



England Coast Path: Frequently Asked Questions

If after reading this document you have further questions:

- Check our website for up-to-date information about our progress around the English coast and links to other useful information:

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Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is the England Coast Path?

The England Coast Path will be a well waymarked walking trail around the whole of the English Coast. When it is complete, it will be one of the longest coastal routes in the world.

2. Why is the project needed?

The coast is an enormously popular destination: walking along it is even more popular than beach activities. Yet our [2008/9 audit](#) found that while overall, some two-thirds of the English coast has legally secure, satisfactory paths, they are regularly interrupted by sections that do not – so there is often no reliable route around the coast. And even on the parts of the coast that have good existing paths, there are often long-standing difficulties from erosion or slumping that lead to loss of the current route. The project provides a solution to both of these issues.

3. What benefits is the project going to bring?

People will be able to arrive at the coast anywhere in England in the confident knowledge that there will be clear, certain, well-managed access in either direction from that point – whether they are seeking a one hour stroll, a two day hike or a marathon coastal journey.

The project is also creating secure public rights of access for the first time to popular coastal areas such as beaches, sand dunes and cliff tops. Such areas of **spreading room** are part of the 'coastal margin' identified alongside the trail by our proposals to the Secretary of State (see below) for each stretch of coast we work on.

And where existing coastal footpaths disappear in future because of issues like erosion or slumping, the legislation governing the project¹ introduces the principle that the coast path can 'roll back' which means that a replacement route can be quickly put in place. To date, it has often taken months or years to reinstate such lost paths, even if it is possible at all. Our 2008 audit showed that as things stood, a further 13% of existing public rights of way around the coast would be lost to erosion over the next 20 years. The project tackles this ever-present reality in a positive and constructive way.

Opening up England's coastline for all to enjoy supports hard-pressed local economies by delivering increased visitor spending to businesses such as shops, pubs and hotels. We know this happens from clear evidence to date - for example the South West Coast Path generates some £300 million a year for the economy of the region, supporting over 7,500 jobs².

4. How is the England Coast Path being created?

To make this massive task manageable, we have established five initial delivery areas around England – in Cumbria, the North East, Norfolk, Kent and the South West (covering north and south coasts). Within these, we started work on particular 'stretches' of coast from

¹ Introduced by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

² Southwest Tourism/University of Exeter 2003, *South West Coast Path*, research for Countryside Agency



which we are progressively working outwards as the project continues. The various stretches around the coast will eventually link up to provide a single national route.

For each delivery stretch, we prepare a report to the Secretary of State setting out our recommendations. We follow the approach set out in our [Coastal Access Scheme](#), which is the methodology for the project. The Scheme contains a wealth of information on more detailed issues that these FAQ cannot deal with directly.

5. When will the England Coast Path be available?

Different parts of the England Coast Path are being opened at different times around the coast as our proposals for particular stretches are approved by the Secretary of State and the final preparations on the route are then completed. We aim to have the Path open on a typical stretch within two years of starting work there, but this can vary considerably according to the length of the stretch and the complexity of local circumstances.

Our proposals have already been approved on three stretches - in Cumbria, in the Durham area and at Weymouth Bay, where the England Coast Path opened in time for the Olympic sailing events there in 2012.

At present we are continuing our work on 8 other stretches within the initial delivery areas. There is a map of these active stretches on our main [coastal access webpage](#), with links to more detailed information about progress with each.

Our indicative medium term delivery plans can be seen on the map at the end of this document.

6. What about consultation and differing views?

We design and implement the path on each stretch through local consultation. Owners and occupiers of coastal land, local access forums and key interest groups locally and nationally are all fully consulted at an early stage, and there is scope for anyone else with an interest to have their views heard too. We work closely with the local access authority (eg the county council) throughout the process.

Once we reach the point of formalising our proposals in our report to the Secretary of State, anyone who wishes can make representations about what we are recommending. And owners and occupiers of affected land can make formal objections, if unusually our dialogue with them has not resulted in an approach they are content with.

Any objections are considered by an inspector from the Planning Inspectorate, who advises the Secretary of State as necessary on how they should be determined. The Secretary of State then decides in the light of all these inputs whether to approve our report as submitted, or whether to require any modifications to our proposals.

After the Secretary of State has approved our proposals for a stretch, any new pieces of physical infrastructure that are needed - such as gates and signs - are installed. Once these preparations are complete the England Coast Path opens on that stretch, together with the public's rights over any adjoining spreading room.

7. Isn't the project unfair to owners and occupiers?



No. It's right that people should be able to walk around the coast but we work very closely with owners and occupiers of potentially affected land to ensure they can tell us about any concerns they may have and help us put the route in the right place bearing in mind the other uses they make of the land, and obvious issues such as privacy.

We offer to 'walk the course' with these interests wherever they wish to do this, so that we can have face to face conversations and aim to agree the best approach. Where necessary we are able to recommend particular restrictions on people's access rights in order to address potential conflicts. There is a requirement on us under the legislation to aim to strike a fair balance between the interests of the public in having rights of access over coastal land, and the interests of affected owners and occupiers.

Occupiers of land subject to new coastal access rights benefit from a uniquely low level of occupiers' liability – considerably lower than that owed by them at present to trespassers, or to their invited guests. Essentially the occupier cannot be sued for injury or damage unless he has acted intentionally or recklessly.

8. How is the coastal environment protected?

In all of our work, we aim to strike the right balance in each circumstance between securing opportunities for the public to enjoy the natural environment, and ensuring appropriate protection of it. This is in keeping with our statutory purpose to conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

There are many wonderfully rich wildlife and geological habitats on the coast and as the relevant statutory conservation agency for England, we have a vested interest in ensuring their appropriate protection. We talk early on to key local bodies such as wildlife trusts and other conservation organisations so that we can understand their views about any opportunities or risks. This complements the extensive knowledge we have in house from our own wildlife experts and our local staff responsible for protecting key sites.

In relation to 'European sites' such as special protection areas or special areas of conservation, where these exist on the coast, we comply with all relevant legal obligations to protect the key sensitive features in question, and we share and publish our audit trail about how we are achieving this.

In relation to historic and archaeological features, we consult English Heritage and where appropriate also seek advice from local government archaeological officers during the preparation of proposals for each stretch.

9. Is it a very expensive project?

The project is implemented through our own staff working with local access authority staff, and these represent the main costs of delivery. Direct investment in works and infrastructure is kept generally low because any path we are newly implementing is typically an informal one along the rural coast, not an engineered route. It is well waymarked and there is some new installation of gates, steps etc, and Natural England meets these initial costs. Each time we submit a report to the Secretary of State, we include as estimate of these initial costs for the relevant stretch of coast. Use of major new infrastructure is generally avoided unless this is provided by external authorities or consortia.



10. Who will maintain the England Coast Path in the future?

We estimate that some two-thirds of the England Coast Path overall will follow existing public rights of way – so the key responsibility for maintenance will continue to sit with the local highway authorities who already maintain them. They will also have maintenance powers in relation to new sections of the route.

Once complete, the England Coast Path will be Britain's longest **National Trail**. Natural England contributes substantially to the costs of maintaining National Trails, in accordance with the findings of our recent [National Trails review](#).

11. Why have you revised the Coastal Access Scheme?

The Act requires Natural England to review the Scheme within three years of its first approval. Our first review of the Scheme was completed in March 2013 and the revised version was approved by the Secretary of State on 9 July 2013. You can find out more about the review [here](#), with further links to a report of the review and the Scheme itself.