

Annex 7 Fact-finding and observations

State of play; Overview of nature and heritage / culture on St Helena

A natural bid based on criterion (x) alone has potential to meet the criteria for OUV, and this has been accepted by the UK Government, in accepting St Helena on the Tentative List.

St Helena and its 200 nautical mile zone Marine Protected Area (MPA) are home to 612 endemic species (45 vascular plants, 26 bryophytes, 10 lichens, 455 terrestrial invertebrates, >50 marine invertebrates, 25 marine fish (including 16 species that are only found in St Helena and Ascension waters). This is a biological heritage of global value, one that is likely to increase as more species can be expected to be described/discovered through future research into lesser known groups and habitats. St Helena presents an evolutionary hotspot in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. With its diversity of habitats and species, St Helena is home to almost one third of all UK and UKOTS endemic species.

That said, St Helena's habitats and species are also highly disturbed and threatened. The historic scale of habitat loss was massive, a swift and irreversible change brought about by people following settlement and fortification that has shaped and modified that landscape over the last five centuries.

What we found, what we heard and what we established.

The need to understand the obligations and restrictions St Helena would face with respect to the natural environment was raised. We haven't answered this question, and further investigation is needed to ensure clarity and understanding.

Uncertainty was also expressed as to whether potential OUV could be demonstrated because of the level of disturbance and scale of St Helena's habitats. The example of another world heritage site the Vallée de Mai in the Seychelles was put forward as offering a similar and rare experience of 'awe inspiring ecosystem' and at 19.5 ha, is similar in size to the core diversity area of the Peaks National Park, 17 ha. Size is not necessarily the issue. IUCN's report on St Helena's first nomination for High Peak and Diana's Peak considered that the very small areas nominated in 1986 might be large enough to be an effective plant conservation site but not a functioning ecosystem. The key lies in demonstrating ecosystem function, even when diversity and conservation is evident.

The 2011 bid identified "The island of St Helena", highlighting the range of habitat and species diversity and endemism. This broader approach sought to tackle the question of functionality. The bid didn't intend to extend status to the whole of the island but to a collection of sites, as featured on the map which was submitted to the UK Expert Panel. Although with the exception of the map there was no further information about boundaries.

Progress in conservation and habitat restoration on the island since 1986, and the knowledge gained through this, suggests that there is now some evidence of functioning ecosystems. The Peaks are considered the key site, home to 250 endemic species in 17 ha, and almost entirely dependent on the cloud forest, considered to have integrity but other sites could possibly be considered. These included Blue Point, Peak Dale Gumwoods and Prosperous Bay Plain.

Evidence to illustrate ecosystem integrity and function was proposed with respect to the invertebrate fauna where there is some knowledge of the ecology and ecological relationships. There is evidence that for example for the Peaks (Mendel, Ashmole & Ashmole, 2006¹) and

¹ Mendel, P. Ashmole, M. Ashmole (2006) Invertebrates of the Central Peaks and Peak Dale, St Helena – Final Report, St Helena National Trust, Overseas Territories Environment Programme.

Prosperous Bay Plain (Ashmole & Ashmole, 2004, Pryce, 2019²). There is a more information about vascular plants, bryophytes, lichens and invertebrates, than was available in 2011, as well as more information about the relationship between biodiversity and the ecosystem services they provide (for examples water security). However, there remain knowledge gaps in fungi, soil biota and an understanding of the relationships between biodiversity (both native and non-native) and ecological health and function. More research would be needed to determine what level of evidence base the island would need to satisfy in order to evidence ecosystem integrity and function.

The Panel stated that “*Future sustainable management will have to be carefully managed if access to the Island is improved.*” The legal and management framework for land use management and conservation has advanced since 2011. The Land Development Control Plan 2012 (LDCP) identifies 23 National Conservation Areas, of these 23, three are National Parks, six are Nature Reserves, five are Important Wirebird Areas and nine are Historic Conservation Areas. Additionally, 26 terrestrials and 1 marine Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) based on international standardised criteria have been proposed on St Helena.

The need for and ability to deliver sustainable management was tested during the construction of the airport (2012-2017) built along the eastern edge of the Central Basin on Prosperous Bay Plain (PBP), a unique semi-desert and one of the island’s key areas for endemic species where there are currently believed to be 26 species that have only ever been recorded in this area. It is also an important area for Wirebirds. An invertebrate survey of the Central Basin found that “there appears to be no evidence that the construction of the Airport adjacent to the site has had a significant impact on invertebrates present”. (Pryce, 2019). Similarly, conservation management during the construction to control feral cats and rats ensured Wirebird numbers remained high, and indeed peaked during the construction period.

Consistent effort over the last decade to build nursery and productive capacity has laid the ground work for a transformational change in scale of restoration efforts. The Peaks National Park Management Plan (2019-2024) sets out the Aims and Objectives driving action over the next five years. The St Helena Government are working closely with the RSPB to secure UK Aid to enable the island to considerably increase the scale at which it is currently working.

The proposal only put forward Criterion (x) amongst the natural criteria that could be considered. The question was therefore posed as to whether there were other criteria worth considering.

The resulting feedback was that potential to consider landscape (vii) and geology.

The whole island approach as adopted for the 2011, makes sense, but it does present dislocated sites. These could be ‘joined’ by including landscape considerations.

St Helena’s geographical location and isolation has determined the process of natural colonisation, in terms of the bird, plant, fungi and invertebrate species that reached St Helena’s shores and became established.

The island’s volcanic origin and landscape has shaped the natural processes of colonisation, succession, adaptation and island evolution.

² Ashmole, N.P. & Ashmole, M.J. (2004). The invertebrates of Prosperous Bay Plain, St Helena. Report for St Helena Government.

Pryce, D. (2019) Prosperous Bay Plain Invertebrate Survey 2018-19, commissioned by the Landscape and Ecology Mitigation Project

What about the Marine environment?

Opinion is that there is potential marine OUV. The mega fauna species were considered most notable. St Helena is recognised by experts as the best place in the world to interact with whale sharks (Dr Simon Pierce, Al Dove). The whale shark aggregations which have been found around the island with a sex ratio of 50:50 is unique in the world to date and considered to be “missing piece of the puzzle” by whale shark scientists (Al Dove presentation to St Helena’s NCA conference). More information needed to determine potential OUV.

Further advice needs to be sought from Dr Simon Pierce and Dr Al Dove.

What about Cultural Heritage?

The 2011 nomination adopted a broad whole island approach to cultural heritage, mirroring the natural bid, identifying key historic conservation areas and sites identified within the LDCP (2007) and HER³ (2012). The 2011 nomination proposed cultural criterion (vi). Expert advice confirmed that St Helena has potential OUV for cultural heritage and that there was potential to extend cultural values to: ii, iii, iv (weakest), and v. From amongst those spoken to, a strong interest was expressed in WHS. Jamestown is considered to provide the most likely site “from the Steps to Maldivia”, with the potential to include fortifications. It was recognised that if Jamestown was included more advice would be needed, and rigorous awareness raising with the community as to what would be the limitations and UNESCO obligations for this area and the need to ensure that the community are actively involved in steering the outcome.

Jamestown is described within the Jamestown Historic Conservation Area (LDCP, 2012) and the wharf forms part of the Heritage Coast HCA along with the fortifications of Ladder Hill, Rupert’s which extends to the liberated African burial grounds and Banks’ Battery. Lemon Valley is described as a separate HCA which aligns with the Conservation Management Plan (CMP). High Knoll is also a HCA with a CMP and too the French Properties of Longwood House, the Briars and Napoleon’s Tomb, managed under ... Plantation House, Knollcombes Boer Cemetery are the other two HCAs.

Development is considered a threat to the integrity and authenticity of Jamestown, the wharf and detached fortifications. It is also noted that neglect, through lack of resources, has perversely contributed to retaining values and features that might have been lost to development before robust planning systems are in place. Neglect and other threats – changing sea conditions, have also led to loss repairs and re-builds (following white ant introduction for example) have generally retained the character of buildings, using the local expertise and materials available at the time.

Extending the criteria provides an opportunity for a holistic broader approach which recognises that on a small island, everything, past, present and future, is connected.

Potential elements were identified:

1) East India Company wharf and Jamestown

Considered by all to be ideally the key element – question of critical mass and integrity if only part “The English East India Company (EIC) was the largest and most influential company the world has known. It rose to account for half the world’s trade. At the height of its rule in India it had a private

³ The HER has not been adopted under the LDCP. The Environment and Natural Resources Sub-Committee Report (Feb, 2019), endorsed by ExCo, recommended that the HER be completed, consulted upon and validated.

army twice the size of the British army. St Helena played a key role in bringing this about, particularly after the Dutch invasion and recapture by the English in 1673. During the early days of sail and trade with the Far East there were vital victualling stops, especially on the homeward run. After provisioning at Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, the next stop was the Cape. The EIC sailing ships, unable to stop there as it was a stronghold of the Dutch had to stop at St Helena. Had it not been for St Helena, the EIC would not have developed to be the global company it was, which in turn led to Britain taking over the vast subcontinent of India. St Helena is the first place outside Britain that the EIC took possession of as a British Island – English at the time as it took place before the union with Scotland. The uninhabited and isolated island was settled by people from England and was run as a company island.”

Meeting place of east and west in the middle of the Ocean – movement of people – immigration & settlement and indentured labour, goods, plants and animals that have shaped the island’s landscape and culture. “Where else in the world have so many people tread in each other’s footsteps in such a small space and place? How many footsteps trod the Wharf during the days of the EIC: sailors, officers and famous people, as visitors or prisoners when more than 1,000 ships a year called?”

2) Island fortifications “EIC landscape”

All part of the defensive system. Broader WHS with related but detached fortifications Ladder Hill, High Knoll, Banks’, Lemon Valley, and possibly isolated defences elsewhere – Sandy Bay.

Inclusion of Lemon Valley reinforces history of early settlement and fortification and growth of a different EIC life: fishermen’s cottages, plantation farming, quarantine and the care and management of African’s freed from trafficking.

3) Broader WHS taking in other elements of the EIC landscape

Wider EIC landscape – Opportunity to give recognition to generations of slaves who enabled the economic growth and development of the island during the EIC period and our role in the history of freeing Africans being trafficked across the Atlantic.

The significance of slaves on St Helena during the time of the EIC for almost two centuries connected with slavery in the Indian Ocean. “Slavery & racial integration”. “One of the significant aspects of global importance under the EIC was the introduction of slaves mostly from countries on the rim of the Indian Ocean. Slaves were introduced from the outset and became the largest of the three main groups of island society, the other two being settlers and their descendants and the military. There is not a lot written about slaves from the Indian Ocean, the part they played in the days of trade with the Far East and the great wealth made by several European nations. The significance of slaves on St Helena during the time of the EIC for almost two centuries connected with slavery in the Indian Ocean would stand alone to make the East India Company wharf and Jamestown a World Heritage site. Society under the EIC was divisive with different laws for the three main groups of settlers, military, slaves and other racial groups like Chinese Indentured labourers. Within a few generations after the abolition of slavery in 1834, these diverse groups became integrated with a common identity. This is of global significance where vestiges of slavery and race continue to be divisive.”

Evidence – to past values “Just how closely St Helena was connected to India, wealth and trade, can be seen that St Helena was transferred to the Crown under the 1833 India Act. St Helena was just

one article of a few lines. Leading up to India becoming independent this Act was cancelled except for the Article on St Helena. It is now called the St Helena Charter Act 1833.”

Our role as a prison island: Napoleon; Boer War Prisoners; Zulu Rebels who rose up against British rule and the port tax in Durban South Africa.

Overall, it is considered that the “journey” towards achieving WHS will be hugely beneficial and is worth it, even if the application does not succeed.