



## Terrestrial Protected Areas: A Pathway to Protection

### Executive summary

- This UK Overseas Territory (UKOT) is a success story and a shining beacon in a world where it has become common-place for unsustainable human activity to result in environmental deterioration and a decline in biodiversity.
- [‘Protect Sustain Inspire’](#), our new strategic framework for 2021-25, outlines our vision for these Islands, “Delivering environmental recovery and resilience through world-leading evidence-based sustainable management”. As such we recognise that we are stewards for an ecosystem in recovery, and we have a global responsibility to protect this uniquely situated biodiversity hotspot in the Southern Ocean.
- The creation of a Terrestrial Protected Area (TPA) across the entirety of South Georgia (SG) and the South Sandwich Islands (SSI) alongside the already established Marine Protected Area will result in **regulated and managed protection** for this UKOT. This will deliver environmental resilience and allow sustainable use.
- A phased approach will be adopted to reach this milestone involving our global community of stakeholders to ensure the management and monitoring is correct from the outset.
- The **South Georgia Protected Area** will have a focus on **holistic protection of the ecosystem** and **promotion of biodiversity** alongside **globally significant science and sustainable tourism**.
- The **South Sandwich Islands Protected Area** will recognise and maintain their **pristine nature**, absence of introduced species and strengthen the inherent protection that arises from their inaccessibility.
- An advisory group will be formed to identify sites which would benefit from more detailed management plans and/or stringent protection in the future. This will be data led and based on a programme of enhanced monitoring.
- All management plans will be made available for stakeholder review.

## Meeting International Obligations

The application of the UK's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity was extended to SGSSI in 2015. Accordingly the Government of SGSSI is committed to delivering its contribution to the implementation of the UK's CBD obligations with respect to SGSSI, as emphasised in its National Biodiversity Action Plan. A key part of implementation is the delivery of protected areas. Protected areas are also key components in delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 14 and 15.

The Government of SGSSI fully supports the aim of the UK Government to press for a new target to be agreed at the CBD for at least 30% of land and 30% of the ocean to be within protected areas to replace the previous commitments to ensure 17% of the world's terrestrial and freshwater habitats and 10% of the ocean is protected by 2020. SGSSI has already made a significant contribution, through its marine protected areas, to delivering on the proposed 30% ocean target. [Protect Sustain Inspire](#) sets out the desire to 'design and roll out island-wide terrestrial protection' so that we can make a similar contribution to that future target for land.

A protected area is defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as "*a geographically defined area, which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.*" Under South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands domestic legislation, a protected area would be designated under Part III of the Wildlife and Protected Areas Ordinance (2011) which makes provision for the Commissioner to designate "*any area of land [that] is in need of a high level of protection to preserve its special values*".

## Terrestrial Protection on South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands in 2021

In 2018, the Government of SGSSI commissioned an [extensive review](#) from the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre to determine options for strengthening terrestrial protection. The final range of options were drawn together following a long

consultative process and highlighted the global significance of the Territory in terms of wildlife and wilderness and the robust mechanisms already in place to manage many potential threats. In 2021 the Government of SGSSI committed to being stewards for this ecosystem in recovery setting a clear vision for the future underpinned by four guiding values. Reflecting upon the outcomes of the 2018 review, and ensuring that decisions meet our strategic objectives and support our values driven approach. How the Government sees the values being met is detailed in the table below.

<p><b>Environmental Protection</b></p> <p>This is fundamental to all activities.</p> <p>Need to demonstrate how the activity will support the ongoing environmental recovery</p>	<p><b>Minimising Environmental Impact</b> - The phase II design and rollout of monitoring to support the regulation and management of any TPA will identify change and provide evidence on which decisions can be taken about the need for site-specific management.</p> <p><b>Presence Provides Protection</b> - Visitors have a positive role to play in the protection of SG. The management plans provided for by the creation of an island wide terrestrial protection will help determine impact and whether that impact is negative.</p>
<p><b>Evidence-based decision-making</b></p> <p>Robust evidence gathered from trusted sources and experts will inform decisions</p>	<p><b>Continuing Long Term Studies</b> - It is intended that the Phase II monitoring programme, , will incorporate a long term monitoring programme. There already exists a great deal of data on the Territory’s wildlife and how the land is used by different groups. However, data were not gathered with management plans in mind and bringing this all together to inform our baseline will be important.</p> <p><b>Developing and Advocating Best Practise</b> - A range of monitoring approaches are being considered, these will make use of appropriate technologies and seek innovation for data collection.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>Our approach will be to ensure long-term sustainability and prevent nature or human activity being pushed too its limit</p>	<p><b>Precautionary Approach</b> - It is intended that the Phase I allocation will make clear that precautionary activity is a principle of our TPA designation.</p> <p><b>Sustainable Use</b> - There is a commitment to highly regulated visitor management. The TPA work seeks to strengthen the evidence base for these management plans.</p> <p><b>Sustainable Finances</b> - Funds (fees and voluntary donations) from visitors are reinvested into meeting the aims of delivering environmental recovery and resilience through world-leading evidence-based sustainable management.</p> <p><b>Enforcement</b> - The Wildlife and Protected Areas (WPA) Ordinance 2011 already sets out the enforcement options available to the Government of SGSSI resulting from non-compliance, but its effectiveness will be reviewed as a part of the programme implementation..</p>
<p><b>Openness</b></p> <p>Collaboration and consultation form an important part of our decision-making process</p>	<p>The 2018 review set out the options for terrestrial protection. The Phase I designation of an island wide TPA is the approach the Government of SGSSI has decided to take as a result of that evidence gathering exercise. Phase II monitoring programme will be open to consultation and the ongoing process of work carried out by any advisory body will inform that work for many years to come. The outcome of those discussions and their route to decision making will be publicly available.</p>

## The approach to terrestrial protection

### Phase I

A Protected Area which covers the whole of South Georgia and its offshore islands will be developed which has a focus on **holistic protection of the ecosystem** and **promotion of biodiversity** alongside **globally significant science and sustainable tourism**. Conservation objectives would be drawn from policies and would include:

- Protection of biodiversity (e.g. through robust biosecurity protocols)
- Environmentally-responsible science
- Promoting wilderness
- Facilitating sustainable visits
- Conservation and respect of cultural heritage
- Management, monitoring and control of invasive species

A Protected Area covering the entirety of the South Sandwich Islands (SSI) will be developed that recognises and maintain their **pristine nature**, absence of introduced species and strengthen the inherent protection that arises from their inaccessibility. Conservation objectives for the SSI would include:

- Protection of biodiversity (e.g. through robust biosecurity protocols)
- Environmentally-responsible science
- Promoting wilderness

The Wildlife and Protected Areas (WPA) Ordinance (2011) makes provision for the designation of TPAs by means of a 'Specially Protected Area Order'. Section 16(6) highlights that in addition to providing details of the features which are being protected, the Order must specify the boundaries of the area which is being designated and the conservation objectives for the area. In this instance it will be the entirety of the landmass.

In order to formalise current arrangements, and set the stage for Phase II gathering the information needed to further develop protection, we plan to designate the entirety of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands a TPA under the WPA.

Phase I will see the management of tourism and regulated activities, including expeditions, continue as it is now but with a recognition that permit conditions may have an increased focus on monitoring activities in order to inform Phase II.

## Phase II

Phase II will focus on the range of methods to identify assess, focus, manage and monitor refining regulation and management so it is more spatially explicit.

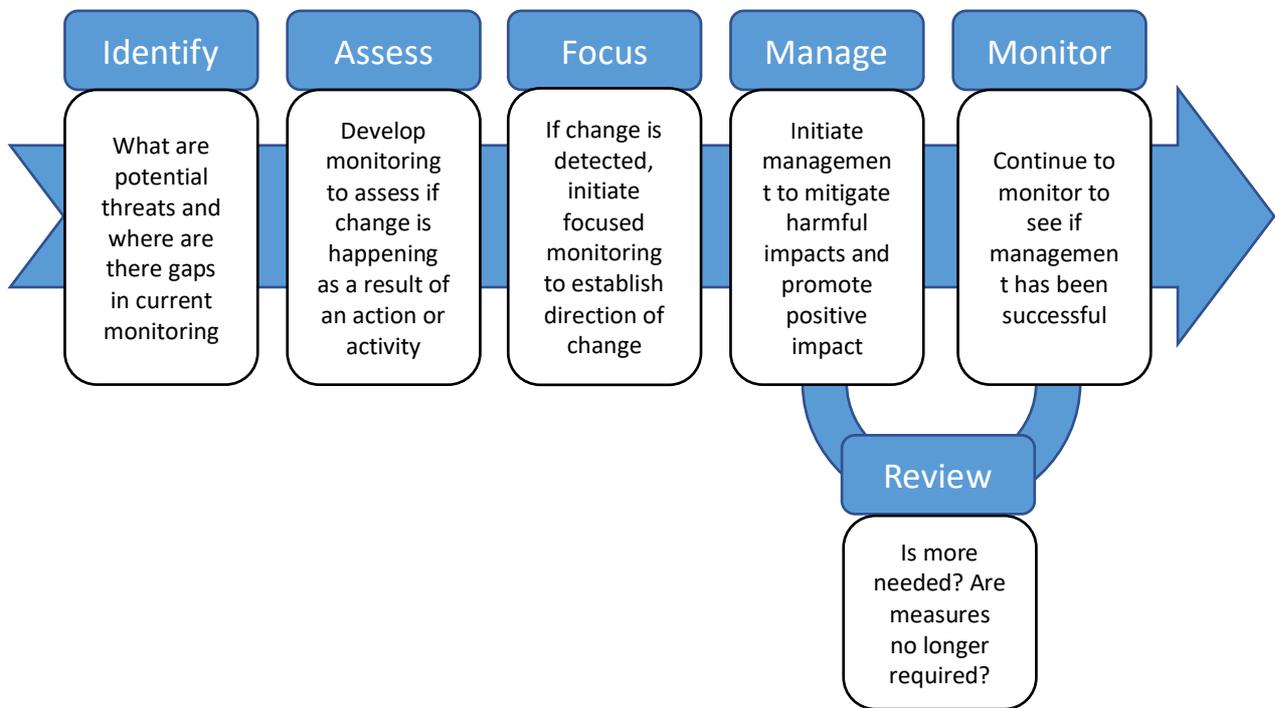
Phase I and Phase II will run in parallel albeit to different time frames. Building on the recommendations of the WCMC-UNEP report, Phase II will establish through a consultative process, how parts of the island are managed to deliver transparent conservation objectives and a sustainable approach to the use of the Islands. Placing sustainability at the heart of every visit is a key goal of the Government of SGSSI; creating island wide TPA is a pillar of successfully delivering this aim.

To achieve this, the Government of SGSSI will establish an advisory group of invited representatives from the spectrum of visitors including; the tourism industry, scientific community, government administration and relevant conservation groups. The initial aims of the group will be to:

- Review existing monitoring on SGSSI, map this against TPA objectives and propose how this can be further developed to inform ongoing management.
- Propose a monitoring programme and support visitor wide engagement in its successful delivery including working with stakeholders outside of the advisory group to facilitate success.
- Pull together the various policy strands and data to report to identify how additional layers of management can be developed to enhance the TPA.

Developing monitoring programmes is a long-term commitment and can be resource intensive. To ensure that future monitoring is targeted and that resources can be

appropriately channelled in to areas where a monitoring priority is identified, the Government of SGSSI will adopt a systematic approach.



As a step towards establishing a baseline and identifying monitoring opportunities, the Government will develop site inventories for each existing visitor landing site. These inventories will detail what is known about each site in terms of the physical environment, wildlife, vegetation, heritage, known pressures and current use. These will be updated and fact-checked during site visits from both Government officials and other interested stakeholders. It is anticipated that these inventories will form the basis for developing detailed monitoring and management plans for those areas. Although the inventories will initially be used for the current designated landing sites, the template can be used as a tool to gather the necessary information to develop a monitoring and management plan for any site or area including sites of special scientific or wildlife value such as Bird Island, Annenkov Island and Cooper Island.

In parallel to detailed site inventories, it is our intention to launch a citizen science programme get visitors engaged in the process of gathering data about the sites they visit inspiring visitors to be ambassadors for the region. The intention is that this will enhance their experience whilst also contributing to the sustainable management of the Territory.

## Our Pathway to Delivery

**Phase I** - The Island-wide management plan for phase I will draw together currently available information and policies and formalise conservation objectives. We aim to have developed the management plan, put it forward for stake-holder review and designated the protected areas in law by the end of 2022.

**Phase II** – 2021 will see the establishment of the advisory group and agree the terms of reference. In parallel, the Government of SGSSI will develop site inventories with the intention that a selection of these will be available for verification in the 2021/2022 season. However, an integral part to establishing monitoring for human impacts is the presence of visitors. This is likely to be limited in 2021/2022 due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, with unknown recovery in the subsequent years. It is currently not possible to set a definitive time frame on the end of phase II although it is hoped that this will be within 5 years of inception.