
Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (South Africa) No 1099 Bis

1 Basic data

State Party

South Africa

Name of property

Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape

Location

North Province

Inscription

2003

Brief description

Mapungubwe is set hard against the northern border of South Africa, joining Zimbabwe and Botswana. It is an open, expansive savannah landscape at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers. Mapungubwe developed into the largest kingdom in the sub-continent before it was abandoned in the 14th century. What survives are the almost untouched remains of the palace sites and also the entire settlement area dependent upon them, as well as two earlier capital sites, the whole presenting an unrivalled picture of the development of social and political structures over some 400 years.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

6 March 2014

2 Issues raised

Background

At the time of inscription in 2003 a buffer zone was not approved. Although a buffer zone of around 100,000 ha was mentioned in the nomination dossier, this was not marked on the maps supplied. It was also stated that a Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding had been drawn up with the objective of establishing the Limpopo-Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA), and that this very extensive area (5,040 km²), would, when established, encircle the property and constitute a very effective buffer zone.

Although the State Party subsequently delineated and gazetted a buffer zone for the property in 2009, this was not submitted to the World Heritage Committee for assessment and possible approval. This buffer zone did not extend to the east of the property and it was within this area that coal mining licences were granted in 2008.

Concern over these mining approvals led to a 2009 Reactive Monitoring mission. The mission report commented that the 2009 delimitation of the buffer zone did not include the zone east of the property and therefore did not protect the OUV of the property and did not match the buffer zone envisioned in the nomination dossier.

A further WHC/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission in 2012 also recommended that the 2009 buffer zone should be formally increased to incorporate a seven kilometre stretch east of the property in order to allow a buffer zone around the whole boundary within South Africa, as envisaged at the time of inscription. This mission noted that a large number of applications for prospecting rights had been submitted in the nationally adopted buffer zone, some of which had been approved and that there was a clear need for protection policies within the Buffer Zone which prohibit opencast and underground mining.

At that time, the State Party acknowledged that there was no consensus among the various institutions and stakeholders regarding the meaning, purpose, nature and consequently extent of the property's buffer zone.

In the SOC report submitted to the World Heritage Committee in 2012, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies noted that the mining issues had highlighted the need for a buffer zone to be formally put in place around the property, as envisaged at the time of inscription, and with appropriate planning controls to protect the landscape context and setting, particularly in relation to mining, in relation to the apparent intention of the State Party to authorise further mining projects. The State Party in its 2012 report stated that the owners of the properties making up the 7 km of land to the east of the property had agreed to be incorporated into the buffer zone and that a legal agreement between the land-owners and the State Party was under development.

The World Heritage Committee in decision 37 COM 7B.43 (37th session, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2013) requested the State Party to submit a minor boundary modification for the buffer zone that clarified the policies for protecting the property with respect to mining in the buffer zone and in relation to "off-set benefits".

Acting upon this request, the State Party worked on a revision of the 2009 buffer zone during 2013 and as a part of the process invited an ICOMOS Advisory mission to visit the property for consultation. An ICOMOS expert visited the proposed buffer zone from 18-20 March 2014.

The mission considered progress made in establishing a buffer zone for the property that would cover land to the east of the boundary, and progress with the establishment of the Limpopo-Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA).

Modification

The State Party acknowledges that in the nomination dossier the area of the buffer zone was erroneously given as around 100,000 hectares, whereas the area described was much larger. This large area had been defined on the basis of the willingness of farm owners in the vicinity of the property to allow their farms to be part of the buffer zone, in order to avoid having their farms destroyed by mining, rather than to protect the attributes that convey OUV.

This rationale was also the case with the existing nationally approved 2009 buffer zone of 237,100 hectares, which the State Party also acknowledges does not extend to cover all areas that are necessary for the effective protection of the property's OUV.

In order to define a buffer zone that does aim to protect OUV, an assessment of land around the property was undertaken that has enabled the State Party to map out what it considers to be a more effective buffer zone, informed by distribution of archaeological sites, view shed protection and catchment protection areas. The result of this analysis shows that the archaeological sites associated with Mapungubwe are mainly distributed along the river, while fewer are located in the lands of the southern part of the existing buffer zone.

Based on these investigations, the State Party has proposed a buffer zone that is a reduction in area from that proposed at the time of inscription and a reduction from that proposed in 2009 to the west and south of the property, while introducing a buffer zone to the east to bring it up close to the existing Vele mining area.

Implications for legal protection and management arrangements

In terms of the National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act, the Minister may declare an area as a protected environment as a buffer zone for a World Heritage property. It is stated that both the property and its proposed buffer zone are accorded protected area status. Within a protected area, mining is prohibited.

The State Party in its justification for this buffer zone, states that "It will be effective in maintaining a reasonable balance between the conservation, biodiversity and heritage priorities on the one hand and the national development priorities on the other."

The State Party has commissioned the development of an Environmental Management Framework to advise on specific land uses for these areas and regulatory tools. Both of these have yet to be defined.

ICOMOS notes that, what is not said, but can be assumed, is that the reduced buffer zone will allow mining activities to take place beyond its revised boundary.

What is also unclear is the status of existing mining licences within the proposed buffer zone and within the property. A report on 'The Audit of land use activities in and around Mapungubwe cultural landscape World Heritage site and the negotiations framework for the review of the Mapungubwe buffer zone' of September 2013 notes a relatively large number of prospecting and exploration licenses. 157 applications between the year 2008 and 2010 were accepted by the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) in the proposed new buffer zone and also in the property and 43 were issued (the difference between accepted and issued is unclear). The DMR had not provided information on the status of these accepted applications and issued permits, when the report was finalized in September 2013. They cover one farm in the property and seven farms within the proposed buffer zone.

In terms of 'off-setting', the State Party reports that it has finalised biodiversity off-set negotiations with Vele Colliery and that a copy of an agreement will be submitted shortly to the World Heritage Centre.

The rationale presented by the State Party to justify the proposed buffer zone seems valid. The purpose of a buffer zone should be to protect the attributes of OUV of the property. The State Party, in a convincing way, has shown that the main distribution of archaeological sites related to those that convey OUV are located in a zone along the Limpopo River. There are very few archaeological sites relating to Mapungubwe kingdom in the southern parts of the buffer zone suggested in the nomination dossier of 2003 or in the buffer zone gazetted in 2009. The proposed new buffer zone covers all areas with known archaeological sites relating to the Mapungubwe kingdom.

The reduced buffer zone is still of a substantial size. The distances between the outer border of the proposed revised buffer zone and the border of the core area vary between 15 and 7 kilometres. The landscape of the buffer zone, mainly bush covered game farms, is lined with low ridges that effectively block out most views of existing and possible future mining activities outside of the borders of the buffer zone. Therefore the proposed revised buffer zone is of a large enough size to protect the property from potentially unwanted visual impacts of activities outside the buffer zone.

The farming and wildlife protection activities, dominating the land use in the proposed buffer zone, do not constitute a threat to the attributes of OUV.

ICOMOS considers that what is less clear is the strength of controls within the buffer zone, particularly in relation to mining activities. Although it is stated that the buffer zone along with the property is a protected area, and that within protected areas mining is prohibited, other documents provided appear to portray a less clear picture.

A report on 'The Audit of land use activities in and around Mapungubwe cultural landscape World Heritage site' of September 2013 describes a large number of prospecting and exploration licenses which DMR has issued up until 2010 – not only on farms in the proposed new buffer zone, but also in the property. The report does not clearly state whether these prospecting and exploration licenses will be closed or not.

ICOMOS considers that although the delineation of the proposed buffer zone is satisfactory, the status of current licenses, in relation to South African mining legislations, both in the proposed buffer zone and also in the property, is not clear.

Confirmation is needed that existing mining licences will not remain active within the buffer zone or within the property, and that no further licences will be accepted or issued, in accordance with the protected status of both the buffer zone and the property.

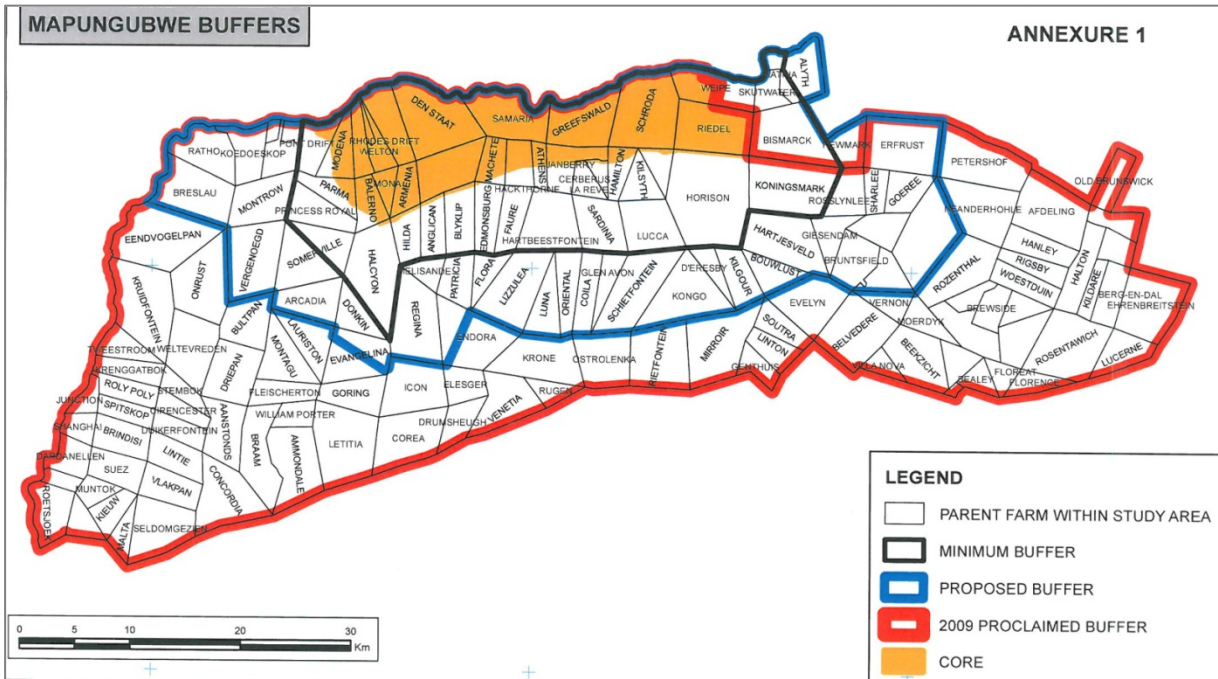
Furthermore details need to be provided of the Environmental Management Framework for the proposed buffer zone that will specify approved land uses and related regulatory tools.

3 ICOMOS Recommendations

Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the proposed minor modification to the boundary of the buffer zone for Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, South Africa, be **referred back** to the State Party in order to allow it to:

- Confirm that the proposed buffer zone will be a protected area where mining is prohibited;
- Confirm that existing mining licences will be closed within the buffer zone and the property, and that no further licences will be accepted or issued, in accordance with the protected status of both the buffer zone and the property;
- Provide details of the Environmental Management Framework for the proposed buffer zone including approved land uses and related regulatory tools;
- Provide details of 'off-setting' in relation to the Vele Colliery, as previously requested by the World Heritage Committee.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the buffer zone