The ‘Sefton Coast Partnership’: an overview of its integrated coastal zone management

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Abstract

The Sefton Coast Partnership (SCP), based in Sefton, Merseyside, UK, is set within the context of and reported as an example of Integrated Coastal Zone Management. It has developed out of a well-established and successful Management Scheme and, since its inception, attempted with varying success to develop a ‘working partnership’ which has sustainable management at its heart and which is responsible for conservation and the needs of the local community. The history, function and structure of the SCP are described together with the problems that emerged as the partnership developed.

Keywords: ICZM, partnership, sustainable management, Sefton.

1 Introduction

The coastal zone is hugely significant in terms of sustainable management since this is where human activities affect and are inseparable from marine and terrestrial processes and environments both in developed countries and the Third World. Integrated management therefore requires a holistic, geographic approach and, in order to be successful, action at the local and regional level which is supported by the national government. This paper introduces the Sefton Coast Partnership as an example of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in
practice. This should not be taken to imply that the Partnership is ideal in every sense but that it illustrates the practical application of ICZM principles in the management of a valuable and dynamic environment. The emergence of the Sefton Coast Partnership in an area with a well-established management tradition highlights how ICZM with ‘partnership’ at its core may be the best way forward.

2 Location

Sefton is located on the North West coast of England between the estuaries of the Ribble and the Mersey (Figure 1). It is a sedimentary coast approximately 36kms long situated within the eastern Irish Sea, because of this location wave action is limited by the length of fetch, although the location also leads to a significant tidal range of 10 metres. The large conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester lie within easy travelling distance for those wishing to make day-trips.

Figure 1: Location map of the Sefton coast and surrounding areas, NW U.K.
3 Recent history

The recent evolution of the coast cannot be separated from human activities, in the north, around the Ribble estuary, the principal activities to influence the coast are land reclamation (Figure 2) and the dredging of a channel and subsequent maintenance with training walls within the Ribble, for the Port of Preston (now closed). The location of the dredged channel on the north side of the estuary accelerated the development of salt marsh on the south side that has subsequently been exploited through reclamation, mainly for agriculture, but seaward of the town it has been reclaimed for recreation and development; and, to some extent, to maintain the seafront adjacent to the beach (Plate 1a).

![Figure 2: Location map of the areas of reclamation and their dates, along the north Sefton coast.](image)

To the south, the Port of Liverpool expanded towards the mouth of the estuary and required increased channel depths to cater for larger ships over a longer tidal period. Working with the Port, in the late 1960’s, the local Council developed coastal defences in front of Crosby (Plate 1b), reclaiming land for recreation and making beneficial use of the material excavated for expansion of the port.
In the central area, subsequently referred to as Formby Point, sand dunes are the dominant features (Plate 2). These have experienced periods of accretion and erosion with the latest period of erosion commencing circa 1900. Prior to this date landowners had encouraged dune formation using traditional techniques, trees were planted on rear dune areas to control wind blown sand and as a crop to be harvested at a later date. It is perceived that the onset of erosion around 1900 might have been caused by the dredged channel for the Port of Liverpool refracting wave energy on to the Point [1], since this time the Point has been receding at an average rate of 4.5 metres per year, but this diminishes to the north and south until areas of accretion are reached.

Plate 1: Coastal defence features along the Sefton coast (a) Southport sea-wall during its construction and (b) Crosby sea-wall.

Plate 2: Coastal erosion features at Formby Point (a) Erosive face of foreshore dunes and (b) Former pedestrian pathway standing above the present, lowered, beach-level.
4 Context for ‘Integrated Coastal Zone Management’

4.1 ICZM: towards working partnerships?

As part of European Commission recommendations, member states are required to undertake a stocktake of the current management of their coastal zones considering the various interests, roles and concerns of all sectors at all levels; the relevant legislation and policy; and to identify inter-regional organisations and co-operation structures [2]. This work has been carried out in two reports, one for Scotland [3] and one for England [4]. The work of coastal partnerships in the north-west of England has also been examined [5].

Typical problems of delivering ICZM through working partnerships that were identified by participants are:

- Inadequate connections between plans
- Lack of strategic overview and direction
- Gap between plan making and plan implementation
- Lack of resources to implement plan
- Unbalanced contributions and commitment from partners
- Lack of power to take actions forward
- Problems with decision making, difficulties in reaching consensus
- Problems engaging stakeholders [3, 4, 5].

None of the reports attempt to define ‘partnerships’ although all make significant reference to them. A summary of the types of partnerships that they identify would be multi-stakeholder, multi-sectorial, often voluntary, seeking to achieve agreed objectives through some form of joint working, often meeting as steering groups, boards or forums and having documented aims, objectives and action plans.

All three reports agreed that partnerships had a role to play in the delivery of ICZM, considering them important to facilitate the exchange of information, involve all stakeholders, resolve conflict, breakdown sectorial barriers and establish joint objectives. There were also concerns expressed in relation to the need to clarify roles and responsibilities, ensure democratic accountability and the need to undertake monitoring and evaluation of partnerships [6].

The principals of ICZM for reference are [2]:

- Broad perspective
- Long term perspective
- Adaptive management
- Local specificity
- Working with natural processes
- Involvement of all parties concerned
- Support and involvement of relevant administrative bodies
- Use of a combination of instruments

It is worth considering, at this stage, why a partnership is a useful mechanism to deliver these principles, but first it is necessary to clarify what is understood to be a partnership in this context. A useful definition is supplied by the Audit Commission [7], who uses the term when describing otherwise independent
bodies who have agreed to co-operate to achieve a common goal and create a separate structure and plan to achieve the goal or goals. They then go on to consider reasons for working in partnership, one of which is to reduce the impact of organisational fragmentation, a particular problem on the coast. A working partnership promotes joint ownership, motivates participants, identifies and consolidates common ground; and provides “a vehicle for effective and positive change” [8], but perhaps most importantly it promotes communication.

The problems listed above and the principals for ICZM make it necessary not only to bring the relevant stakeholders together but to ensure that they communicate, so that conflicting objectives can be identified and reconciled. It also enables opportunities to be identified and better use to be made of resources. This will be illustrated with some examples below.

### 4.2 Sefton Coast Partnership

The case study is the Sefton Coast Partnership, which was established as the Sefton Coast Management Scheme in 1978 after a wide-ranging consultation exercise. Whilst its principal remit was conservation, this was considered within the context of urban regeneration in the surrounding area. For this reason, issues such as the development of recreation, education and the creation of jobs were considered to be important [9]. Problems giving rise to the need for the Management Scheme relate to the conflict between recreational pressures, the desire for nature conservation (Plate 3), the desire to maintain the sand dune system as a coastal defence and ineffective development control. Further complicated by the (then) structure of local government, which split the geographical area of the scheme between two authorities, a reorganisation led to the area being administered by one authority [10, 11] (Plate 4).

![Plate 3: Examples of important rare species found at the Sefton coast](image)

Plate 3: Examples of important rare species found at the Sefton coast (a) sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) and (b) Natterjack toad (*Bufo calamita*).

At its establishment the scheme was under the overall supervision of the Steering Group assisted by an advisory Working Party through which the project officer reported (Figure 3). Only the elected representatives of the local authority had voting rights on the Steering Group, it is noted that the Steering Group is an advisory body and as such has no direct authority over member organisations [9].
It is also stated that the plan developed for the scheme is advisory but seeks to provide commonly agreed goals and a schedule of actions that are agreed to be required in an effort to co-ordinate these actions and to introduce them into partners budgetary planning processes [11].

Plate 4: Aerial photographs of the National Trust section of Sefton coast (a) before management, taken 1972 and (b) after management, taken 1997.

Steering Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting:</th>
<th>Local Authority Members (5)</th>
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| Non-voting: |
| Countryside Commission |
| Nature Conservancy |
| National Trust |
| Sports Council |
| Forestry Commission |
| Territorial Army |

Working Party

| Local Authority Officers |
| Officials from bodies on the Steering Group |
| Project Officer |
| Field Staff representatives |

Local Nature Reserves & Monitoring Group

Project Officer

Local Authority Departments & other Agencies

Figure 3: Structure of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme [9].

The partnership was based on guidance from the Countryside Commission (CC) in ‘Local Authority Countryside Management Projects’ [13]. This identified the need for a co-ordinated approach to address problems that fall into the following two categories:
Problems too complex to be dealt with by individual land managers but too small or short term to be of major concern to local authorities.

Problems that cannot be solved by statutory planning instruments such as development control [13].

The CC focuses on the role of the project officer who, under the general supervision of a steering group and with “substantial delegated financial and administrative responsibilities” (ibid, p3), can work with stakeholders to address issues of conflict and identify and progress opportunities. They emphasise the need for the project, or partnership, to be related to government actions and policy and see the management plan as the mechanism for this. They also see the management plan serving other functions such as promoting public acceptance of actions; identifying opportunities and conflicts; defining objectives; setting out methods for resolving conflicts and doing work; identifying a work programme and linking this to longer term goals. Within the management plan of the Partnership a vision was set out (see below) that acts as a brief overarching statement that all partners could agree with.

Vision Statement of the Sefton Coast Partnership: “Our vision is for the Sefton Coast to be managed to ensure the conservation of one of the most important coastal areas in Europe for nature while being an asset to a healthy local economy and providing a much needed area for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Specifically, we accept the joint responsibility to ensure that the integrity and natural value of the dune system and estuaries is protected in perpetuity as one of the series of European nature areas.” [14]

In the early part of its life the partnership achieved some high profile, high value successes across a range of land ownerships and disciplines; evidence of which can still be seen on the site. It was observed at this time that this work would reduce the need for major physical works with low-key maintenance being the principal physical works carried out by the partnership subsequently [13, 15]. These high profile successes relating to the rejuvenation (over twenty years ago) of a substantially degraded area of sand dunes are still referred to by Partners as one of the major successes of the Partnership.

An important aspect of the work undertaken within the Partnership was bringing the most vulnerable parts of the coast under the control of organisations that shared a common interest in conserving coastal areas [16]. It should be said that corporately the Council has maintained a strong view that an integrated approach to the management of the coast is the optimum method of managing this resource giving evidence to the House of Commons Environment Committee to this effect in 1991 [17].

During the nineties the Partnership continued in much the same format with minor changes such as an increase in the number of Councillors represented on the steering group and a number of new members. All steering group meetings were open to the public [18]. There were no more major physical works carried out although under the Partnership there were a number of successful bids for
funding for projects developing nature conservation management and examining tourism in the area, amongst other initiatives. However, a number of Partners have related their feelings about the growing frustration that was felt by the non-voting members of the steering group during this time. This manifested itself through more infrequent attendance at the steering group and more emphasis was placed on the sub-groups where practical issues could be addressed.

Following discussion between the principal partners it was decided a reorganisation of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme was needed, and to discuss this a forum was arranged with an independent chair [18]. Following the forum, the Sefton Coast Management Scheme was re-launched as the Sefton Coast Partnership in 2000 [14].

The principal change associated with the move from Management Scheme to Partnership was one of power; the revised organisation all Partners had voting rights and the Councils representation was reduced from eight Councillors to three. The Chair was taken up by one of the voluntary organisations and while the Council was still a Partner it was identified that the partnership should be independent of the Council. The structure of the partnership was still to be determined at this stage but it had been identified that representation needed to be broadened. The existing vision statement was endorsed for the reformed partnership and new Partners to accept.

5 Conclusions

This description of the Partnership and its setting is important for two reasons. Firstly, the Partnership exists in its particular format because of the local characteristics, both temporal and spatial. It came about because of concerns over the physical state of the coast and so has to be considered within the context of societal attitudes and priorities at that point in time. The second reason this description is important is its concentration upon the management aspects of the Partnership; ICZM is by definition about the management process so it must consider what form this management process takes and what the nature of the organisation that delivers it is.

The transformation from Management Scheme to working partnership in the Sefton Coast Partnership is also an important example of how ICZM can be implemented with sustainability at its core. Sustainable management of the coastal zone, particularly on the light of global climate change, requires fluid and responsive strategies together with a mechanism which allows for rapid response to physical environmental change. The Partnership and ICZM in Sefton reflect strongly the local natural environment and its management history and this may be significant to success or failure in the future.

References


[16] Sefton Council, *Visit to the Dune Coast at Ainsdale Sands and Formby Point by the Policy and Resources (Land and Development) Sub-Committee*, Bootle, 1980.
