

Alde and Ore Association

Note of a Presentation given by Jonathan Clarke of Natural England, Coastal Path Delivery Team, on progress so far in examining possible routes of The English Coast Path from Bawdsey to Aldeburgh

The Britten Studios, Snape Maltings on 17th July 2019

Summary: A full description of the legislation and thinking behind the creation of the English Coast Path. Natural England are at the stage of discussing possible routes with land owners and they have a preferred alignment for around 80% of the route. There are a few areas still under discussion. NE hope to be able to make proposals to the Secretary of State in February 2020 when there would be an 8 week period for comments on the proposals before the Secretary of State makes a decision.

1. The Chairman, Lady Andrews, introduced Jonathan Clarke of the Natural England Coastal Path Delivery Team who came to give an update on progress to date in identifying routes in the Alde and Ore area.
2. The England Coastal path is a waymarked walking trail to be established around the whole of the English coast and when complete will be one of the longest coastal paths in the world. Its economic benefits are estimated as a contribution to the economy of an annual £2,572m revenue and support 100,000 jobs. Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to complete the path and she relies on Natural England to propose the appropriate routes. Natural England must follow the statutory guidance (called the Scheme, available in Coast Path section of the Government website) which seeks to balance the interests of landowners and the public's rights of access along the coast. Access to houses and gardens will not be allowed and there may be other local access restrictions as well. It had been the plan for all routes to be proposed by 2020 but some slippage is now likely. The path will be for recreation including walking, climbing and picnicking (but not camping, horse riding and cycling). The English Coast path will be 2,700 miles in total when complete and will link to the Welsh Coastal Path. Unlike public rights of way, the coastal path can be moved to a new line if the coast changes (called rollback).
3. Jonathan outlined the five stages of bringing each stretch of the path into existence-
 - (1). *Formulating the route.* The starting point is identifying the closest route along the sea taking account of the views of local authorities, key organisations, assessing problems and opportunities and existing access patterns but after consultation with local organisations some modification may be necessary.
 - (2). *Development.* Local landowners are contacted to discuss the route and seek the 'fair balance'. This is the current stage that has been reached on the Bawdsey to Aldeburgh stretch.
 - (3). *Proposal to the Secretary of State of the Preferred Route.* This will be published with maps. Affected landowners get details as do parish councils and everyone else on Natural England's list. Details will also be in libraries and on the Government website. In the great majority of cases agreement is reached with landowners and occupiers but they have 8

weeks to raise objections – on a 2 page Form of Objection - but others may make representations.

(4). *Determination of the route by the Secretary of State.* Objections are considered by a planning inspector who makes recommendations about them to the Secretary of State, the key issue being whether a fair balance of interests has been proposed. If the Secretary of State decides a balance has not been reached in any location then the route is reconsidered. The route will be formally approved in documents laid before Parliament.

(5). *Establishment of the route.* The County Council carries out necessary works to open the path and is responsible for future maintenance. A Coast Path website will provide information on the route as well as information on services that are available along it.

4. Jonathan explained some of the problems which arise in finding the fair balance between owner/occupier interests and private interests. Private interests include operational needs, the right to earn income, privacy and changes of use whilst the public want proximity to the sea, views of the sea, safety and convenience and an assured continuity of the trail. The balance must also include protection of the natural environment as well. There will also be spreading room on the seaward side of the path where people will also generally have a right of access. However, the path may have to take account of exceptions such as military land, gardens and areas that have been ploughed or drilled in the previous 12 months. Some land use is seasonal so paths may at certain times of the year follow alternative routes e.g. to avoid breeding birds. Jonathan produced a map that showed extensive saltmarshes in the Alde and Ore Estuary and these are likely to become areas where coastal access rights do not apply. In these restricted areas there will not be any new rights of access but it does not take away existing ones such as shooting or commoners' rights.

5. Jonathan and the team have been consulting local owners/occupiers on the route of the Bawdsey to Aldeburgh stretch. No final decisions have been made but he indicated current thinking is that the path is likely to take the following line-

- from Bawdsey Ferry it is proposed the line will proceed along the road towards Bawdsey before forking right, through the car park to the existing Suffolk coastal path;
- part of the route towards Bawdsey village is still being discussed but north of East Lane it is proposed the path will then follow the existing Suffolk coastal path to Shingle Street which is protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, then across Oxley Marshes following the existing coastal route towards the Butley river where it will pass the Butley Ferry enabling walkers to take the ferry across when it is in service in the summer months;
- the path in the Upper Butley River, up river of the ferry (necessary as the ferry cannot run all the year round) is presently subject to discussion but there will likely be different routes around the estuary in the summer and winter months to take the river birds into account;
- the path will then follow the existing coastal path through Orford around to below Stanny House Farm, Iken;
- the route from Stanny House Farm, Iken to the Anchorage, Iken is also subject to discussions with landowners and also needs further consideration as it is subject to several protective designations;
- there are well established paths, from Iken beach to Snape and, via the Sailors Path, then on to Brick Dock via the road, back towards the river taking the new path at Brick Kiln to join

the river wall at Brick Dock, which will most likely be used to complete the route to Aldeburgh.

6. Some eighty per cent of the route along the Bawdsey to Aldeburgh stretch is more or less agreed and NE hopes to be in a position to make its proposals in February 2020 and have the route open in eighteen months to two years.

7. Other points which were raised in discussion were-

- the problem of dogs running free in the bird breeding season and the need for restrictions and the education of owners and the need for signs advising dog owners – *reply – is an existing issue but looking at ways, such as education but policing is difficult.*
- how large an increase in users might be expected – *reply – an assessment will be made in the report for each area.*
- the responsibility of the County Council for the paths in the event of a breach of the banks – *reply – responsibility extends to maintaining a walking route, not taking into account the flood defence structure. Thus coast path money isn't available for any of the current plans to improve the walls. The drainage board's bank design though does allow for improved access. When the walls breached in Norfolk the County Council worked with the Environment Agency and paid to replace improved areas where a better quality surface was needed for walkers - in general creating the coast path costs about £2000 per km.*
- the issue of shooting taking place along the path – *reply – no change to existing rights,*
- the effect of the building of the windfarms interconnector, or for that matter any other development, on the continuity of access to the paths – *reply – working on different time scales*
- the extent blocking orders of the path can be obtained without providing an alternative route – *reply – in such as case a diversion has to be provided*
- the Estuary plan was to spend £27 million on getting river walls to the right standard, would the coast path be using the banks?- *reply- majority of the walls were already topped by paths, but NE kept in touch with the Internal Drainage Board as the thinking progressed.*

Being kept informed

Jonathan said that he already had 670 names on his data base of people who have asked to be kept informed of the proposals and invited those who had not given their names to add to his list. This can still be done via email to Jonathan.Clarke@naturalengland.org.uk