



Access and Sensitive Features Appraisal

Coastal Access Programme

This document records the conclusions of Natural England’s appraisal of any potential for environmental impacts from our proposals to establish the England Coast Path in the light of the requirements of the legislation affecting Natura 2000 sites, SSSIs, NNRs, protected species and Marine Conservation Zones.

Skegness to Mablethorpe

21 March 2017

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This appraisal should be read alongside Natural England’s related Coastal Access Report in which the access proposal is fully described and explained

1. Our approach

Natural England's approach to protection of sensitive features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in section 4.9 Coastal Access: Natural England's Approved Scheme 2013¹. We call our internal processes to support this approach 'Access and Sensitive Features Appraisal' or ASFA.

Our final published proposal for a stretch of England Coast Path is preceded by detailed local consideration of options for route alignment, the extent of the coastal margin and any requirement for restrictions, exclusions or seasonal alternative routes. The proposals are thoroughly considered before being finalised and initial ideas may be modified or rejected during the iterative design process, drawing on the range of relevant expertise available within Natural England.

Evidence is also gathered as appropriate from a range of other sources which can include information and data held locally by external partners or from the experience of local land owners and occupiers. The approach includes looking at any current visitor management practices, either informal or formal. It also involves discussing our emerging conclusions as appropriate with key local interests such as land owners or occupiers, conservation organisations or the local access authority. In these ways, any nature conservation concerns are discussed early and constructive solutions identified as necessary.

The conclusions of our assessment are certified by both the member of staff responsible for developing the access proposal and the person responsible for considering any environmental impacts. This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

2. Scope

In this part of the document we define the geographic extent for the appraisal and the features that are included. Note that this appraisal is concerned with ecological, geological and geomorphological features; any other possible sensitivities, including landscape and historic features, are discussed in our coastal access report.

2.1 Geographic extent

The Lincolnshire coast between Skegness and Mablethorpe.

The following sections of coast are referred to in this appraisal:

- Skegness to Ingoldmells Point
- Ingoldmells Point to Anderby Creek
- Anderby Creek to Sutton on Sea
- Sutton on Sea to Mablethorpe

See Overview Map A: Key Map – Skegness to Mablethorpe.

2.2 Designated sites

The following designated sites are considered in this appraisal – see Overview Map C: Key statutory environmental designations – Skegness to Mablethorpe:

- Greater Wash pSPA
- Chapel Point to Wolla Bank SSSI
- Sea Bank Clay Pits SSSI

2.3 Context

The Greater Wash pSPA includes the coastline between Great Yarmouth in the south and Bridlington Bay in the north. It extends seaward from mean high water to a maximum of approximately 30km.

Potential impacts of the England Coast Path on this site will also be considered in our appraisals for the following stretches (see map - Greater Wash pSPA and its interaction with the England Coast Path):

- Easington to Filey Brigg
- Humber Bridge to Easington
- Mablethorpe to Humber Bridge
- Sutton Bridge to Skegness
- Hunstanton to Sutton Bridge
- Weybourne to Hunstanton

Two stretches of England Coast Path along the Norfolk coast, between Sea Palling and Weybourne & Hopton-on-Sea and Sea Palling, are already open. Our appraisal of potential impacts on sensitive features for these stretches was carried out before proposals for the Greater Wash pSPA had been made.

2.4 Designated features

Features – of the designated sites listed in 2.2	Greater Wash pSPA	Chapel Point to Wolla Bank SSSI	Sea Bank Clay Pits SSSI
A001 <i>Gavia stellata</i> ; Red-throated diver (Non-breeding)	X		
A065 <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ; Common scoter (Non-breeding)	X		
A177 <i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i> ; Little gull (Non-breeding)	X		
A191 <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> ; Sandwich tern (Breeding)	X		
A193 <i>Sterna hirundo</i> ; Common tern (Breeding)	X		
A195 <i>Sternula albifrons</i> ; Little tern (Breeding)	X		
S4 <i>Phragmites australis</i> swamp and reed beds			X
S12 <i>Typha latifolia</i> swamp			X
S21 <i>Scirpus maritimus</i> swamp			X
Aquatic plant assemblage			X
Standing waters			X
FB (Finite buried interest) – Quaternary Of East Anglia		X	

2.5 Other features about which concerns have been expressed

Feature	Conservation interest
Breeding waders	Active management of HLS agreement land to improve wet grassland habitat for breeding waders

3. Baseline conditions and environmental sensitivities

In this part of the document we identify any of the features mentioned above that are potentially sensitive to changes in access, and rule out from further consideration those that are not.

3.1 Non-breeding sea birds

Composition of feature group
A001 <i>Gavia stellata</i> ; Red-throated diver A065 <i>Melanitta nigra</i> ; Common scoter A177 <i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i> ; Little gull
Current conservation status and use of the site by features
<p>The Greater Wash pSPA covers an extensive area of marine waters. Non-breeding seabirds use in-shore and off-shore marine waters for maintenance behaviours (resting, preening) and foraging.</p> <p>The number of little gull in the Greater Wash is the largest of any inshore area in the UK. 8.9% of the UK wintering red-throated diver population can be found in the Greater Wash, making it the second most important site in the UK for red-throated diver.</p> <p>Red-throated diver uses the Lincolnshire coast in significant numbers and is present during the winter period (November to March inclusive)</p> <p>Dense flocks of common scoter are consistently found in the mouth of The Wash and to the north of Gibraltar Point, making the Greater Wash area the fourth most important UK site for non-breeding common scoter.</p> <p>During severe weather conditions at sea, small numbers of these non-breeding species may take refuge in creeks, lagoons, harbours or sheltered bays, for short periods of time.</p>
Sensitivities to changes in access
<p>These species are not generally present close in-shore and the spatial separation from people on the shore is large enough to conclude that there is no ecological sensitivity to consider in this appraisal.</p> <p>Small numbers of red-throated divers and other non-breeding sea birds may be present at sheltered water-bodies closer to the shore during periods of severe weather at sea. Records show these to occur infrequently in very small numbers. Therefore the risk of causing significant increased disturbance to the pSPA population in these conditions is negligible enough to conclude that there is no ecological sensitivity to consider in this appraisal.</p>

3.2 Breeding terns

Composition of feature group
<p>A191 <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>; Sandwich tern</p> <p>A193 <i>Sterna hirundo</i>; Common tern</p> <p>A195 <i>Sternula albifrons</i>; Little tern</p>
Current conservation status and use of the site by features
<p>The Greater Wash pSPA covers an extensive area of marine waters. The designation is complemented by existing SPAs that include breeding sites for terns. Breeding tern's use of the area covered by the Greater Wash pSPA is concentrated at breeding sites and adjacent marine waters where the birds forage. Details of foraging zones are given in the Departmental Brief prepared to support the proposed designation².</p>
Sensitivities to changes in access
<p>Breeding terns could be sensitive to changes in access to the coast that lead to increased disturbance affecting either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breeding sites; or, • areas used for foraging and flights between these areas and breeding sites. <p>There are no known breeding sites for terns on this stretch of coast. The closest breeding site to this stretch is the little tern colony at Gibraltar Point, which extends from 6km south of the start point at Skegness. Little tern have also been known to occasionally attempt to nest at Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes National Nature Reserve, which extends from 0.25km north of the end point at Mablethorpe.</p> <p>Terns forage mainly off-shore and return to the breeding colony to feed adult partners or chicks. There are many tern breeding colonies located around the English coastline where current public access exists. It is a common occurrence that terns forage in waters near to people on the shore, or commute between protected nesting areas and foraging areas, over publicly accessible areas and in the presence of walkers and their dogs.</p> <p>There is no ecological sensitivity to consider in the appraisal.</p>

3.3 Wetland habitats

Composition of feature group
<p>S4 <i>Phragmites australis</i> swamp and reed beds</p> <p>S12 <i>Typha latifolia</i> swamp</p> <p>S21 <i>Scirpus maritimus</i> swamp</p> <p>Aquatic plant assemblage</p> <p>Standing waters</p>
Current conservation status and use of the site by features

Sea Bank Clay Pits SSSI consists of five isolated clay pits; Sandilands Pit, Huttoft Bank Pit, Wolla Bank Reedbed, Wolla Bank Pit and Chapel Pit. The SSSI is important for its aquatic plant assemblage and also supports marginal wetland vegetation associated with standing open water, which consists of flooded clay workings with slightly brackish water. The open water and wetlands provide habitat for a range of invertebrates, especially water beetles.

Units 1,2,4,and 5 are considered to be in favourable condition (07/2009). Unit 3 (Wolla Bank Reedbed) is considered to be in unfavourable recovering condition. Excavation was undertaken in 2011 to rejuvenate the reedbed and make it more suitable for breeding birds such as reed bunting and reed warbler.

Sensitivities to changes in access

There is a possible sensitivity if the access proposal were to lead to localised trampling of vegetation. The wetland habitats are also used by breeding and non-breeding birds that could be sensitive to increased disturbance by people and/or their dogs.

3.4 Geological

Composition of feature group

FB (Finite buried interest) – Quaternary Of East Anglia

Current conservation status and use of the site by features

Site of international importance for its buried Holocene inter tidal sediments including interbedded peats, saltmarsh and shelly clays which record evidence of sea level change.

The geological interest feature is buried below the beach and under the sea at high tides. Parts of the feature may be seen at extreme low tides (usually March and September equinoxial spring tides).

The site is considered to be in favourable condition.

Sensitivities to changes in access

The feature is not sensitive to changes in access as it is buried below the beach and only occasionally exposed close to mean low water for short periods. Continued sediment supply through the Lincshore beach nourishment scheme is ensuring that the fossil saltmarsh and forest features continue to be protected from coastal erosion.

There is no geological sensitivity to consider in the appraisal.

3.5 Breeding waders

Composition of feature group
<p>Vanellus vanellus; lapwing</p> <p>Tringa tetanus; redshank</p> <p>Numenius arquata; Curlew</p> <p>Gallinago gallinago; Snipe</p>
Current conservation status and use of the site by features
<p>Conservation management to improve conditions for breeding waders is being undertaken on HLS agreement land at Chapel-out-Marsh and Anderby Marsh Nature Reserve.</p>
Sensitivities to changes in access
<p>Efforts to encourage breeding waders could be sensitive to changes in access that lead to direct damage to nests or increased disturbance in their vicinity.</p>

4. Potential for interaction

In this part of the document we identify places where sensitive features are present *and* whether there could, or will not, be an interaction with proposed changes in access.

4.1 Skegness to Ingoldmells Point

Outline of changes in access
<p>The proposed route from Skegness to Ingoldmells Point uses existing walked routes, public rights of way along the promenade and a length of foreshore.</p> <p>From Skegness the trail follows the sea defence before continuing along a concrete path within the boundary of North shore Golf Course. The route then continues along the top of the beach before re-joining the sea-defence at Seathorne.</p> <p>The beach and foreshore is currently accessible and well used. There are access points from the sea-defence to the beach at regular intervals. The beach adjacent to the popular holiday destinations of Skegness, Seathorne and Ingoldmells is particularly well used.</p> <p>For more detail see Chapter 1 of the published report.</p>
Potential for interaction (or lack of it)
<p>No potential for interaction between the access proposal and the features identified in Part 3 along this section of the route.</p>

4.2 Ingoldmells Point to Anderby Creek

Outline of changes in access
<p>The proposed route from Ingoldmells Point to Anderby Creek uses lengths of foreshore and existing walked routes.</p> <p>From Ingoldmells Point the trail follows the sea defence to Chapel Point before continuing along the top of the beach. It then crosses to the landward side of the dunes and continues through the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park to Anderby Creek.</p> <p>The beach and foreshore is currently accessible and well used. There are access points to the beach at regular intervals, including several access points with car parks. The beach adjacent to the popular holiday destinations of Ingoldmells and Chapel St Leonards is particularly well used.</p> <p>For more detail see Chapter 2 of the published report.</p>
Potential for interaction (or lack of it)

Wetland habitats:

The proposed route for England Coast Path passes seawards alongside the boundary of Wolla Bank Reedbed (Unit 3 of Seabank Clay Pits SSSI - see map: Chapel Point to Wolla Bank and Sea Bank Clay Pits SSSIs, Anderby Nature Reserve & Chapel Out Marsh HLS), where it follows an existing walked route within the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park. There is a car park adjacent to this part of the SSSI has been in use for many years.

A stock-proof fence has been installed which prevents people (and their dogs) using the path from entering the site at this point. As well as protecting the wetland habitat from possible trampling, this separation reduces the risk of disturbance to birds that use the wetland area. The reeds themselves anyway provide good cover for the birds throughout the year.

Breeding waders:

The potential for interaction with two Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements with management areas on non-designated land directly adjacent to the trail was also considered. We concluded that there was no potential for interaction between the access proposal and the interest features (breeding waders);

Chapel-out-Marsh: the route follows an existing walked route which is securely fenced off from the HLS management area which prevents disturbance by users and/or dogs straying on to the area. Natural screening is also provided by mature scrub. The car park to the north at Wolla Bank has also been in use for many years.

Anderby Marsh Nature Reserve: the route follows an existing walked route which is flanked by a belt of mature scrub which provides natural screening and an effective barrier to disturbance by users and/or dogs straying onto the area.

No potential for interaction between the access proposal and the features identified in Part 3.

4.3 Anderby Creek to Sutton on Sea

Outline of changes in access

The proposed route from Anderby Creek to Sutton-on-Sea uses lengths of existing walked routes, public rights of way and one length where the trail is not using an existing walked route.

From Anderby Creek the trail follows a public footpath before continuing through the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park on the landward side of the dunes. It then joins the sea-defence at Huttoft Car Terrace to Sutton-on-Sea.

The beach and foreshore is currently accessible and well used. There are access points to the beach at regular intervals, including several access points with car parks. The beach adjacent to the popular holiday destination of Sutton-on-Sea is particularly well used.

For more detail see Chapter 3 of the published report.

Potential for interaction (or lack of it)

No potential for interaction between the access proposal and the features identified in Part 3.

4.4 Sutton on Sea to Mablethorpe

Outline of changes in access

The proposed route from Sutton-on-Sea to Mablethorpe uses lengths of existing walked routes and public highway.

From Sutton-on-Sea the trail follows the sea-defence to Queens Park where it takes a slight inland diversion on a public highway before re-joining the sea-defence to Mablethorpe Amusement Park. Here the route continues through Quebec Road carpark and along Quebec Road before climbing onto the dunes to North End.

The beach and foreshore is currently accessible and well used. There are access points to the beach at regular intervals, including several access points with car parks. The beach adjacent to the popular holiday destination of Sutton-on-Sea and Mablethorpe is particularly well used.

For more detail see Chapter 4 of the published report.

Potential for interaction (or lack of it)

No potential for interaction between the access proposal and the features identified in Part 3.

5. Establishing and maintaining the England Coast Path

In this part of the document we describe how the access proposal would be implemented and arrangements for ongoing management and maintenance once coastal access rights are in place.

Note that before the access proposal can be taken forward, the coastal access report must first be considered by the Secretary of State in light of any representations, any objections from affected owners or occupiers and the Appointed Person's recommendations as to how any objections should be determined.

5.1 Establishment

5.1.1 Works on the ground

Once approval for a coastal access report is received from the Secretary of State, any necessary works can be carried out on the ground to make the trail fit for use and prepare for opening. In this case, works on the ground would be carried out by Lincolnshire County Council.

An estimate of the total cost of works needed to establish the trail is given in our coastal access report for the stretch. The cost of establishment works will be met by Natural England.

No establishment works are required within boundary of the designated areas therefore it is not envisaged SSSI assent will be required.

5.1.2 Implementation of mitigation measures

No mitigation measures are required to be implemented.

5.1.3 Local restrictions or exclusions

Where specific restrictions or exclusions have been included in the proposal and are approved by the Secretary of State, Natural England will give the necessary directions before public rights come into force to make the rights subject to those restrictions or exclusions.

5.2 Maintenance

Where there is a need for ongoing maintenance of any special measures proposed, this will become part of longer term arrangements for upkeep of the trail. An overall estimate of the ongoing cost of maintaining stretches of the England Coast Path is given in the relevant part of our report for the stretch.

5.3 Monitoring

Monitoring of the protected site will continue through established programmes including our common standards monitoring protocols. The access authority will be responsible for ongoing monitoring of trail condition. Natural England will be tracking general trends, including in the number of people using the path, as part of our evaluation of the coastal access programme nationally.

5.4 Future changes

The access proposals in this document are designed to ensure appropriate protection of sensitive features, taking account of any mitigation measures that are included. The coast is a dynamic environment and in designing the access proposals we have taken account of any changes predicted by the Environment Agency as a result of coastal erosion or other geomorphological processes. Should it be necessary in the future to identify a new alignment for the trail in line with 'roll back' proposals in the stretch report, due care will be taken at that stage to minimise any potential impacts of this change on sensitive features. The same will be true if any unforeseen other changes arise in the future that may require us to propose a variation of the access arrangements described in these proposals, following due procedures.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Overall conclusion –Greater Wash pSPA

6.1.1 Population level effects

Feature- or feature group	Conclusion
Non-breeding sea birds	No possible adverse effects from the access proposal have been identified.
Breeding terns	No possible adverse effects from the access proposal have been identified.

6.1.2 In combination assessment

No non-significant effects have been identified as a result of this access proposal and therefore in combination assessment is not required.

Note that we are developing several other England Coast Path stretch proposals that could affect Greater Wash SPA (see section 2.3 of this document for details). We will carry out a separate appraisal for each of these access proposals once the details have been finalised.

6.1.3 Overall screening decision

In the light of this appraisal, Natural England has reached this conclusion about the new access proposal: (Mark one box only with an X as appropriate)

No likely significant effect- as the new access proposal is unlikely to have a significant effect on Greater Wash pSPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, (taking into account any proposed mitigation measures) no further Habitats Regulations assessment is required;

OR

Likely significant effect - as the new access proposal is likely to have a significant effect on Greater Wash pSPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects (despite any proposed mitigation measures), appropriate assessment is required to consider whether the new access proposal may proceed.

6.2 Overall conclusion - SSSI

In the light of this appraisal, Natural England has concluded that the new access proposal:
(Mark one box only with an X below)

complies with Natural England's duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of the SSSI, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions¹ - and accordingly the new access proposal may proceed as finally specified in this template

OR

would not comply with the duty referred to in (a) – and accordingly permission/ authorisation/ assent should not be given for the new access proposal in the form finally specified in this template, for the following reasons:

Reasons (where second box is ticked):

¹The reference in 7.2 above to Natural England's functions includes its balanced general purposes for access, nature conservation and landscape under the NERC Act 2006, any specific statutory duties it may have to deliver specific improvements to public access, and the access-related policies and priorities it periodically agrees with Defra.

7. Certification

7.1 Certification – access proposal

I agree with the conclusions of this appraisal and am satisfied that the final access proposal, incorporating any special measures, is the least restrictive option necessary to ensure appropriate protection of sensitive features.		
Signed: 	Name: Emily Ledder	Date: 21/03/2017

7.2 Certification – environmental impacts

I agree with the conclusions of this appraisal and am satisfied that potential environmental impacts of the access proposal on Greater Wash pSPA have been fully addressed.		
Name: Michael Meadows	Signed: 	Date: 21/03/2017
I agree with the conclusions of this appraisal and am satisfied that potential environmental impacts of the access proposal on Chapel Point to Wolla Bank SSSI and Sea Bank Clay Pits SSSI have been fully addressed.		
Name: Claire Weaver	Signed: 	Date: 21/03/2017

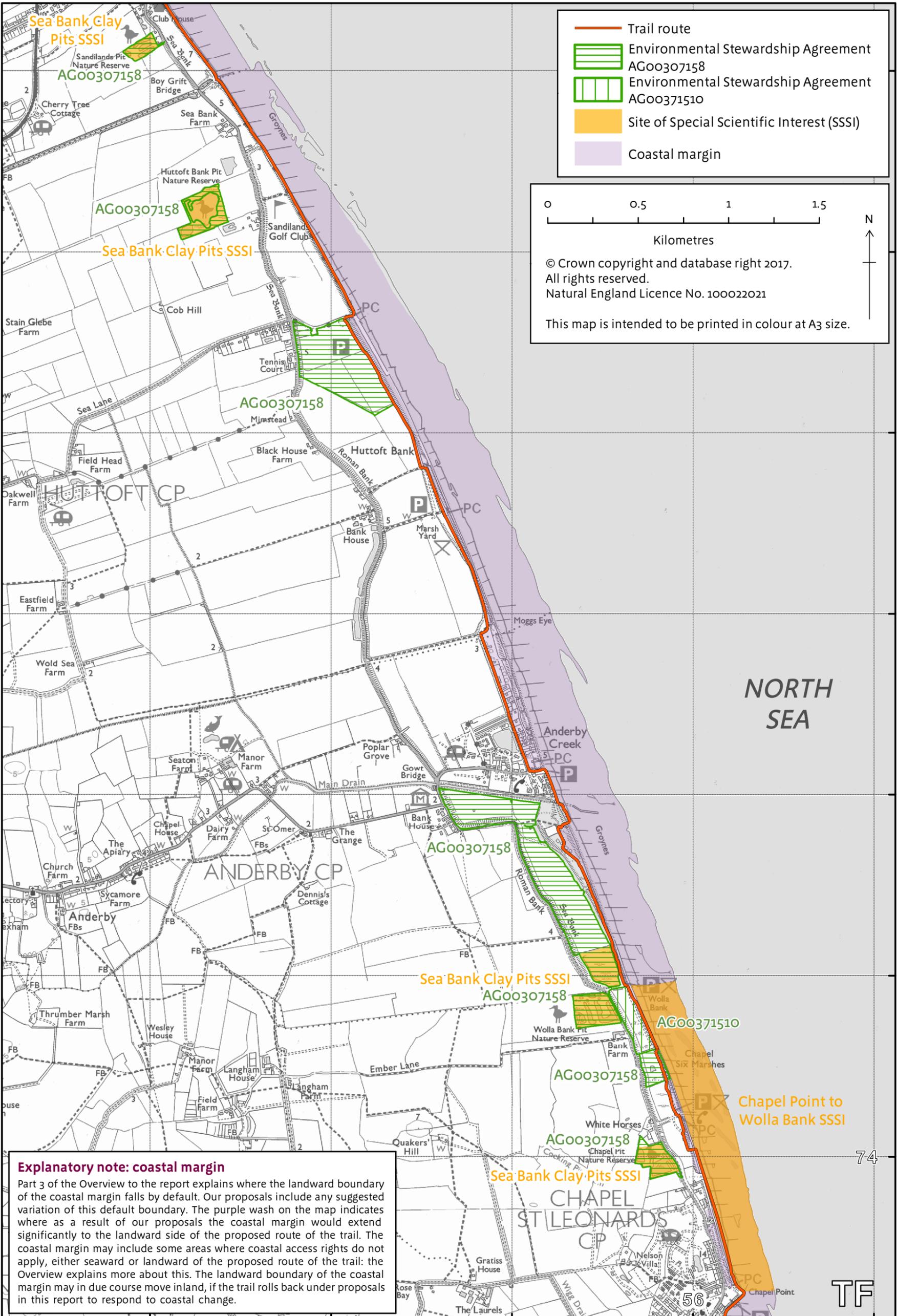
8. References

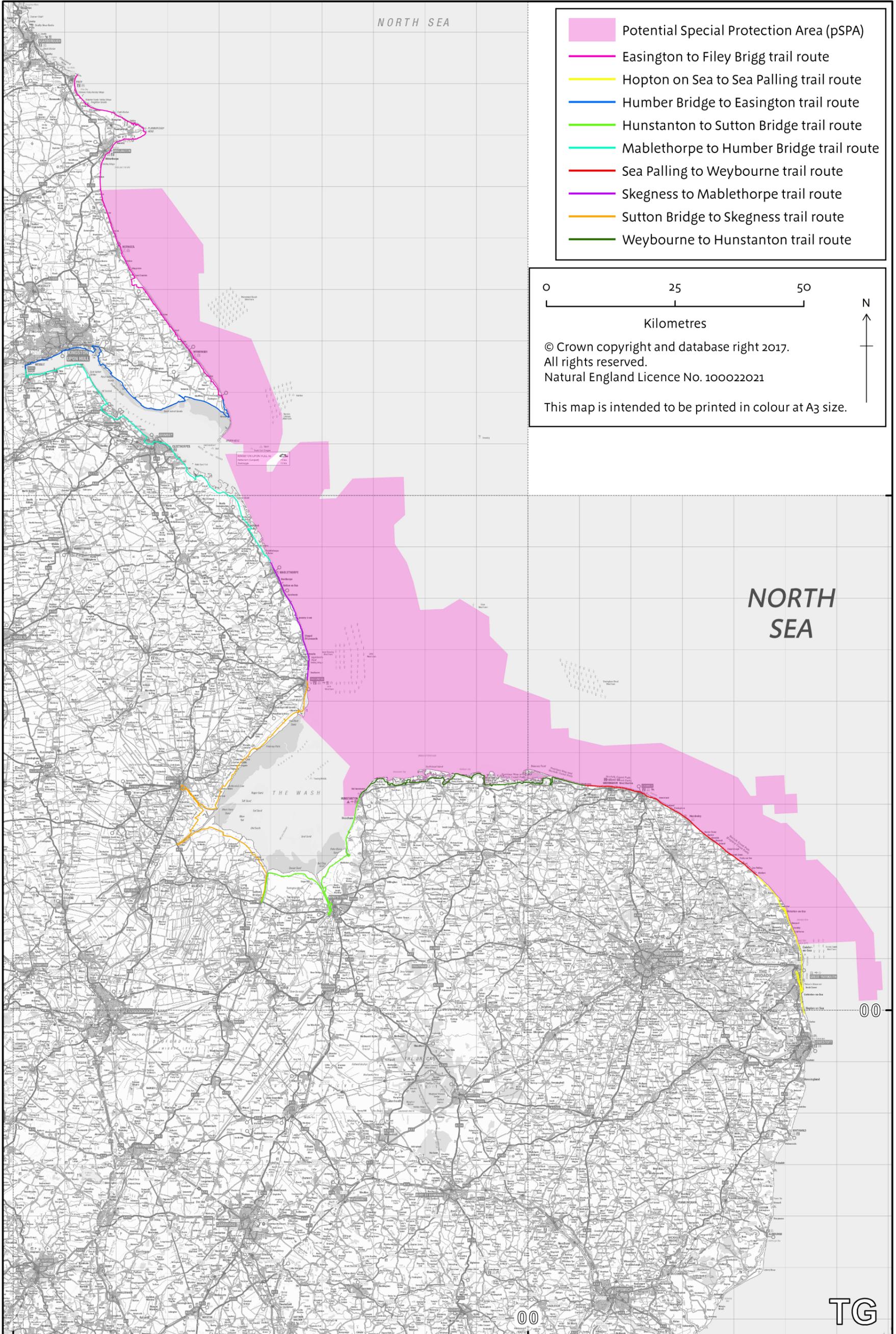
1. NATURAL ENGLAND. 2013. Coastal Access Natural England's Approved Scheme 2013. Published by Natural England Catalogue Code: NE446

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5327964912746496?category=50007>

2. NATURAL ENGLAND and JNCC. 2016. The Greater Wash pSPA Departmental Brief

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-england-marine/greater-wash-potential-special-protection-area-com/supporting_documents/V9%20FINAL%20Greater%20Wash%20Departmental%20Brief%2017%20October%202016%20ready%20for%20consultation.pdf





- Potential Special Protection Area (pSPA)
- Easington to Filey Brigg trail route
- Hopton on Sea to Sea Palling trail route
- Humber Bridge to Easington trail route
- Hunstanton to Sutton Bridge trail route
- Mablethorpe to Humber Bridge trail route
- Sea Palling to Weybourne trail route
- Skegness to Mablethorpe trail route
- Sutton Bridge to Skegness trail route
- Weybourne to Hunstanton trail route

0 25 50
 Kilometres

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