fossils.

The Heritage Coast comprises a great many different habitats (limestone and chalk grasslands, heathlands, woodland, salt meadows, march, peat bogs, dunes and pools), and consequently possesses a highly diversified flora and fauna, favoured by the exceptional mildness of the climate. Foremost among the rare plants are several varieties of orchid, particularly the early spider orchid which grows on the limestone grassland, and among the birds is the Dartford warbler (Sylvia undata) for which the heathlands around Purbeck are the principal habitat in Great Britain. There are sizeable colonies of seabirds which nest on the cliffs, and many ducks spend the winter in Poole harbour. Mammals are few in number. The red squirrel survives on Brownsea Island, where the grey squirrel has not penetrated.

The greater horseshoe bat (Rhinolophus ferrum-equinum) finds shelter in old stone workings. Among reptiles, the viper (Vipera berus) is common and the smooth snake (Coronella austriaca) lives in the salt heaths, the only place in England where it is found. Species of insects are particularly numerous, including several rare varieties. Orthoptera, butterflies and dragonflies are especially abundant.

Lastly, marine fauna and flora are particularly abundant and diversified by reason of the great variety of different types of habitat available - sand and shingle beaches, reed beds, rocky coasts, cliffs.

The whole region is of major tourist importance, particularly in summer. It was therefore vital to attempt to achieve a harmonious compromise between tourism and other human activities on the one hand, and the protection of the environment and of a magnificent landscape on the other hand. This was the purpose of establishing Purbeck Heritage Coast.

3. Legal status and land ownership

Purbeck Heritage Coast, established in 1978, is part of an area of outstanding natural beauty, or AONB. It contains within itself sites of special scientific interest - SSSIs - and a number of reserves governed by a variety of legal regulations. The whole area can therefore be seen as a kind of mosaic, whose various parts have to be analysed in order to obtain a clear idea of the degree of protection enjoyed by the area as a whole.

a. The Dorset AONB covers a large tract of the County of Dorset. Purbeck Heritage Coast is only part of it.

AONBs are regions outside national parks which are designated by the Countryside Commission by reason of their exceptional scenic beauty. Some regulations applicable to national parks also apply to them. In particular, whenever the relevant local authorities draw up a development plan affecting an AONB they are required to consult the Countryside Commission and taken its observations into account. These authorities are also empowered to take any necessary steps to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONBs within their jurisdiction. However, as with the national parks, neither the local authorities nor the Countryside Commission can block any change in the agricultural or forestry use to which land is put. The clauses covering AONBs are contained in Sections 87 and 88 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. AONBs are thus established by law.

b. The Heritage Coast

The concept of "heritage coast" is not defined by law but simply in a circular by the Ministry of the Environment (DoE Circular 12/72). According to that circular, a "heritage coast" is defined by a joint decision of the Countryside Commission and the relevant local authority. In other words, this is not a designation from which certain legal effects flow, as in the case of AONBs or national parks, but simply a "definition" which is without legal effect but constitutes an administrative framework within which planning constraints under the ordinary law - in this case those relating to AONBs - must be respected, together with positive conservation measures jointly accepted by the interested parties, including in particular private landowners. The system operates on the basis of a county structure plan drawn up by the county for the whole of its territory. This plan contains particular clauses governing the heritage coast and lays down broad policy guidelines for its conservation. The Countryside Commission has appointed a Heritage Coast Officer who is responsible to the county authorities and paid by them. He is responsible for drawing up a management plan and subsequently implementing it. As stricter urban planning constraints than those under the ordinary law cannot be imposed in a heritage coast area outside the nature reserves, the success of this plan depends entirely on persuasion and negotiation.

c. Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI)

SSSIs are not reserves but areas of particular interest by reason of their flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features. They were created under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The Nature Conservancy Council is empowered to enter into agreements with landowners for the conservation of their land when it has been designated an SSSI. Clauses in such agreements may require the owners to abstain from certain activities in exchange for compensation. The new Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 strengthened the Government's hand with respect to SSSIs. Landowners are now obliged to notify the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) of any work they intend to carry out. If the NCC considers that such work would detract from the features which give the area its particular scientific interest, it may enter into an agreement with the owner whereby the latter refrains from carrying out the work in question or modifies it in a manner acceptable to the NCC in return for compensation. Failure to honour such an agreement may result in compulsory purchase by the NCC.

A fairly large proportion of the area covered by Purbeck Heritage Coast carries an SSSI designation, in particular a narrow strip of land along virtually the whole of the coast itself. There are a total of ten SSSIs in the Purbeck area.

d. Reserves

The total area covered by reserves of various kinds is at least 1,500 hectares, or almost 10% of the total area of the heritage coast.

i. National nature reserves

The main ones are the national reserves of Studland Heath, Hartland Moor and Holton Heath. These are state-owned reserves administered by the NCC, which is not the owner but simply a tenant. However, since a substantial part of the land in question has recently been acquired by the National Trust, the future of these reserves seems assured. The total area is 709 hectares. They are strictly patrolled and public access is limited.

ii. Reserve of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

This is the Arne reserve, covering 400 hectares. It is a private reserve and at the same time an SSSI. It was established in order to safeguard the nesting sites of the Dartford warbler (Sylvia undata) which has a very limited distribution in England. The reserve is patrolled and public access is limited.

iii. Dorset County Council reserve

Dorset County Council acquired 105 hectares of cliffs and grassland at Durlston Head in 1968. This area was declared a "Country park" in 1972 under Section 7 of the Countryside Act 1968. This is a local nature reserve administered by the county, to which the public is admitted.

iv. Dorset Naturalists' Trust reserves

The Dorset Naturalists' Trust is a private association of the kind which exist in many British counties. These associations are all affiliated to the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. One of their functions is to acquire the ownership or tenancy of land which they then make into reserves and manage themselves. Apart from the above-mentioned Brownsea Island reserve, covering 100 hectares, the Dorset Naturalists' Trust owns the small Townsend Nature Reserve of some 13 hectares in the immediate vicinity of Durlston Country Park, within the area of the Heritage Coast, and rents from the National Trust 46 hectares of the coastal reserve of Whitenoth in the western part of the Heritage Coast, which we were unable to visit for lack of time.

The Trust also manages a marine reserve running along 7 kilometres of the coast from Kimmeridge to Lulworth. This reserve includes cliffs, some of them reaching a height of 165 metres, together with the beach and coastal rocks and the sea to about one kilometre from the coast.

However, this is only a reserve in name, as it has no legal existence. Its continuance therefore depends solely on voluntary co-operation by users.

e. Landowners

Most of the land lying outside the reserves, and indeed some of the land inside them, is the property of five major landowners including the National Trust and the Ministry of Defence.

i. National Trust

The National Trust is a private organisation which exists for the purpose of acquiring property, whether buildings or land, in order to preserve its historical or aesthetic character. It acquires such property free of estate transfer tax and death duty. The National Trust can declare its assets non-transferable, which means that they may not even be compulsorily purchased in the public interest unless a special act of parliament is passed. The organisation owns several hundred hectares within the Purbeck Heritage Coast area. Some of the land it holds is let to the NCC and has been made into nature reserves. Examples are the Studland Heath and Hartland Moor nature reserves. Part of Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour is let to the Dorset Naturalists' Trust, which has created a private reserve there.

ii. The Lulworth military ranges

These are not of course a reserve, but since access to the land is strictly controlled (especially as the Army uses it for firing practice) it enjoys a fairly good degree of protection. The land is owned by the Ministry of Defence and covers 2,800 hectares, extending over more than 9 kilometres of coast from Kimmeridge to Lulworth Cove.

iii. Other properties

The remainder of the area covered by the Purbeck Heritage Coast consists of private properties, some of them very large. The local authorities have powers to prohibit or regulate construction, mining, camping, caravanning, car-parking etc. On the other hand, changes in agricultural or forestry use, for example converting pastureland into arable land or converting a heath into a forest, do not require authorisation. Nor does the construction of farm buildings.

4. State of conservation and management of the various types of habitat

i. The coast

The geological and paleontological importance of the Purbeck cliffs is universally recognised. They are consequently visited by many professional and amateur geologists who are unable to resist the temptation to take specimens away - though this depredation seems tiny when compared with the natural damage caused by erosion. On Kimmeridge beach, the most easily accessible and therefore most visited area, the owner has banned the use of geologists' hammers. On the Lulworth army ranges, along the coast there are relics of a fossilised forest in which the fossils have been photographed and mapped. No damage has been recorded since 1980; public access to this fossilised forest is controlled and supervised by the military.

./.

Some of the cliffs are occupied in springtime by large colonies of seabirds, notably puffin (Fratercula arctica) and fulmar (Fulmarus glacialis) which are interesting in that this is the very limit of their distribution, as well as kittiwakes (Rissa tridactyla), guillemots (Uria aalge) and razorbills (Alca torda). These colonies are threatened by rock climbers. Since the establishment of Durlston County Park, climbing has been forbidden in vulnerable places and agreements have been concluded with the association representing mountaineers and rock climbers to ensure that nesting colonies are not disturbed.

As regards marine fauna and flora, a very comprehensive inventory has been made under the auspices of Dorset County Council, the NCC and the Dorset Naturalists' Trust. This inventory shows the great richness of the Purbeck coastal zone, with for example more than 150 species of algae. The voluntary marine reserve run by the Dorset Naturalists' Trust, mentioned above, seems to provide effective protection for the more accessible part of the coast. As the reserve has no legal status, it has not been possible to issue regulations for it. But the problem appears nevertheless to have been solved by setting up an information centre and employing a warden (female) whose job is to act as guide for groups of visitors, especially schoolchildren, keep an eye on tourists' behaviour and explain to them why they are asked not to do certain things. A leaflet setting out a code of conduct is also available. In addition, the reserve includes a scientific zone about three kilometres long by one kilometre wide which boats are asked to keep away from and in which underwater divers are asked not to take specimens. Sub-aqua diving is encouraged throughout the reserve, but fishing is not.

Potential threats to the coastal area are pollution and the introduction of the exotic alga Sargassum uticum.

The discharge of effluent, whether treated or untreated, by towns along the coast does not appear to be affecting the coastal ecosystems for the time being. However, the discharge of untreated effluent should not be allowed in sensitive areas, and particularly inside the reserve. The degree of water pollution should be carefully monitored, especially in the almost enclosed bay of Poole harbour. The alga Ulva lactuca has been observed to proliferate in some places at the end of certain outfalls, especially the one which discharges warm water from the nearby nuclear power station. This may lead to the appearance of sea urchins, which do not occur in the reserve at present, and could endanger some of the rare algae growing in it.

There are of course lumps of tar on the beaches, but so far there have been no serious problems caused by oil pollution. There is an oil-spillage emergency plan which would be put into effect in conjunction with the NCC. A good deal of jetsam is thrown up on Kimmeridge beach. This is a problem that can only be solved by more stringent regulations on discharges from ships, and which of course exists outside the context of Purbeck Heritage Coast.

The exotic alga Sargassum muticum is present in nearby coastal areas. It constitutes a serious threat to the reserve, being highly prolific and resistant and consequently capable of eliminating the native species. All specimens found in the reserve are weeded out.

It would no doubt be helpful to consider extending the area of the reserve, both in length and in width, making its seaward limit coincide with the 20-metre isobath so as to include the areas much visited by sub-aqua divers. Finally, since the enactment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 permitting the establishment of marine reserves, there seems to be nothing to prevent this voluntary reserve from becoming a national nature reserve subject to binding regulations.

ii. Chalk grasslands

A distinction must be drawn between two habitats: a slightly curved chalky outcrop running from the cliffs at Ballard Down eastwards to Lulworth Cove. This is an environment very rich in flora but which has now almost entirely disappeared as intensive agriculture has spread. The remaining fragments are slopes on which farming has hitherto been regarded as difficult and uneconomic, but some of these slopes have been brought into cultivation recently. Conserving the surviving vestiges is therefore a matter of urgency. The largest and richest botanically appears to be the Ballard Down grassland at the eastern extremity of the outcrop. Since this land now belongs to the National Trust, conservation ought to be possible.

The second important limestone habitat of Purbeck Heritage Coast is the area of limestone cliffs extending from Durlston Head to Lulworth. The calcicolous flora subject to constant maritime influence is particularly rich here. Insects too are numerous and there are rare species, including butterflies. This environment has been almost entirely destroyed by the development of farming, and all that really remains is a rather narrow strip of heath above the cliffs constituting an SSSI along its whole length. At the eastern end is Durlston Country Park where this habitat is protected. Other fragments are comprised in land belonging to the National Trust. Ecological management measures have been taken in Durlston Country Park, such as late mowing to allow the plants time to disperse their seed. Agreements have been reached with certain farmers for the continuance of traditional methods and the non-use of fertilisers. Almost all the grasslands are threatened by invasive reeds, and controlled pasture experiments are under way in an effort to remedy this problem.

There are in the limestone region a number of old stone workings which provide shelter for certain rare bats. These should be protected.

iii. Heathlands

The Purbeck heathlands are among the habitats which have suffered most from the development of agriculture and forestry in England, and this plant formation has now almost vanished from the southern part of the country. Dorset is one of the rare counties in which a few fragments of it still remain. Within the boundaries of the Purbeck Heritage Coast, the heathlands used to extend over 6,000 hectares to the north of the curving chalk line from Ballard Down to Lulworth. Today there are scarcely 2,000 hectares left. These Purbeck heathlands are protected in a number of reserves, notably the national nature reserves of Studland Heath, Hartland Moor and Holton Heath and in the RSPB reserve at Arne. Studland Heath is the only one genuinely open to the

public, and is particularly rich in flora. The royal fern (*Osmundia regalis*) is common there. A special permit is needed to enter the RSPB reserve. In order to maintain the habitat and in particular prevent its invasion by pines and bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), controlled burning is carried out or, alternatively, the bracken is treated with a herbicide (Asulox); the rhododendrons are pulled up and the old plantations of exotic conifers are being gradually thinned out, and will have completely disappeared in ten years or so. The Arne reserve is of great biological richness: it contains 400 species of plants, 800 butterflies (heterocera), half the British rhopalocera species (more than 30 species), half the dragonflies (29 species out of 38) and all the reptiles. However, the reserve was established primarily in order to preserve the nesting sites of the Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*). A wide range of habitats is represented.

Not all the heathlands, however, are inside the reserves: far from it. Moreover, while most of the reserves have the status of SSSIs, that is not enough to protect them from development. For example, Slepe Heath, an SSSI which lies within the Heritage Coast area, has become a conifer plantation which has grown out of all proportion. The owner, who received government grants, has not agreed to discontinue his scheme, even in return for compensation.

The heaths are also threatened by fire - there was a very serious fire in 1976 - and by the use of fertilisers on higher ground. The problem has arisen in Hartland Moor reserve, and was solved only by the NCC's acquisition of the land where fertiliser was being used.

iv. Other habitats

Purbeck Heritage Coast does of course also contain other habitats. Woodland and forest cover about 14% of the region's area. Half of this is taken up by conifer plantations, the remainder being made up of broadleaved species, notably oak and hazel. The forest fragments which seem to be of greatest ecological interest are Brerscombe Wood on the north slope of the chalk line and Great Wood, inside the military area. The latter is an SSSI. We did not visit these. There are also a number of particular habitats such as the moors, an extensive area of grassland near Poole Harbour, another SSSI. Nor should we forget to mention the rich flora which grows on roadside verges, often the last refuge of natural vegetation. This includes such rare species as *Erica cilianis* and the orchid *Epipactis palustris*. Unfortunately, these verges are frequently cut in spring, so that the plants have no opportunity to propagate themselves.

Finally, on the coast above Poole Harbour, partly protected by the Studland nature reserve, is a coastal cordon of dunes. Those which lie outside the reserve suffer from trampling by walkers.

5. General problems affecting Purbeck Heritage Coast

a. Farming and forestry

A great many of the habitats to which the landscape around Purbeck owes its biological and scenic value have already vanished and been replaced by crops and improved pastures on the downlands or by conifer plantations on the heaths.

The remaining natural habitats survive in the reserves, along the top of the cliffs, on some sheltered slopes and in a few heaths further inland which are in fact still being broken up. Most of these sites are SSIs, whose owners are required by the new Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to inform the NCC of any changes they propose to make. The NCC can then enter into an agreement with the owner for the site to be left in its present state in return for compensation, failing which the area may be compulsorily purchased, though that takes money and the NCC is poorly off. Under the law as it stands in Britain at present, it is not possible to prevent agricultural changes taking place through planning regulations. Creating a reserve is the only way of doing so. A great deal will therefore depend on the extent to which the NCC (as regards the SSSI) and the County, through the intermediary of the Heritage Coast Officer, are able to reach amicable arrangements with certain owners in order to preserve the most important sites. It ought to be possible, for example, to conclude agreements with the Ministry of Defence and the National Trust for them to include clauses in their tenant farmers' leases prohibiting or restricting certain agricultural practices such as the use of fertilisers, or encouraging others such as traditional grazing or haymaking. Finally, the greatest possible recourse should be had to that clause in the new Act which enables the authorities (the Ministry and the NCC) to oppose agricultural grants which would have the effect of jeopardising the biological value of an SSSI (Section 32 of the above-mentioned Act of 1981).

b. Mining, quarrying and oil production

Within the boundaries of the Heritage Coast there are ball clay deposits and stone quarries. The appropriate planning authorities (county or district) issue the requisite extraction permits on conditions which ensure that the landscape, flora and fauna are safeguarded. There do not seem to be any problems at the present time.

The same is true, broadly speaking, of oil extraction. Since the discovery of oil deposits at Purbeck this resource has been intensively exploited, both on land and offshore, and several wells have been drilled. Two pumps are in operation on the shore at Kimmeridge, but do not seriously impair the landscape. A number of others are operating in a small inland area near Studland Heath reserve and are well camouflaged by a screen of trees. The other installations are also camouflaged and the oil pipeline has been run underground. The oil company has not been given permission to widen the approach road. Finally, the wells are protected by a low masonry wall in order to contain any accidental spillage. New drillings are now envisaged and permits have already been applied for to drill within the Arne reserve, and other permits for Studland Heath are to be applied for. The County, the NCC, the RSPB and the National Trust, which owns Studland Heath, are categorically opposed to this for reasons of principle which we can only applaud. At the time of the on-site appraisal no final decision had been taken.

c. Tourism and recreation

The Purbeck region is visited by two or three million people each year. An attempt is made to channel these visitors by encouraging them to use the network of existing coastal paths. Other paths will probably be marked out in the future with the agreement of the landowners concerned. Where car parking is concerned, the policy adopted has been to provide small car parks at some distance from the coast.

There are no large hotels or large camp or caravan sites within the area of the Heritage Coast. The only exceptions are the particularly unattractive Lulworth camp site, with some 500 caravans very near the coast, and those at Osmington Mills further west, which we did not see.

An effort has been made to divide the Heritage Coast into four types of zone:

- zones of intensive use. These are the beaches at Studland and Lulworth Cove. In each case there are car parks for 500 vehicles;
- zones of medium use, eg Durlston Country Park, Kimmeridge Bay and Brownsea Island, whose rural character is to be preserved;
- zones of low intensity use, beaches and observation points with small parking areas nearby but no other facilities;
- quiet zones where no developments other than farming activities are to be authorised.

This zoning policy is reflected in planning regulations of increasing stringency from one zone to another.

Finally, while some sporting activities are encouraged, an effort is made to control them so that they do not impair the natural environment. For example, a campaign has been conducted among the national federations of sub-aqua diving and rock climbing clubs to get them to tell their members, mainly through their own publications, what precautions they must take along the Heritage Coast in order to avoid damaging the environment, the flora or the fauna.

d. Construction

The only type of construction permitted in the rural area is farm buildings. It is not allowed to build second homes or hotels. The areas in which there are already buildings are old-established villages composed of old, picturesque houses in the traditional style. Almost all the villages along the Heritage Coast are in "conservation areas". This means that buildings may not be demolished without a demolition permit, which is seldom granted. Any new constructions must be built in the traditional style and certain specific materials must be used. A consultant architect is at the disposal of builders. Despite these rules, there are a number of buildings in a fairly modern style which do not blend very well with the landscape.

e. Archaeological remains and restoration of old buildings

The whole Purbeck region is extremely rich in prehistoric remains. It is the policy of the local authorities wherever possible to conserve them in conjunction with the landowners. Some work has also been undertaken to restore old buildings. Finally, the old stone walls which used to mark property boundaries have also been largely restored.

6. Administration

The Heritage Coast has no legal status of its own and is administered by Dorset County Council. The Heritage Coast Officer deals with general

policy matters and relations with the other relevant authorities such as the NCC and with landowners. He is assisted by a Heritage Coast Warden, who is more specifically concerned with supervision of the coast and practical field work - way-marking of paths, repairs to old walls, certain ecological management jobs such as the reseedling of certain slopes, visitor information and guided visits. The warden is in turn assisted by a small staff of variable size whose wages are paid out of the government-sponsored job creation scheme. Volunteer workers also provide their services.

For the most part, of course, the various reserves within the boundaries of the Heritage Coast have their own wardens. There is no official machinery for co-ordination between the management of the Heritage Coast itself and other interested bodies such as the NCC, the Dorset Naturalists' Trust, the National Trust and the Army. This does not seem to be a problem because relations between the Heritage Coast Officer and the other organisations are excellent and unofficial meetings take place as and when the need for them arises. Moreover, the persons concerned do not themselves think it desirable to place such meetings on an institutional basis.

In keeping with the policy laid down by the County Council, the Heritage Coast Warden has endeavoured to provide easier public access in various sectors of the Heritage Coast, while controlling it to some degree in order to prevent damage to private property and the natural environment. Agreements have been entered into with the owners of the Smedmore estate at Kimmeridge and with the military authorities. The Lulworth military ranges are now partly open to the public.

Visitor information centres have been opened at Kimmeridge (for the marine reserve) and at Tyneham in the military area, in Durlston Country Park and on Brownsea Island. There are plans to set up another such centre on Studland beach.

7. Conclusions

There can be no doubt of the European significance of Purbeck Heritage Coast, by reason of the variety and quality of the habitats it contains and the beauty of its landscapes. Whether the criteria laid down by the Council of Europe for the award of the European Diploma are complied with remains to be seen. The criteria applicable here are those relating to category C.

a. The boundaries of the area must be laid down in an official procedure. The boundaries must be set out in a plan.

As we have seen, the concept of "heritage coast" has been set out in a simple government circular, and each of these coasts is then simply "defined" by the Countryside Commission which determines its boundaries. The heritage coasts have no real legal existence. The fact remains however that they are certainly determined by an official procedure, the Countryside Commission being a state agency, and that their boundaries, at least in the case of Purbeck, are clearly marked on the map. So this first criteria is certainly satisfied.

b. The area must be zoned.

We have seen that this is so. The Heritage Coast has been divided into four zones in accordance with the intensity of human activity permitted in them. In addition, a number of reserves exist inside the area.

c. There must be effective measures for protection of the landscape.

On the whole, the planning regulations in force in the various parts of the Heritage Coast are well enforced. They cover building, transport, quarrying and recreational facilities. There are however two problems which call for examination in greater depth:

1. Oil production

It is for the appropriate Minister to decide, if necessary after a public enquiry, whether or not to give authorisation for oil production at a particular place, even if it is a protected area or nature reserve. Thus NCC opposition to such activities will not be sufficient to prevent them going ahead if the development of oil production is judged to be of overriding importance in the national interest. There is therefore a risk that drilling will be authorised in Purbeck, particularly in the Arne and Studland Heath reserves.

ii. Farming and forestry

Natural habitats, particularly the chalk grasslands and heathlands, are an integral part of the Purbeck landscape. The impoverishment which their disappearance would bring about would seriously detract from the European importance of the area. Yet the legislation in force and the financial resources available to the appropriate official and private bodies are not such as to afford categorical protection.

However, the question arises whether these reasons are sufficient justification for withholding the Diploma. That does not seem to be the case. For the time being the threats are only latent ones, and can still be averted or at any rate minimised. The award of the Diploma, accompanied by certain conditions and recommendations, could even exert a decisive influence in this regard.

d. The public should have free access and certain arrangements might be made for their benefit.

As has been said, a whole range of measures have been taken to facilitate public access and information, even on private property and on the ranges belonging to the Army.

For all these reasons, the award of the European Diploma, category C, seems fully justified.

8. Recommendations

The recommendations which follow fall into two groups. The first group sets out conditions which must be met without fail if the Diploma is to be retained and renewed (assuming it is awarded). The second group is more concerned with points of detail and suggests ways of improving the management of Purbeck Heritage Coast to enable it to discharge its function more effectively.

8.1. Fundamental recommendations

8.1.1. Oil production must not be permitted in the national nature reserves or in the RSPB reserve at Arne.

Outside the reserves, the impact of oil installations, including pipelines and access roads, on the landscape and natural environment must be kept to a minimum. Stringent measures must be taken to eliminate the risks of accidental pollution. Drilling waste must not be discharged within the boundaries of the Heritage Coast.

8.1.2. The inventory of natural areas meriting protection must be completed as rapidly as possible. Efforts must be made to reach agreement with their owners in order to safeguard them against agricultural development. Failing this, priority must be given to the allocation of funds for the purchase of land which owners are planning to develop. Agreements must be negotiated with the Army and the National Trust whereby they ensure that their own tenant farmers do not destroy important natural environments.

8.2. Particular recommendations

8.2.1. The Heritage Coast Officer has concerned himself more particularly with problems of public access and information and with certain improvements and restoration work. The ecological element, however, seems to have been somewhat neglected by comparison. It might be helpful in this connection to recruit an ecologist whose job it would be to liaise with the NCC and co-operate closely with landowners in updating the inventories of natural environments, examine ecological management methods for them, continuously monitor their state of conservation and advise owners on the best ways of conserving them.

8.2.1. Roadside verges should be left unmown in spring in order to preserve the rare species found in them and the diversity of their flora, except where absolutely necessary for reasons of road safety.

8.2.3. The old stone workings and the old buildings in which bats nest should be protected, if necessary by fencing.

8.2.4. The protection of the marine reserve can be improved in two ways:

- a. the new Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 now provides for the possibility of creating marine nature reserves, which was not possible previously. There is therefore no legal obstacle to the transformation of the voluntary nature reserve into an official reserve, governed by binding regulations and managed by the NCC;
- b. the area of the present reserve could be increased, in length by extending the eastern limit to St Aldhelm's Head and out to sea by setting its boundary on the 20-metre isobath to include the area most frequented by sub-squa divers.

8.2.5. The Studland Heath dunes are at risk from walkers. These could perhaps be protected by fencing.

8.2.6. Pollution in Poole Harbour bay and the resultant danger of eutrophication should be carefully monitored. Ways of reducing pollution should already be under consideration.

8.2.7. The process water discharged at Kimmeridge by the nuclear power station should be analysed and its effect, especially on flora, should be carefully watched. If the proliferation of Alva lactuca is indeed caused by the effluent, consideration should be given to resiting the outflow or else treating the effluent first.

8.2.8. Greater attention could be paid to the style of permitted buildings, to ensure that they do not detract from the harmony of the landscape.

8.2.9. The large caravan site between Durdle Door and West Lulworth is too near the coast and an eyesore. It should be moved inland, outside the Heritage Coast area.

8.2.10. The parking area at Lulworth Cove should at least be camouflaged by a screen of trees.

8.2.11. The bathing huts on Studland beach should be removed.

8.2.12. There are several stands of the wild variety of the cultivated cabbage (Brassica oleracea) along the coast. In view of the importance of this vanishing genetic resource, local protection measures (eg fencing) should be taken.