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Habitats Regulation Assessment of England Coast Path proposals between **Wootton Bridge and East Cowes Ferry Terminal, Isle of Wight** on **sites of European importance for nature Conservation**

(Updated June 2022)

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Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) ('Habitats Regulations Assessment')

Summary

I) Introduction

This is a record of the Habitats Regulations Assessment ('HRA') undertaken by Natural England, on behalf of the Secretary of State, in accordance with the assessment and review provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) ('the Habitats Regulations').

Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. This assessment considers the potential impacts of our detailed proposals for coastal access from Wootton to East Cowes on the following sites of international importance for wildlife:

- Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar
- Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- South Wight Maritime SAC
- Isle of Wight Downs SAC
- Solent and Dorset Coast SPA
- Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC
- Briddlesford Copses SAC

Natural England's proposals for the Isle of Wight (IOW) are being submitted to the Secretary of State in two tranches. This assessment concerns the first tranche of Reports (IOW2 to IOW10) and the associated Overview. The assessment should be read alongside these documents that between them fully describe and explain the access proposals for the section of coast clockwise between Wootton Bridge to the East Cowes Ferry Terminal as a whole. The Overview explains common principles and background and the reports explain how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths.

Note that, a further Habitats Regulations Assessment will be carried for Natural England's coastal access proposals for the length of Isle of Wight coast between The East Cowes Ferry Terminal and Wootton Bridge.

Note also that this HRA is a revised and updated version in response to additional information gathered after the Reports for IOW2 to IOW10 were published, and in response to objections and representations received during the consultation process on the published proposals.

II) Background

The main wildlife interests for this part of the Isle of Wight coast are summarised in Table 1 (see Tables 3 and 4 for a full list of qualifying features)

Table 1. Main Wildlife Features

Interest	Description
Non-breeding water birds	During the winter months the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar supports an internationally recognised population of non-breeding water birds. The extensive areas of soft mud exposed at low tide provide feeding habitat, whilst suitable undisturbed places to roost are necessary at high tide.
Breeding terns and gulls	During the breeding season Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar supports an internationally recognised population of nesting seabirds. These include three species of tern (little, common, and Sandwich) and the Mediterranean gull. The site is also designated for roseate tern, though this species has not nested in recent years. Shingle banks and saltmarsh islands are the main potential nesting areas. These birds need undisturbed access to both nesting and foraging areas.
Foraging terns	The Solent and Dorset Coast SPA protects the foraging habitat used by the terns that nest within the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and adjacent coastal SPAs. Terns use subtidal areas within harbours and on the open coast, as well as coastal lagoons, to forage. Little terns additionally use intertidal areas. Relatively undisturbed foraging areas are required to ensure successful breeding.
Intertidal Habitat	The northern coast of the Isle of Wight has many harbours and estuary inlets which consist of mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh designated as part of the Solent Maritime SAC. Where sea defences are absent, important transitions between intertidal and terrestrial habitat can be seen, including to coastal woodland.
Vegetated shingle	Annual vegetation of drift lines and perennial vegetation of stony banks are types of vegetated shingle habitat designated as part of the Solent Maritime SAC and can be found at Thorness Bay, Norton Spit and Newtown Harbour. These features make up a rare habitat within the UK and play an important role within the transition between intertidal and terrestrial habitat. Shingle spits and islands are also potential habitat for breeding birds including terns and ringed plovers.
Chalk Grassland	This mosaic of habitat hosts a number of species including large populations of early gentian *Gentianella anglica ssp anglica*, on the south coast of the Isle of Wight. Large extents are found on Tennyson Down and West High Down, which form part of the Isle of Wight Downs SAC.

Vegetated Maritime Cliffs	This habitat occupies the cliff tops and faces on the southern side of the Isle of Wight (within South Wight Maritime SAC) and the north west (within Solent Maritime SAC), and supports maritime influenced plant communities.
Assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates	The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site supports assemblages of plants and invertebrates that are nationally scarce, rare and/or declining. These species are associated with saltmarshes, grazing marshes and their ditches, or other brackish coastal habitats such as the lagoons and borrow dykes behind sea defences.

III) Our approach

Natural England's approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in the Coastal Access Scheme [1]. Note that, following a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (Case C-323/17 – usually cited as People over Wind), we have issued a technical memorandum concerning the application of this methodology where assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required.

Our final published proposal for the 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 proposal is 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 landowners, environmental consultants 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 landowners 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 this assessment are approved by a member of Natural England staff who is not a member of coastal access programme team and who has responsibility for protected sites. This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

****Update on data and evidence used to inform this assessment****

As part of revising and updating this HRA, Natural England has checked whether there is any new substantive data or evidence that has become available since the proposals were submitted to Secretary of State and which might have a bearing on the assessment. Where appropriate, we have contacted relevant stakeholders and interests to ask whether they are aware of any such new information. The additional data and evidence are summarised at Appendix 1.

IV) Aim and objectives for the design of our proposals

The new national arrangements for coastal access will establish a continuous well-maintained walking route around the coast and clarify where people can access the foreshore and other parts of the coastal margin. These changes will influence how people use the coast for recreation and our aim in designing our detailed proposals has been to secure and enhance opportunities for people to enjoy their visit whilst ensuring appropriate protection for affected European sites.

A key consideration in developing coastal access proposals has been the possible impact of disturbance on non-breeding waterbirds, breeding seabirds, or sensitive habitats, as a result of recreational activities.

Objectives for design of our detailed local proposals have been to:

- Avoid exacerbating issues by aligning the trail away from sensitive locations and/or by making use of established coastal paths[1] (where these are not having an existing detrimental impact) and/or introducing mitigation measures where necessary. By using existing walked routes, existing patterns of use (and disturbance) are unchanged, though potential uplift in use is considered.
- Work with local partners to design detailed proposals that take account of and complement efforts to manage access in sensitive locations.
- Where practical, incorporate opportunities to raise awareness of the importance of this part of the coast for wildlife and how people can help efforts to protect it.

V) Conclusion

We have considered whether our detailed proposals for coastal access between Wootton Creek and East Cowes might have an impact on Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar, Solent and Dorset Coast SPA, Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC, Isle of Wight Downs SAC or Briddlesford Copses SAC. In Part C of this assessment, we identify possible risks to the relevant qualifying features and conclude that proposals for coastal access, without incorporated mitigation, may have a significant effect on some of these sites (assuming there is a likely significant effect (LSE)).

In Part D we consider these risks in more detail, taking account of avoidance and mitigation measures incorporated into our access proposal, and conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity any of these sites. These measures are summarised in Table 2 below.

[1] Where access use and patterns are already established (be it statutory or *de facto* access) it is often best to accommodate and manage that access, rather than wrongly assume that England Coast Path (ECP) exclusions or restrictions will curtail those, as they won't on their own, in either a legal or practical sense.

Table 2. Summary of risks and consequent mitigation built in to our proposals

Risk to conservation objectives	Relevant design features of the access proposals
Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposals, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site.	<u>Route Alignment: All Areas</u> • A carefully aligned and well-maintained path, and associated infrastructure, that avoids the most sensitive areas, and enables people to enjoy and appreciate wildlife without adding to disturbance pressure over the European site. • Aligning along Public Rights of Way (PRoW) or other existing walked routes wherever possible, and where this would not add significantly to current levels of disturbance. • Clear signage will ensure walkers find it easy to follow the trail and minimise the risk that they accidently access sensitive areas. • Interpretation panels and other signage at appropriate locations will inform people of any restrictions, sensitive habitats/species, and encourage responsible behaviour to minimise disturbance. Interpretation will be designed in partnership with Bird Aware Solent. <u>Coastal Margin: All Areas</u> • Under S25A of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, access will be excluded to saltmarsh and mudflat as these areas are unsuitable for public access on foot. <u>Route Alignment: Newtown Harbour</u> • The trail at Western Haven (sections IOW-7-S025 to IOW-7-S037) will be closed between 1 August and 1 March for land management and conservation reasons. An alternative route inland (following the existing Isle of Wight Coastal Path (IOWCP)) will be open during this time. • The S26 dogs to leads restrictions at Western Haven and Walters Copse, that are in the published proposals will not be taken forward*. This is to encourage users to stay on the trail and avoid the situation where dog walkers use the margin to exercise their dogs off lead. • Screening will be added at the National Trust's two-storey Mercia Seabroke hide and Clamerkin hide* to reduce visual disturbance to birds. • Scrub adjacent to the trail at Clamerkin (IOW-7-S095 to S096) will be managed on a rotational basis to ensure it remains thick and impenetrable*. • Trail is set away from the intertidal habitat at Harts Farm and Walters Copse (sections IOW-7-S090 to

	IOW-7-S093). <u>Coastal Margin: Newtown Harbour</u> • S26 nature conservation exclusions will be applied: o to the shingle spit at Hamstead Dover (year round); o to Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy site IOW26 just south of Hamstead Spit (winter)*; o to Harts Farm fields (year round); o extending the intertidal exclusion at Walter's Copse and Clamerkin to include upper saltmarsh and woodland within the Solent Maritime SAC (year round)*. o A dogs to lead restriction will be applied to woodland at Clamerkin (year round)*. <u>Route Alignment: Medina</u> • Alignment routed inland to avoid fields used as supporting habitat by wintering geese and waders. • Signage and surfacing improved (short length of boardwalk) between Folly Inn and Island Marina to encourage people to keep off the intertidal habitats*. <u>Route Alignment: Thorness Bay</u> • A new bridge will be installed to take people off the beach and into a field for part of the route. * Changes to the previously published proposals.
Disturbance to breeding birds that form a non-trivial proportion of the wintering SPA population, ie ringed plovers, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduction in the abundance and distribution of the qualifying features within the site, resulting in a reduction in the population of non-breeding birds.	<u>Route Alignment</u> • At Thorness Bay, the trail follows the existing IOWCP and is diverted off the beach and into a field for part of the route. • At Newtown Harbour, the alignment avoids the shingle spit on the western side of the mouth of the harbour. • Interpretation panels will educate walkers on the sensitivities regarding breeding ringed plovers <u>Coastal Margin</u> • S26 nature conservation exclusions on the shingle spits either side of the mouth of Newtown Harbour (see directions map IOW7A).
Disturbance to breeding Mediterranean gull and tern species following changes in recreational activities as a result of access proposals lead to reduced breeding	<u>Newtown Harbour</u> • Aligning along the existing IOWCP or PRoW and avoiding the shingle spit at Hampstead Dover. • Interpretation panels to educate walkers on the sensitivities

productivity and consequent population impacts and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site	• Willow screening will be erected next to the National Trust's Mercia Seabroke hide to minimise disturbance to nesting Mediterranean gulls • Section 26 Nature Conservation exclusion on shingle spit at Hampstead Dover (see directions map IOW 7A) as potential tern nesting habitat.
Repeated disturbance to foraging terns following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposals, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in populations and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site	<u>Bembridge Harbour</u> • Alignment along existing IOWCP. Lagoons adjacent to Embankment Road are landward of the trail and separated by buildings and existing vegetation. • Interpretation panels at Bembridge Causeway will inform walkers of the wildlife sensitivities and ask them to keep dogs out of the intertidal area. <u>Newtown Harbour Lagoons</u> • Trail follows an existing promoted route at Newtown Quay. The lagoons are landward of the trail so are not in the coastal margin. • Information panels will be installed to request that dogs are not allowed to enter the lagoons. <u>Coastal Margin</u> Under S25A of CRoW, access will be excluded to saltmarsh and mudflat as these areas are unsuitable for public access on foot due to hazardous and unsafe terrain.
Damage to coastal habitats and associated rare wetland plant and invertebrate communities following changes in access	<u>Overall:</u> • A carefully aligned and well-maintained path, with clear waymarking, to encourage walkers to stay on the trail and avoid areas of sensitive habitat • Restriction or exclusion of Coastal Access Rights where there is a risk of increased recreational activity in sensitive areas <u>Vegetated shingle:</u> • Aligning along existing coast path and PRoW at Thorness Bay, and installing a new bridge into a pasture field to take people off the beach for part of the route. • Alignment of trail to avoid, and S26 nature conservation exclusion covering, the spits either side of the mouth of Newtown Harbour. <u>Sand dunes</u> • Following existing IOWCP at Yarmouth – avoiding the dunes at Norton Spit.

	• Interpretation panels strategically placed where the route meets the PRoW on to the dunes to inform walkers of sensitivities and discourage access on to habitat. <u>Saltmarsh</u> • Under S25A of CRoW, access will be excluded to saltmarsh as these areas are unsuitable for public access on foot. <u>Newtown Harbour:</u> • New boardwalk at Hamstead Quay will take walkers off the already damaged saltmarsh • Where new access is proposed at Western Haven, this is set back from the shoreline with a woodland buffer between the trail and intertidal habitats. Where necessary, fencing seaward of route (eg at Upper Hamstead Plantation) will ensure people and dogs stay on the path and avoid trampling of intertidal habitats or damage to transitional coastal woodland. • Path is aligned inland at Walters Copse to keep walkers away from saltmarsh and reduce trampling. • The exclusion from the margin will be extended to the tree line at Walters Copse so that access is excluded from the upper saltmarsh. At Clamerkin the exclusion will follow the SAC boundary so that access is excluded from the upper saltmarsh and transitional woodland*. • Interpretation panels strategically placed at Hamstead Quay, Newtown Quay, Western Haven and Walters Copse to inform walkers of sensitivities and discourage access on to habitat. * Additional mitigation to that in previously published proposals. <u>Chalk grassland</u> • Using existing IOWCP on Tennyson Down and West High Down as opposed to cliff top worn routes • Way marking clearly to encourage walkers stick to the path <u>Wetland invertebrate and plant assemblage</u> • Trail alignment along existing IOWCP and PRoW where possible, avoiding sensitive wetland habitats. • Clear signage and interpretation panels where appropriate on the route • Directions to exclude access from saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for public access on foot. In certain areas at Newtown Harbour, these

	exclusions extend above Mean High Water to include transitional habitats.
The installation of access management infrastructure may lead to the reduction in the extent and distribution of qualifying and supporting habitat	Proposed works include surface improvements, boardwalks, bridges and interpretation panels. • Where possible way markers will be added to existing infrastructure • Where additional infrastructure is necessary, this is located outside the designated sites wherever possible. If not possible, it is located in areas that do not support qualifying habitats and/or where the overall function of the habitat will not be adversely affected. • Replacement infrastructure will use the existing footprint wherever possible. • When boardwalks need replacing at Hamstead, Newtown Harbour, the piles will be left in the ground as it is more damaging and disturbing to the substrate if taken out and replaced
Disturbance of non-breeding waterbirds, or breeding terns, ringed plovers, or Mediterranean gulls, from construction works	Design, timing and methods of construction to cause minimal disturbance: mitigation measures set out in Table 8, section D3.1 of this assessment

VI) Implementation

Once a route for the trail has been confirmed by the Secretary of State, we will work with Isle of Wight Council to ensure any works on the ground are carried out with due regard to the conclusions of this appraisal and relevant statutory requirements.

VII) Thanks

The development of our proposals has been informed by input from people with relevant expertise within Natural England and other key organisations. The proposals have been thoroughly considered before being finalised and our initial ideas were modified during an iterative design process. We are particularly grateful to the National Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, Bird Aware Solent, local WeBS counters and other local experts whose contributions and advice have helped inform the development of our proposals.

VIII) Acknowledgements

This assessment contains Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data from Waterbirds in the UK 2019/20 © copyright and database right 2021. WeBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, in association with WWT, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers.

This assessment includes site-specific data kindly provided by the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS). These data are subject to copyright and should not be reproduced without permission.

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Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) ('Habitats Regulations Assessment')

PART A: Introduction and information about the England Coast Path

A1. Introduction

Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. The duty is in two parts: one relating to securing a long-distance walking route around the whole coast: we call this the England Coast Path; the other relating to a margin of coastal land associated with the route where in appropriate places people will be able to spread out and explore, rest or picnic.

To secure these objectives, we must submit reports to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recommending where the route should be and identifying the associated coastal margin. The reports must follow the approach set out in our methodology (the Coastal Access Scheme), which – as the legislation requires – has been approved by the Secretary of State for this purpose.

Where implementation of a Coastal Access Report could impact on a site designated for its international importance for wildlife, called a 'European site[2]', a Habitats Regulations Assessment must be carried out.

The conclusions of this assessment are approved by a member of Natural England staff who is not a member of coastal access programme team and who has responsibility for protected sites. This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

Natural England's approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in the Coastal Access Scheme [1]. Note that, following a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (Case C-323/17 – usually cited as People over Wind), we have issued a technical memorandum[3] concerning the application of this methodology where assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required.

A2. Details of the plan or project

This assessment considers Natural England's proposals for coastal access along the coast of the Isle of Wight clockwise from Wootton Bridge to East Cowes Ferry Terminal. Our proposals to the Secretary of State are presented in a series of reports that explain how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths. These comprise an Overview, which explains common principles and background, and Report which explain

[2] Ramsar sites and proposed Ramsar sites; potential Special Protection Areas (pSPA); candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC); and sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on European sites are treated in the same way by UK government policy

[3] Published at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5327964912746496?category=50007

how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths (IOW2 to IOW10). Within this assessment we consider each of the relevant reports, both separately and as an overall access proposal.

Our proposals for coastal access have two main components:

- alignment of the England Coast Path; and,
- Identification of coastal margin.

England Coast Path

A continuous walking route around the coast – the England Coast Path National Trail - will be established by joining up existing coastal paths and creating new sections of path where necessary. The route will be established and maintained to National Trail quality standards[4]. The coastal path will be able to 'roll back' as the coast erodes or where there is significant encroachment by the sea such as occurs in the case of a deliberate breach of sea defences.

Coastal Margin

An area of land associated with the proposed trail will become coastal margin, including all land seawards of the trail down to mean low water.

Coastal margin is typically subject to new Coastal Access Rights (CARs), unless land within it is excepted, is subject to certain other public access rights[5], or is locally excluded from them. CARs are rights of access on foot for open air recreation. The nature and limitations of the new rights, and the key types of land excepted from them, are explained in more detail in Chapter 2 of our Coastal Access Scheme [1].

Where the public has an existing right of access by statute or by express or implied permission (for example where there already are public-facing signs or messaging) CARs exist in parallel. Coastal access arrangements do not change the position for people using the land under other rights - for example to shoot or to exercise rights of common there.

The position in relation to pre-existing statutory open access rights varies according to their type:

- Any that already apply within the margin under Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) are replaced by the new coastal access, because the detailed CROW rules are somewhat different on the coast.
- But most other pre-existing open access rights - for example over urban commons or those with their own Act of Parliament - continue to apply instead of coastal access rights coming into force. This is in part because they often include higher rights, for example to ride horses on the land, as well as open-air recreation on foot.

Where public access on foot already takes place on land within the margin because people are 'helping themselves' to it without any right to be there (as happens for example on many beaches), the new CARs secure this existing use legally, subject to the normal national

[4] National Trails: management standards - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[5] As defined in CROW section 15

restrictions on CARs, and to any additional local restrictions or exclusions that may prove necessary.

Local restriction or exclusion of Coastal Access Rights

Local restrictions and exclusions, where needed, are normally put in place through directions given by NE. NEs direction making powers are explained in Chapter 6 of the Coastal Access Scheme [1].

There must be valid grounds to make a direction; particularly relevant to this assessment are directions made on grounds of nature conservation (s26(3)(a) of CROW) and where saltmarsh and flats are unsuitable for public access (s25A of CROW). In estuaries where there are extensive areas of saltmarsh and flats that are unsuitable for public access, we normally use our general exclusion making power under s25A, supplemented by directions made on other grounds to cover additional areas where necessary. Should a direction no longer be required under the grounds upon which it was made, NE would consider whether any other type of direction is needed in its place before it is revoked.

Specific directions are discussed in Part D of this assessment as necessary.

Access management

Through the coastal access programme, we can deliver practical access management measures that help to avoid or reduce possible impacts of recreation on sensitive sites. Interventions may be an inherent feature of the access proposals (eg providing a managed path that avoids more sensitive parts of a site) or additional measures added to the proposals for conservation reasons (eg installing new screening between a path and sensitive area). Theoretical impacts of coastal access are often avoided at the design stage by how the path is aligned and other inherent features of the proposals, such as exclusion of CARs for reasons of public safety. Our proposals for ECP often make use of existing routes or create CARs over areas where there is established access (a common situation at the coast where public access to the foreshore is widely accepted). In this situation, the access proposals may not create any new issues, and the interventions delivered through the programme are more relevant to managing existing pressures.

Our general approach to access management is described in our Coastal Access Scheme (see Chapter 6 for our general approach and Part C for discussion of particular coastal land types and land uses) [1]. Our practical experience, and that of practitioners we work with, is that access management measures work best when used in combination and deployed as part of an integrated, area wide approach. The specific proposals we make are tailored to local circumstances and new interventions are often combined with existing access management and natural features of the site.

The main types of access management delivered by the programme are:

- Manipulation of the physical environment (eg improving the surface of a path or installing barriers);
- Limited access rights with local restrictions or exclusions where necessary; and,
- Signs directing people to behave in particular ways.

Direct manipulation of the physical environment, for example by the alignment or surfacing of a path or installing barriers to make certain routes or areas attractive or unusable, are a widely used group of techniques for managing access to sensitive sites. Such practical measures are favoured by practitioners where circumstances allow and are widely used for controlling where people walk on sensitive sites. Local restriction or exclusion of CARs is likely to work best at locations where social norms have not been established and alternatives are readily available. In contrast, imposing limitations on access will generally be less effective where the behaviour they are directed at has already become normalised and socially accepted, and enforcement or surveillance is difficult [2].

On-site signs or notices are often needed to convey messages to access users, for example where there are restrictions on dogs. Signs alone are unlikely to be an effective way of changing already established behaviour at a site. Signs are more likely to be effective when used alongside other measures and have the advantage of being low-cost and always present. Where signs are specified in ECP proposals they are used alongside other access management measures (such as path alignment and restrictions) and designed to suit the local circumstances, using principles established from practitioner experience (for example [3].

Access management measures in the proposals are discussed in Part D of this assessment as necessary.

Promotion of the England Coast Path

The Coast Path will be promoted as part of the family of National Trails. On the ground, the path will be easy to follow, with distinctive signposting at key intersections and places people can join the route. Directional way markers incorporating the National Trail acorn symbol will be used to guide people along the route. The coastal margin will not normally be marked on the ground, except where signage is necessary to highlight dangers that might not be obvious to visitors, or to clarify to the scope and/or extent of coastal access rights.

Information about the Coast Path will be available on-line, including via the established National Trails website that has a range of useful information, including things for users to be aware of, such as temporary closures and diversions. The route is depicted on Ordnance Survey maps using the green diamond (lozenge) symbol for promoted route placed along the route and named England Coast Path with the National Trail acorn symbol placed alongside the name. Alternative routes will be shown by hollow version of the green diamond (lozenge) symbol. The extent of the coastal margin is depicted by a newly created symbol, a 10% magenta wash bounded on its landward edge by distinctive magenta semi-circles. The reason for this is to clearly reflect the different nature of this new designation from open access, which is depicted by a yellow wash. An explanation about the margin and about CARs, where they do and don't apply and how to find out about any local restrictions or exclusions is provided in the map key.

Establishment and maintenance of the England Coast Path

Establishment works to make the trail fit for use and prepare for opening, including any additional measures that have been identified as necessary to protect the environment, will be carried out before the new public rights come into force on this stretch. Details of the works to be carried out and the estimated cost are provided in the access proposals. The

cost of establishment works will be met by Natural England. Works on the ground to implement the proposals will be carried out by the Isle of Wight Council, subject to any further necessary consents being obtained, including to undertake operations on a SSSI. Natural England will provide further advice to the access authority carrying out the work as necessary.

The access proposals provide for the permanent establishment of a path and associated infrastructure, including any additional measures referred to in this assessment and described in the access proposals. Ongoing maintenance of the route will be carried out by the Isle of Wight Council. The ECP will be part of the National Trails family of routes, for which there are national quality standards. A Trail Partnership will be established to oversee delivery and there will be regular reporting and scrutiny of key performance indicators, including the condition of the trail.

Responding to future change

The legal framework that underpins coastal access allows for adaptation in light of future change. In such circumstances Natural England has powers to change the route of the trail and limit access rights over the coastal margin in ways that were not originally envisaged. These new powers can be used, as necessary, alongside informal management techniques and other measures to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained in light of unforeseen future change.

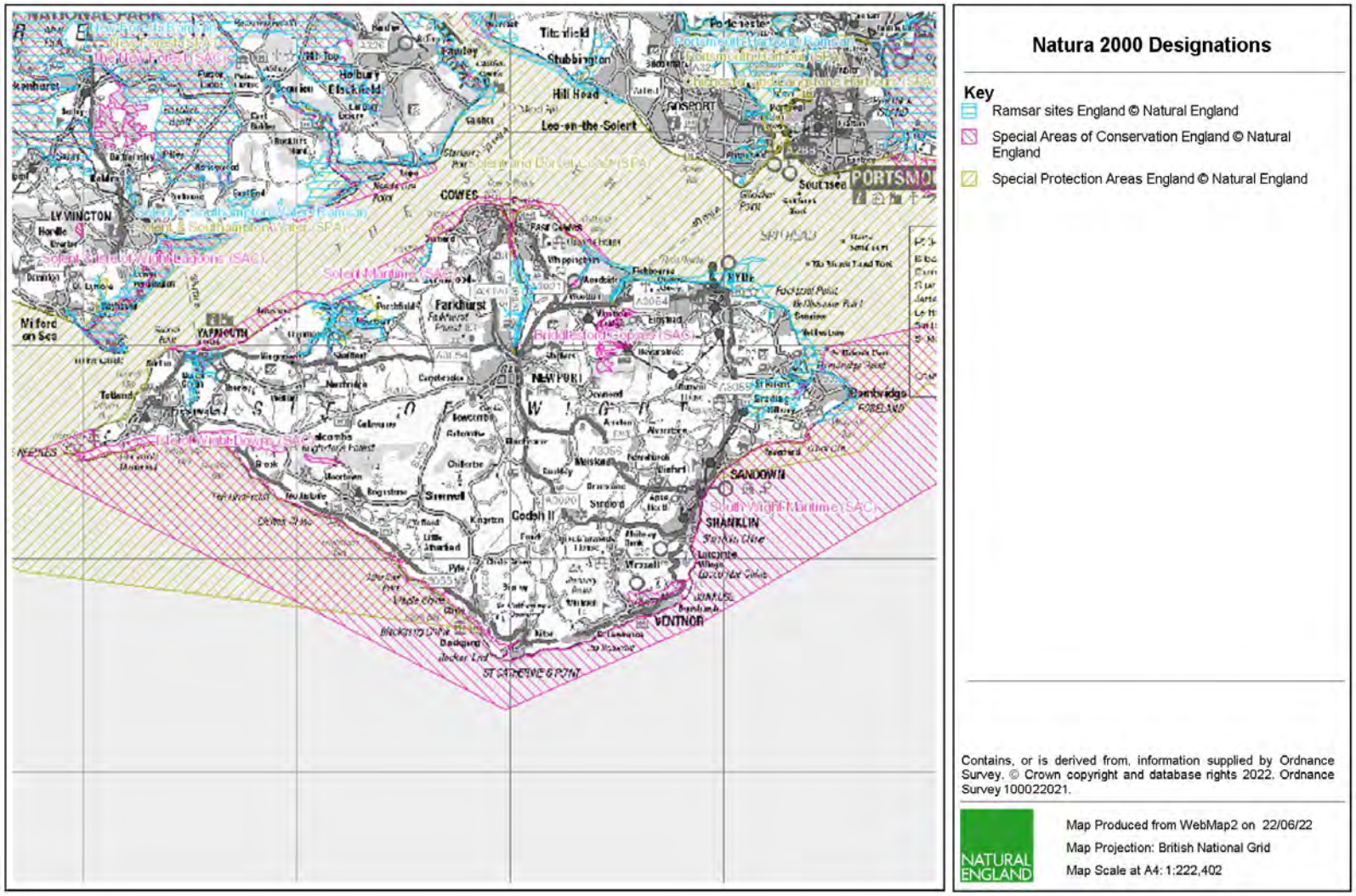


Figure 1: Map to show Natura 2000 designations on the Isle of Wight

PART B: Information about the European Site(s) which could be affected

B1. Brief description of the European Sites(s) and their Qualifying Features

Solent and Southampton Water SPA & Ramsar site

The SPA/Ramsar stretches from Hurst Spit to Hill Head on the mainland, and from Yarmouth to Whitecliff Bay on the north coast of the Isle of Wight. The site is composed of extensive intertidal mudflats and sandbanks, saltmarsh, coastal lagoons shingle banks and grazing marsh. The estuarine sediments support rich populations of invertebrates which provide an important food source for overwintering birds. The area supports approximately 10% of the world's dark-bellied brent geese, which feed on seagrass beds, saltmarsh, *Enteromorpha*, and grazing marsh within the SPA, but also make use of arable crops and grassland outside of the SPA boundary. The shingle banks and islands provide important nesting habitat for terns and Mediterranean gulls.

Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

This relatively recently designated area covers subtidal areas used by foraging Sandwich, common, and little terns associated with the breeding colonies of the Chichester & Langstone Harbours SPA, Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Poole Harbour SPA. The seaward boundary of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA extends around the Isle of Wight coast from Blackgang Chine, near the southern tip of the island, around the northern shore of the island and to the southeast side at Sandown.

Solent Maritime SAC

The Solent and its inlets are unique in Britain and Europe for their unusual tidal regime, including double tides and long periods of tidal stand at high and low tide. As a result, the Solent Maritime SAC is a unique suite of functionally linked estuaries and dynamic marine and estuarine habitats. Within the site are extensive areas of intertidal mudflats and sandflats, often supporting eelgrass (*Zostera* species), subtidal sandbanks, saltmarsh and natural shoreline transitions such as drift line vegetation. The SAC is of particular interest as it is the only site to support all four species of cordgrass (*Spartina*) found in the UK, including the rare native small cordgrass (*Spartina maritima*). At the time of designation, the SAC also supported a population of the rare Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*).

Isle of Wight Downs SAC

This SAC is located at either end of the east- west running chalk spine on the Island. In the west there are notably exposed white chalk cliffs which support grassland communities, particularly Tennyson Downs and the Needles Headland and also Ventnor Downs towards the east. Chalk grassland is the dominant habitat supporting rare species such as Early Gentian.

Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC

This site encompasses fourteen coastal lagoons (eight along the Solent coast and four on the Isle of Wight), each with its own unique conditions and recognised for both nationally scarce species and high species diversity. The four Bembridge Harbour lagoons are located behind the sea wall, the sea water enters by percolation and man-made culverts. They support specialist species including the nationally scarce starlet sea anemone.

Briddlesford Copses SAC

This site is a species rich area of ancient broadleaved woodland near Wootton Bridge, designated for its breeding population of Bechsteins's bat *Myotis bechsteini.* The bats use crevices in mature trees for roosting and connecting woodlands for feeding.

South Wight Maritime SAC

The South Wight Maritime SAC runs the full length of the south coast of the Isle of Wight, from the impressive sea stacks of the Needles in the west to Bembridge Point in the east. The site is designated in recognition of its outstanding reef marine habitats, pristine sea cave systems and vegetated sea cliffs. The western part of the site is dominated by exposed bedrock, chalk cliffs and reefs whereas the eastern part is more sheltered with areas of limestone and sandstone. The reef systems support a diverse range of seaweeds and sponges. The Needles, Freshwater Bay and Bembridge represent some of the best areas in Britain for chalk cliffs and limestones ledges.

The following tables provide a complete list of the qualifying features of the European Sites which could be affected by the access proposals.

Table 3. Avian Qualifying Features

Avian Qualifying feature	Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar	Solent and Southampton Water SPA	Solent and Dorset Coast SPA
A156 Black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa islandica* (non-breeding)	✓	✓	
A046a Dark-bellied brent geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* (non-breeding)	✓	✓	
A137 Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (non-breeding)	✓	✓	
A052 Teal *Anas crecca (non-breeding)*	✓	✓	
Waterbird assemblage[1] (non-breeding)	✓	✓	
A193 Common tern *Sterna hirundo*[2]	✓B	✓B	✓F
A195 Little tern *Sternula albifrons*[2]	✓B	✓B	✓F
A176 Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus*[2]		✓B	
A192 Roseate tern *Sterna dougallii*[2]	✓B	✓B	
A191 Sandwich tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*[2]	✓B	✓B	✓F

Notes:

[1] The wintering waterbird assemblage is a qualifying feature of both the SPA and Ramsar sites. When classifying a waterbird assemblage as an SPA qualifying feature, the Ramsar Convention's Strategic

Framework definition of 'waterbird' is used and as such we consider the two qualifying features synonymous.

'Main component species' of an assemblage are those which regularly occur on the site in internationally or nationally important numbers, regularly exceed 2,000 individuals, or are otherwise named on the citation. The main component species are: dark-bellied brent geese; teal; ringed plover; black tailed godwit; dunlin *Calidris alpina*; great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*; grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*; lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*; little egret *Egretta garzetta*; pintail *Anas acuta*; turnstone *Arenaria interpres*; shoveler *Spatula clypeata*; whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*; wigeon *Mareca penelope* and greenshank *Tringa nebularia*.
In addition to the main components, other wintering waterbirds should be considered as these contribute collectively to the assemblage diversity, in particular proportionally abundant populations of species of conservation importance, for example curlew *Numenius arquata*.

[2] **B** denotes breeding interest and **F** denotes foraging.

Table 4. Non Avian Qualifying Features

Non Avian Qualifying feature	Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar	Solent Maritime SAC	Isle of Wight Downs SAC	Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC	Briddlesford Copses SAC	South Wight Maritime SAC
H1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time		✓				
H1130 Estuaries	✓[1]	✓[2]				
H1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide		✓				
H1150 Coastal lagoons		✓		✓		
H1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines		✓				
H1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks		✓				
H1310 *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand		✓				
H1320 *Spartina* swards (*Spartinion maritimae*)		✓				
H1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)		✓				
H2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* ('White dunes')		✓				
S1016 Desmoulin's whorl snail, *Vertigo moulinsiana*		✓				
H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts			✓			✓
H4030 European dry heaths			✓			
H6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites")			✓			
S1654 Early gentian, *Gentianella anglica*			✓			
S1323 Bechstein's bat, *Myotis bechsteini*					✓	
Wetland plant assemblage[3]	✓					
Wetland invertebrate assemblage[4]	✓					
Sheltered Channel between island/mainland	✓					
Reefs						✓
Submerged or partially submerged sea caves						✓

Notes:

[1] The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site comprises a series of estuaries and adjacent coastal habitats including intertidal mud and sandflats, saline lagoons, vegetated shingle, saltmarsh,

reedbeds, damp woodland, and grazing marsh [4] . Natural England considers the estuary feature of Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is largely synonymous with the estuaries feature of Solent Maritime SAC. For the purposes of this assessment, where there are differences in the landward boundary of Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site, and where a transition between marine and adjacent coastal habitats is apparent, we have treated these areas as forming part of the estuaries feature.

[2] A description of the Estuaries habitat (H1130) is given in the Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats [5]. In this document it is noted that estuaries form an ecological unit with surrounding terrestrial coastal habitat types. The following are cited [6] as contributing to the SAC estuaries feature, each of which are considered in the assessment that follows: intertidal seagrass beds; intertidal sand and muddy sand; intertidal mud; intertidal mixed sediments; intertidal coarse sediment, subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal mixed sediment; subtidal sand, subtidal seagrass beds.

[3] Species included in the wetland plant assemblage as listed on the Ramsar Information Sheet [4] are: Dwarf spike-rush, *Eleocharis parvula*, little robin, *Geranium purpureum forsteri,* slender birds-foot trefoil, *Lotus angustissimus,* Hampshire purslane, *Ludwigia palustris,* yarrow broomrape, *Orobanche purpurea,* foxtail stonewort, *Lamprothamnium papulosum,* small cordgrass *Spartina maritima,* common eelgrass, *Zostera marina.*

[4] Species included in the wetland invertebrate assemblage as listed on the Ramsar Information Sheet [4] are: *Gammarus insensibilis* (lagoon sand shrimp)*, Nematostella vectensis* (starlet sea anemone), *Arctosa fulvolineata* (yellow striped bear spider), *Aulonia albimana* (a spider), *Anisodactylus poeciloides* (a ground beetle), *Anthonomus rufus* (a weevil), *Baris analis (*a weevil), *Berosus, spinosus* (an aquatic beetle), *Cantharis fusca* (a soldier beetle), *Drypta dentata* (a ground beetle), *Leptura fulva* (a long-horned beetle), *Meligethes bidentatus* (a beetle), *Paracymus aeneus* (a water beetle), *Staphylinus caesareus* (a rove beetle), *Aphrosylus mitis* (a long-legged fly), *Atylotus latistriatus (*saltmarsh horsefly), *Dorycera graminum* (picture winged fly), *Haematopoda grandis* (long horned cleg), *Hippobosca equina* (a true fly), *Linnaemya comta* (a parasitic fly), *Stratiomys longicornis* (long horned general soldier fly), *Syntormon mikii* (a long legged fly), *Tetanocera freyi (*Frey's buff snail-killer fly), *Villa circumdata (*a bee fly), *Trachysphaera lobata* (a pill millipede), *Paludinella littorina (*lagoon snail), *Truncatellina cylindrica (*the cylindrical whorl snail), *Andrena alfkenella* (Alfken's mini mining bee), *Acleris lorquiniana* (marsh button moth), *Elachista littoricola (*a micro moth), *Melissoblaptes zelleri (*twin-spot honey moth), *Platytes alpinella* (a moth), *Psamathrocrita argentella* (silvery neb moth), *Armandia cirrhosa* (lagoon sandworm).

B2. European Site Conservation Objectives (including supplementary advice)

Natural England provides advice about the Conservation Objectives for European Sites in England in its role as the statutory nature conservation body. These Objectives (including any Supplementary Advice which may be available) are the necessary context for all HRAs.

The overarching Conservation Objectives for every European Site in England are to ensure that the integrity of each site is maintained or restored (as appropriate), and that each site contributes to achieving the aims of the Habitats Regulations, by either maintaining or restoring (as appropriate):

- The extent and distribution of their qualifying natural habitats,
- The structure and function (including typical species) of their qualifying natural habitats,

- The supporting processes on which their qualifying natural habitats rely,
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of their qualifying features rely,
- The population of each of their qualifying features, and
- The distribution of their qualifying features within the site.

Where Supplementary Advice on the Conservation Objectives is available, this provides further detail about the features' structure, function and supporting processes mentioned above. The implications of the plan or project on the specific attributes and targets listed in the supplementary advice is taken into account in this assessment.

The links below are provided to the conservation objectives for each site:
Solent and Southampton Water SPA
Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC
Isle of Wight Downs SAC
Solent Maritime SAC
Briddlesford Copses SAC
South Wight Maritime SAC
Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

For Ramsar sites, a decision has been made by Defra and Natural England not to produce Conservation Advice packages, instead focussing on the production of Conservation Objectives. As the provisions on the Habitats Regulations relating to Habitat Regulations Assessments extend to Ramsar sites, Natural England considers the Conservation Advice packages for the overlapping European Marine Site designations to be, in most cases, sufficient to support the management of the Ramsar interests.

PART C: Screening of the plan or project for appropriate assessment

C1. Is the plan or project either directly connected with or necessary to the (conservation) management (of the European Site's qualifying features)?

The Coastal Access Plan is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European sites for nature conservation listed in B1 above.

Conclusion:

As the plan or project is not either directly connected or necessary to the management of all of the European site(s)'s qualifying features, and/or contains non-conservation elements, further Habitats Regulations assessment is required.

C2. Is there a likelihood [or risk] of significant [adverse] effects ('LSE')?

This section details whether those constituent elements of the plan or project which are (a) not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European Site(s) features and (b) could conceivably adversely affect a European site, i.e. would have a **likely significant effect,** either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, upon the European sites and which could undermine the achievement of the site's conservation objectives referred to in section B2.

In accordance with case law, this HRA has considered an effect to be 'likely' if it '*cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information'* and is 'significant' if it *'undermines the conservation objectives'*. In accordance with Defra guidance on the approach to be taken to this decision, in plain English, the test asks whether the plan or project '*may'* have a significant effect (i.e. there is a risk or a possibility of such an effect).

This assessment of risk therefore takes into account the precautionary principle (where there is scientific doubt) and **excludes**, at this stage, any measures proposed in the submitted details of the plan/project that are specifically intended to avoid or reduce harmful effects on the European site(s).

Each of the project elements has been tested in view of the European Site Conservation Objectives and against each of the relevant European site qualifying features. An assessment of potential effects using best available evidence and information has been made.

C2.1 Risk of Significant Effects Alone

The first step is to consider whether any elements of the project are likely to have a significant effect upon a European site 'alone' (that is when considered in the context of the prevailing environmental conditions at the site but in isolation of the combined effects of any other 'plans and projects'). Such effects do not include those deemed to be so insignificant as to be trivial or inconsequential.

In this section, we assess risks to qualifying features, taking account of their sensitivity to coastal walking and other recreational activities associated with coastal access proposals, and in view of each site's Conservation Objectives.

Some of the qualifying features considered in this assessment occupy similar ecological niches and share ways in which they might be sensitive to the access proposals. To avoid repetition and improve the clarity of this assessment we have grouped the qualifying features as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Feature Groups

Note: Qualifying features are shown in bold text while sub features are shown in brackets

Feature group	**Qualifying feature(s)**
Breeding terns	**Common, little, roseate and Sandwich tern**
Breeding Mediterranean gull	**Mediterranean gull**
Non-breeding waterbirds	**Black-tailed godwit; ringed plover; dark-bellied brent goose; teal; waterbird assemblage**
Bats	**Bechstein's bat**
Subtidal features	**Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time** (subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal mixed sediment, subtidal sand, subtidal seagrass beds) ; **Estuaries** (subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal mixed sediment; subtidal sand, subtidal seagrass beds); **sheltered channel between island/mainland**
Desmoulins whorl snail	**Desmoulins whorl snail, *Vertigo moulinsiana***
Reefs	**Reefs** (circalittoral rock; infralittoral rock; intertidal rock; subtidal stony reef)
Coastal lagoons	**Coastal lagoons**
Wetland plants and invertebrates	**Wetland plant assemblage** **Wetland invertebrate assemblage**
Intertidal habitats	**Estuaries** (intertidal seagrass beds; intertidal sand and muddy sand; intertidal mud; intertidal mixed sediments; intertidal coarse sediment) ***Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Atlantic salt meadows; *Spartina* swards**

	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (intertidal coarse sediment; intertidal mixed sediments; intertidal mud; intertidal sand and muddy sand; intertidal seagrass beds); **Submerged or partially submerged sea caves**
Vegetated shingle	**Annual vegetation of drift lines**; **Perennial vegetation of stony banks**
Chalk grassland	**Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites"); Early gentian**, **Gentianella anglica**
Dry heathland	**European dry heaths**
Sand dunes	**Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* ('White dunes')**
Vegetated maritime cliffs	**Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts**

The risk of significant effects alone is considered in the following table:

Table 6. Assessment of likely significant effects alone

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Non-breeding waterbirds	Disturbance from recreational activities outside the breeding season	Birds feeding on the foreshore or roosting in the vicinity of the coast path may be disturbed by recreational activities including walking and walking with a dog, which impacts their energy budgets and hence fitness	Waterbirds are present in significant numbers in many locations on the northern coastline of the Isle of Wight, close to the proposed route. Disturbance could lead to changes in population abundance or distribution, so a significant effect is considered likely at this stage of the assessment.	Yes
Non-breeding waterbirds	Disturbance from recreational activities in the breeding season	Non-breeding waterbirds (that are wholly or largely resident) and which breed within or near to the SPA in the vicinity of the coastal path may be disturbed, or nests may be trampled by recreational activity. Ringed plover is a Qualifying Feature known to breed on the Isle of Wight. In addition, waders, grey herons, and potentially little egrets, nest on the island.	The breeding population of ringed plover on the Isle of Wight represents a non-trivial proportion of the SPA non-breeding population. If disturbance affects the productivity of nesting birds, this may reduce the recruitment of individuals into the wintering population, affecting the abundance Conservation Objective. There is potential for displacement of assemblage	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
		These species form part of the wintering bird assemblage.	species due to disturbance, which could affect the diversity of the assemblage. Therefore, there is a likely significant effect.	
Non-breeding waterbirds	Disturbance from construction works	Waterbirds may be disturbed by construction activities necessary for the physical establishment of the path.	Waterbirds are present in significant numbers in many locations in the vicinity of the trail, so their distribution within the SPA may be affected by construction works.	Yes
Non-breeding waterbirds	Disturbance from construction works in the breeding season	Non-breeding waterbirds (that are wholly or largely resident) and which breed within or near to the SPA in the vicinity of the coastal path may be disturbed by construction activity and nest failure may result. Ringed plover is the only Qualifying Feature known to breed on the Isle of Wight	The breeding population of ringed plover on the Isle of Wight represents a non-trivial proportion of the SPA non-breeding population. It has attempted to nest on the beach at Thorness Bay, in the vicinity of proposed new access infrastructure. Therefore, a likely significant effect cannot be ruled out at this stage.	Yes
Non-breeding waterbirds	Loss of supporting habitat through installation of access management infrastructure	The supporting habitats of the qualifying features may be permanently lost due to installation of new access management infrastructure	The level of risk is higher where there is a permanent and irreversible loss of the extent of supporting habitat which the birds depend on. New infrastructure, including bridges and boardwalks, is proposed at Newtown Harbour, Thorness Bay and the Medina Estuary.	Yes
Breeding terns	Disturbance to foraging terns from recreational activities in the breeding season.	Foraging behaviour may be interrupted if birds are feeding close to places where recreational activities take place, including walking and walking with a dog. This may then affect the productivity of nesting populations.	Where terns forage offshore there is likely to be sufficient spatial separation between path users and the birds to avoid disturbance. Furthermore, whilst the presence of people on the shore may discourage birds from feeding close to the shore, this is unlikely to significantly reduce the available foraging area.	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
			However, where terns make use of inland lagoons or harbours, there is a risk of significant disturbance, with consequent impacts on population levels, which therefore requires further assessment.	
Breeding terns	Disturbance to nesting birds and potential breeding sites from recreational activities	The qualifying features are colonial species and nest on shingle spits and islands, shallow scrapes in the sand or in low vegetation. Nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance as a result of recreational activities (including walking and walking with a dog) which can lead to direct trampling of nest sites and eggs as well as flushing of parent birds from nests, leading to exposure and predation of eggs and chicks.	Tern species no longer breed on the Isle of Wight, however there is potential breeding habitat within Newtown Harbour for common, Sandwich and little tern, which the National Trust are consciously managing, to encourage them to return. There is a risk that recreational activity could compromise the achievement of the Conservation Objective to restore breeding tern populations within the SPA. As a result, a significant effect is considered likely at this stage of the assessment.	Yes
Breeding terns	Disturbance to nesting terns from construction activities	Breeding birds may be flushed from the nest as a result of noise and visual disturbance caused by the installation of access infrastructure. This may lead to exposure or predation of eggs and chicks, with consequent impacts at a population level.	Terns do not currently nest on the Isle of Wight, but the National Trust is managing habitat for them at the mouth of Newtown Harbour. No access infrastructure will be installed near existing or potential tern nesting habitat, and so likely significant effects can be ruled out based on the spatial separation.	No
Breeding Mediterranean gull	Disturbance to nesting and foraging birds from recreational activity	This species nests colonially in short to medium swards of vegetation, and sometimes on vegetated shingle islands. Nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance as a result of recreational activities (including walking and walking with a dog) which can lead to direct trampling of nest sites and eggs as well as flushing of	Mediterranean gulls nest at Newtown Harbour and forage in the coastal waters and terrestrial habitats in this area. An increase in recreational activity could potentially affect productivity with consequent impacts on the population abundance Conservation Objective.	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
		parent birds from nests, leading to exposure and predation of eggs and chicks.		
Breeding Mediterranean gull	Disturbance to nesting birds from construction activity	Breeding birds may be flushed from the nest as a result of noise and visual disturbance caused by the installation of access infrastructure. This may lead to exposure or predation of eggs and chicks, with consequent impacts at a population level.	Mediterranean gulls nest at Newtown Harbour. Some access infrastructure is proposed in the vicinity of the nesting area, and so a likely significant effect cannot be ruled out at this stage.	Yes
Bats	Disturbance to roosting and foraging patterns	Bats are not generally vulnerable to disturbance from recreational activity on foot, except when roosting or hibernating, as they feed nocturnally.	There will be no interaction between coastal path users and this species given the level of spatial separation between the woodland in which they roost and feed and the path (approx. 400m). Way marking will encourage users to stick to the path, away from the woodland. Flight lines and foraging patterns may extend beyond the SAC boundary however where the route passes in the vicinity of the SAC, it is aligned along a road in an urban environment and unlikely to impact on bats feeding as they feed nocturnally.	No
Subtidal features	Physical damage from recreational activities	Areas below mean low water are outside of the coastal margin. The access proposals are concerned with recreation on foot along the shore to which marine features are not sensitive	No new coastal access rights will be created over subtidal habitats, and where they are adjacent to beaches that are used for recreation, there will be minimal interaction between users and the habitat. The partially submerged sea caves, within South Wight Maritime SAC are partially exposed however the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives [7] states there is no pressure on this feature from recreational activity.	No

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Desmoulins whorl snail	Trampling of species and its supporting habitat	Could be vulnerable where the coast path creates or improves access to the banks of calcareous wetlands, streams and lakes in which this species is found.	At time of designation, Desmoulin's whorl snail was found in fen and reedbed habitat in Fishbourne Channel, Chichester Harbour, though was absent from surveys of the area in 2009/10 [8]. The trail is not aligned close to any habitats that may support the feature. Therefore, there is no risk that the proposals will compromise the achievement of the Conservation Objective to restore the population, and hence no likely significant effect.	No.
Coastal lagoons	Trampling from walkers or dogs entering the lagoons	An increase in recreational activity could cause physical damage to lagoons if walkers or dogs enter them, disturbing the features within them.	SAC Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives [9] states minimal risk from recreational activities on coastal lagoons. All lagoons at Bembridge, Newtown Harbour Quay and Yar Bridge are landward of the trail, and therefore not within the coastal margin. As a result there will be no interaction from coastal path users and this feature.	No.
Wetland plants and invertebrates	Physical damage from recreational activities	The assemblages of rare wetland plants and invertebrates depend on the maintenance, in good condition, of the habitats in which they are found. These habitats may be damaged due to trampling where people regularly walk away from established paths.	Wetland plants and invertebrates that form part of the assemblage occur within a number of habitats that could be affected by the proposals, including intertidal mudflats, shingle beaches, coastal lagoons, saltmarsh, vegetated maritime slopes and wet woodland. The level of risk is higher at places where the access proposals are likely to place wetland plants and the habitats that support wetland invertebrates at risk from repeated trampling. Therefore, significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment.	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Wetland plants and invertebrates	Physical damage from installation of access management infrastructure	Wetland plant assemblages and the habitat that the invertebrate assemblages rely on may be lost due to the installation of new access management infrastructure. Wetland plants and habitat for invertebrates may also be indirectly affected, for example by changes to drainage patterns.	The level of risk is higher at places where there is a permanent and irreversible loss of wetland plants and the habitats that support wetland invertebrates. New infrastructure, including bridges and boardwalks, is proposed at Newtown Harbour, Thorness Bay and the Medina Estuary. Therefore, significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment.	Yes
Intertidal habitats	Trampling of sensitive species and habitats from recreational activities	Of the features in this group saltmarsh vegetation and sea grass beds are at greater risk as they can be more easily damaged or destroyed by people walking repeatedly over the same area. Bare patches may be created which make the surrounding habitat more vulnerable to erosion.	Saltmarsh and seagrass habitat is found along the north coast of the Island and may form part of the coastal margin. If erosion occurs due to the new access rights, this may affect the Conservation Objective to maintain the distribution of habitats. Significant effects cannot therefore be ruled out at this stage of the assessment.	Yes
Intertidal habitats	Loss of supporting habitat through installation of access management infrastructure	Installation of new access management infrastructure could lead to a permanent reduction in the extent of this habitat.	Installation of access infrastructure is proposed within the SAC at Newtown Harbour, Medina Estuary and Thorness Bay. Loss could affect the Conservation Objective to maintain or restore the extent of habitats.	Yes
Vegetated shingle	Trampling of vegetation	Vegetated shingle can be damaged or destroyed by people walking over it repeatedly.	Areas of vegetated shingle are within the coastal margin at Newtown Harbour, Norton Spit and Thorness Bay. Significant effects therefore cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment.	Yes
Sand dunes	Trampling of colonising vegetation	Vegetation colonising the dunes could be damaged or destroyed by people repeatedly walking on the same areas. This can lead to erosion of the dune system.	The proposed trail is routed away from the dune system at Norton Spit, Yarmouth, however the dunes are within the coastal margin, with existing public access. Therefore, trampling may affect the Conservation Objective to maintain the extent and distribution of the habitat within the site.	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Chalk grassland	Trampling of vegetation	Trampling of vegetation can lead to creation of bare patches and erosion of habitat.	Chalk grassland occurs on cliff tops and slopes along the south side of the Island. Much of this area is accessible to the public. Away from steeper slopes, the grassland is easy to walk over and there is a network of existing paths and tracks. The proposed trail is routed across chalk grassland habitat within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC at Compton Down, Tennyson Down and West High Down. There is a risk that erosion compromises the Conservation Objective to maintain and restore the extent of chalk grassland habitat.	Yes
Chalk grassland	Nutrient enrichment	Use of the coast path and associated margin by walkers with dogs could lead to eutrophication caused by dog fouling. As a result, there may be a change in species composition.	Chalk grassland occurs on cliff tops and slopes along the south side of the Island. Much of this area is accessible to the public. Away from steeper slopes, the grassland is easy to walk over and there is a network of existing paths and tracks. The proposed trail is routed across chalk grassland habitat within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC at Compton Down, Tennyson Down and West High Down. Therefore there is a risk that nutrient enrichment will affect the structure and function of the habitat.	Yes
Chalk grassland	Loss of habitat through installation of access management infrastructure	Installation of new access management infrastructure could lead to a permanent reduction in the extent of this habitat.	Where the trail passes through this habitat it is aligned along existing promoted routes and as a result minimal new infrastructure is needed to guide walkers. However, significant effects cannot be ruled out on the basis of size of loss of habitat alone, therefore further detailed assessment is necessary.	Yes
Vegetated maritime cliffs	Trampling of vegetation	Trampling can lead to bare patches of soil, erosion of habitat and modification of vegetation communities.	Vegetated maritime cliff habitat occurs on cliff tops and cliff faces on the south side of the Island. Much of this area will fall within coastal margin as result significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage.	Yes

Feature group	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Vegetated maritime cliffs	Nutrient enrichment	Use of the coast path and associated margin by walkers with dogs could lead to eutrophication caused by dog fouling. As a result, there may be a change in species composition.	Vegetated maritime cliff habitat occurs on cliff tops and cliff faces on the south side of the Island. Much of this area will fall within coastal margin as result significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage.	Yes
Vegetated maritime cliffs	Loss of supporting habitat through installation of access management infrastructure	Installation of new access management infrastructure could lead to a permanent reduction in the extent of this habitat. Modification of source material could also lead to changes in vegetation composition.	Where the trail passes through this habitat it is aligned along existing promoted routes and as a result minimal new infrastructure is needed to guide walkers. However, significant effects cannot be ruled out on the basis of size of loss of habitat alone.	Yes
Dry heathland	Trampling of vegetation	The vegetation of dry heaths can be damaged or destroyed by people repeatedly walking on it. This creates bare patches and localised soil erosion which make the surrounding vegetation more vulnerable to further erosion.	The heathland habitat within Isle of Wight Downs SAC occurs north of Ventnor, around 750m landward of the trail. As a result, walkers following the proposed route will not interact with this feature, and there will be no risk to the Conservation Objective to maintain the extent of the habitat.	No
Reefs	Trampling of species found on the rock surfaces within the reef structures, or erosion of the structures themselves	Subtidal rock sub-features will not be impacted by the coastal access proposals. Intertidal rock that is periodically exposed, located at Bembridge Ledges, falls within the coastal margin. Continuous trampling and climbing on these features from walkers and dogs could result in damage to both the rocky substrate itself and the algal communities that it supports.	At Bembridge, the trail follows the top of the shingle beach. Although the trail is within the South Wight Maritime SAC, it does not interact with the reef feature. Bembridge Ledges, where the intertidal reef feature is exposed, is within the coastal margin. However, as this area has existing access and is a popular place to go rock pooling, it is not expected that the presence of the ECP or introduction of the margin will significantly increase use.	No

Conclusion:

The plan or project alone has the potential to cause a likely significant effect on the following qualifying features:

- **Non-breeding waterbirds** (dark-bellied brent geese; teal; ringed plover; black-tailed godwit; water bird assemblage) as a result of disturbance from recreational activities, loss of supporting habitat due to installation of access management infrastructure and disturbance from construction works
- **Non-breeding waterbirds (ringed plover and waterbird assemblage species) present in the breeding season,** as a result of disturbance from recreational activities or during construction works.
- **Terns** (breeding and foraging common, little, roseate and Sandwich terns) as a result of disturbance from recreational activities
- **Mediterranean gull** (breeding) as a result of disturbance from recreational activities or during construction works
- **Wetland plant and invertebrate assemblages** as a result of trampling and habitat loss from installation of access management infrastructure
- **Intertidal habitats** (estuaries - intertidal seagrass beds, intertidal sand and muddy sand, intertidal mud, intertidal mixed sediments, intertidal coarse sediment; *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand*;* Atlantic salt meadows; *Spartina* swards and mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide) as a result of habitat loss from installation of access management infrastructure or trampling
- **Vegetated shingle** (annual vegetation of drift lines; perennial vegetation of stony banks) as a result of habitat loss due to trampling
- **Sand dunes** (shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* - 'White dunes') as a result of habitat loss due to trampling
- **Chalk grassland** (semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites"); Early gentian, *Gentianella anglica* as a result of trampling, nutrient enrichment and habitat loss from installation of access management infrastructure
- **Vegetated maritime cliffs** (vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts) as a result of habitat loss from installation of access management infrastructure or trampling

The plan or project alone is unlikely to have a significant effect on the following qualifying features:

- **Bats** (Bechstein's bat, *Myotis bechsteini*)
- **Dry heathland** (European dry heaths)
- **Reefs**

- **Subtidal habitats** (sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time; estuaries - subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal mixed sediment; subtidal sand, subtidal seagrass beds; sheltered channel between island/mainland; submerged or partially submerged sea caves)
- **Coastal lagoons**
- **Desmoulins whorl snail**

(Any appreciable risks identified that are not significant alone are further considered in section C2.2)

C2.2 Risk of Significant Effects in-combination with the effects from other plans and projects

The need for further assessment of the risk of in-combination effects is considered here.

Natural England considers that it is the appreciable risks of effects (from a proposed plan or project) that are not themselves considered to be significant alone which must be further assessed to determine whether they could have a combined effect significant enough to require an appropriate assessment.

In C2.1 the qualifying features on which the access proposals might have an effect alone are identified – these are considered further in Part D of this assessment. For all other features, no other appreciable risks arising from the access proposals were identified that have the potential to act in combination with similar risks from other proposed plans or projects to also become significant. It has therefore been excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project is likely to have a significant effect in-combination with other proposed plans or projects.

C3. Overall Screening Decision for the Plan/Project

On the basis of the details submitted, Natural England has considered the plan or project under Regulation 63(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations and made an assessment of whether it will have a likely significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

In light of sections C1 and C2 of this assessment above, Natural England has concluded:

As the plan or project is likely to have significant effects (or *may* have significant effects) on some or all of the Qualifying Features of the European Site(s) 'alone', further appropriate assessment of the project 'alone' is required.

PART D: Appropriate Assessment and Conclusions on Site Integrity

D1. Scope of Appropriate Assessment

In light of the screening decision above in section C3, this section contains the Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project in view of the Conservation Objectives for the European Site(s) at risk.

The Sites and the Qualifying Feature for which significant effects (whether 'alone' or 'in combination') are likely or cannot be ruled out and which are initially relevant to this appropriate assessment are:

Table 7. Scope of Appropriate Assessment

Environmental pressure	**Qualifying Feature(s) affected** **(nb = non-breeding** **b = breeding)**	**Risk to Conservation Objectives**
Disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds from recreational activities	Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Dark-bellied brent geese (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb) ■ Teal (nb)	Repeated disturbance to feeding or resting non-breeding waterbirds, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site.
Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds present in the breeding season from recreational activities	Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site ■ Ringed Plover (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)	Disturbance to breeding birds, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduced fitness of adult birds and a reduction in productivity, resulting in a decline in the population of non-breeding birds. The Conservation Objective for the waterbird assemblage is to maintain the population abundance at a level above 51,361 individuals. Therefore, it is unlikely that impacts on breeding birds will have a

Environmental pressure	Qualifying Feature(s) affected (nb = non-breeding b = breeding)	Risk to Conservation Objectives
		knock-on effect on the wintering assemblage abundance. However, there is potential for the Conservation Objective regarding the diversity of the assemblage to be affected.
Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds from construction works	<u>Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site</u> ■ Dark-bellied brent geese (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)	Undertaking works to install access management infrastructure disturbs feeding or roosting birds, leading to reduced fitness and consequent reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of Qualifying Features within the site.
Disturbance to nesting terns and gulls from recreational activities	<u>Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site</u> ■ Common tern (b) ■ Little tern (b) ■ Roseate tern (b) ■ Sandwich tern (b) ■ Mediterranean gull (b)	Disturbance to terns and gulls at nesting site, or potential nesting sites, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, either deters birds from nesting or impacts productivity.
Disturbance to foraging terns	<u>Solent & Dorset Coast SPA</u> ■ Common tern ■ Little tern ■ Sandwich tern	Disturbance to foraging terns following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal could lead to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site.
Disturbance to nesting gulls from construction works	<u>Solent & Southampton Water SPA</u> ■ Mediterranean gull	Disturbance from construction activity in the vicinity of nesting gulls leads to reduced productivity and consequent impacts on the population and/or contraction in the distribution of Qualifying Feature within the site.
Trampling of sensitive species and habitat	<u>Solent Maritime SAC</u> ■ Annual vegetation of drift lines ■ Perennial vegetation of stony banks ■ Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (White dunes)	Repeated trampling, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, may damage sensitive habitats, plant communities or species, leading to long-term declines in their quality, distribution or numbers within the site. Types of possible effect include physical changes to habitats (for example

Environmental pressure	Qualifying Feature(s) affected (nb = non-breeding b = breeding)	Risk to Conservation Objectives
	■ Estuaries (intertidal seagrass beds, intertidal sand and muddy sand, intertidal mud, intertidal mixed sediments, intertidal coarse sediment) ■ Atlantic salt meadows ■ *Spartina* Swards ■ *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand <u>South Wight Maritime SAC</u> ■ Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts <u>Isle of Wight Downs SAC</u> ■ Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites"); ■ Early gentian, *Gentianella anglica* ■ Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts <u>Solent &Southampton Water Ramsar</u> ■ Wetland invertebrate assemblage ■ Wetland plant assemblage ■ Estuary	through compaction or erosion of the substrate), shifts in the species composition of plant communities, and reductions in species' population size or distribution.
Nutrient enrichment from dog waste	<u>Isle of Wight Downs SAC</u> ■ Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites"); ■ Early gentian, *Gentianella anglica*	Changes in levels of use by dog walkers, as a result of the proposals, may increase the amount of dog waste within the SAC. This nutrient enrichment may change the species composition of the grassland sward.
Loss of qualifying and supporting habitat through installation of access management infrastructure	<u>Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site</u> ■ Dark-bellied brent geese (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Water bird assemblage (nb)	The installation of access management infrastructure may lead to a permanent loss of extent of habitats that are qualifying features, or that support invertebrate or bird species that are qualifying features.

Environmental pressure	Qualifying Feature(s) affected (nb = non-breeding b = breeding)	Risk to Conservation Objectives
	Solent &Southampton Water Ramsar ■ Wetland invertebrate assemblage ■ Wetland plant assemblage ■ Estuary Solent Maritime SAC ■ Annual vegetation of drift lines ■ Perennial vegetation of stony banks ■ Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (White dunes) ■ Estuaries (intertidal seagrass beds, intertidal sand and muddy sand, intertidal mud, intertidal mixed sediments, intertidal coarse sediment) ■ Atlantic salt meadows ■ *Spartina* Swards ■ *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand South Wight Maritime SAC ■ Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts Isle of Wight Downs SAC ■ Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*), (note that this includes the priority feature "important orchid rich sites"); ■ Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	

D2. Contextual statement on the current status, influences, management and condition of the European Site and those qualifying features affected by the plan or project

Non-breeding waterbirds

A key consideration when developing proposals for the alignment of the England Coast Path is the potential for disturbance to waterbirds. This is clearly particularly important on this

stretch of the Coast Path, which runs close to, and in some locations within, the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site.

The Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site provides important foraging and roosting sites for over wintering birds, and nesting sites for breeding birds (considered further below). Intertidal mudflats within the estuaries on the north coast of the Isle of Wight form important low-tide foraging habitat for waders and wildfowl designated as part of the SPA/Ramsar. These birds then roost at high tide on upper saltmarsh, islands within the intertidal area or terrestrial habitat within or close to the SPA/Ramsar.

Disturbance resulting from recreational activities during wintering periods can affect a bird's ability to feed due to increased vigilance or having to move to an undisturbed area, which then affects the bird's energy balance. Energy expenditure is also increased if roosting birds are disturbed causing them to fly. Repeated disturbance can be problematic if it causes displacement of birds from an area or if it affects the fitness of individuals to the extent that there are population-level effects.

As part of the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives for the SPA [10], Natural England has set targets for all qualifying features that are necessary to meet the Conservation Objectives for the site. The Supplementary Advice sets out the attributes that are considered to best describe the site's ecological integrity, and which if conserved will achieve the Conservation Objectives. All the features have a target to 'reduce disturbance caused by human activities'.

Natural England has also set targets to maintain the abundance of SPA waterbird features, and restore their supporting habitats. Supporting habitats in this context include intertidal feeding areas and high tide roosts on upper saltmarsh and nearby wet grassland and freshwater habitats. The target to restore supporting habitats has been set due to the loss of saltmarsh across the SPA as a result of coastal squeeze. Waterbirds may also roost and feed on arable and pasture fields that are not part of the designated site. This has been mapped by the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) [11], which has also characterised the level of use of each field.

Dark-bellied brent geese

The SPA supports 6,855 individuals (5 year peak mean 2015/16 – 2019/20) [12] of the wintering Western European population of dark-bellied brent goose. WeBS data shows that the SPA population has declined by 30% between 2006/07 and 2016/17, triggering a medium WeBS Alert [13]. However, numbers have remained stable over the long term (25 years). The proportion of the regional population held by the site is stable, suggesting that conditions remain relatively favourable for the species. Hence a target to maintain the population abundance has been set in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives [10].

Brent geese start to arrive on the Isle of Wight in late September and depart again by early April. The main food sources in early winter are the green algae (*Ulva spp.*) and seagrass beds growing on the intertidal sediments. They will also feed on pasture or arable fields and coastal grazing marshes at high tide. Studies have found that use of improved pasture, winter cereals and oil seed rape peaks in November to February, whilst use of permanent pasture increases through until spring as geese prefer the new grass growth [14]. Newtown Harbour supports nationally important numbers of brent geese and can hold around a quarter of the SPA population at times [12]. The complex of intertidal and terrestrial habitats (some outside the SPA) are important for both foraging and roosting geese. Smaller

numbers are found at other sites on the Isle of Wight, including the Yar Estuary, Bembridge Harbour and Foreland, Medina Estuary and Ryde Sands.

Black-tailed godwit

The SPA supports 1,053 black-tailed godwits (5 year peak mean 2015/16 – 2019/20) [12]. Numbers within the SPA have been stable in the long term having previously increased, and so a 'maintain' target has been set for population abundance within the Supplementary Advice [10]. Therefore, whilst medium WeBS Alerts have been triggered in the short term (25% decline between 2011/12 and 2016/17) and since baseline (28% decline between 1994/95 and 2016/17) these should be viewed with caution as the change in numbers underpinning the Alerts are within the range of fluctuation typical for this site [13].

Black-tailed godwits are present within the SPA between July and April, though tend to be found in highest numbers between September and March. The key sites for feeding and roosting on the island are the Yar Estuary (WeBS core count 5 year peak mean (2015/6 – 19/20) of 142 birds) and Newtown Harbour (5 year peak mean of 104 birds) [12]. Smaller numbers are also found at Brading Marshes/Bembridge Harbour and the Medina Estuary.

Ringed plover

The SPA supports a 5 year peak mean (2015/16 – 2019/20) of 285 ringed plovers [12]. Numbers have declined in the long term (52% decline between 1991/92 and 2016/17) and since designation (54% decline), triggering high WeBS Alerts [13]. However, the trend on site appears to be tracking the regional and national trend, and the proportion of the regional population held by the site has increased, suggesting broadscale reasons for declines. Given the declines, an objective has been set to restore the size of the population [10], but as it is apparently tracking wider species trends it is unclear if site-specific conservation measures would be successful.

Ringed plover will roost on habitats such as sandbanks, spits, beaches and islands. Important roosting sites on the Isle of Wight are Newtown Harbour, Bembridge Harbour, Ryde and Thorness Bay. At low tide they feed on invertebrates found on sand and shingle shores and mudflats, in particular at Ryde Sands, Newtown Harbour and the Medina Estuary [11].

Ringed plovers are partially resident in the Solent (see next section for a description of breeding ringed plovers). In Newtown Harbour, the highest numbers recorded by the WeBS are during autumn passage (August to October). At other sites on the Isle of Wight, numbers remain higher during the winter, though there still tends to be a peak in WeBS counts during the autumn passage [12].

Teal

Teal have seen relatively stable populations within the SPA with 4,962 individuals present (5 year peak mean 2015/16 – 19/20) [12]. The feature is in good condition with no WeBS Alerts triggered, and therefore has a target to maintain population abundance set within the Supplementary Advice [10].

The most important site for feeding and roosting birds on the Isle of Wight is Newtown Harbour, which can hold around a quarter of the SPA population [12]. Other important sites at high tide are found within the Yar Estuary and Brading Marshes.

Waterbird Assemblage

The non-breeding waterbird assemblage feature of the SPA has seen a decline in numbers since designation, most recently averaging 41,211 individuals (2015/16 to 2019/20) [12]. There has been a 29% decline (between 1994/95 and 2016/17), triggering a medium WeBS Alert [13]. The waterbird assemblage is made up of the geese, ducks and waders that depend on the plant and invertebrate communities present within intertidal habitats and grazing marsh (and other supporting terrestrial habitats) in the area.

It is recognised that some constituent species contribute more towards the integrity of the overall assemblage than others and as such our assessment focuses on the abundance and diversity of the main component species (see notes under table 3) but considers the assemblage as a whole when assessing the impact of the proposals on water bird abundance and diversity.

Main component species of an assemblage are those which regularly occur on the site in internationally or nationally important numbers, regularly exceed 2,000 individuals or are otherwise named on the citation. The qualifying features considered above form part of the assemblage but are not repeated below. The proportions of the SPA populations referred to below are derived from WeBS core counts [12].

Main component species:

- Shelduck – Large numbers feed and roost within Newtown Harbour, which can hold 45% of the SPA population.
- Shoveler – The most important sites for roosting shovelers on the Isle of Wight are the Yar Estuary and Bembridge Harbour/Brading Marshes.
- Wigeon – Largest numbers of wigeon are found at Newtown Harbour, with lower numbers foraging and roosting at the Yar Estuary and Brading Marshes).
- Pintail – Nationally important numbers of pintail are found at Newtown Harbour.
- Great-crested grebe – Most great crested grebes that contribute to the assemblage figure are found on the northern shore of the Solent. They are only present in low numbers within Isle of Wight WeBS sectors.
- Little egret – This species fishes along the water's edge in any sheltered areas around the coast of the Isle of Wight. However, the largest numbers are recorded in Newtown Harbour due to the large extent of sheltered habitat found at this site.
- Grey plover – Newtown harbour is the most important site on the island for grey plovers, with smaller numbers feeding and roosting within the Yar Estuary, Medina Estuary and Bembridge Harbour.
- Whimbrel – Found in small numbers in Newtown Harbour.
- Turnstone – The Isle of Wight does not support a large proportion of the turnstone population within the SPA. However, small numbers can be found feeding along the water's edge on shingle beaches along the northern coastline, and roosting in Newtown Harbour, Thorness Bay and the Medina Estuary.
- Lapwing – The main WeBS core count sites on the Isle of Wight are Newtown Harbour, the Yar Estuary and Brading, each of which can hold over 10% of the SPA population at times. Lapwings make use of intertidal habitats for feeding (principally within the previously mentioned sites, plus the Medina Estuary [12] , but mainly use grassland within and outside the SPA/Ramsar and arable fields [11].
- Dunlin – At high tide dunlin are found principally within Newtown Harbour, which can hold 17% of the SPA population at times, with smaller numbers present at Bembridge Harbour.

- Greenshank – The main site on the Isle of Wight for feeding and roosting greenshank is Bembridge Harbour, which can hold 19% of the SPA population at times.

Solent-wide initiatives to manage impacts on wintering waterbirds

Bird Aware Solent

Extensive research has been undertaken to assess the impact of recreational activity on wintering birds in The Solent in light of planned new housing. This found evidence that current levels of recreational disturbance were impacting SPA birds, and so adverse impacts from further residential growth could not be ruled out. The implications this has for management of recreational activities within the Solent SPAs has been addressed by local authorities as part of the planning process. The resulting mitigation strategy aims to ensure no net increase in bird disturbance through a series of management measures (including provision of rangers, a dog project, signage and other infrastructure, and provision of alternative greenspace) which actively encourage coastal visitors to enjoy their visits in a responsible manner [15].

Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy

The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) [11] presents evidence, analysis and recommendations to inform decisions relating to strategic planning as well as individual development proposals. The strategy relates to internationally important brent goose and wading bird populations within and around the SPAs and Ramsar wetlands of the Solent Coast.

Sites within and outside the Solent SPAs used by waders and brent geese have been identified, mapped and categorised according to their use. Movement studies have also been carried out, which have identified sites that are important as ‘hubs’ linking other sites together, and as such are important to the functioning of the network as a whole. An explanation of the classification of sites as ‘core’, ‘primary support’, ‘secondary support’ or ‘low use’ can be found at Appendix 1.

Guidance on mitigation and off-setting requirements has been prepared by the Strategy Steering Group to achieve the long-term protection of the wider dark-bellied brent goose and wader network of sites [16]. The underlying principle of the Strategy is to conserve existing sites, but where this is not possible, the guidance sets out requirements to ensure that new sites enhance the quality and extent of the feeding and roosting resource.

Non-breeding waterbirds (breeding ringed plover and waterbird assemblage)

Where a breeding population of a species significantly contributes to the non-breeding population on the same site by being wholly or largely resident (or this cannot be ruled out), there is the potential for impacts on that breeding population to have consequences for the non-breeding population. Ringed plover is a non-breeding qualifying feature of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA, which is partially resident, with some birds staying on through the summer to nest. For this species, increased disturbance to the breeding population as a result of changes in recreational access could have knock-on effects on the size of the non-breeding population through reduced recruitment of young birds or increased adult mortality during the nesting season.

Ringed plovers have a preference for wide sandy or shingle beaches for breeding [17]. These types of beaches are also attractive for recreation and hence nesting ringed plovers are at risk from trampling of eggs and nests and disturbance.

It is estimated that around 8 pairs of ringed plovers nest on the coast of the Isle of Wight (pers. comm. NE SSSI Responsible Officer). This equates to 16 individuals, which represents 3% of the current SPA population (5 year mean of 467 individuals (2015/16 – 2019/20)) [12]. Therefore, impacts on breeding ringed plovers could affect the wintering population abundance. Along this part of the coast ringed plovers nest either side of the mouth of Newtown Harbour. They have also attempted to nest at Thorness Bay but have been unsuccessful in recent years due to disturbance (pers. comm. NE SSSI Responsible Officer).

Other species that make up part of the wintering waterbird assemblage are also partially resident, with some individuals present in the breeding season. Species of relevance to this HRA are lapwings, which nest on wet grassland close to the proposed trail at Newtown Harbour, grey herons, which nest at Hamstead, Newtown Harbour, and, potentially, little egrets. Therefore, these species are considered further in sections D3.2D and E.

Breeding terns and gulls

Changes in coastal access arrangements may increase the interaction between Coast Path users and important nesting and feeding sites for terns and Mediterranean gull.

Little, common, Sandwich and roseate tern populations have declined across the SPA since designation. 5-year peak means for the period 2013 to 2017 are 11, 147, 95 and 2 pairs respectively [10]. The reasons for decline are increased recreational disturbance to nesting sites, predation, and coastal squeeze reducing the shingle habitat they require to nest, with increased storminess leading to the flooding of nest sites. Given the declines, all tern species have a target in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives to restore the size of the breeding population across the SPA, along with a target to reduce disturbance caused by human activity. On the island there are ongoing discussions between the National Trust and other local partners as to how terns can be encouraged to breed successfully again. The current thinking is around restoring the shingle banks on the western spit of Newtown Harbour (Natural England, internal comms 2019) and the deployment of rafts to encourage nesting common terns.

Breeding pairs of Mediterranean gulls have increased across the SPA to 13 pairs (5 year mean 2013-2017) [10]. The feature is considered to be in favourable condition and has a target to ‘maintain’ the size of the breeding population. This species also has a target to reduce disturbance caused by human activity set in in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives. On the Isle of Wight, Mediterranean gulls nest at Newtown Harbour in front of the Mercia Seabroke hide.

<u>EU LIFE+ Nature Little Tern Recovery Project & Roseate Tern LIFE Project</u>

These two projects, funded through the EU LIFE programme, aimed to improve the conservation status of the little tern and roseate tern in the UK through targeted action at the most important colonies. The Little Tern Project finished in 2018 and included habitat improvements to tern nesting sites in Chichester and Langstone Harbours [18]. The Roseate Tern Project ran until 2020 and focused on the colonies near Lymington Harbour in the Western Solent [19].

Foraging terns

The Solent and Dorset Coast SPA [20] is designated for foraging terns which breed within the coastal SPAs and covers deeper waters below Mean Low Water (MLW). Interaction between coast path users and foraging terns will be minimal over the majority of the SPA given the distance between the path and the subtidal foraging areas. However, where the SPA covers harbours and inland lagoons, such as at Newtown Harbour, Bembridge and the River Yar, the foraging terns are closer to sources of potential disturbance. The sheltered nature of these areas, and their role as nurseries for small fish, means they are favoured by foraging terns. Therefore, the potential coast path interaction at these locations will be assessed in section D3.2.

Sand Dunes

The Solent Maritime SAC Is designated, in part, for shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* ('White dunes'). This habitat is mainly found at East Head and Pilsey Island in Chichester Harbour, but there is also a small area of dunes at Norton Spit to the west of the Yar Estuary on the Isle of Wight. The risk associated with the proposal is the possible increase in repeated trampling where the Coast Path changes current access levels and patterns at sensitive sites. Whilst the path is not directly routed on the dunes at Norton Spit, they are within the coastal margin. The targets in the SACO for Solent Maritime SAC are to maintain the extent and distribution of the habitat [6].

Some plant or animal species make a particularly important contribution to the necessary structure, function or quality of an Annex 1 habitat feature. Key species for sand dunes are marram grass, *Ammophila arenaria*, sand sedge, *Carex arenaria*, and sand couch grass, *Elytrigia juncea* [6]. Further detailed information about the Norton Spit dune habitat can be found at D3.2C, but coastal defences have resulted in the loss of much of the area. Dune plant species are still present, but marram grass is the only key species remaining.

Vegetated Shingle

The ‘annual vegetation of drift lines’ habitat feature comprises principally annual plants that occupy accumulations of drift material and gravel, rich in nitrogenous organic matter. It occurs on shingle or sand/shingle beaches, which are mobile, but not so dynamic as to prevent short-lived plants from establishing. ‘Perennial vegetation of stony banks’ is the habitat type that forms on more stable beaches, which allow perennial plants to persist.

These designated features of the Solent Maritime SAC and can be found on the Isle of Wight at Thorness Bay and the spits either side of the mouth of Newtown Harbour. Vegetated shingle is sensitive to abrasion from trampling due to the potential for damage to succulent plants and their root systems. Compaction of the surface may also affect the seed bank making it more difficult for some species to germinate [21].

The SACO for Solent Maritime SAC [6] sets targets to maintain the extent and distribution of vegetated shingle within the site

Intertidal habitats

The Solent Maritime SAC comprises a wide range of intertidal habitats, representing different sediment regimes and transitions from subtidal to terrestrial. The sub-features are considered below:

<u>Estuaries (intertidal sub-features)</u>

The Solent Maritime SAC encompasses a suite of tightly packed estuaries either side of the Solent. They are unique in Britain and Europe for their unusual tidal regime including double tides and long periods at high and low tide. Different types of estuaries are represented, including examples of coastal plain estuaries (Yar and Medina) and bar-built estuaries (Newtown Harbour). Habitats present within the Solent estuaries include intertidal mudflats and sandflats, seagrass and saltmarsh. Rare and unusual transitions to terrestrial and freshwater habitats such as reedbed, woodland and shingle vegetation are also present. Seagrass beds (which can be found near to Cowes and Ryde) and saltmarsh are among the most sensitive to anthropogenic impacts.

Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Atlantic salt meadows and *Spartina* swards

These saltmarsh features are all designated within the Solent Maritime SAC. The '*Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand' pioneer saltmarsh feature is found in the River Yar and Medina Estuary. The Solent Maritime SAC is the only site in the UK where all four species of cordgrass (*Spartina*) are found in close proximity. Small cordgrass has a restricted distribution with the most extensive stand at Newtown Harbour. Cordgrass species are an important precursor to saltmarsh development where sediments are accreting as they colonise a wide range of substrates in areas that are sheltered from strong wave action.

Atlantic salt meadows comprise the low marsh to upper marsh zones and transitions to terrestrial habitats. Particularly good examples of the saltmarsh zones and transitions to terrestrial habitats are found at Newtown Harbour, the Yar Estuary and the Medina Estuary where sea walls are not present.

The Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives for the Solent Maritime SAC set a target to maintain the extent of *Salicornia* pioneer saltmarsh and Atlantic salt meadows, but a restore target for Spartina swards as surveys show that these have declined since designation [6].

Saltmarsh vegetation is more sensitive to trampling than many terrestrial vegetation communities. The effects include changes in vegetation structure and species composition, often resulting in a shorter, less diverse sward with more bare ground and a greater susceptibility to erosion or colonisation by invasive *Spartina anglica*. The relative susceptibilities to trampling damage of different saltmarsh communities depend as much on where they grow as on the intrinsic sensitivity of their constituent species.

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide

Intertidal mudflats and sandflats are found throughout the Solent Maritime SAC and form much of the intertidal region. Mud communities are present in the most sheltered areas of the site and are dominated by worms, bivalve molluscs and the mud snail *Hydrobia ulvae*. Coarser sand and cobble communities are found on beaches on the more exposed open coast areas. The intertidal mudflat and sandflat communities provide a vital food source for internationally important populations of birds.

The intertidal habitats of the Solent Maritime SAC are currently being adversely affected by poor water quality: high levels of nutrients are causing algal mats to form on the mudflats

and saltmarsh [6]. These algal mats can prevent wading birds reaching the mudflat beneath, and if anoxic conditions develop, benthic invertebrate communities can also be affected.

Chalk grassland

The Isle of Wight Downs SAC is dominated by chalk grassland habitat that supports the rare UK endemic but locally abundant species, Early Gentian. The Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives [22] states there should be no measurable reduction in the extent of chalk grassland, with restoration (scrub removal) necessary in some areas. The reported extent of chalk grassland within the SAC is as follows;
1 Compton Down = 170ha
2 Mottistone Down = 16ha
3 Headon Warren & West High Down = 104ha
4 Ventnor Downs = 28ha

The Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives sets targets to maintain the population abundance and total extent of supporting habitat for the endemic species, Early Gentian. In 2008 a survey was carried out by National Trust which found around 10,000 plants on Tennyson Down [23].

Some plant or animal species (or related groups of such species) make a particularly important contribution to the necessary structure, function and/or quality of an Annex I habitat feature at a particular site. In the case of the Isle of Wight Downs SAC, the habitat is made up of three types of chalk grassland communities: CG1 *Festuca ovina - Carlina vulgaris* grassland, CG2 *Festuca ovina - Avenula pratensis* grassland and CG3 *Bromus erectus* grassland. These plant communities support an important Lepidoptera assemblage including Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon*, Small Blue *Cupido minimus*, Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus*, Brown Argus *Aricia agestis* , Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*, Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*, Grayling *Hipparchia Semele*, Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*, Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae.*

There is a risk of loss of habitat, or associated species, due to the installation of access infrastructure. Chalk grassland is sensitive to trampling which can lead to bare patches of ground and erosion of land. The Site Improvement Plan for the Isle of Wight Downs [24] states that Tennyson Down is locally experiencing high levels of pedestrian visits that damage the chalk grassland habitat. Nutrient enrichment from animal waste can also cause changes to plant communities.

Vegetated Maritime Cliffs

Vegetated maritime cliffs are a feature of the Isle of Wight Downs SAC and South Wight Maritime SAC and comprise a mosaic of maritime influenced plant communities. Located on both cliff faces and fringing cliff tops, the habitat is maintained by grazing and natural factors such as erosion and periodic cliff falls. The cliff habitat feature is found along the entire south east and south west coast, from The Needles to Bembridge. Vegetation on the cliff top is sensitive to trampling and there is a risk of loss of habitat due to the installation of access infrastructure.

The cliffs support a range of different plant communities. The presence, composition, location and extent of maritime scrub, heath and/or grassland, plus mosaics of the three, on cliff slopes or cliff tops will be determined by the interaction of natural geomorphological

processes with exposure and soil characteristics and management where relevant. Typical species of vegetated sea cliffs include wild cabbage, *Brassica oleracea*.

The vegetated sea-cliffs of the South Wight are a stronghold for the Glanville Fritillary butterfly within the UK. The slumping and the landslips of the vegetated sea cliffs provides a continual supply of suitable condition for the growth of new young plants of Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolate* on which the female lays her eggs, and which is the primary food plant for developing larva. Other colonies are also found on the nearby chalk downland at Mottistone and Compton Downs.

Wetland plant and invertebrate assemblages

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated, in part, for its wetland invertebrate and plant assemblages. The species are associated with grazing marsh and saltmarsh, ditches, saline lagoons, shingle beaches and coastal cliffs. See notes under table 4, above, for a list of species. The risk associated with the coastal access proposal is the possible increase in repeated trampling where the coast path changes current access levels and patterns at sensitive sites and where infrastructure might be established causing a loss of supporting habitat. The species are also sensitive to changes in the hydrological regime, and so there is a risk of impact from the installation of infrastructure across watercourses.

Current access patterns and levels of use

Current patterns and levels of public use can have an important influence on the potential effects of Coast Path alignment options on Qualifying Features, particularly in relation to bird disturbance, but also trampling and erosion of sensitive habitats. Where there are paths, levels of use vary considerably and depend on a variety of factors, in particular the proximity of towns, villages and holiday/caravan parks, as well as car parks, public beaches and other attractors and access points, and the scope for short circular walks.

During the course of developing detailed proposals about how to implement coastal access around the Isle of Wight, we have built up a detailed picture of current patterns and levels of use. This has been informed by evidence from a number of sources including site visits and on-line information for visitors. We have made extensive use of the results of visitor surveys undertaken to inform strategic mitigation for new housing (Bird Aware Solent). Our access management has been informed by local knowledge and advice from local access managers including the Isle of Wight Council, Bird Aware Solent rangers and local site managers including the National Trust.

In 2019, the Island's resident population totalled 141,538 people [25]. The more populous urban areas on the island are to the north of the Island, particularly Ryde, Newport and Cowes. This is reflected in a map (appendix 3) produced as a result from the household surveys carried out to inform Bird Aware Solent, which shows the highest predicted annual visits to the coastal areas closest to the towns, with 716,000 to 1,265,000 at Cowes and east of Ryde and 524,000 to 716,000 towards St Helens and Bembridge [26]. There is an existing coast path around the Isle of Wight which is popular among locals and visitors.

Tourism is one of the major contributors to the economy on the Isle of Wight. Large numbers of visitors are attracted by the historic landscapes and heritage on the Island. Recreational events such as the Walking Festival and Cowes Week, and a number of music festivals attract large numbers of people. There are an average of 5.45 million day visits and 0.61 million holidays with overnight stays annually (2017-19) [27].

In a visitor survey undertaken for Bird Aware Solent over the winter of 2019/20 [28], around half (48%) of interviewees were aware of the development of the England Coast Path, and 68% said that they expected its development would lead to them exploring new sections of the coast.

Housing growth

Between 2011 and 2019, the population of the Isle of Wight grew by 2.3%, with this growth driven by an increase in the number of people aged 65 or over, whilst at the same time there was a decrease in those under 65. This pattern is projected to continue, with an increase in the population aged over 65 predicted by 2038, partly offset by decreases in working age people and children, resulting in an overall predicted increase of around 11,100 people. Therefore, increased house building is necessary, and allocations for sites have been consulted on by the Isle of Wight Council [25]. The majority of the proposed sites are around Newport, with Cowes, East Cowes and Ryde delivering most of the rest of the housing. This housing growth is likely to increase demand for recreational access to the coast. Therefore, the HRA of the draft Island Plan [29] concludes that green infrastructure and contributions to the Bird Aware Solent strategic mitigation project are necessary to mitigate adverse effects. As the majority of the growth is centred on the existing main towns on the Isle of Wight, the pattern of access to the coast is not likely to change considerably from that predicted by visitor survey information collected for Bird Aware Solent and shown on the map at Appendix 2.

The effects of planned growth in combination with ECP proposals are considered in section D4.

D3. Assessment of potential adverse effects considering the plan or project 'alone'

This section considers the risks identified at the screening stage in section C and assesses whether adverse effects arising from these risks can be ruled out, having regard to the detailed design of proposals for coastal access.

In reviewing the ability of any incorporated measures to avoid harmful effects, Natural England has considered their likely effectiveness, reliability, timeliness, certainty and duration over the full lifetime of the plan or project. A precautionary view has been taken where there is doubt or uncertainty regarding these measures.

D3.1 Approach to assessment of risks

In assessing risks to the conservation objectives, we have considered the relevant environmental pressures, the nature of activities associated with the proposals and sensitivity of features to those activities. Direct risks from the access proposals are loss of habitat from installing new infrastructure and disturbance from construction works. Indirect risks of disturbance to birds or damage to habitats arises from the way the interventions delivered by the programme affect the distribution, intensity or type of recreational activities that take place in areas where sensitive features may be present. The risks to the site conservation objectives are summarised at the start of this Appropriate Assessment - in Table 7 on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**.

In this part of the assessment, we make some general points about assessment of each of the risks identified and our approach to predicting how the interventions will affect recreational activities. In D3.2 we consider the detailed design of the access proposals and possible impacts at specific locations and in D3.3 we summarise our conclusions.

Possible impacts of the access proposals

Disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds from recreational activities

A key nature conservation issue for the north coast of the Isle of Wight is the protection of non-breeding water birds that are SPA or Ramsar qualifying features. When considering the potential for the detailed design of the access proposals to increase disturbance to birds, we have taken into account that recreational activities are currently impacting the achievement of site Conservation Objectives. We have focussed attention on the access management interventions proposed in places where: i) we predict appreciable changes in levels of public use as a result of our proposals; and ii) there are sensitive locations likely to hold concentrations of birds, such as high tide roosts and important feeding areas, either within or outside SPA boundaries.

To assess sensitive locations for bird disturbance, we used BTO WeBS data [12] , the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy mapping data [11], observations during site visits, and information provided to us by site managers and local naturalists. To identify parts of the stretch where at least a moderate increase in levels of recreational use appears to be likely, we used our own observations, on-line mapping and aerial photography and information provided by the local access authority and site managers.

Increased recreational visits to locations near where birds are feeding or resting may produce some increase in bird disturbance. But that can vary from occasional, short-term, events affecting a few birds (for example increased alertness and a small reduction in feeding rates lasting a few minutes) to major disruption on a regular basis (such as large flocks abandoning a key roost site or feeding area and flying several kilometres to the nearest alternative site).

When assessing whether increases in bird disturbance at a particular location require changes to route alignment or other mitigation measures to ensure there is no adverse effect on site integrity, we have followed the principle that ‘significant’ disturbance - as defined by the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and used in Natural England’s supplementary advice on the conservation objectives for marine SPAs - must be avoided. The definition is: “Disturbance should be judged as significant if an action (alone or in combination with other effects) impacts on (water)birds in such a way as to be likely to cause impacts on populations of a species through either: (i) changed local distribution on a continuing basis; and/or (ii) changed local abundance on a sustained basis; and/or (iii) the reduction of ability of any significant group of birds to survive, breed, or rear their young.”

On the north coast of the Isle of Wight the proposals follow existing walked routes where possible, and where this is the case the potential for the access proposals to cause a significant increase in disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds is reduced. This is because the pattern of access and distribution of visitors is unlikely to be affected where existing routes are used. Also, the number of new walkers attracted by the ECP is likely to be only a small proportion of existing users.

In a report to the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership, Footprint Ecology [26] note that in general, where access levels are already very high, increased recreational use is perhaps to be expected to result in less impact as the birds will be either avoiding the area at times when people are present, or have become habituated to the level and type of disturbance at that location. By contrast, increasing recreational use in areas that currently have little or no access is likely to have the biggest impact. However, it should be stressed that this does not mean that adding further visits to an already stressed system is acceptable. It is just that in these cases the ECP is likely to only be a small contributor to an existing issue, and it is not the ECP's role to resolve existing disturbance issues, but should take opportunities to improve the situation where possible.

Where we are proposing new access or significantly improving coastal paths, we consider that demand for access is likely to increase on present levels, and with projected population growth on the island. In section D4 of this HRA we consider any specific in-combination effects with Local Plans and substantial development proposals.

Our objective in designing proposals for coastal access has been to ensure they do not increase the disturbance pressure affecting the site and that where possible they contribute to wider efforts to manage existing and future demand for places for coastal recreation in ways that help to reduce disturbance to wintering birds. To achieve this on the Isle of Wight our proposals for coastal access:

- Where possible, make use of popular established paths where an increase in the level of use is unlikely to increase the disturbance pressure affecting the SPA. The majority of the proposed alignment for this part of the coast is following existing promoted routes such as the existing IOWCP.
- The trail will be well-maintained and easy to follow, minimising the likelihood that users will stray into sensitive areas.
- Do not create new coastal access rights over intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh that are used by feeding waterbirds. In practice, use of such intertidal areas for recreation is limited as they are unattractive, dangerous and inherently unsuitable for public access on foot. A year-round Section 25A exclusion will be applied over the mudflats and saltmarsh along this part of the coast therefore not creating any new coastal access rights. Maps of excluded areas are shown in each published stretch report, and at the beginning of each section in D3.2 below.
- Contribute to raising awareness and encouraging appropriate visitor behaviour close to areas used by wintering birds by installing new information panels at key access points along this part of the coast. These will be developed with Bird Aware Solent, reinforcing their messages by explaining how to enjoy the area without damaging sensitive wildlife. More detail on the positioning of particular signs and the messages to be conveyed at a local level is set out in section D3.2 below.

These design features mean that the ECP proposals can make a positive contribution by helping to address and manage wider issues of waterbird disturbance.

A key finding from the research underpinning the Solent Recreation and Mitigation Strategy (now Bird Aware Solent) for wintering waterbirds is that how people behave, and how access is managed at each location determines the extent of disturbance [30]. Therefore, Bird Aware Solent focusses on engaging with users through ranger patrols, events and signage. One of the main ways access management strategies encourage responsible recreation is to urge people stick to existing footpaths and avoid letting dogs run on the intertidal habitat. Therefore, by using existing walked routes wherever possible, and excluding access to saltmarsh and mudflats, the ECP proposals complement the approach taken by Bird Aware Solent.

Overall, by using existing walked routes, careful route alignment, restrictions and signage, recreational disturbance will be minimised. However, where there are sensitive locations and/or changes in access levels predicted, these are considered in more detail below (see D3.2A to D3.2J).

Disturbance to breeding birds from recreational activities

Existing or potential nesting sites have been identified within Newtown Harbour for little, common and Sandwich tern, ringed plover and Mediterranean gull. Ringed plovers also potentially nest at Thorness Bay. Waders, including lapwings, redshanks, and oystercatchers, nest at various locations around Newtown Harbour, and there is a small heronry at Hamstead.

In general, recreational disturbance will be avoided by routing the path away from key beach nesting sites for terns. Where appropriate, other mitigation measures such as screening or exclusions to access will also be used, reinforced by signage and interpretation. The risk to areas potentially used by breeding terns, gulls, ringed plovers or waterbird assemblage species at Newtown Harbour or Thorness Bay is considered further in sections D3.2D, G & I.

Disturbance to foraging terns from recreational activities

All tern species forage in subtidal waters but may choose to feed close to the shoreline. Where they feed offshore terns are not susceptible to recreational disturbance. However, where they feed in coastal lagoons or sheltered harbours, they are closer to the source of disturbance and potentially susceptible. Key feeding areas are Newtown Harbour, Bembridge Harbour and Lagoons and within the Medina. The coastal lagoons at Newtown and Bembridge Harbours are all landward of the trail, and therefore no coastal access rights will be created over these areas. Interpretation will be installed at Newtown Quay, Bembridge Harbour and the Medina to inform people of tern feeding behaviours, notify them of the S25A exclusion over the intertidal areas and ask them to keep dogs out of the water. Potential impacts on foraging terns are considered in more detail in sections D3.2B, G & J.

Trampling of habitats

<u>Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar and Solent Maritime SAC</u>

In places where the proposed route runs within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar site there is the potential for trampling and erosion of habitats. Possible impacts of trampling at places where the path crosses or passes close to locations where saltmarsh, dune, vegetated shingle, or vegetated maritime cliffs occur, or where there is a possibility that creation of coastal access rights might influence patterns of access are considered in detail in sections D3.2C, D, E, F, H and I.

<u>South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC</u>

Chalk grassland and vegetated maritime cliff features are located on the south side of the island within the South Wight Maritime SAC and the Isle of Wight Downs SAC. Looking at the route in detail:

Bonchurch Landslip
From IOW-3-S050 to IOW-3-S066 the published route of the trail follows the existing IOWCP through the South Wight Maritime SAC. However, parts of the area are affected by active landslips and so the IOWC has closed part of the route (Public Footpath V65a) for safety

reasons. Therefore, at IOW-3-S063 modifications to the route will be needed to move it to stable ground. The new alignment will be confirmed in summer 2022, following the conclusions of a detailed survey that can only be undertaken once the IOWC is confident that the current landslip has stabilised.

The vegetated maritime cliff habitat in this location is mature woodland. This habitat is relatively robust and not particularly susceptible to trampling pressure. Furthermore, the steep terrain means that people are likely to keep to the path, limiting potential impacts. Therefore, where the trail uses an existing well-used route, it is unlikely that the introduction of the ECP or coastal margin will result in significant erosion from trampling.

Where the ECP needs to be realigned to avoid the active landslip, some vegetation clearance will be needed, and it is likely that new infrastructure including steps and handrails will need to be installed. However, the detailed design of the route will aim to minimise, as far as possible, the need for vegetation clearance and new infrastructure. Where the existing PRoW has slumped and is no longer used, this part of the site will be able to vegetate over. As the modification is to realign an existing walked route, the overall trampling pressure on this part of the site will not increase. Nevertheless, once the details of the modification are finalised, the IOWC will apply for SSSI assent for the infrastructure works. At this time, Natural England will carry out a project-level HRA of the works, to ensure that they will not lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.

St Catherine's Point

IOW-4-S039 to IOW-4-S040 and IOW-4-S045 to IOW-4-S050 are within the South Wight Maritime SAC vegetated maritime cliff habitat (chalk grassland and scrub in this location). The route follows a PRoW and then an existing walked route. Part of the proposed margin, including the land on which IOW-4-S040, S046 and S047 are proposed, is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW. This part of the coast is very popular with visitors as St Catherine's Point is the most southerly tip of the island and has spectacular views. There is a National Trust car park at the end of Sandrock Road (between IOW-4-S046 and S047). The terrain is steep in places, which encourages people to use the path as the easiest route. Therefore, as the trail uses an existing well-used route, partly within existing open access land, it is unlikely the introduction of the ECP or coastal margin will change access pressure or patterns and lead to significant additional erosion from trampling pressure.

Shepherd's Chine

Between IOW-4-S084 and IOW-4-S086, the trail follows the existing IOWCP where it crosses Shepherd's Chine, which is part of South Wight Maritime SAC. The vegetation is woodland and grassland with scrub. As the trail follows an existing route, and as people are likely to stick to the path as it is the safest and easiest route across the chine, the introduction of the ECP and coastal margin, is unlikely to add significantly to any erosion of habitats.

Brook Chine to Shippards Chine

At IOW-5-S007 to IOW-5-S009 and IOW-5-S012 the trail follows the existing footpath through South Wight Maritime SAC. The land is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW. The vegetated maritime cliff habitat in this section is comprised of grassland at the top of low cliffs that slump down onto the beach. Surfacing, or other infrastructure improvements, that might encourage additional use are not proposed on this part of the route. Therefore, as the trail follows an existing well-used route within existing open access land, patterns of access are unlikely to change to the extent that significant additional trampling disturbance results.

Compton Down

At IOW-5-S015 to IOW-5-S017 the trail follows the route of the current IOWCP through existing CRoW open access land within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC. This is an easily accessible part of the coast path with car parks at either end of the stretch through Compton Down. As the route follows an existing well used footpath through open access land, the introduction of the trail and margin are not likely to change the level of use or patterns of access to the extent that there would be significant additional erosion of chalk grassland habitat.

The chalk cliff and foreshore adjacent to Compton Down is designated as part of the South Wight Maritime SAC. This will form part of the coastal margin, but in practice, the steep and dangerous terrain means it will not be accessed from the trail.

Tennyson Down
IOW-5-S035 follows the route of the existing IOWCP through Tennyson Down, which is within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC, and a popular tourist destination. The habitat here is a mix of chalk grassland, acid grassland, scrub and woodland. Part of the site is dedicated open access land under CRoW and as such there are a number of existing worn paths. West of Tennyson's Monument, the trail continues to use the route of the existing IOWCP rather than the worn paths that are closer to the coast. This is to encourage walkers to use the PRoW, which has better views of the sea, in order to concentrate use onto one route and reduce the trampling pressure across the site. However, as the coastal margin in this area is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW, the introduction of coastal access rights over the chalk grassland will not change the pattern of access.

The chalk cliff and foreshore adjacent to Tennyson Down is designated as part of the South Wight Maritime SAC. This will form part of the coastal margin, but in practice, the foreshore is inaccessible due to the presence of the cliff.

West High Down
IOW-5-S035 to IOW-5-S049 follows the route of the existing IOWCP across West High Down, but at The Needles follows other existing walked routes to take walkers closer to the coast. The Needles is an extremely popular tourist spot, and the introduction of the ECP is not likely to constitute an additional draw to the area. The majority of the area is already open access land under CRoW. Therefore, the introduction of the trail and margin are not likely to increase visitor numbers significantly, nor change the pattern of access in the area, and so the conservation objectives for the site will not be adversely affected.

The cliff and foreshore around the western tip of the Isle of Wight form part of the South Wight Maritime SAC, and will become part of the coastal margin. However, the cliffs are inaccessible and the beach at Alum Bay is only accessible via chairlift or existing steps. Therefore the introduction of the margin will not change this pattern of access, and will not lead to any damage of qualifying habitats, which in this area are the cliffs, submerged reefs, and sea caves.

Conclusion regarding potential trampling of habitat within South Wight Maritime SAC or Isle of Wight Downs SAC
Where the trail passes through the South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC, the proposal is to follow existing walked routes, including the current IOWCP. Much of the coastal margin is already open access land under CRoW, or is steep and inaccessible cliff. The route includes some very popular walking and tourist destinations. Therefore, the ECP is unlikely to attract significant numbers of new walkers to the area, and the pattern of use and trampling is unlikely to change. In conclusion, the introduction of the trail and associated margin is not likely to increase trampling and erosion of SAC habitats and lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites.

Nutrient Enrichment

The trail runs through the Isle of Wight Downs SAC at Compton Down, Tennyson Down and West High Down, therefore, there is a risk that dog faeces will lead to nutrient enrichment and changes to chalk grassland plant communities. The route chosen is to follow the existing IOWCP, and as such, the introduction of the ECP is not likely to be a particular draw that would lead to an increase in usage by people or dogs. Furthermore, much of the downs is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW. Therefore, it can be concluded that the introduction of the trail and margin will not change the level of use or pattern of access to the extent that there is likely to be any additional nutrient enrichment issues that could lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

Loss of habitat as a result of installing new access management infrastructure

Loss of habitat as a result of new infrastructure being installed has been identified as a potentially significant impact of the proposals. Method statements by the local authority managing the works will minimise the area affected, for example by stipulating safe routes for vehicle access and requiring the use of hand tools where more control is necessary (see table 8 below).

There are a few places where, having considered all the circumstances, we have concluded that it is necessary to install new infrastructure within designated site boundaries. In some circumstances infrastructure or path surfaces may need replacing as they are considered to be unsatisfactory by National Trail standards or are in disrepair. In the event that replacement or resurfacing works are required, we will replace the infrastructure with a like for like footprint so no additional habitat loss occurs.

Detailed consideration of the installation of access infrastructure within designated sites is found at sections D3.2D, E, G, I, J & K.

Before establishment of the trail, the route is walked to check the infrastructure and any resurfacing requirements (‘walk the course’ checks). As this HRA is a review of existing published proposals, some of the walk the course checks have been completed before the revised HRA is finalised. This is the case for stretches 4 and 5, and so any additional new infrastructure identified within European sites on this part of the route is considered in section D3.2K, which assesses the cumulative impact of works within the designated sites (see table 10 at p.136).

Any further infrastructure identified as part of walk the course checks for other stretches will be considered during the SSSI assenting process, and the cumulative impact of any further habitat losses will be assessed to ensure that the integrity of the European sites is not adversely impacted.

Impact of construction works on habitat and disturbance to birds

Where infrastructure is to be installed on or near to designated sites, there may be a risk of disturbance to birds or impacts on habitats due to the working area. Table 8, below, summarises mitigation measures to reduce these potential impacts during path construction works.

Table 8. Establishment works - mitigation measures

Site design	■ Operator to design access routes, storage areas and site facilities to minimise disturbance impacts. ■ Operator to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
Timing of works	■ Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk. ■ Natural England to specify a period of low sensitivity at each construction site, based on likely departure and arrival dates of waterbird species that use it. ■ At all other times, operator to work within 200 metres of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the 2 hours before and after high tide. ■ Operator to limit construction activities to daylight hours at all times of year.
Method	■ Operator to use hand tools where practicable. ■ Operator to avoid use of percussive machinery outside period of low sensitivity, or avoid use of machinery during the 2 hours before and after high tide.

Detailed consideration of the impact of construction disturbance is found at sections D3.2B, C, D, E, F, G, I, and J.

Predicting how the access proposals will affect recreational activity

The Coastal Access Programme delivers interventions to improve or secure public access to the coast (as described in A2). Detailed proposals are developed through an iterative design process during which constraints and opportunities are considered, including any relating to nature conservation. In this assessment we consider possible direct impacts of the proposals on affected European sites and features from path improvement works and indirect impacts that might arise from changes to the distribution, intensity, and type of recreational activity because of the interventions made.

Assessment of indirect impacts requires an understanding of the baseline access situation and how this will be affected by the access proposals. Detailed consideration of possible impacts is made in sections D3.2A to J of this assessment; in this section we describe the general approach we have used to predicting how the access proposals are likely to affect recreational activity, expanding on the method outlined in Chapter 6 of the Coastal Access Scheme [1].

Access baseline

For the purposes of this assessment, the baseline distribution, intensity, and types of recreational activity is inferred by combining evidence from several sources including:

- Data that provides an indication of how a site is used, for example user apps like Strava[6], automated pedestrian counters and car park provision
- Information about recreation and access to sites in printed and on-line maps, guides, apps etc
- Advice from local access professionals, conservation site managers, rangers and land managers
- Bespoke walk over surveys to look for signs of use, such as well beaten paths

By combining evidence from these and other sources a comprehensive picture of access at a given location can be established.

Several sources of data provide background information about demand for access, including the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey [31] and its successor, the People and Nature Survey, that provide information about how people use the natural environment at a national level. In addition, we have used visitor surveys carried out by the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership [26] [32] and more recently by Bird Aware Solent [33] [28], that estimate visitor numbers to the Solent area.

Also relevant to this assessment is access in the sense of people having access for recreational purposes. Broadly speaking, public access may be 'given' or 'taken'. Access that is given includes all forms of statutory access (like CARs), access under local acts or where dedication of access has occurred or permission for access has been given. Some types of access rights are easily identified, for example from Ordnance Survey maps, others can be more difficult to establish. There are often clues on the ground, for example where a means of access has been provided or there are regulations concerning specific activities, but given access can be difficult to prove conclusively and may appear similar to access that is taken. Access that is taken is sometimes referred to as *de facto* access: meaning that it is true in fact but is not legally sanctioned. *De facto* access is access that is taken without force, without secrecy and without permission. In this assessment, where the legal status of current access is unclear, we refer to 'existing access'.

Predicting change

The types of interventions delivered through the programme are described in Part A of this HRA. The access proposals incorporate three main types of on-site interventions:

- Manipulation of the physical environment
- Limiting access rights with local restrictions and exclusions
- Signs directing or encouraging people to behave in particular ways

Access management techniques like these are widely used by site managers, and this provides a basis for predicting what impact they are likely to have on recreational activity at a given location. The specific proposals we make are tailored to local circumstances and new interventions are often combined with existing access management and natural features of the site. Because there is a degree of uncertainty when making predictions about on-site

[6] Strava is an app used by recreational users to record activities. Strava Metro provide aggregated data to active transport planners to help understand mobility patterns, identify opportunities for investment and evaluate the impact of infrastructure changes.

interventions, where we consider the sensitivity of features presents a higher level of risk (at Western Haven and Clamerkin in Newtown Harbour) we have sought expert advice from an independent access and recreation consultant.

Coastal Access Rights (CARs) are a new form of access rights and there are some minor differences in the limitations that apply, however, they are very similar to other statutory access rights from which reasonable assumptions can be made about how they are likely to affect recreational activities at a given location. Members of the public rarely, if ever, distinguish between the many forms public access can take beyond whether access is or isn't allowed at a particular location and any advertised limitations that apply. Monitoring open access confirmed the strong tendency of people in open spaces to follow defined paths and tracks and also that this tendency is not generally affected by the creation of open access rights [34]. More important for predicting how a site might be used for recreation are the types of factor listed in the method outlined in Chapter 6 of the Coastal Access Scheme [1]. Therefore the predictions we have made are bottom-up assessments made at the local level considering factors such as existing use, terrain, physical barriers, access points, proximity to settlements, alternatives, legal limitations, and other factors, as well as the detailed design of specific interventions proposed, such as the position of the path, any improvements to the path and any other physical interventions.

D3.2 Design of the access proposal to address possible risks – at a local level

In this part of the assessment, we have subdivided the coast of the Isle of Wight from Wootton Creek to East Cowes into a series of shorter lengths of coast, corresponding the Coastal Access Reports, where establishing the England Coast Path and associated coastal access rights might impact on qualifying features of a European site. Each length of coast is then considered in a separate subsection (3.2A, 3.2B etc.). In each subsection we explain how the detailed design of our proposals in the relevant report or reports takes account of possible risks.

The features occurring at each of these key locations are shown in the table below. To make it easier to cross-reference between this assessment and the corresponding Coastal Access Reports in which access proposals are made, the relationship between the geographic units in this assessment and the Coastal Access Reports is shown.

Table 9. Summary of key locations

Location	Coastal Access Report (stretch identification number)	Relevant risks Links back to the assessment scope						
		Disturbance of non-breeding waterbirds	Disturbance to non-breeding waterbird (ringed plover)	Disturbance of breeding terns and gulls	Disturbance to foraging terns	Trampling of sensitive species and supporting habitat	Loss of habitat from installation of infrastructure	Disturbance to birds from construction works
D3.2A - Ryde Sands	Report 2 (IOW-2-S028 to IOW-2-S059	✓						
D3.2B - Bembridge Harbour	Report 2 (IOW-2-S119 to IOW-2-S131)	✓			✓			✓
D3.2C - Yarmouth Estuary	Report 6 (IOW-6-S028 to IOW-6-S033)	✓				✓		✓
D3.2D - Newtown Harbour: Hamstead Dover/Hamstead Quay	Report 6 and 7 (IOW-6-S086 to IOW-7-S024)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

D3.2E - Newtown Harbour: Western Haven	Report 7 (IOW-7-S025 to IOW-7-S037 and IOW-7-A001)	✓				✓	✓	✓
D3.2F - Newtown Harbour: Shalfleet Fields to Fleetlands Farm	Report 7 (IOW-7-S046 to IOW-7-S067)	✓				✓		✓
D3.2G - Newtown Harbour: Newtown Quay to Harts Farm	Report 7 (IOW-7-S074 to IOW-7-S097)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
D3.2H - Newtown Harbour: Walters Copse/ Clamerkin	Report 7 (IOW-7-S093 to IOW-7-S098)	✓				✓		
D3.2I - Thorness Bay	Report 8 (IOW-8-S001 to IOW-8-S005)	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
D3.2J - The Medina	Report 10 (IOW-10-S001 to IOW-10-SO95)	✓			✓		✓	✓

D3.2A Ryde Sands

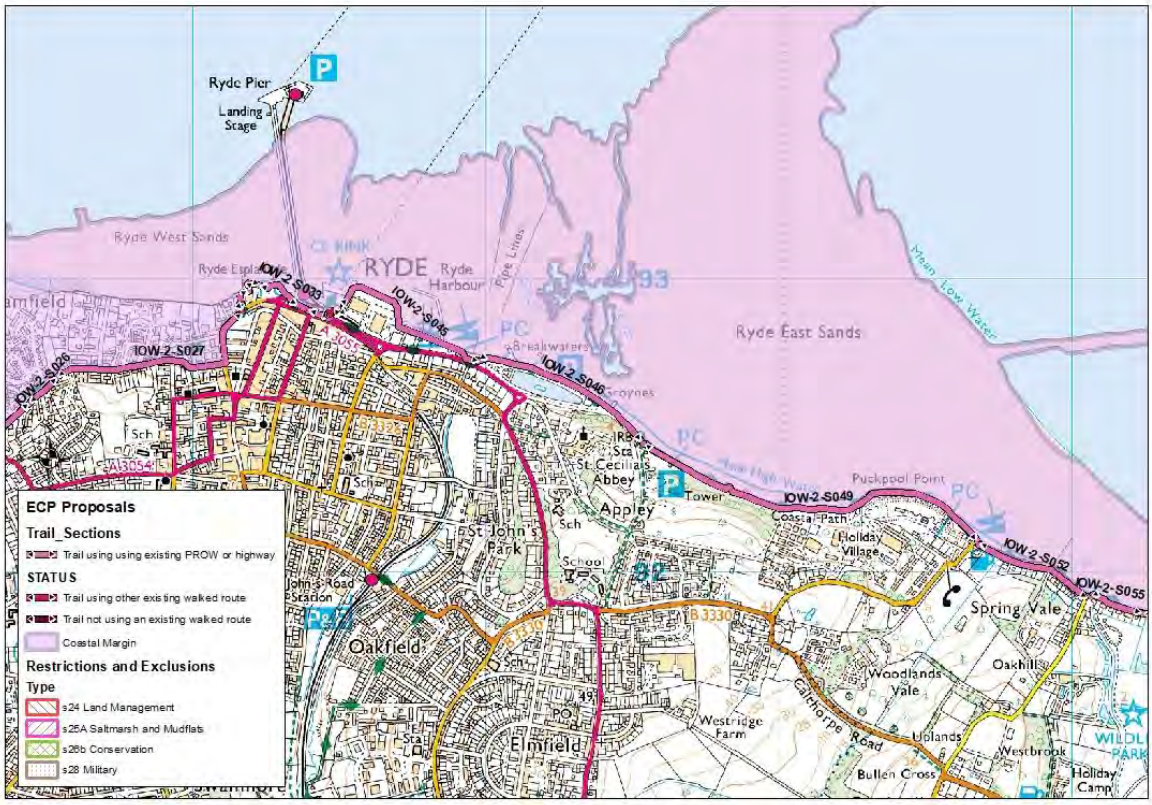


Figure 2: Map of ECP proposals at Ryde Sands

Current situation

Access baseline

Ryde is situated on the NE coast of the Isle of Wight. A foot passenger catamaran service runs between Portsmouth and Ryde Pier, and a hovercraft runs between Southsea and Ryde. These transport links, along with the wide sandy beaches, make it a very popular destination for day trippers. There are an average of 5.45 million day visits and 0.61 million holidays with overnight stays annually (2017-19) [27].

Ryde is the largest town on the Isle of Wight, with a resident population of around 26,000 (based on 2011 census data) [35]. Bird Aware Solent householder survey modelling shows the coastline from Ryde Pier to Puckpool Point to be the most visited part of the N coast of the Isle of Wight, with around 1,187,000 annual visits by residents predicted [26]. This translates to around 271 people per hour [32].

Visitor surveys undertaken for the Isle of Wight Council in 2011 to inform management of recreational disturbance [36]found that most activity occurs between the Appley Inshore lifeboat station and Puckpool Point. At that time, the free parking at Appley Park was a strong incentive for those arriving by car, but this was also the most popular area for those arriving on foot. Although the car park at Appley Park is currently closed, there are plenty of alternative parking options, so the pattern of access is not likely to have changed significantly.

The visitor surveys [36] found that few people were casual visitors, 79% of interviewees visited Ryde Sands at least twice a week. Nearly all those interviewed said that they visited all year round. The survey found that between 1 May and 30 September when dogs are not allowed on the beach [37], they walk along the Esplanade to Appley Tower and then drop down onto the beach as they walk east. Interviewees said the beach was a popular place to walk dogs in the winter as a sandy dog was seen as less problematic than a muddy dog.

A car park survey in 2018/19 for Bird Aware Solent found an average winter usage of 21 cars per survey at Ryde Esplanade and 14 cars per survey at Appley Park [38]. At the same time, vantage point surveys were carried out of people using the beach, which found a significant increase in usage compared to the previous counts in 2016/17. Around half the people walked along the promenade above the beach. At Ryde around 20% of people walked on the intertidal area below mean high water, though at Puckpool Point the proportion of users in this zone was less than 10%. This pattern was also found by Bird Aware Solent disturbance studies, where it was noted that most walkers and dog-walkers stayed on upper beach, but a minority ventured well below the MHW mark. These tended to include particularly active dog-walkers, e.g. those throwing balls [39].

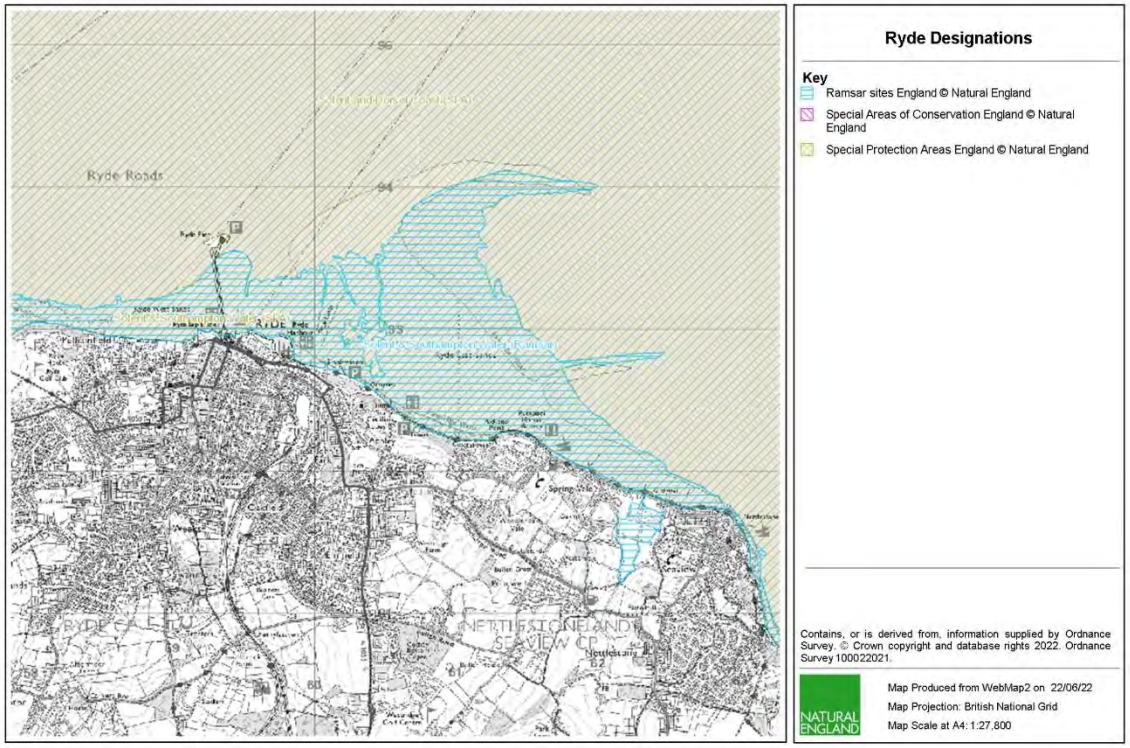


Figure 3: Nature conservation designations at Ryde

Environment baseline

The beach at Ryde forms part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site. The extensive sandy habitat with sea grass beds provides an excellent foraging resource for large numbers of wintering brent geese. The SWBGS site IOW84, west of Ryde pier, recorded 361 brent geese in December 2018, and later that month 425 brent geese were recorded east of the pier in IOW85 (though some of these may have been the same individuals) [11]. The Ryde Pier to Puckpool Point WeBS sector supports a 5 year mean (2015/16 to 19/20) of 527 brent geese, which represents 8% of the SPA population [12].

Ryde beach is also nationally important for sanderling (and is the most important part of the SPA for this species). Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, a 5 year peak mean of 220 individuals were recorded through WeBS [12]. Numbers have fluctuated over the long term, but the increasing proportion of regional numbers supported by this site suggest the environmental conditions remain relatively favourable and indicates that it is becoming increasingly important on a regional scale for sanderling [13].

The third species found in notable numbers is the ringed plover (latest WeBS 5 year mean of 44 individuals, which represents 9% of the SPA population). The area east of Ryde pier (SWBGS site IOW85) recorded a peak of 55 birds in 2014.

SWBGS movement studies have demonstrated a link between sites at Ryde and the mainland. Brent geese have been recorded flying from sites in Gosport and Ryde, and sanderling between Portsmouth Harbour and Ryde.

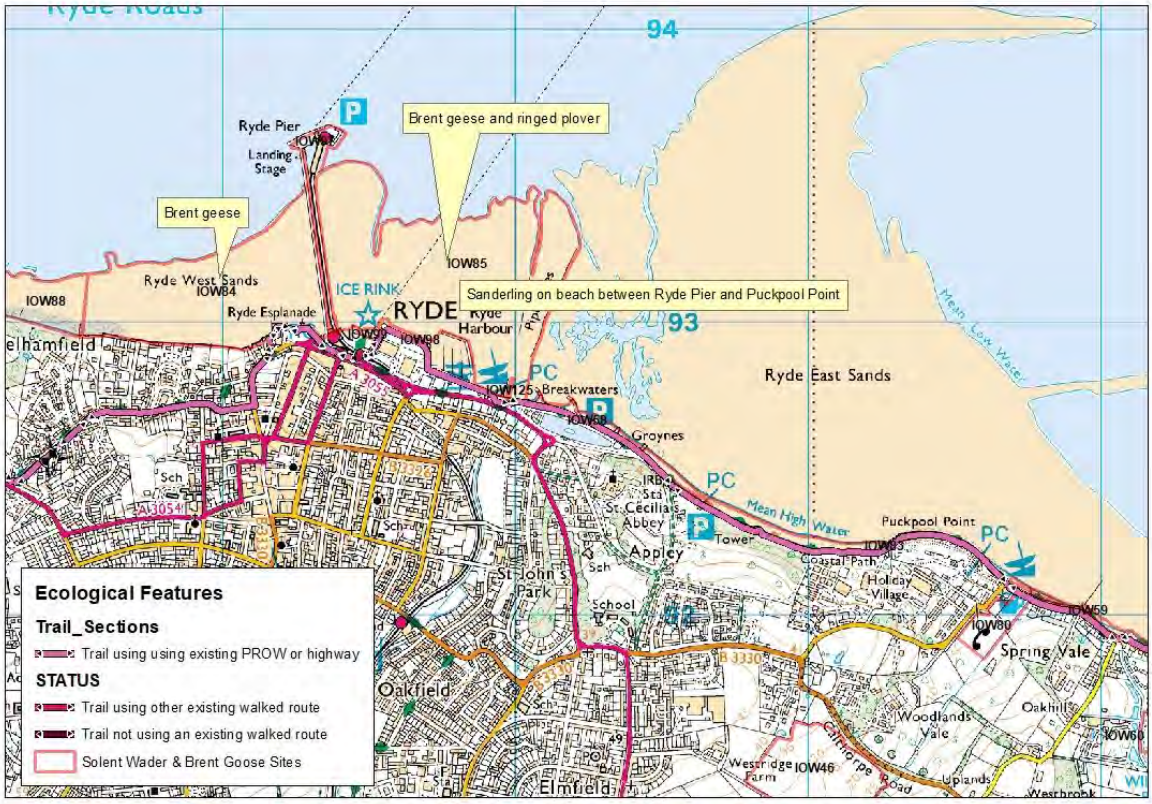


Figure 4: Ecological features at Ryde

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)

This risk is considered further below:

<u>Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds</u>

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The alignment, installation and promotion of the trail needs to be considered. To the west of Ryde Pier, the trail is set inland, on roads, away from the intertidal area. Immediately either side of the pier, the trail is set on the public walkway above the beach. East of the marina, the trail continues along North Walk and then Garden Walk adjacent to Appley Park. East of Puckpool Point, the trail follows Springvale Road.

The trail, therefore, uses roads and heavily used pathways, including the current IOWCP. The promotion of the ECP may encourage more visitors to the island to walk the coast path. However, as no improvements are necessary to raise the surface to national trail standards, the introduction of the ECP is unlikely to lead to a significant increase in local users.

Only on the section between Ryde Pier and Puckpool Point are walkers visible to birds on the sands below. However, disturbance research for Bird Aware Solent found that walkers on the promenade at the top of beaches were less likely to cause disturbance to birds using intertidal habitats due to the distance from the birds and the predictable nature of the movement (walking past, rather than towards, birds) [30]. Therefore, walkers on the trail are unlikely to cause significant additional disturbance to birds on the foreshore and hence the creation of the trail is not considered to pose a risk to the site conservation objectives.

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Ryde is composed of a sandy beach and wide intertidal sandflats. This terrain is suitable for walking on, so in contrast to other sections of coast considered in this HRA, a S25A exclusion of access to the intertidal area is not being proposed.

Whilst there are concerns about recreational disturbance to birds in this area, a S26 direction to exclude access to the margin on conservation grounds is not being proposed. This is because the beach is already well used by people, and so exclusions are unlikely to be supported or complied with by the local community or visitors. Instead, the approach taken by IoW Council and Bird Aware Solent to manage current and future recreational pressure is to use signage and visitor engagement to encourage walkers and dog walkers to give the birds space.

As noted above, visitor studies [36] have found that around half of visitors used the promenade, around 20% were in the intertidal, and the rest were using the beach above mean high water. The introduction of the coastal margin is not likely to change this pattern of access, and as public access rights already exist over the beach, creating new coastal access rights will not generate new demand, and will not hinder the approach to visitor engagement by Bird Aware Solent. Therefore, the introduction of coastal access rights will not lead to significant additional disturbance to wintering waterbirds and will not compromise the site's conservation objectives.

D3.2B Bembridge Harbour

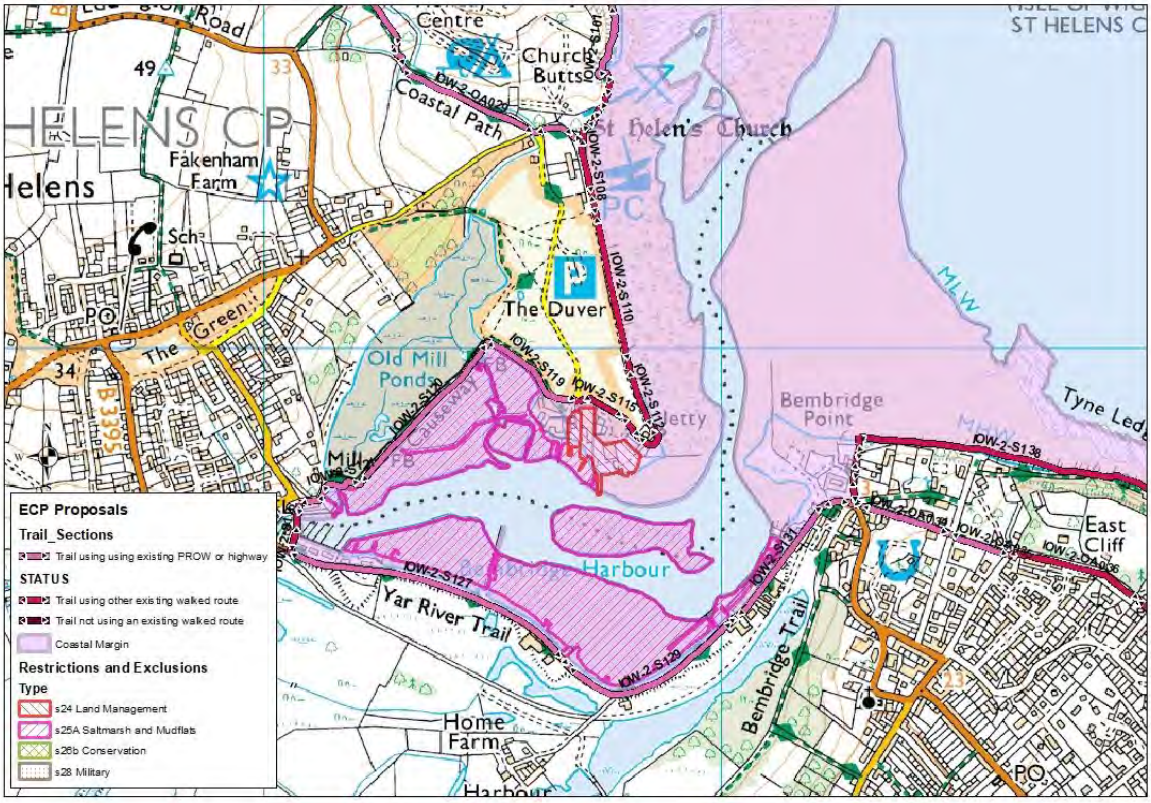


Figure 5: Proposals at Bembridge Harbour

Access Baseline

The trail follows PRoW or existing walked routes between St Helens Church, Duver, and Bembridge Point. The picturesque coastal villages of St Helens and Bembridge, with natural working harbour, are popular destinations for recreation by residents and tourists, and the ECP will offer walkers an attractive route across the harbour on the causeway wall with beautiful scenery and opportunities to observe wildlife.

The area is easily accessible by car, with a large (51 spaces) and well-used National Trust car cark at St Helens Duver, parking in St Helens and Bembridge, at St Helen's Church, Duver, and at Bembridge Point. It is one of the best served parts of the Isle of Wight coast for car parks [26]. Bembridge Harbour is within 5 miles of the towns of Shanklin, Ryde and Sandown (combined population of approximately 46,000 based on 2011 Census data) [35]. According to Natural England's research – Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) [31], most (71%) visits to the coast, other than to towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5 mile radius, giving a smaller catchment [32]. Bird Aware householder survey modelling shows Bembridge Harbour to be one of the more visited areas on the N coast of the Isle of Wight, with around 626,000 annual visits by residents predicted [26].

The area is also popular with tourists. Bembridge Harbour Authority estimate that the marina and pontoons in the harbour attract 30,000 visitors per year [40]. On land there is a wide range of nearby accommodation and visitor facilities, including hotels and holiday parks [41].

Bird Aware Solent installed a people counter near the National Trust car park at St Helens Duver. This recorded a count of nearly 76,000 over the year running from November 2017 to October 2018 [42]. There was a big difference in use between the seasons: with summer being 153% busier than winter, but also much busier than spring and autumn. The counter recorded an average summer use of 325 on weekdays and 395 on weekends, and an average winter use of 125 on weekdays and 188 at weekends. This reflects the large influence of tourism at this site.

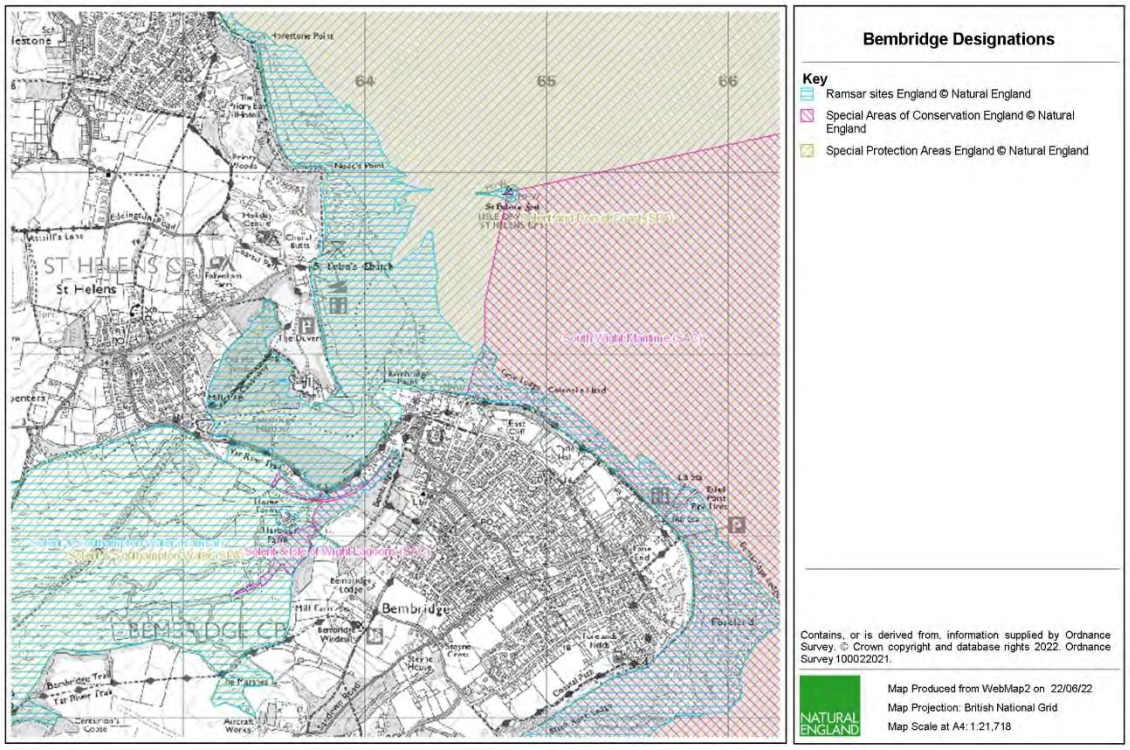


Figure 6: Environmental designations at Bembridge Harbour

Environment Baseline

The Bembridge Harbour area supports a range of important habitats including mudflats in the harbour itself, saltmarsh in the old mill ponds landward of the causeway, shingle at the mouth of the harbour, fixed sand dunes at St Helens Duver, saline lagoons landward of Embankment Road, and wet grassland at Brading Marshes. The intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats, saline lagoons and wet grassland form part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar, and the saline lagoons form part of the Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC. On the open coast, the subtidal area is designated as part of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA for foraging terns.

In winter, the large Brading Harbour WeBS core count sector (which covers both the intertidal harbour and the wet grassland of Brading Marshes) supports significant proportions of the following SPA populations, with 5 year peak means (2015/16 – 2019/20) of: 593 brent geese (9% of the SPA population), 50 shoveler (13% of the SPA), 618 wigeon (9% of the SPA), 316 teal (6% of the SPA), 15 little egret (8% of the SPA), 724 lapwing (17% of the SPA), 41 ringed plover (9% of the SPA), 215 dunlin (4% of the SPA) and 7 greenshank (14% of the SPA) [12]. The sector also supports nationally important numbers of Mediterranean gulls (a breeding feature of the SPA) in the wintering season.

The WeBS Alert report shows that the total number of waterbirds using the harbour and marshes has increased significantly over the long term (47% increase between 1991/92 and 2016/17) [13]. However, some species have shown declines over that time, with high alerts (greater than 50% decline) reported for shelduck, ringed plover, dunlin and redshank. Whilst the regional and national populations of shelduck have declined, suggesting broadscale reasons for site declines, the proportion of the regional population held by the site has also decreased, indicating that site specific pressures are also acting on the population. In contrast, comparison with regional and national population trends suggests the site is favourable for ringed plover and redshank and that declines on the site are driven by broadscale population changes. The small proportion of the regional population held by the site means that a comparison is not possible for dunlin.

At high tide, waders roost on the derelict sea defences and pontoons in the harbour [43] [11]. At mid- to low-tide, waders, ducks and geese feed in the old mill ponds landward of the causeway, and in the intertidal area around the derelict sea defences. WeBS Low Tide Count data shows that the open coast outside the harbour mouth is used by brent geese, dunlin and lapwing, in particular [12].

Brading Marshes have been managed as a nature reserve by the RSPB since 2001. Large numbers of lapwings, brent geese [11] and ducks [12] use the grasslands in the winter.

In the spring/summer, Brading Marshes supports breeding lapwings [44], and common terns forage in the harbour and saline lagoons landward of Embankment Road [10].

The saline lagoons (SPA/Ramsar/SAC) all support good communities of species, including the lagoon specialists, starlet sea anemone *Nematostella vectensis* and lagoon sand shrimp *Gammarus insensibilis* [9].

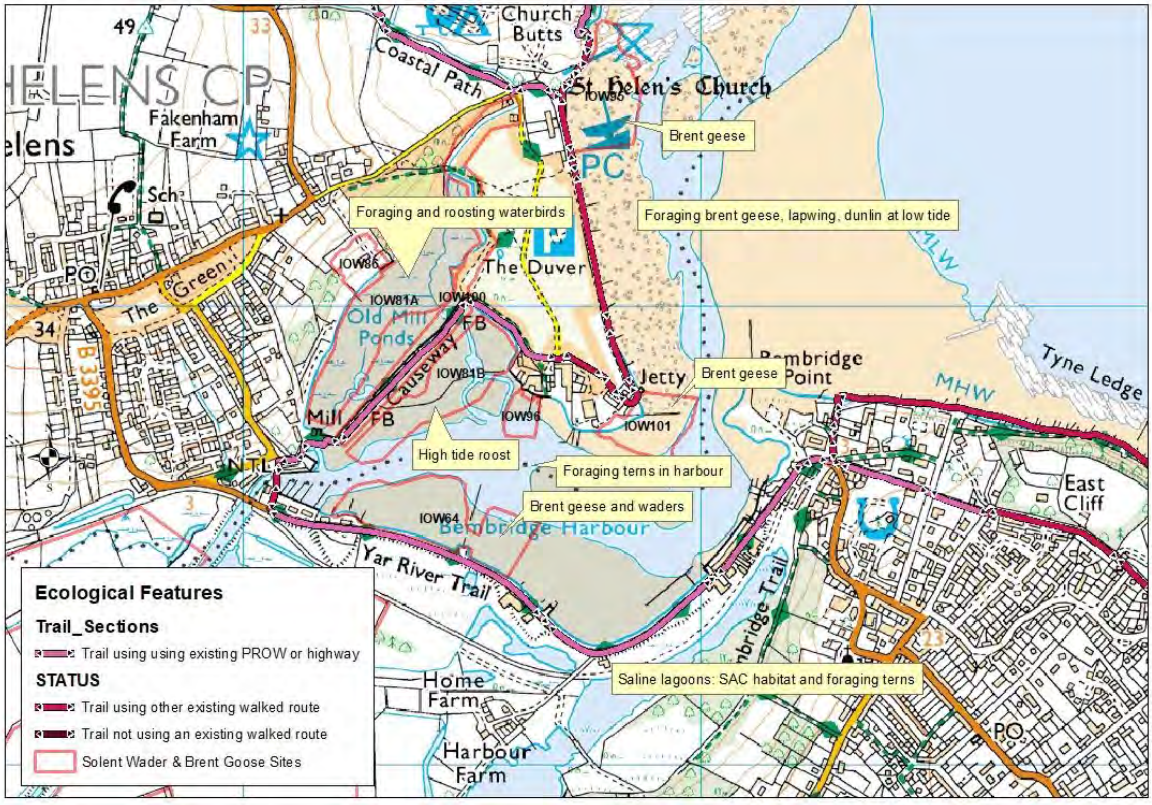


Figure 7: Ecological features at Bembridge

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance to foraging terns (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The trail alignment between St Helens Church, Duver, and Bembridge Point follows existing walked routes and PRoW, including the IOWCP for part of the stretch. As noted above, Bembridge Harbour is well used by residents and tourists (the latter particularly in summer). The only improvement to bring the route up to national trail standards is the raising of a section of the causeway to remove a steep step and replacing handrails to make it easier and safer to use. This will improve the accessibility of the causeway and is likely to increase its use. Whilst this and the promotion of the ECP on the National Trails website will result in an uplift in numbers, this is likely to be a relatively small proportion compared to the existing level of use.

Considering the route around Bembridge Harbour in detail:

From St Helen's Church, Duver, to the mouth of the harbour, the route follows the concrete promenade at the top of the beach. WeBS Low Tide Count data shows that the intertidal habitat adjacent to this section is used by foraging brent geese, dunlin and lapwing [12]. The intertidal area adjacent to IOW-2-S108 is identified as a core site in the SWBGS (IOW95) as it is an important linking site in the network [11]. A peak of 78 brent geese were recorded in 2019. Due to the presence of the car park at St Helen's Church, the National Trust Car Park at St Helens Duver and the Baywatch Café, the promenade is already very well-used and this pattern of access will not change. This area is primarily used by feeding birds, and as such can maintain sufficient separation from users of the trail due to the width of the intertidal habitat available at low tide. Therefore, it is unlikely that users of the trail will cause significant disturbance to SPA birds foraging on intertidal habitats.

At IOW-2-S113, the trail turns away from the mouth of the harbour and heads back behind the harbour businesses. This avoids SWBGS site IOW101, which although only small numbers of brent geese have been recorded (peak of 25 in 2018) is classified as a core site because it is an important linking site in the network [11]. As this part of the route is already well used due to the presence of the National Trust car park, it is unlikely that the ECP will be a particular draw to the area, and so it is unlikely that there will be a significant uplift in use compared to current levels. As the trail heads away from the mouth of the harbour, with waymarking to make it clear of the route, additional disturbance to IOW101 will be minimised.

From IOW-2-S119 to IOW-2-S121, the trail follows an existing PRoW along the edge of the harbour, and the causeway (part of the existing IOWCP) across the harbour past the old mill ponds. Either side of the causeway are important feeding and roosting areas for SPA birds

(SWBGS sites IOW81A and B: peaks of 75 brent geese in 2019, 25 redshanks in 2015, 33 lapwings in 2018 and 45 turnstones in 2018). The causeway itself forms part of SWBGS secondary support area IOW100, which extends into the terrestrial habitat between the old mill ponds and the National Trust car park. IOW100 supports large numbers of birds at times (peaks of 29 black-tailed godwits, 117 brent geese and 100 lapwings in 2019) [11].

The replacement of a step in the causeway with a bridge will improve the accessibility of the trail in this location, which may lead to an uplift in use. However, as people (and dogs) are contained on the causeway, this pattern of access does not lead to significant disturbance, and this is unlikely to change even with an uplift in use.

The current level of recreational use is likely to mean the causeway is only available as a high tide roost during the night, dawn or dusk. The establishment of the ECP is unlikely to increase disturbance to birds using the causeway as a high tide roost, as it is not expected it will extend the period of recreational use.

The trail then crosses water on an existing footbridge at Bembridge Marina and heads east along Embankment Road. This part of the harbour is a core site in the SWBGS (IOW64) as it is an important linking site in the network (peaks of 29 brent geese and 36 lapwings in 2019) [11]. Landward of the road wet grassland, reedbed and saline lagoon habitats form part of the SPA/Ramsar and are managed by the RSPB as part of their Brading Marshes reserve. For part of Embankment Road, the intertidal habitat is screened from the trail by Bembridge Marina and some flats. There is little screening on the landward side. However, additional disturbance to SPA birds is unlikely given the fact that the trail is following a road and existing promoted routes (IOWCP and River Yar Trail).

Further along Embankment Road and to Bembridge Point, the road is screened from intertidal habitat by houseboats and other development, and from the SPA/Ramsar saline lagoons by industrial buildings and hedges. Therefore, additional disturbance to birds using habitat either side of the trail is unlikely.

Overall, use of the trail between St Helen's Church and Bembridge Point is not considered to pose a risk to site conservation objectives, and an adverse effect on site integrity will be avoided.

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Bembridge Harbour consists of a sandy and shingly beach at the Duver, and mudflats within the harbour itself. A S25A exclusion is proposed on the mudflats of the harbour as this area is unsuitable for access on foot. The unsuitability of access and handrails on the causeway mean that people currently stick to the path and this pattern of use is unlikely to change. Interpretation panels are proposed at either end of the causeway, which will inform people of the sensitivities of the area and ask them to keep their dogs from entering the intertidal areas.

Dune grassland at the Duver and the saltmarsh/mudflat of the old mill ponds (landward of the causeway) are landward of the trail and do not form part of the margin. As such, birds using these areas will not be affected by the ECP proposals.

No exclusions are proposed on the beach between St Helen's Church and the mouth of the harbour. This is because the sandy/shingle substrate is suitable to walk on and there is an established use given the presence of beach huts, car parks, a café and holiday park nearby. As noted above, the people counters have shown that the highest use is in summer, outside the sensitive period for birds. Vantage point surveys for Bird Aware Solent have

shown that around 80% of the activity at the Duver is above MHW, i.e. outside of the bird foraging area [38].

As the area is well used currently, the introduction of the coastal margin will not change that pattern of use and therefore will not add to any disturbance of birds using the intertidal area. An interpretation panel is proposed, which will inform people of the sensitive wildlife and encourage them to give birds space when they are using the beach. The interpretation will be developed in collaboration with Bird Aware Solent and reinforce their messaging.

Therefore, the introduction of the coastal margin is not likely to add to the current levels of use or change the pattern of access. Therefore, it is not considered to pose a risk to site conservation objectives, and an adverse effect on site integrity will be avoided.

Disturbance to foraging terns

Common terns do not currently nest within the SPA on the Isle of Wight, but those nesting on the mainland sometimes forage in Bembridge Harbour and the lagoons behind the sea wall. Where the trail uses the causeway, and where Embankment Road runs past the lagoons, the trail is close to foraging birds, and potential disturbance could not be ruled out at the likely significant effect stage.

However, foraging terns do not tend to be disturbed by recreational use of terrestrial areas, and the trail in these locations follows existing well used routes. The risk of disturbance derives from use of the margin, and particularly dogs entering the water. At the causeway, the mudflat seaward of the trail is excluded from the margin by a S25A direction, and interpretation panels either end will encourage users to not let their dogs stray off the path either side of the trail. This ensures that the risk of disturbance to birds using this small part of the SPA is minimal. At Embankment Road, the lagoons are landward of the trail and so do not form part of the margin. Thick, scrubby vegetation along the edge of the road forms a barrier to disturbance and prevents dogs from entering the water.

The subtidal area of the open coast outside the harbour is also designated as part of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA. However, a likely significant effect on these foraging birds has been screened out due to the distance between the birds and the trail (including margin).

Therefore, it is considered unlikely that the presence of the trail and margin will result in any disturbance to foraging terns to the extent that the Conservation Objectives will be compromised, and so an adverse effect on the integrity of the site will be avoided.

Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the works to the causeway to replace the step with a bridge, new handrails and interpretation panels are installed, the mitigation measures set out in table 9 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.

- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

In regards to timing of works, the overwintering period is the key time to avoid impacts on the SPA/Ramsar. The causeway is within 200m of, and visible to, the high tide roost on the derelict sea wall. Therefore, if the overwintering period cannot be avoided, work will stop during the period either side of high tide.

Foraging terns use the area in the breeding season. However, it is still preferable to time works outside the winter. This is because the area available for foraging terns is large, and Bembridge Harbour is not close to any nesting sites. In contrast, there are fewer high tide winter roosts available and are more likely to be limiting the bird use of the area.

Therefore, as the works are temporary, and with the mitigation measures set out, an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites from construction disturbance will be avoided.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities. These may be damaged by trampling where people regularly walk away from established paths. As the trail around Bembridge Harbour follows existing walked routes, the risk to wetland communities arises from use of the margin.

The majority of sensitive habitats are either landward of the trail, and so do not form part of the margin, or a S25A direction is proposed to exclude coastal access rights from intertidal habitats within the harbour. Therefore, the only place where the coastal access rights would be created is over the beach at the Duver. However, the beach already has public access and is well used by people. As such, the introduction of the margin will not change any right of access or create additional demand for use of the beach.

Whilst there is existing heavy use of the beach, a SSSI condition assessment survey in 2009 examined the biotopes and invertebrate fauna in the area and found no indications of damage from human impacts on the intertidal sandflats [45]. However, a survey of vegetation shingle in the Solent in 2013 reported that the far southern tip of the Duver is a very trampled dune remnant with 0.03ha of strandline/vegetated shingle community recorded [46]. Therefore, in this location recreational use is impacting the plant species present. Whilst the tip of the Duver will become part of the margin, this will not change the current pattern of access. Given the current high level of use and the fact that no improvements to the surfacing or accessibility are required to upgrade to national trail standards, establishment of the trail and margin is not likely to be a particular attractor for people, nor add a significant proportion to the visitor use in this area. As such the coast access rights over the tip of the Duver will sit alongside the existing rights, and are not considered likely to add significantly to the trampling of habitats in this area.

D3.2C Yarmouth Estuary

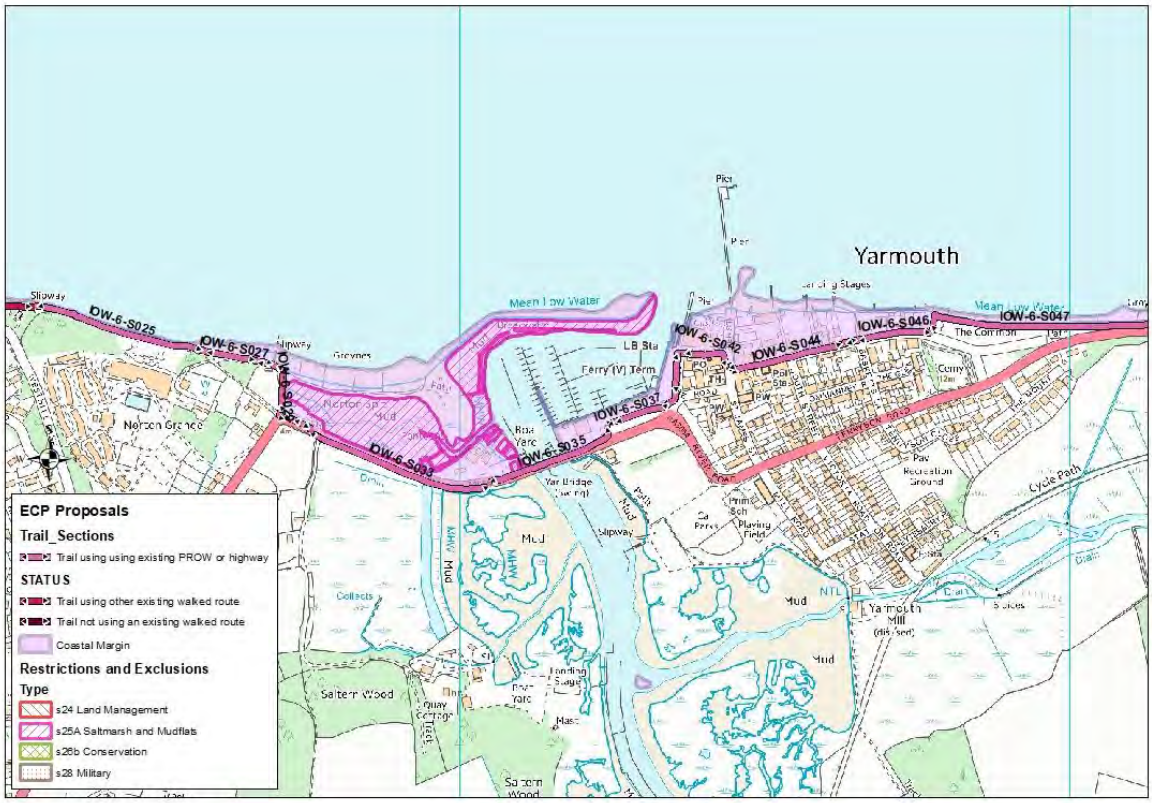


Figure 8 ECP proposals around Yarmouth Harbour

Access Baseline

Yarmouth acts as one of the gateways to the Isle of Wight as its harbour serves one of the main ferry routes to the mainland. It is, therefore, a busy tourism destination, with hotels in town and holiday parks nearby. As such, it is easily accessible and well-served by car parks. There are two car parks in Yarmouth (total 244 spaces) and others at Fort Victoria Country Park and Bouldner Viewpoint to the west and east, respectively. There is also a network of existing PRoW in the area including the existing IOWCP and the Freshwater Way, which runs between Freshwater Bay and Yarmouth.

Yarmouth is one of the smallest towns in the UK with 865 residents (based on 2011 census data) [35]. The only other town within 5 miles is Freshwater, which had a population of 5,369 in 2011. According to MENE research [31]most (71%) visits to the coast, other than towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5 mile radius [32], giving a smaller catchment. Despite the limited residential catchment, Bird Aware householder survey modelling shows Yarmouth to be one of the more visited areas on the western coast of the Isle of Wight with around 490,000 annual visits predicted [26].

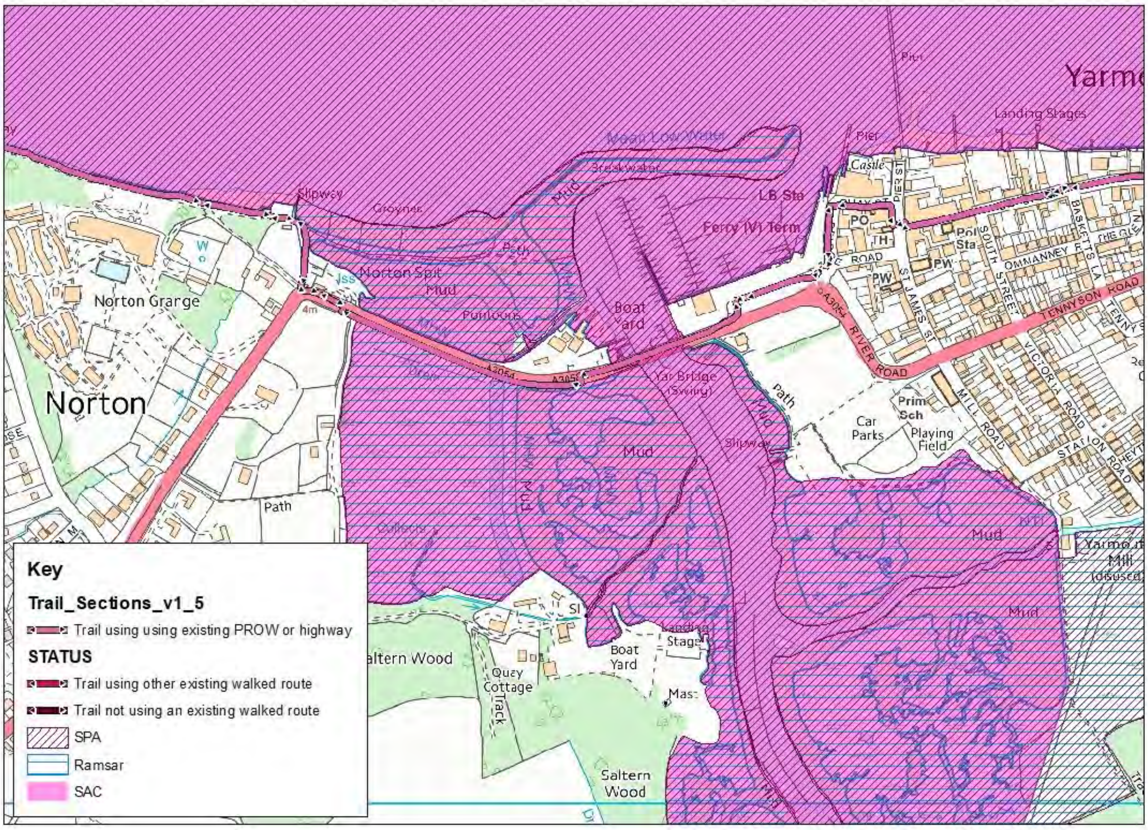


Figure 9: Nature conservation designations at Yarmouth

<u>Environment baseline</u>

The Yar Estuary extends from Yarmouth, inland to Freshwater, and supports a range of different estuarine habitats, dominated by extensive saltmarshes. These habitats form part of the Solent Maritime SAC. On the western side of the mouth is Norton Spit, which although is mostly covered by sea defences, does support sand dune and vegetated shingle habitat.

The dune supports a marram grass, *Ammophila arenaria*, and sea holly, *Eryngium maritimum*, community. The small patch of vegetated shingle supports spear-leaved and grass-leaved orache, *Atriplex prostrata* and *A. littoralis*. When the habitat was surveyed in 2013, some light recreational use and trampling was evident, though most people walked on the revetment at the top of the beach [46]. The Norton Spit units within the Yar Estuary SSSI are in unfavourable recovering condition, with recreational disturbance noted as a pressure that is being managed, though the last assessment was in 2009 [47].

The Yar Estuary as a whole is an important component of the Solent & Southampton Water SPA, supporting significant numbers of birds, including 5-year peak means (2015/16 – 19/20) of 314 brent geese (5% of SPA population); 51 shovelers (14% of SPA); 581 wigeon (8% of SPA); 454 teal (9% of SPA); 678 lapwings (16% of SPA) and 142 black-tailed godwits (13% of SPA) [12].

Looking in more detail at where the birds are found within the area; the mudflat sheltered by Norton spit supports waders including 120 lapwings in 2018 (SWBGS site IOW110); and beyond the spit, the breakwater (SWBGS site IOW54) serves as high tide roost for brent geese (42 in 2019) and ringed plovers (14 in 2006) [11].

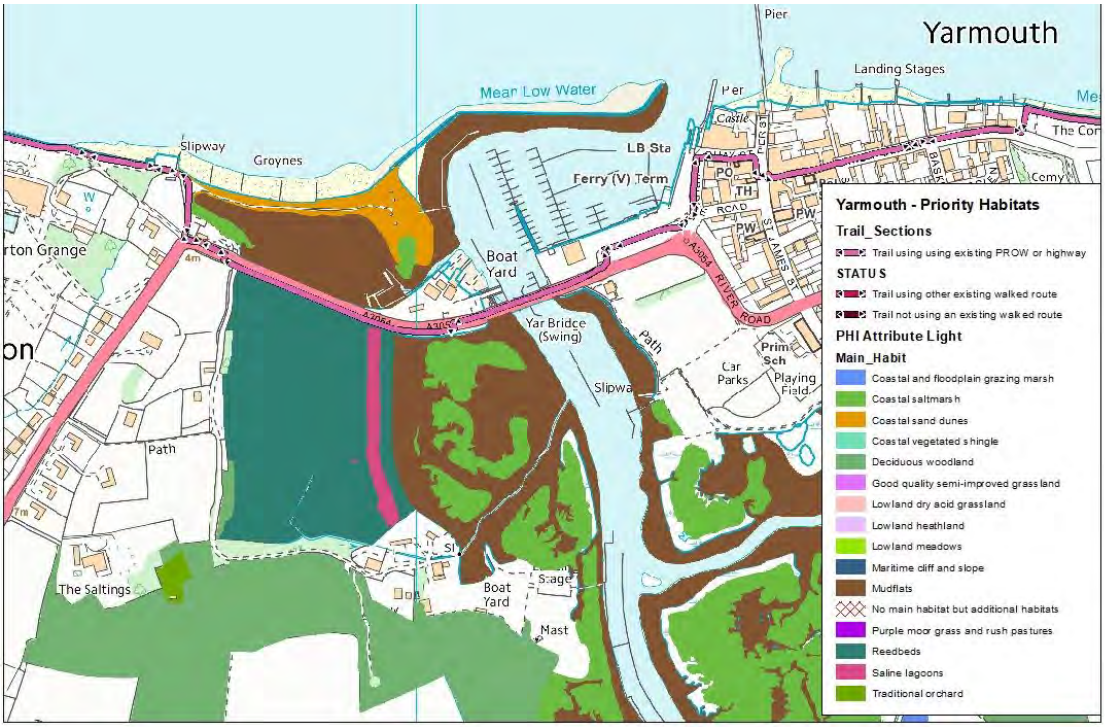


Figure 10: Priority habitats at Yarmouth

Landward of the road bridge over the estuary there is a reedbed and saline lagoon, plus saltmarsh and mudflat estuarine habitat, which support wintering waterbirds and wetland plants and invertebrates associated with the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. For example, SWBGS site IOW51 recorded 73 brent geese in 2019 and 50 lapwings in 2018. SWBGS site IOW48 recorded peaks of 55 black-tailed godwits, 200 brent geese, 200 golden plovers and 320 lapwings in 2019 [11].

The sheltered nature of the harbour, estuary and saline lagoon, mean that foraging terns are likely to be found, though the nearest nesting sites are on the mainland.

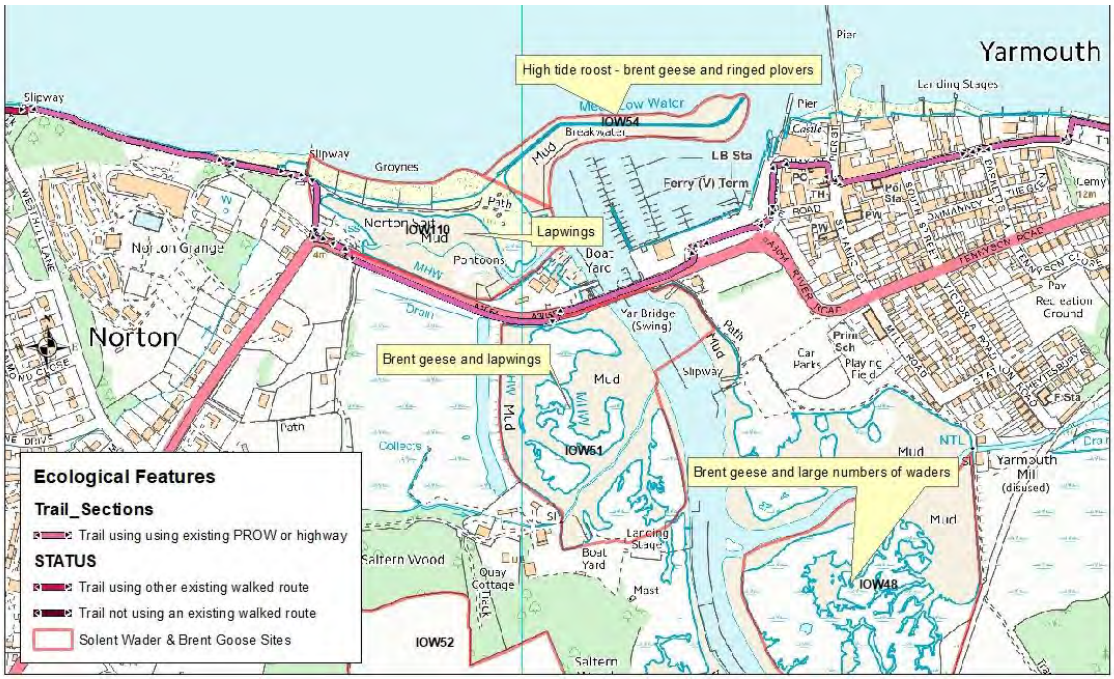


Figure 11: Ecological features at Yarmouth

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The route of the ECP past Yarmouth Estuary follows the PRoW or road. Bird Aware Solent visitor modelling predicts relatively high visitor numbers to this part of the coast. Whilst the introduction of the ECP may attract additional walkers to the island, it is not likely to be a significant attractor in a location like Yarmouth. As the trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP and no improvements to the infrastructure are required, it is not expected that the creation of the trail will lead to a significant increase in use.

The trail is situated on the road (A3054) that runs past habitats used by wintering waterbirds. Seaward of the trail are mudflats used by waders including lapwings, and landward of the trail are reedbeds and estuarine habitats used by geese and waders. Given the existing high levels of use of the road, the expected small increase in use is unlikely to add significantly to current disturbance levels.

Coastal access rights

Coastal margin at Yarmouth comprises intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh and Norton Spit. A S25A exclusion will be placed over all the mudflats and saltmarsh as it is unsuitable for access on foot (see figure 8, above). As no new access rights will be created in this area, the pattern of access will not change, and there will be no additional disturbance to birds using the mudflats.

There is an existing PRoW along Norton Spit, and so this area is not excluded from the margin. Figure 11 illustrates that the breakwater beyond Norton Spit is used as a high tide roost by brent geese and waders. Whilst the breakwater is within the coastal margin, in practice, access levels and hence disturbance are unlikely to change.

As the establishment of the trail and coastal margin are unlikely to significantly add to the current levels of use, or change the pattern of access, it is not considered to pose a risk to SPA conservation objectives, and an adverse effect on site integrity will be avoided.

Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure

An interpretation panel is proposed to be installed at the western end of Norton Spit. Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. The location of the interpretation panel is adjacent to the intertidal habitats used by waders (SWBGS site IOW110), therefore, the mitigation measures set out in table 9 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

The small scale of the works and the mitigation measures will minimise disturbance to wintering birds and ensure an adverse effect on the integrity of the site is avoided.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

SAC/Ramsar dune habitat at Norton Spit is within the coastal margin and is, therefore, at risk of increased trampling and erosion. However, as there is an existing PRoW that runs along the spit, directions to exclude access are not applicable.

As explained above, the establishment of the ECP at Yarmouth is unlikely to significantly increase the numbers of walkers in the area and the creation of the coastal margin will not change the current pattern of access to Norton Spit. As also noted above, most people walk along the revetment at the top of the beach [46], which limits the trampling of habitats.

An interpretation panel will be installed adjacent to the trail at the western end of the spit, which will inform visitors of the sensitive dune habitats and ask them to keep to the footpath. As patterns of access are unlikely to change, and with the installation of interpretation, it is considered that an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC/Ramsar habitats will be avoided.

D3.2D-H Newtown Harbour

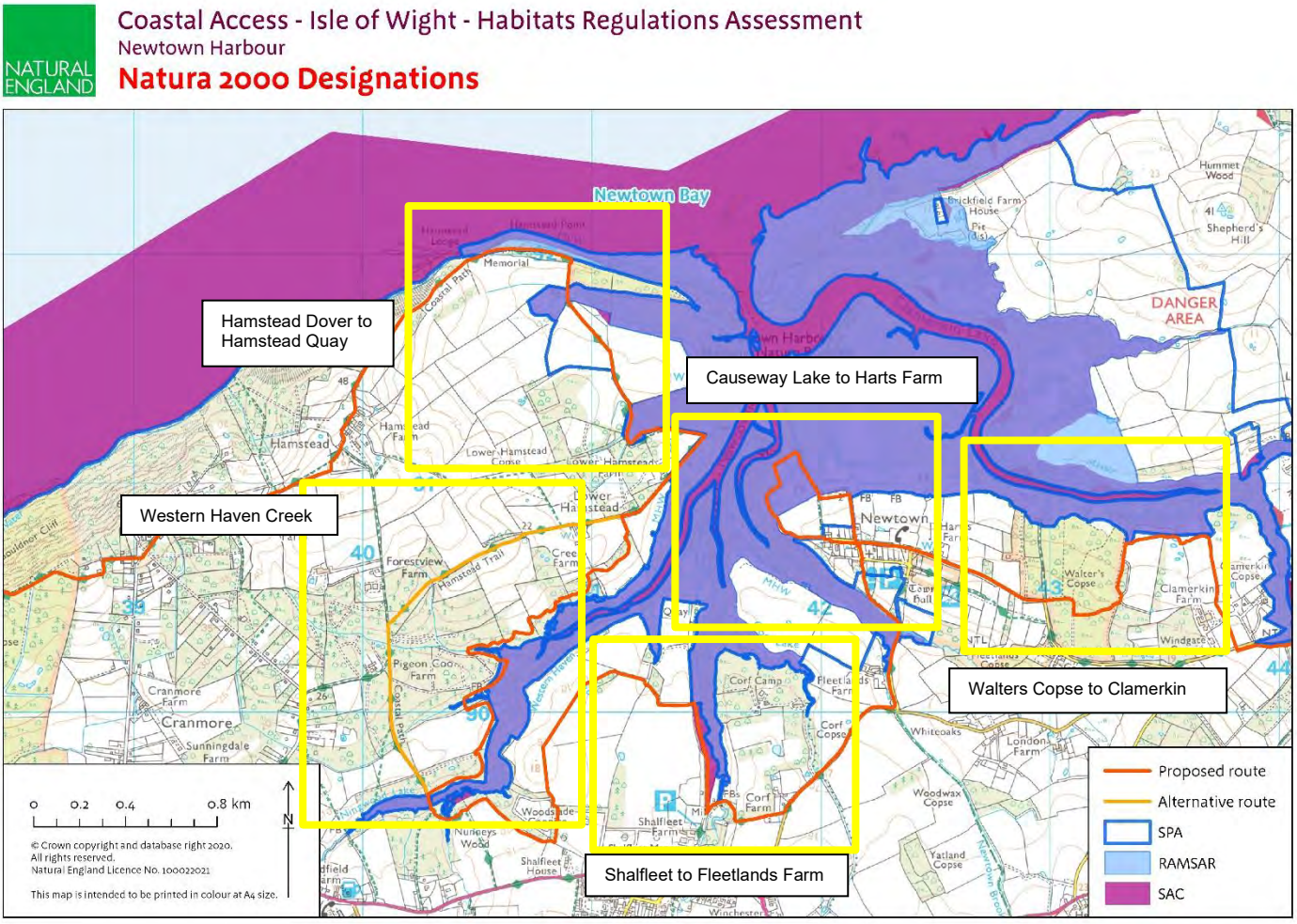


Figure 12: Map of ECP proposals around Newtown Harbour – divided into subsections

Newtown Harbour is a large site that includes extensive areas of estuarine mudflats and saltmarsh that form a dendritic pattern of tidal creeks. Surrounding and sloping down to the estuary are extensive areas of unimproved grassland, woodland and scrub, interspersed with ponds and hedgerows. Either side of the mouth of the harbour are shingle spits and beaches. The proposed route of the coast path around the Harbour includes creating some new sections of path.

Due to the scale of this site and the varying levels of access around the harbour this part of the assessment is subdivided into smaller sections, as shown on figure 12 above, with the risks assessed at each specific location;

- Hamstead Dover to Hamstead Quay
- Western Haven
- Shalfleet fields to Fleetlands Farm
- Causeway Lake to Hart's Farm (Newtown Quay)
- Walters Copse to Clamerkin Fields

<u>Environmental Baseline</u>

The current status of the European Site qualifying features is set out in detail in each of the following sections. However, some data is only available at the whole harbour scale and is presented here.

There is one WeBS core count sector covering the whole of Newtown Harbour. Therefore, wintering bird population abundance and trend data is only available at that scale. The site is the most important wetland on the Isle of Wight and holds nationally important numbers of wintering brent geese, Mediterranean gulls, and pintails. The extensive, sheltered intertidal habitats provide excellent feeding areas, and the islands, upper saltmarsh, relict seawalls and terrestrial habitats provide multiple high tide roost opportunities. This range of habitats means that Newtown Harbour is holds important numbers of a wide range of wintering birds.

The latest WeBS 5-year (15/16 – 19/20) peak mean counts demonstrate that Newtown Harbour can hold important proportions of the qualifying features of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA. For example, the 5-year peak mean counts include 1568 brent geese (23% of the SPA population), 264 shelduck (45% of SPA), 1974 wigeon (28% of SPA), 236 pintail (40% of SPA), 1339 teal (27% of SPA), 38 little egret (21% of SPA), 437 lapwing (10% of SPA), 72 ringed plover (15% of SPA), 104 black-tailed godwit (10% of SPA), and 1096 dunlin (19% of SPA) [12].

Newtown Harbour SSSI is notified for wintering brent geese and black-tailed godwits. The WeBS Alerts system has assessed trends of these two species within the SSSI. Numbers of brent geese have been stable in the long-term having previously increased. Consequently, no Alerts have been triggered and the stable proportion of regional numbers supported by this site suggest the environmental conditions remain relatively favourable for this species. Numbers of black-tailed godwit have been decreasing in the medium-term having previously peaked. Consequently, Alerts have been triggered for the short- and medium-terms. The contrast between the declining site trend and both the regional and British trends suggests that declining numbers underpinning these Alerts are most likely due to site-specific pressures [13].

D3.2D Hamstead Dover to Hamstead Quay

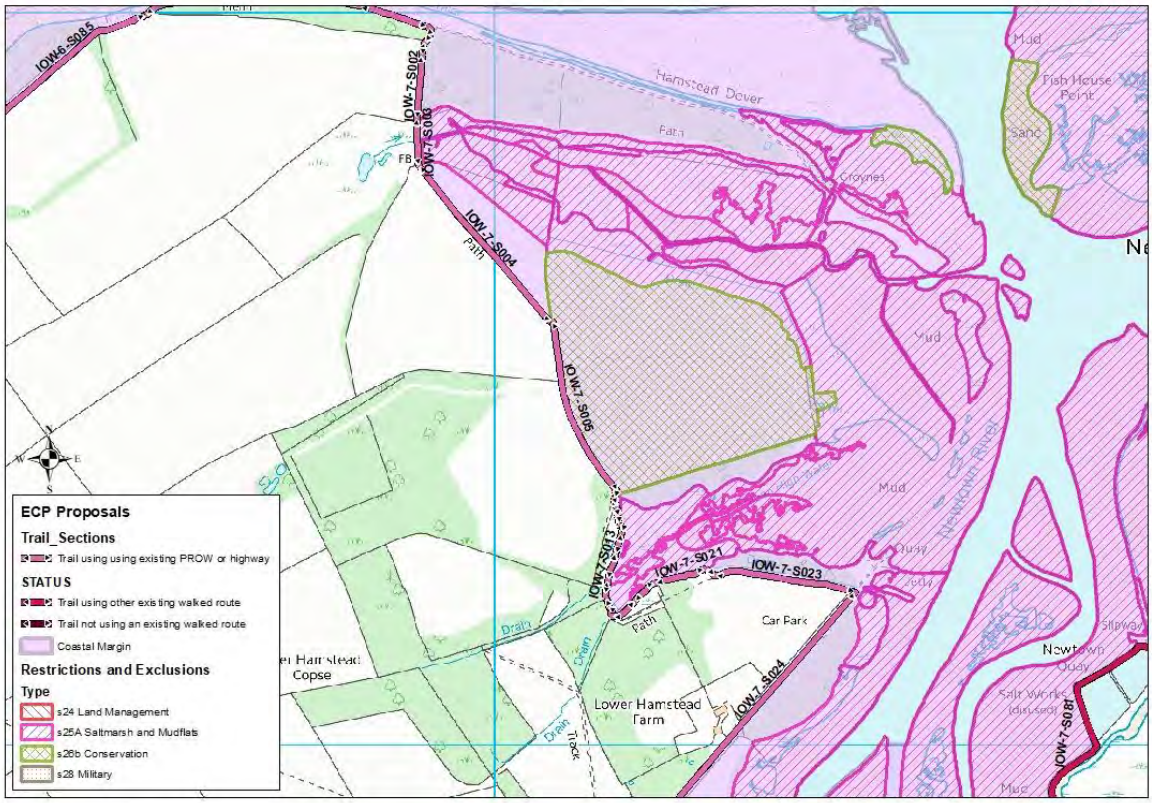


Figure 13: ECP proposals between Hamstead Point and Hamstead Quay

Natural England proposes to modify the extent of the exclusions to the coastal margin in the Hamstead area. An additional S26 exclusion (in winter) is proposed on terrestrial fields, as shown in figure 13 above. The original proposals are shown on directions map 7A, in the published report (March 2020)

Access Baseline

The National Trust manage Newtown Harbour National Nature Reserve (NNR), which includes the shingle spit at Hamstead Duver and the intertidal area in this part of the ECP stretch. Access on foot is limited as the nearest public car park is at Nunney's Wood, which is around 4km from Hamstead Duver along the route of the existing IOW coast path (IOWCP). Access to this part of the NNR is largely by boat, which in summer can put considerable pressure on the spit and the breeding birds that attempt to nest there [48].

According to MENE research [31], most (71%) visits to the coast, other than to towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. Within this catchment on the western side of Newtown Harbour is Yarmouth, Carisbrooke and other villages. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy [32] found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5-mile radius, giving a smaller catchment and a relatively low population living within easy travelling distance. There is also little formal car parking around the western half of Newtown Harbour. Consequently, the area from Hamstead Duver to Causeway Lake has the lowest modelled visitor numbers of the Isle of Wight sections of

coast, with a total of around 10,000 annual visits currently predicted, based on householder surveys undertaken to inform Bird Aware Solent [26].

The new draft Island Plan allocates just 255 new dwellings to the West Wight area (Freshwater and Totland) for the 15 year plan period, and none within 5.6km of the west of Newtown Harbour. Therefore, the low use of this part of the coast is unlikely to change significantly as a result of planned new housing. However, in combination impacts are considered further at section D4.

Given the low numbers of modelled visits, the western half of Newtown Harbour is currently a low priority for visitor engagement by Bird Aware Solent [49]. National Trust engagement at Hamstead Dover is mainly with waterborne users. A byelaw allows boats to land on the spit, but an area for breeding birds is roped off, and the harbourmaster provides information to boats entering the harbour encouraging them to avoid the area.

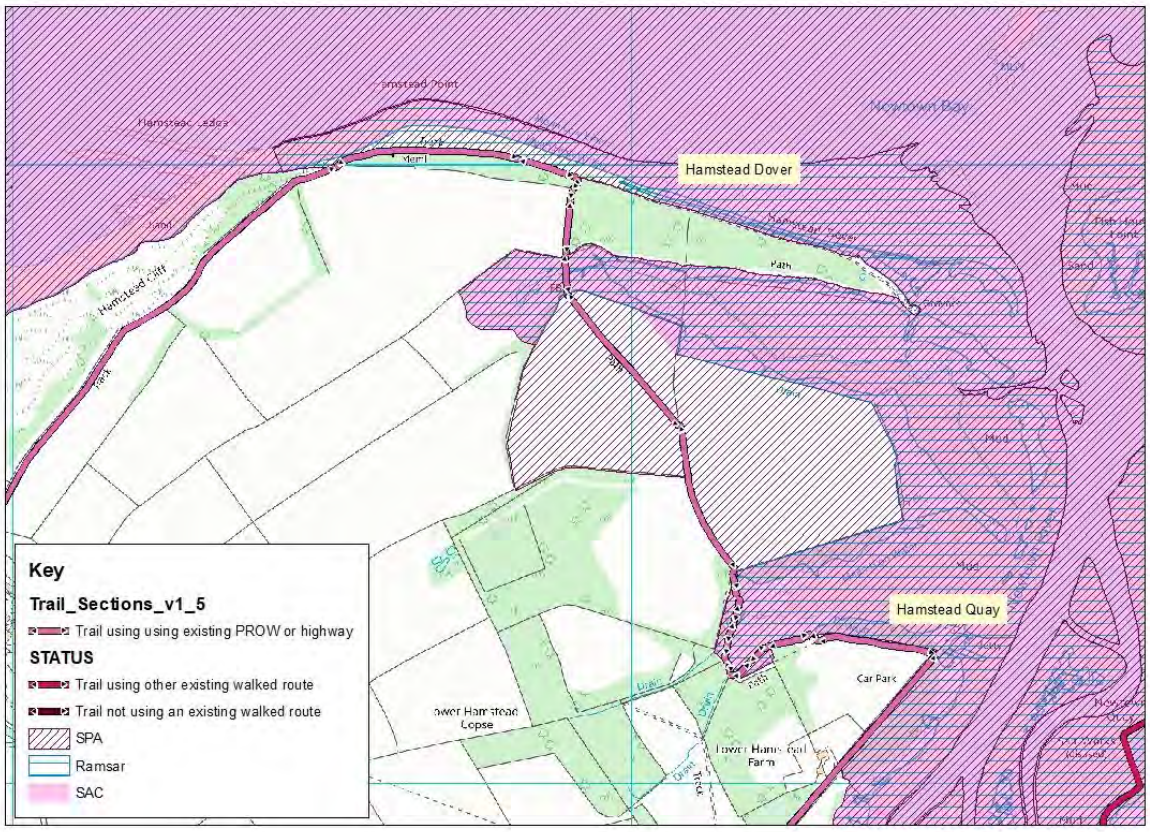


Figure 14: Nature conservation designations at Hamstead

Environment baseline

The shingle spit at Hamstead Dover extends around 750m and forms part of the Solent Maritime SAC. It supports pioneer vegetated shingle communities and more stable shingle vegetation which then grades into maritime grassland dominated by sea couch, *Elytrigia atherica*, on the sheltered south side of the spit. There is some evidence of recreational damage, with paths evident at the western and eastern ends of the spit, and bare patches as a result of barbeques [46].

Part of the shingle spit is roped off to prevent access and protect breeding birds, which is enforced by National Trust wardens. This also benefits shingle vegetation by minimising trampling. Transect surveys showed vegetation within the roped off area grew taller, and had a higher species diversity, than outside [50]. Whilst terns no longer breed in Newtown

Harbour, the National Trust is aiming to encourage them to return by ensuring undisturbed areas remain on the spit. This also ensures that 1-2 pairs of ringed plovers remain [51].

The intertidal habitat between Hamstead Point and Hamstead Quay is designated as part of the Solent Maritime SAC, and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. The area to the south of the spit provides important foraging habitat for wintering waterbirds, particularly ducks, including shelduck and teal (counts of 30 and 110, respectively, reported by the National Trust [51]. The SWBGS recorded a peak of 150 brent geese and 11 oystercatchers in 2018 in this area (site IOW24). The sheltered saltmarsh in the lee of the spit also supports brent geese and small numbers of waders, with 64 brent geese, 2 redshank and 4 lapwings, recorded in 2019 (site IOW30) [11].

Terrestrial fields between Hamstead Point and Hamstead Quay are designated as part of Solent and Southampton Water SPA. The grassland habitat supports foraging and roosting geese and waders. The National Trust report peaks of 510 brent geese and 12 oystercatchers [51], and the SWBGS recorded peaks of 72 brent geese and 10 curlews in 2019 (IOW26). The National Trust also report that lapwings breed in this field, and there is a heronry (3 pairs of grey heron) on the southern edge.

Figure 15: Priority habitats at Hamstead

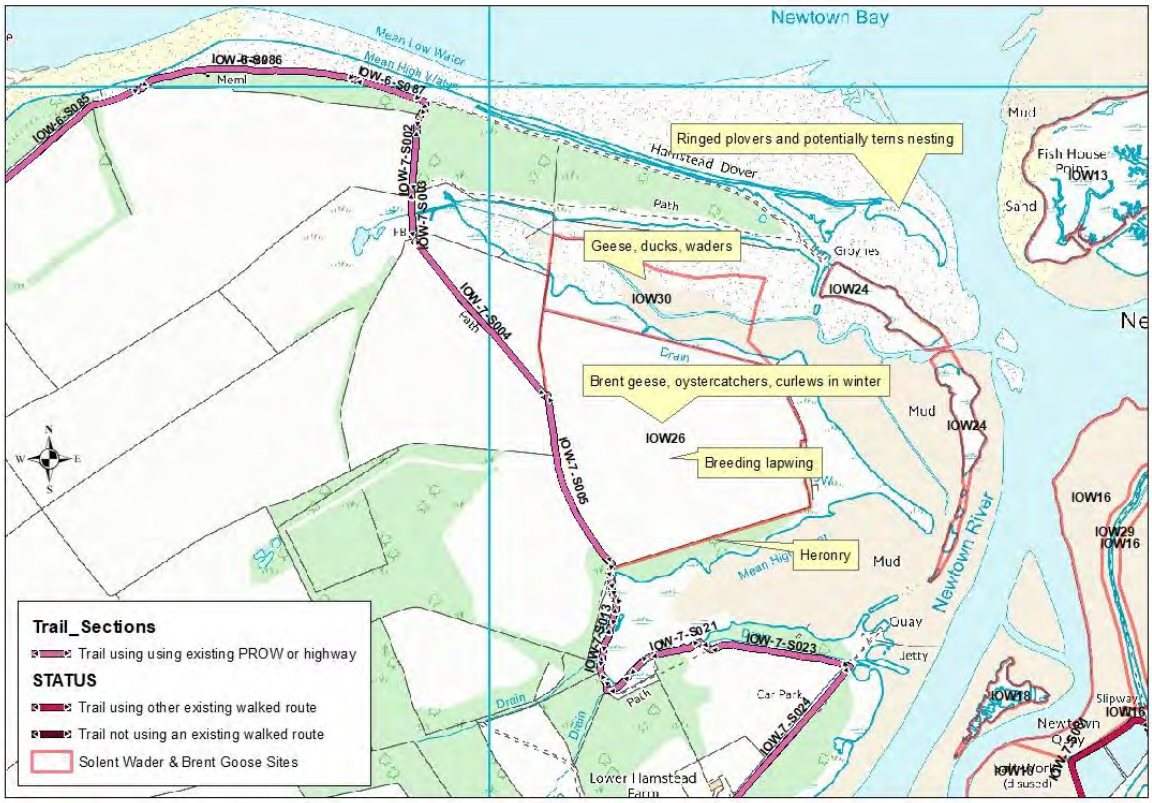


Figure 16: Bird features at Hamstead

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Additional disturbance to ringed plovers and terns in the breeding season (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)
- Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure (Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

<u>Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds</u>

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

Between Hamstead Point and Hamstead Quay the trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP. As described above, the low level of housing within easy travel distance (which is unlikely to change in the future), and the distance to car parking limits the number of people that are drawn to the area. However, as improvements to the trail are proposed including installation and upgrading of boardwalks and a new bridge at IOW-7-006 where the path surface has become damaged, the trail will become more attractive to walk on, particularly in

the winter. This could result in a small increase in those users seeking long walks in a quiet location.

Considering the route between Hamstead Point and Hamstead Quay in detail:

From Hamstead Point, the trail heads south, avoiding the spit. This avoids additional disturbance to wintering birds roosting on the spit at high tide or using the saltmarsh at the end of the spit (SWBGS site IOW24).

The trail then crosses the creek, where the existing degraded boardwalk at IOW-7-S003 will be replaced and upgraded. Significant disturbance to wintering birds from an uplift in users of this stretch is unlikely as the shape of the creek means that wintering SPA birds do not tend to use the intertidal habitat closest to the trail. SWBGS site IOW30 (categorised as Low Use) is 185m from the trail where it crosses the creek, and therefore unlikely to be significantly disturbed by users of the ECP.

The route then follows the existing IOWCP across a grassed field that is within the Solent and Southampton Water SPA. This field is not noted as supporting geese or waders in the SWBGS, or in bird data provided by the National Trust. As the trail follows the existing IOWCP the pattern of use will not change and it is unlikely that the small uplift in numbers of people using the trail will affect the level of bird use in this part of the SPA.

IOW-7-S005 runs along the western edge of a grassed field within the SPA, which is also an important feeding and roosting site for geese and waders (SWBGS site IOW26). This field also supports breeding lapwing and 3 pairs of grey herons nest in trees on the southern edge. The trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP, but as noted, there may be an uplift in users. As the trail runs along the edge of the field, with a mature hedgerow on the landward side preventing skylining, it is not considered likely that the predicted small increase in use of the trail would add lead to a significant change in the numbers of birds using the field.

From IOW-7-S006 to Hamstead Quay, the trail passes the top and southern edge of a creek which is not reported as being used by significant numbers of wintering birds by the National Trust or SWBGS. Nevertheless, it is part of the SPA, provides suitable habitat and is likely to be used by waterbirds. Additional infrastructure is proposed in this location which will encourage people to stay on the path by creating a dry surface to walk on. Section IOW-7-S018 to Hamstead Quay is largely set within scrub or landward of woodland, which screens users from any birds using the intertidal.

Overall, as the trail uses the route of the existing IOWCP, the pattern of recreational use will not change, and it is not expected that any small increase in visitors will result in significant additional disturbance that would lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Hamstead comprises the shingle spit, saltmarsh, mudflat, grassland and small amounts of fringing woodland. A S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the margin will not add to disturbance of birds using them. Some new infrastructure is proposed which will provide a safe, dry surface to walk on. This will limit trampling of vegetation, and is discussed below, but will also restrict disturbance by encouraging people to stay on the path.

Hamstead Spit forms part of the margin but a S26 exclusion is proposed at the seaward end for conservation purposes. As this is principally to protect breeding birds, it is discussed

below. However, the exclusion is year-round and so will also avoid disturbance to roosting waterbirds in the wintering season.

The SPA fields landward of IOW-7-S004 and IOW-7-S005 will become part of the margin. As noted, the field adjacent to IOW-7-S005 is an important feeding and roosting area for geese and waders. Therefore, a S26 exclusion is proposed on this field over the winter for conservation purposes (see figure 13 above). This mitigation is in addition to that set out in the proposals published in March 2020, and is in response to additional information gathered post-consultation from the SWBGS and National Trust (and described in the environmental baseline section above).

Natural England considered fencing seaward of IOW-7-S005 to ensure people and dogs do not use the excluded part of the margin. However, the landowner and manager informed us that currently people are respectful and stay on the existing footpath, evidenced by the fact that they find no footprints or trampling of grass in the field. Their preference is for the trail in this location to remain unfenced. Therefore, the proposal is to replicate the current situation by excluding the field from the margin and simply providing signage to ensure that people understand that they and their dogs should stay on the trail.

Additional disturbance to breeding birds

Hamstead Spit is used by small numbers of breeding ringed plover. Despite the small numbers, they could contribute a significant proportion of the wintering population, and as such, impacts on them could affect the Conservation Objective to maintain the abundance of the wintering population. In the past, terns have nested, though recreational disturbance, including a large proportion accessing the spit from the water, has prevented this in recent years. Nevertheless, there is an objective in the SACOs to restore the tern population and reduce disturbance [10] and the National Trust are aiming to achieve these objectives by roping off an area of the spit and providing information to water users.

The ECP proposals support the Conservation Objectives for the SPA and the National Trust management by aligning the trail along the route of the existing IOWCP and avoiding the spit. A S26 exclusion for conservation is proposed over the seaward end of the spit, covering the area roped off by the National Trust, which is where terns have nested in the past and where ringed plover are currently present (see figure 13 above, and Directions Map IOW 7A in Report IOW7).

The alignment and exclusion from the margin is supported by additional infrastructure to encourage compliance. New steps and signage will ensure the route of the trail is clear and easy to follow. An interpretation panel will explain the ecological importance of the area, exclusions and need to avoid entering the roped off areas. This will be designed in consultation with Bird Aware Solent to ensure consistency of messages.

Given these mitigation measures, it can be concluded that additional disturbance to breeding birds will be minimised and an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA avoided.

Disturbance due to the installation of infrastructure

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the steps, boardwalk, bridge, waymarkers, and interpretation panels are installed on this stretch, the mitigation measures set out in table 9 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting, nesting and feeding areas where possible.

- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

In regards to timing of works, the overwintering period is the key time to avoid impacts on the SPA/Ramsar. The replacement steps and interpretation board at IOW-6-S089 are around 330m from potential ringed plover or tern nesting locations on the spit and so are unlikely to cause any noise or visual disturbance during installation. However, this is around 130m from habitat used by wintering waterbirds. The boardwalks and new bridge at IOW-7-S003 and IOW-7-S008 to IOW-7-S022 (see map IOW7a in the Report) are also within 200m of high tide roosts for waterbirds. Therefore, if the wintering period cannot be avoided, construction will avoid the period two hours before or after high tide.

Overall, as the works are temporary, and with the mitigation measures set out, an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites from construction disturbance can be avoided.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and the Solent Maritime SAC is designated for its important habitats including saltmarsh and vegetated shingle. These habitats and communities may be damaged by trampling, causing erosion, where people regularly walk away from established paths.

Hamstead Spit supports strandline and perennial shingle vegetation, which grades into maritime grassland. The spit will form part of the coastal margin, though the eastern end will be restricted year-round for conservation reasons. This exclusion reflects National Trust management of the area and will reduce trampling and erosion of shingle vegetation.

It is not considered necessary to place a direction to exclude access over the whole spit because the western half of the spit, closest to the trail supports a pioneer shingle vegetation *Atriplex prostrata* community, which is relatively resilient to trampling pressure [50]. This strandline community readily recolonises after winter storms and so can also recover from light trampling pressure. High summer pressure could potentially have an effect, but this is unlikely in this location given the current access and distance to car parking.

Saltmarsh is sensitive to trampling and erosion but will be protected by placing a S25A exclusion over intertidal habitats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. This Direction will be supported by improvements to infrastructure to encourage people to stay on the path rather than stray onto adjacent saltmarsh habitats.

Where the existing PRoW takes a route around the top of the creek at Hamstead, the footpath has become muddy and widened as people have sought drier terrain (see Appendix 4 for photographs showing the route). To address this, new boardwalks will be installed between IOW-7-S006 and IOW-7-S021 where the current path surface has become damaged, and existing degraded boardwalks will be replaced. Handrails and passing places will be added as necessary, to reduce the need for walkers to step off the boardwalk. The new boardwalks will have a reduced distance between the slats to encourage dogs to use them. These works will enable the recovery of damaged vegetation next to the path.

Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure

The trail is within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar where it crosses the creeks south of Hamstead Dover and around Hamstead Quay. As noted above, in these locations replacement or additional boardwalks (as shown on map 7a of the published Report) will be installed to upgrade the trail surface to National Trail standards.

In order to minimise impacts on saltmarsh habitat, the new and replacement boardwalks will be installed with the same width, apart from the addition of passing places added. This will have a small additional shadowing impact on the saltmarsh, but as stepping off the boardwalk will be limited, there will be an overall benefit to the condition of the saltmarsh in this area. In the future, management of the trail passes to the trail partnership, with the Isle of Wight Council as the access authority, who will maintain it to National Trail standards.

A detailed assessment of the impact of infrastructure on habitats is set out in table 11, and the cumulative impact on habitats assessed at D3.2K.

D3.2E Western Haven creek

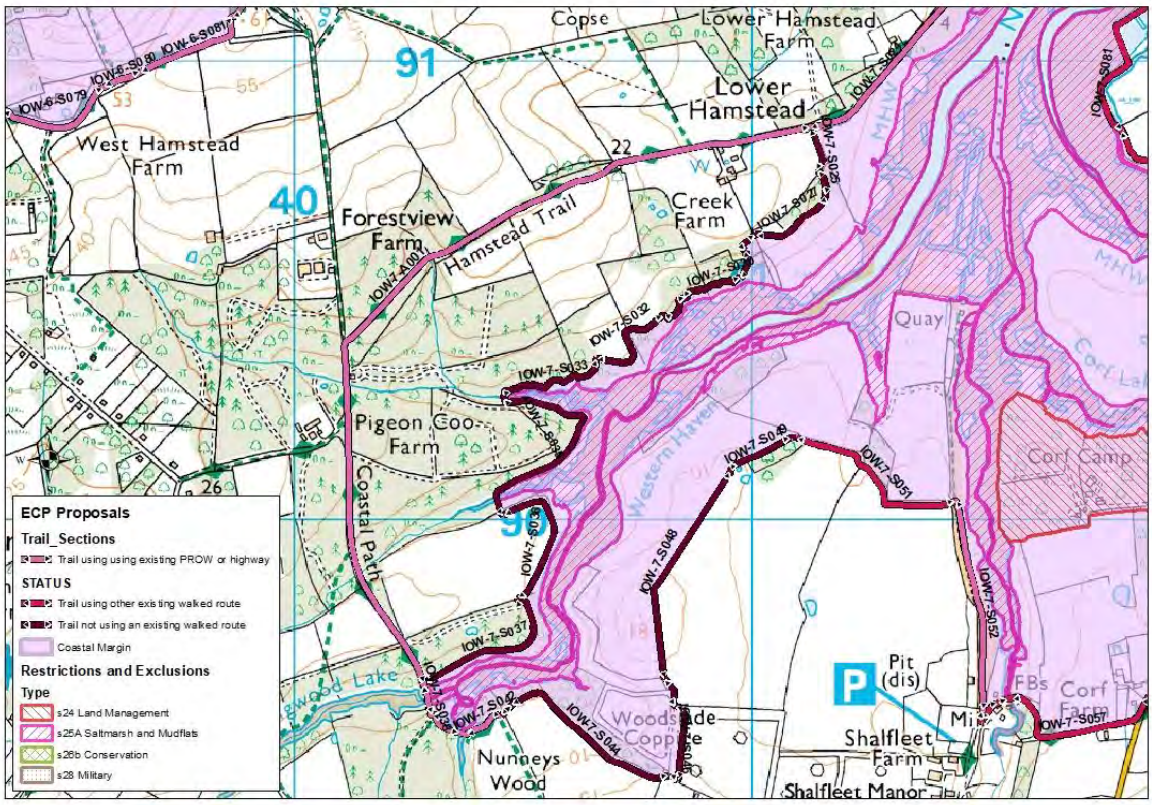


Figure 17: Proposals at Western Haven

Access Baseline

The National Trust manage Newtown Harbour NNR, the boundary of which generally follows the mean high-water (MHW) mark and includes the intertidal habitat. On the western side of Western Haven, land above MHW and at Aunt Emmy's Creek is in private ownership and currently has no public access. On the eastern side, the land above MHW is owned and

managed by the National Trust, but similarly does not have a right of public access (there is permissive access to Shalfleet Fields, which overlook Western Haven, but this area is considered in the next section of this HRA). Therefore, the shoreline at Western Haven is currently not accessible to recreational users on foot.

Instead, the existing IOWCP runs inland from Lower Hamstead Farm to the crossing at the upper reaches of Western Haven and onwards through Nunney's Wood. This part of the IOWCP is served by Nunney's Wood car park, with informal space for around 5 cars.

Like the Hamstead section to the north, Western Haven has a relatively low population living within easy travelling distance, with Yarmouth being the only town within 5 miles, and the only car park is at Nunney's Wood. Consequently, the area from Hamstead Duver to Causeway Lake has the lowest visitor numbers modelled for Bird Aware Solent of all the Isle of Wight sections of coast, with a total of around 10,000 annual visits currently predicted, based on householder surveys [26].

Whilst there is no public access to the shore of Western Haven on foot, there is a right of navigation to the channel. The Strava Metro water-based recreational data, shown in figure 18 below, demonstrates that Western Haven is relatively well used by watercraft.

Figure 18: Strava[7] heat map showing water-based recreational use of Western Haven

[7] Strava is an app used by recreational users to record activities. Strava Metro provide aggregated data to active transport planners to help understand mobility patterns, identify opportunities for investment and evaluate the impact of infrastructure changes. Available from: https://metro.strava.com/.

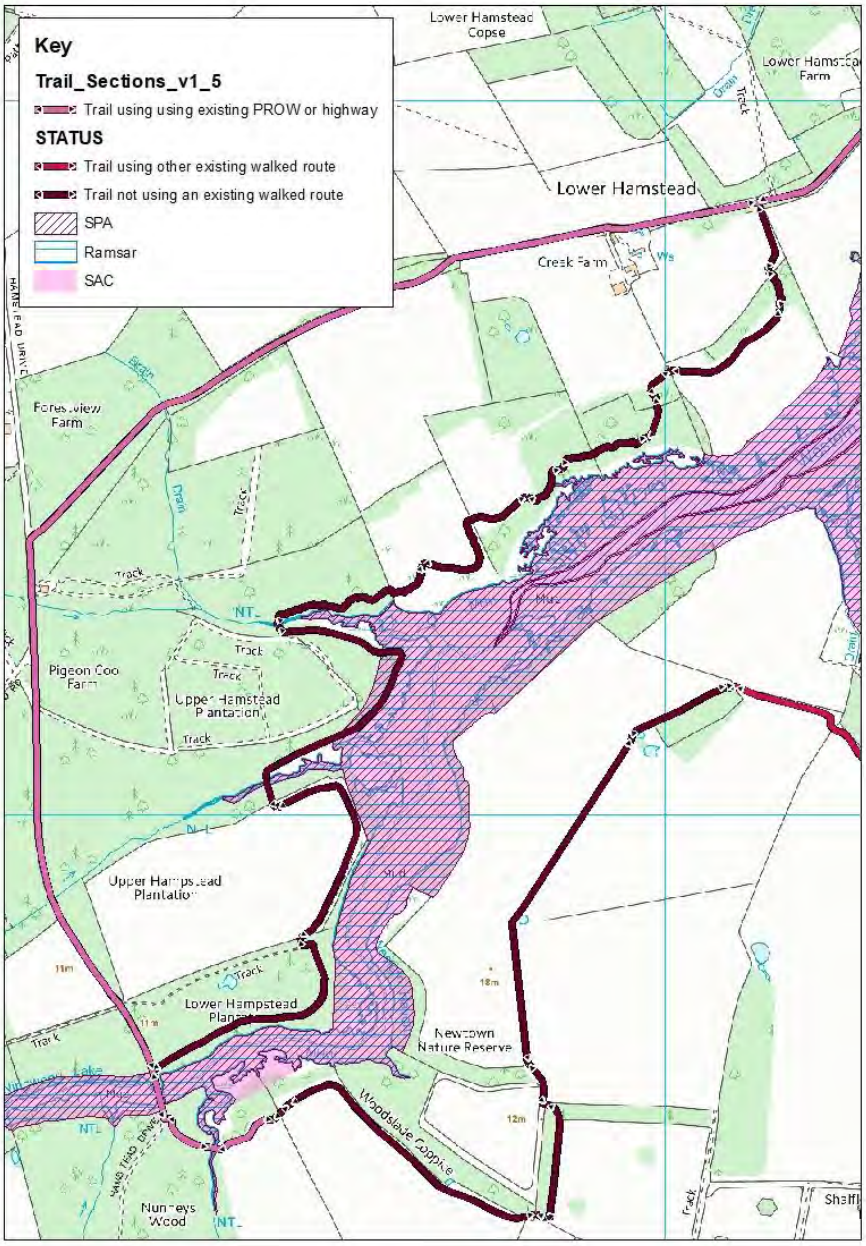


Figure 19: Nature conservation designations at Western Haven

Environment baseline

The channel and intertidal habitat at Western Haven form part of the Solent Maritime SAC. Saltmarsh habitat grades into coastal woodland, and particularly in the lower-middle reaches, shows excellent examples of the transition with branches of the oak trees reaching to the water. In the upper reaches, there is plantation woodland that is managed for forestry, but nevertheless, there is fringing coastal woodland. In the creeks there is ample dead wood that has fallen into the water, providing important habitat for Ramsar invertebrates.

The intertidal habitat at Western Haven is also part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. As there is no public access that would allow a vantage point from which a bird count of the whole area could be taken, it is not surveyed as part of WeBS and there is little data for the upper reaches. However, its sheltered nature mean that it is likely to provide a refuge for wintering waterbirds that form part of the SPA assemblage. The National Trust reports that the saltmarsh adjacent to IOW-7-S030 is used as a high tide roost by lapwings,

greenshank and redshank, but is unsuitable for breeding waders, including those that may contribute to the wintering SPA population [51]. The nearby terrestrial field, adjacent to IOW-7-S027, is used by foraging birds including black-tailed godwits (peak count of 144), shelduck (35 individuals) and greenshank (12 individuals) [51].

The SWBGS has also mapped several sites in the lower reaches of Western Haven as follows: brent geese use the intertidal habitat towards Hamstead Quay (core site IOW22: peak count 150 in 2018) and redshank roost on the intertidal further upstream (low use site IOW28D: peak count 14 in 2019). On the eastern side of Western Haven, there is a SWBGS core site (IOW28C: counts of 200 dunlin and 27 lapwing in 2007, and 80 brent geese in 2018) [11].

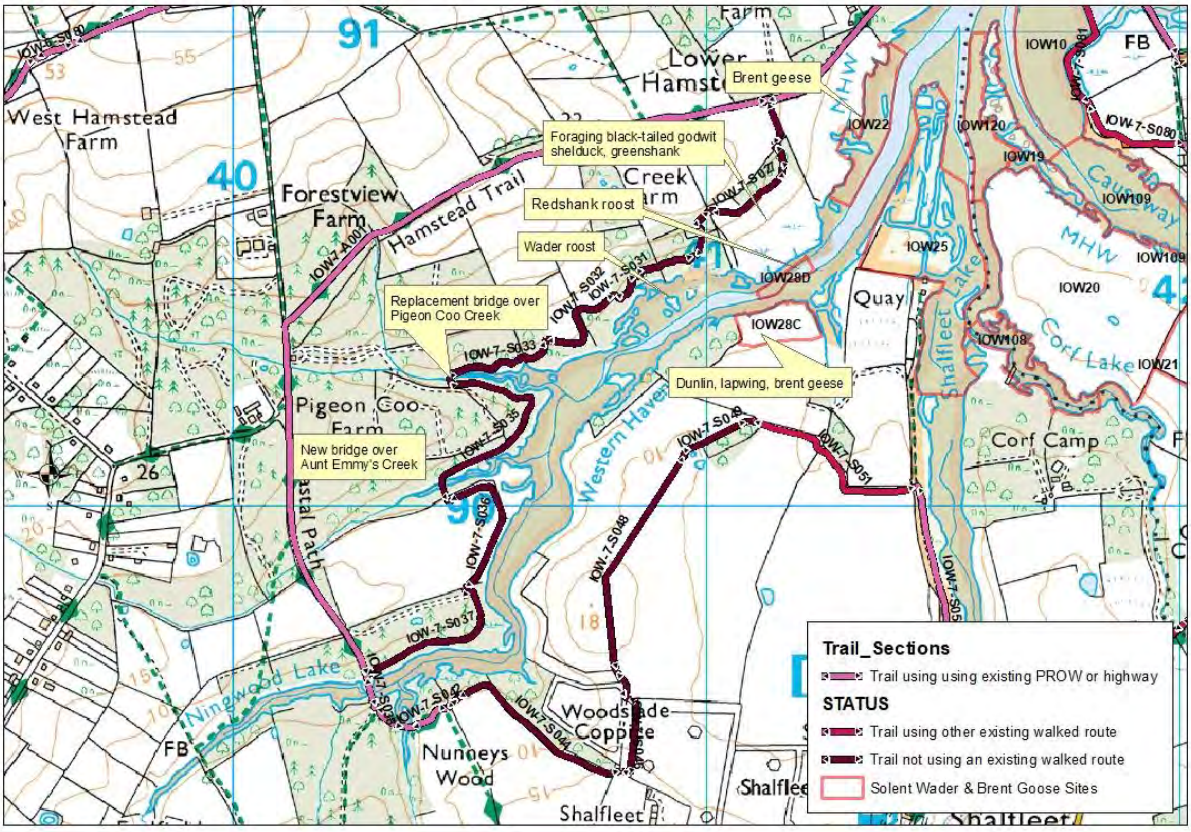


Figure 20: Ecological features at Western Haven

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)
- Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure (Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

From Hamstead Quay, the ECP follows the route of the existing IOWCP along a road set within trees. This screening avoids any risk of disturbance to brent geese using SWBGS core site IOW22.

Between Lower Hamstead and Creek Farms, the ECP diverges from the IOWCP and new access is proposed, taking walkers along a route set within the tree line but closer to the intertidal habitat. It re-joins the IOWCP at the bridge over the upper reach of Western Haven. As this is new access where there is currently no formal or informal public use, there will be a clear uplift in the recreational use. However, this will remain a relatively remote part of the trail, with the only car park being at Nunney's Wood. A 4.5km circular walk will be created with the new trail and existing IOWCP. Though the 3.8km circular walk created on the eastern side of Western Haven and via Shalfleet is likely to be more attractive to dog walkers for daily dogs walks, for the reasons set out in the next section of this report (in which access from Shalfleet is considered).

Given the risk of disturbance to wintering birds in this quiet part of the SPA, the main route will be closed between 1st August to 1st March each year for a combination of conservation and land management reasons. When the main route is closed, the ECP will use the route of the existing IOWCP which runs along the road inland. Gates with locks and infilled rails, to make them hard to climb, will be installed at the entry points to ensure that walkers do not access the main route when it is closed. Fencing will also be installed to make the gates difficult to circumvent. The Isle of Wight Council, as access authority, will open and close the gates at either end of the season. Interpretation panels will be installed by each gate, informing people about the timings of the closure, environmental sensitivities and alternative route.

The seasonal closure of the main route for conservation and land management reasons will avoid potential disturbance to birds during the autumn passage and core winter periods. SPA/Ramsar birds may be present outside these times, but potential disturbance is minimised as the route is mainly set within the tree line. At the north-eastern end (IOW-7-S027), the path is set at the landward edge of the field, away from the intertidal habitat. The National Trust reports that this field supports black-tailed godwits, greenshanks and shelducks. Peak numbers of greenshanks are seen on autumn passage with lowest numbers in spring and summer. Highest numbers of shelducks are reported by WeBS in winter with lowest numbers from March onwards [12]. Therefore, the closure of the trail between 1st August and 1st March each year will avoid significant disturbance to these greenshanks and shelducks. Black-tailed godwit reporting rates drop off in April, so there is a risk of disturbance during March when the trail is open. However, this is not likely to lead to significant adverse effects to foraging birds due to the short period and timing when the weather tends to be less harsh and so birds' energy budgets are less constrained.

Breeding waders are not likely to nest in Western Haven given the shape of the channel and lack of suitable habitat. Therefore, there is no risk to the wintering bird SPA/Ramsar interest from disturbance in the breeding season. Whilst there are no breeding records, the woodland adjacent to the trail, in sections IOW-7-S029 to IOW-7-S031, is suitable nesting habitat for little egret, a main component of the waterbird assemblage. Therefore, as part of the evidence gathering for this updated HRA, a walkover survey was undertaken using the

guidance set out for the BTO Heronries Census[8]. The visit was carried out on 3 March 2022 by the HRA author (NE Senior Ornithologist). Whilst little egrets do not start to nest until April, an early visit meant that a check could be made for nests whilst there were no leaves on the deciduous trees. A combination of vantage point scans, and coverage of the proposed trail route and other woodland rides, was used to confirm that no little egret (or grey heron) nests were apparent on this section of the trail. Therefore, there does not appear to be an established heronry in the woodland at Western Haven.

Natural England's published proposals included a dogs to lead restriction on the main route at Western Haven. We sought advice on the proposals for on this section of coast from an independent expert on managing access for walkers with dogs[9]. Taking account of this advice, Natural England now proposes to remove the dogs to lead restriction. This is because the dogs to lead restriction was aimed at minimising disturbance to wintering birds but the seasonal closure of the trail means there is only a small overlap with SPA birds (in March and beginning April). For all of the main route, the topography, existing vegetation/fencing, or our proposed infrastructure, mean that trail users will be away from the intertidal. Therefore, having dogs off lead on the trail is not likely to cause significant disturbance to birds using the intertidal. In addition, this will ensure that dog walkers will not seek to use the coastal margin in order to exercise their dogs off lead.

Instead, simple and clear messaging will be used to ask people to keep their dogs with them on the path and out of vegetation. Figure 21 below shows an example of the signage that has been used at Thames Basin Heaths and has been effective at reducing disturbance to ground nesting birds.

Figure 21: Example of signage used at Thames Basin Heaths

After crossing Western Haven, the trail continues on the route of the existing IOWCP to Nunney's Wood. From here, it diverges from the IOWCP and new access is proposed landward of Woodslade Coppice. The trail is landward of an existing fence (from IOW-7-S043 to S047), which, combined with thick scrub, will ensure people stay on the trail as it provides an extensive physical and visual barrier to the intertidal area. The new access continues across National Trust land on higher ground, and then enters Shalfleet Fields. The trail is set back a minimum of 120m from the intertidal habitat, which will minimise the risk of any noise disturbance. Visual disturbance is avoided as the intertidal habitat is fringed by woodland which runs the length of Western Haven and screens the intertidal from the trail.

Coastal access rights

[8] Heronries Census instructions: Taking part | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology
[9] Advice from S. Jenkinson, on how to best manage recreational access for people, and particularly those with dogs, on a site visit to Shalfleet and Western Haven, 3 March 2022.

The coastal margin at Western Haven comprises saltmarsh, mudflat, grassland and woodland seaward of the main route. There is no coastal margin created between the seasonal alternative route and the main route on the western side of Western Haven. When the main route is closed, coastal access rights are excluded over the trail, and the position of the locked gates at either end, which will be designed to be difficult to climb or circumvent, effectively prevents people entering the area, including the margin.

A year-round S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the margin will not add to disturbance of birds using them. Some fencing and other infrastructure is proposed on the western side of Western Haven to ensure people stay on the path and do not stray onto the saltmarsh. This is considered in more detail regarding the risk of trampling and erosion below, though will have the added benefit of minimising disturbance to birds using the intertidal at times when the main route is open.

On the eastern side of Western Haven, the trail is set back from the intertidal, with woodland and grassed fields forming the coastal margin. At Woodslade Coppice, the trail is landward of a fenced boundary with thick scrub, which will minimise access to the margin and potential disturbance. Towards Shalfleet Fields, the trail is set inland in grassed fields which will form part of the margin. The trail from IOW-7-S048 to S051 will be set within a 5m corridor livestock-free, fenced either side. This is for land management reasons and to avoid disturbance to breeding hares, but will also mean that people will be highly motivated to stay on the trail and not use the margin. The rotational presence of livestock in the fields abutting the trail will be a particular incentive to walkers with dogs to stay in the livestock-free corridor. Given the choice, walkers with dogs will seek to avoid sheep and cows for reasons of safety, the need to have dogs on lead, and the risk of confrontation with the grazier[10]. Therefore, we can be confident that disturbance to birds using the intertidal, and the grassed fields (particularly the SWBGS site IOW28C), will be minimised.

In conclusion, with the mitigation measures described, an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA/Ramsar from disturbance to birds from use of the trail and associated margin will be avoided.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and the Solent Maritime SAC is designated for its important habitats including saltmarsh and transitions from woodland to intertidal habitat. These habitats and communities may be damaged by trampling, causing erosion, where people regularly walk away from established paths.

Saltmarsh is sensitive to trampling and erosion but will be protected by placing a S25A exclusion over intertidal habitats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. This will also apply to canoeists and paddleboarders – they can launch from Shalfleet Quay or other public access points, but the Direction means they should not cross the saltmarsh on foot to reach land in other areas.

As new access is proposed at Western Haven, there is the opportunity to establish non-damaging patterns of use by encouraging people to stay on the trail and off the saltmarsh. At the north-eastern end, IOW-7-S027 is within a fenced field, which makes it unlikely that many people will climb over onto the saltmarsh. From there, the trail follows a route through

[10] Advice from S. Jenkinson, (consultant with expertise in access management providing advice to Natural England on how to best manage recreational access for people, and particularly those with dogs) on a site visit to Shalfleet and Western Haven, 3 March 2022.

woodland, avoiding the edge of the intertidal where the woodland transitions into saltmarsh. For the most part, the existing understorey vegetation and terrain will be sufficient to keep people on the path, but at IOW-7-S031 stock fencing will be installed on the seaward edge of the trail.

The route then runs inside some fields along the landward edge of woodland, and through further woodland to the crossing at Pigeon Coo Creek. The fenced fields and relatively steep terrain mean that it is unlikely that people will access the saltmarsh in this section.

A replacement bridge at Pigeon Coo Creek will encourage people to use this crossing. The trail then follows the edge of the headland between Pigeon Coo and Aunt Emmy's Creek. Whilst this part of the trail is within the SAC, the woodland here comprises conifers with little understorey. Although this means the trail alignment will not cause any damage to SAC transitional habitat, there is easy access to the saltmarsh. To avoid access and trampling, fencing will be installed to ensure people stay on the trail. A route set further inland, outside the SAC and along forestry tracks, was explored but rejected due to potential conflict with forestry operations.

At Aunt Emmy's Creek the existing, dilapidated foot bridge at the mouth of the creek will be removed. A new crossing will be installed upstream, with fencing to guide people towards it. The trail then follows the edge of a grassed field, with existing fencing and woodland preventing people accessing the intertidal. At Lower Hamstead Plantation, the trail is set within the woodland with a thick, scrubby, understorey that will discourage users from reaching the intertidal habitat.

Interpretation panels will be installed at each bridge to inform people of the wildlife and behaviours to avoid damage. These are ideal locations for this type of interpretation board as there tends to be more 'dwell time' as people cross the bridges. In addition, signage will be attached to fence posts where there is fencing (at IOW-7-S031 and IOW-7-S035) with simple graphics and text along the lines of "Please don't cross this fence – it's here to protect the sensitive habitat beyond from being trampled".

Overall, the measures described are considered sufficient at this stage to ensure that people stick to the trail and do not access the saltmarsh to the point where trampling will lead to significant erosion. As the trail will only be open in the spring and summer, this will allow checks of the trail and infrastructure to be carried out by the trail partnership, and any changes to the infrastructure to be made in the winter whilst people are not present.

On the eastern side of Western Haven, the risk of access to the saltmarsh from the trail and margin is minimised by fencing and scrub.

<u>Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure</u>

The trail is within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar where it crosses Aunt Emmy's Creek and at the headland between this and Pigeon Coo Creek. As set out in table 11, stock fencing will be installed within the SAC/SPA/Ramsar resulting in a small loss of area. However, in this location the habitat is conifer woodland, which does not support SPA/Ramsar species and is not a habitat for which the SAC is designated. Installation of the fencing would not preclude restoration to native broadleaved woodland nor affect the transition from woodland to intertidal, which is the SAC feature.

A new footbridge is proposed at Aunt Emmy's Creek as the existing is in a state of disrepair. The existing will be removed, and it was decided not to cross at that location as it would require a significant length of bridge and boardwalk with consequent loss of saltmarsh. The

proposed location for the new bridge would not result in any loss of saltmarsh as this is not present in this part of the site due to the shape of the creek being narrow and steep sided at this point. The bridge will use an open mesh, anti-slip surface that lets light through, which will minimise any impacts from shading. There will be a small loss of mudflat due to the footings, but the bridge will be designed to avoid any hydrological impacts on the creek, and so the functioning of the habitat will not be affected.

The cumulative loss of habitat and potential for adverse effects on the integrity of the site is considered further at section D3.2K

The most important habitat within the creek is provided by the fallen trees and woody debris. Therefore, the detailed design and siting of the bridge should avoid this as far as possible. If some removal to create a working width is necessary, the logs should be moved rather than removed from the site. Wherever possible, any logs or other compatible natural arisings from the bridge works will be relocated so as to further aid the steering of walkers away from the intertidal area. This will ensure that important habitat for Ramsar invertebrates is not adversely affected.

Figure 22: Possible location for new bridge across Aunt Emmy's Creek, minimising vegetation clearance required. However, the final siting will be confirmed on the 'walk the course' checks before establishment, so that any changes in vegetation or woody debris can be taken into account.

Disturbance due to the installation of infrastructure

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the infrastructure (shown on map 7b of the published Report), including steps, boardwalk, bridge, fencing, and interpretation panels, are installed on this stretch, the mitigation measures set out in table 8 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting, nesting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not

possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.

- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

In regards to timing of works, the overwintering period is the key time to avoid impacts on the SPA/Ramsar. The bridges over Aunt Emmy's and Pigeon Coo Creek are the most significant works but are not within 200m or visible to any known high tide roost sites.

Overall, as the works are temporary, and with the mitigation measures set out, an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites from construction disturbance can be avoided.

D3.2F - Shalfleet fields to Fleetlands Farm

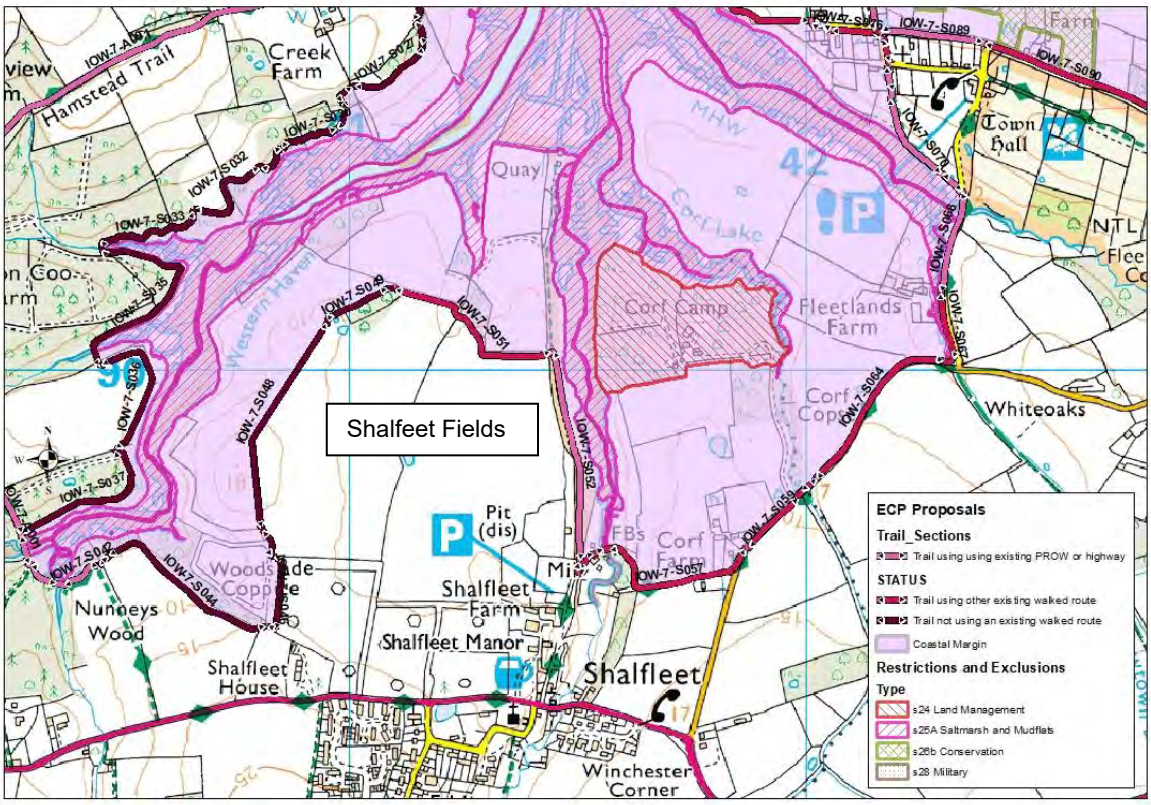


Figure 23: Map of ECP proposals from Shalfleet fields to Fleetlands Farm

Access Baseline

Shalfleet is a small village on the southern edge of Newtown Harbour. Shalfleet Quay is a short walk from the village and is a popular anchoring and mooring spot [52]. Whilst there is no longer a public car park at Shalfleet, there is parking available on the roads and at the car park at Nunney's Wood. There is an existing PRoW from the village to the quay, which is popular with locals and visitors. The National Trust manage the NNR, the boundary of which follows the MHW mark, and also the land between Western Haven and Shalfleet Lake. Permissive access is provided to Shalfleet Fields from the PRoW at Shalfleet Lake.

Whilst the Shalfleet section of Newtown Harbour has a relatively low population within easy travelling distance, with Yarmouth and Carisbrooke being the only towns within 5 miles, the existing footpaths and parking mean that it is the busiest of the sections on the western side of Newtown Harbour. However, this is relative, as the area from Hamstead Duver to Causeway Lake has the lowest visitor numbers modelled for Bird Aware Solent of all the Isle of Wight sections of coast, with a total of around 10,000 annual visits currently predicted, based on householder surveys [26].

Between Shalfleet Lake and Corf Lake there is a small peninsular on which Corf Scout Camp is situated. The campsite is open from 1st April to 31st October, though the buildings are available for activities in winter.

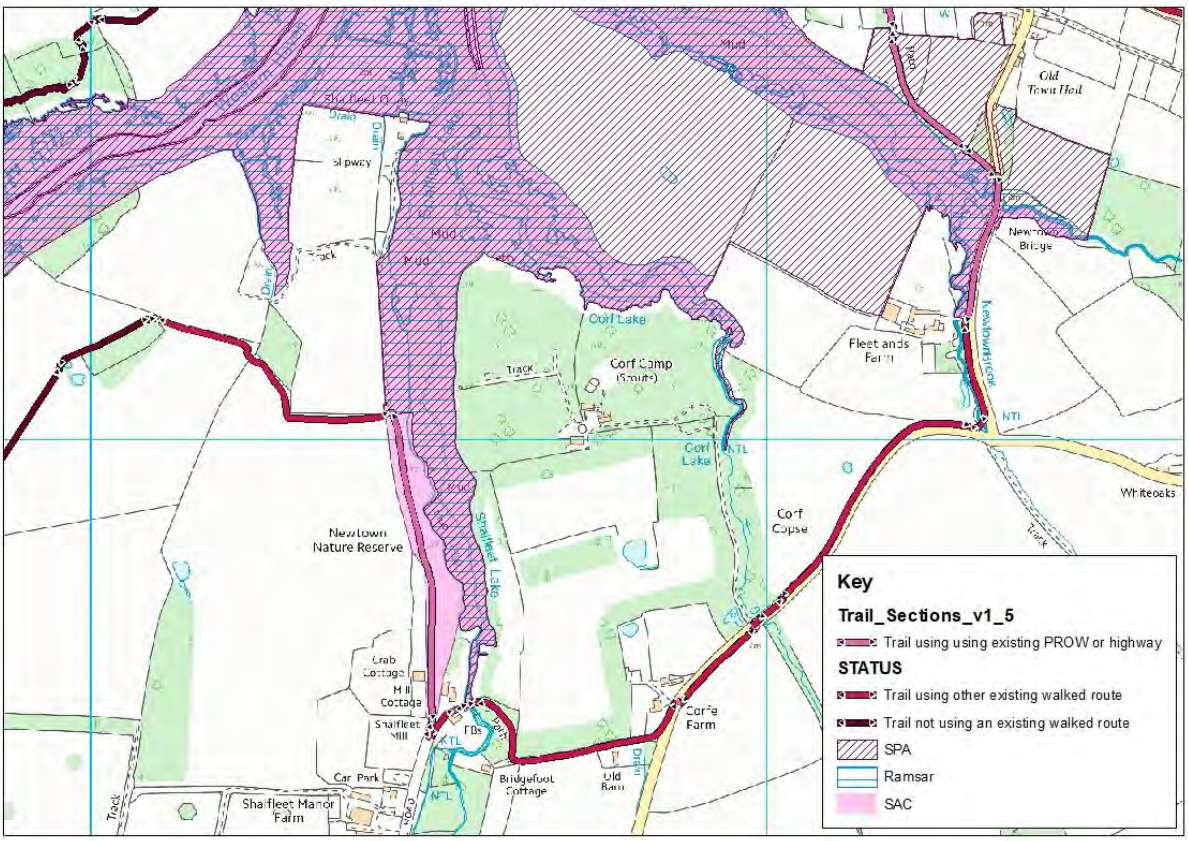


Figure 24: Nature conservation designations between Shalfleet Fields and Fleetlands Farm

Environment baseline

Shalfleet Lake and Corf Lake are small creeks feeding the main estuary. The channels and intertidal habitats form part of the Solent Maritime SAC and support saltmarsh with fringing woodland.

The intertidal habitat of the creeks are also part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. Their sheltered nature means that they provide ideal foraging habitat for ducks: the National Trust report peaks of 160 wigeon and 35 mallard in Shalfleet Lake. Corf Lake also supports foraging waders and waterfowl (peaks of 144 black-tailed godwit, 160 wigeon, 35 mallard, and 150 teal) [51]. Intertidal habitat around Shalfleet Quay is particularly important as a roost site for waterbirds (SWBGS core site IOW25 records the following peak counts: 327 brent geese in 2019, 20 golden plover in 2018, 150 lapwing in 2018). Additionally, the National Trust have recorded 54 black-tailed godwits, 35 curlew, and 300 Mediterranean gulls roosting on land between Shalfleet Lake and Corf Lake.

The terrestrial fields between Corf Lake and Causeway Lake are also part of the SPA and support significant numbers of wintering birds. SWBGS core site IOW20 has recorded peaks of 940 brent geese in 2007, 40 black-tailed godwit in 2019, 50 curlew in 2018, 26 golden plover in 2019, and 200 lapwing in 2019. In addition, the adjacent SWBGS core site IOW21 has recorded peaks of 840 brent geese in 2019, 20 black-tailed godwit in 2018, 49 curlew in 2008, 220 lapwing in 2007, and 22 redshank in 2008 [11].

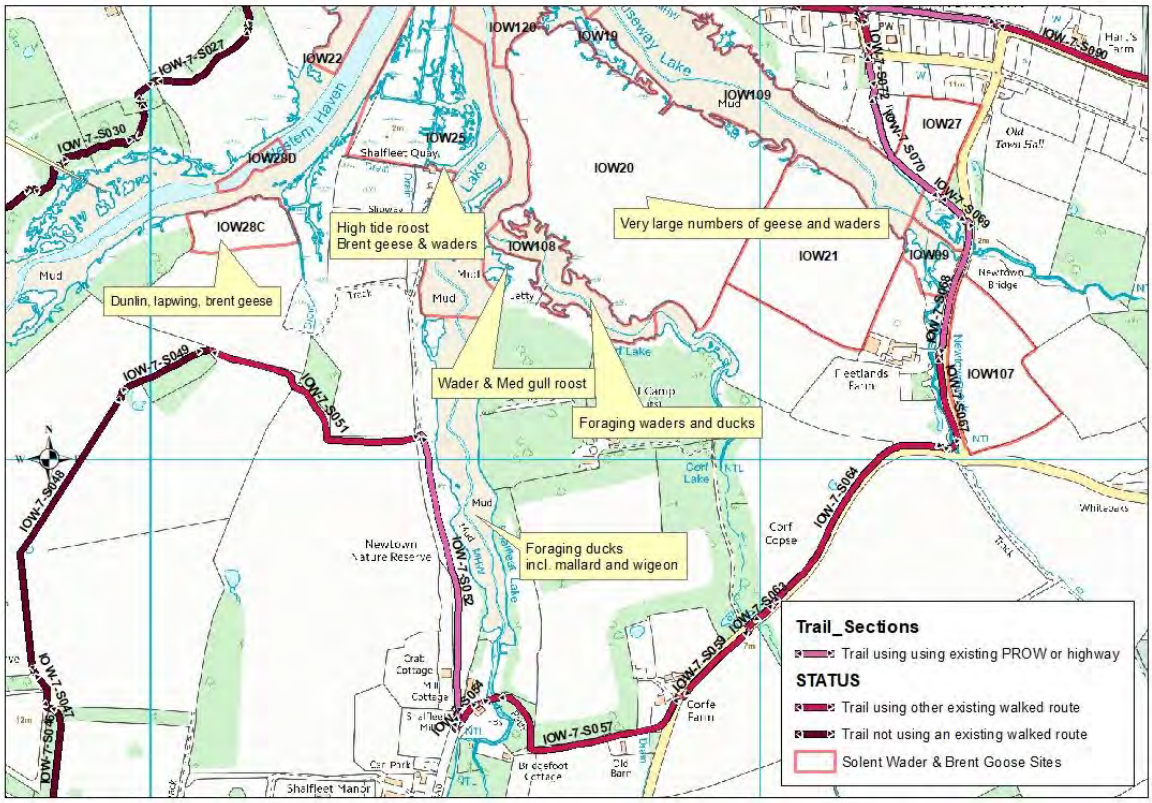


Figure 25: Ecological features between Shalfleet Fields and Fleetlands Farm

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

<u>Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds</u>

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The new access created by the ECP between Nunney's Wood and Shalfleet Fields will create an attractive circular walk for Shalfleet residents and visitors (see figure 26 below).

This route benefits due to the new off-road pedestrian link parallel to the A3054 arising from planning obligations associated with the new housing development at Burt Close on the western edge of Shalfleet. The ECP, off road pedestrian link, and the existing IOWCP create a circular route from Shalfleet village of around 3.8km long which avoids walking along busy roads with no footway. This route's characteristics reflect the amenities dog owners most value on a daily walk; namely a circular route of around an hour, close to home, mostly off-lead, and away from traffic.

There was some ambiguity regarding the restrictions around lead use at Shalfleet in our published proposals (March 2020) as the overview document (p.45) stated that a year-round dogs to lead restriction will be introduced for land management reasons, whereas Stretch Report 7 stated that dogs should be kept on leads around livestock at Shalfleet Fields. Natural England can confirm that the trail at Shalfleet will only be subject to the requirement for lead use around livestock, as long as dogs are otherwise kept under effective control. No other restrictions are necessary because the proposal is to create the trail within a 5m fenced livestock-free corridor, which provides a safe route for exercising dogs off leads.

Therefore, the creation of the ECP at Shalfleet is likely to increase usage where the trail uses existing PRoW and permissive footpaths, as well as on the parts of the trail without current access. However, with the mitigation proposed, including the fencing that will be used along IOW-7-S048 to S049 (as described in the previous section of this report), this circular route is capable of being used by increased numbers of walkers and dog walkers without causing significant disturbance to the SPA. The creation of the circular walk is likely to have the benefit of drawing users away from the more sensitive western side of Western Haven (described in the previous section of this report), because it is directly accessible from the Shalfleet settlement without needing to use a car or walk along the A3054, and will permit off-lead exercise for much of its length.

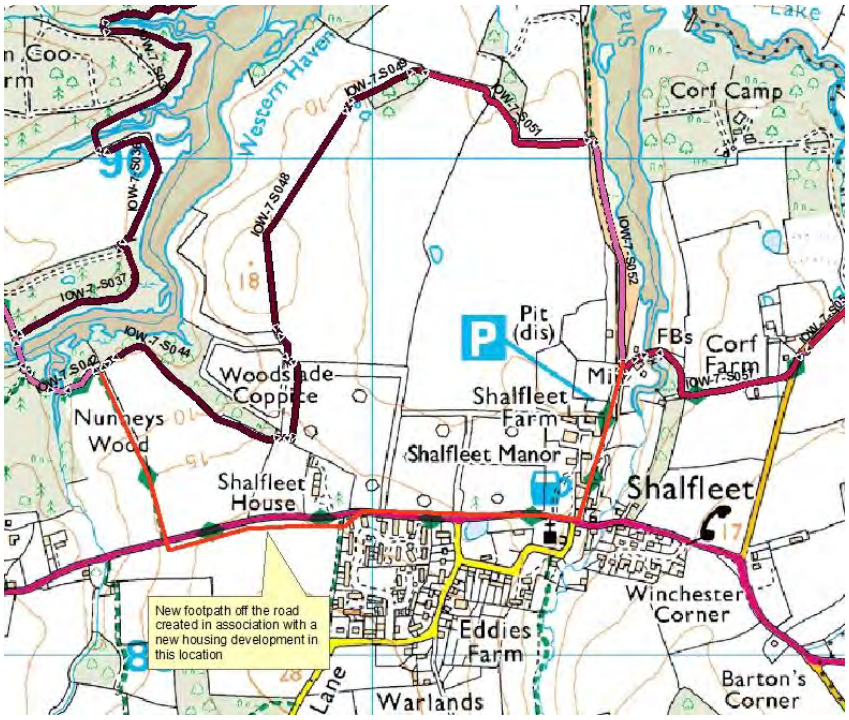


Figure 26: Map showing circular route created by the linking of the route of the existing IOWCP with the new access created by the ECP

Considering the route between Shalfeet Fields and Fleetlands Farm in more detail:

At Shalfleet Fields, the route of the ECP follows the permissive footpath provided by the National Trust. The route is within existing fenced fields, set back from Shalfleet Quay. The topography and intervening woodland mean that any disturbance to birds using the roosting and feeding areas around Shalfleet Quay is avoided.

The trail then follows an existing PRoW alongside Shalfleet Lake. Whilst this is co-located with the private vehicular access track to Shalfleet Quay, the traffic volumes are very low and the uneven, unsealed, single track surface means the traffic speeds are also very low. This track is already very regularly used at all times of the year by walkers with, and without, dogs. It is set back from the edge of the water, and largely screened by trees and scrub. Given this, it is not expected that any uplift in use due to the establishment of the ECP will significantly add to any disturbance of foraging ducks in this area.

At the top of Shalfleet Lake, the trail rejoins the IOWCP and follows it on an inland route to the road bridge across Causeway Lake. This inland route was chosen to avoid disturbance to the large roosts at the mouth of Shalfleet Lake and the roosting/foraging fields between Corf Lake and Causeway Lake (part of the SPA, and SWBGS core sites IOW20 and IOW21).

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Shalfleet comprises saltmarsh, mudflat, grassland and woodland seaward of the trail.

A year-round S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the margin will not add to disturbance of birds using them. In addition, there is a year-round S24 exclusion to Corf Scout Camp (shown on figure 23 above), which has the added benefit of avoiding any additional disturbance to birds from use of the margin in this location by coast path visitors.

For the majority of this section around Newtown Harbour, the trail is set inland away from the SPA. This creates a significant area of margin, but existing barriers (woodland, walls, fencing and farms) mean that it is unlikely that people will use the margin to reach the SPA. In particular, existing barriers mean that the risk of disturbance to SPA birds using the SWBGS sites IOW20 and IOW21 will be minimised, and therefore additional exclusions from the margin are not considered necessary at this time. However, it is a legal requirement for ECP restrictions and exclusions to be reviewed every 5 years, and so there will be an opportunity to add further directions if necessary in the future.

Where the trail runs alongside Shalfleet Lake, the margin is made up of grassland that is currently used for recreation, with benches provided. The area is largely screened from the intertidal by trees and scrub, though there are some gaps that appear to be intentionally maintained by surface mowing and clearance of overhanging vegetation. As the area is already well-used, it is unlikely that the creation of coastal margin will increase this such that significant additional disturbance to birds will result.

<u>Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat</u>

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and the Solent Maritime SAC is designated for its important habitats including saltmarsh and transitions from woodland to intertidal habitat. These habitats and communities may be damaged by trampling, causing erosion, where people regularly walk away from established paths.

Saltmarsh is sensitive to trampling and erosion but will be protected by placing a S25A exclusion over intertidal habitats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. This will also apply to canoeists and paddleboarders – they can launch from Shalfleet Quay or other public access points, but the Direction means they should not cross the saltmarsh on foot to reach land in other areas.

As noted above, the location of the trail inland with existing barriers means that it is unlikely people will cross the margin to reach the intertidal habitat. The only gaps are at Shalfleet Lake. However, in this location the shape of the creek means there is naturally very little fringing saltmarsh, and therefore, little risk from trampling.

Disturbance due to the installation of infrastructure

There is only one location in this part of the stretch where access infrastructure will be installed closed to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds: at the boundary of Shalfeet Fields. To minimise any temporary noise and visual disturbance when the interpretation panel is installed, the mitigation measures set out in table 9 will apply. However, as the works are minor, and likely to take less than a day, any impacts are likely to be minimal.

Overall, as the works are temporary, and with the mitigation measures set out, an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites from construction disturbance can be avoided.

D3.2G - Causeway Lake to Harts Farm

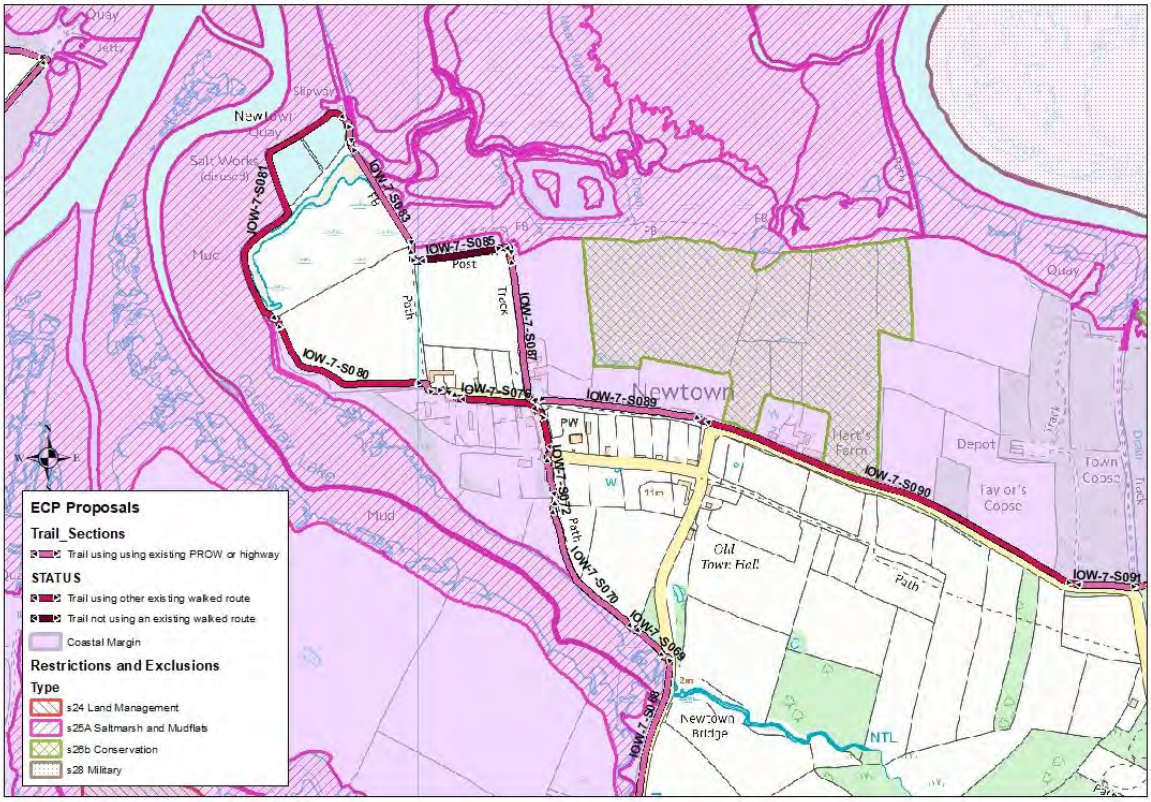


Figure 27: ECP proposals, as published in March 2020, between Causeway Lake and Harts Farm

Access baseline

This part of the ECP centres around Newtown, which is the main hub for visitors to Newtown Harbour. There is a network of footpaths and promoted walks [53] which are popular with locals and visitors. The National Trust operate a charged car park here with space for around 10 cars, and there is additional car parking by the Coastguard Cottages. A car park survey in 2018/19 for Bird Aware Solent found an average winter usage of two cars per survey for the National Trust car park and 4.5 cars per survey for the other [38]. National Trust car counter statistics accord with this around 750 cars recorded per month in winter, but much higher usage in spring/summer when between 1500 and 2000 cars were recorded per month in 2016-17 [51].

Newtown Harbour is within 5 miles of the towns of Newport and Yarmouth (combined population of approximately 27,000 based on 2011 Census data) [35]. According to MENE research [31], most (71%) visits to the coast, other than to towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5-mile radius [32], giving a smaller catchment. Bird Aware householder survey modelling predicts the eastern half of Newtown Harbour to receive a total of 296,000 annual visits by residents [26].

Bird Aware Solent commissioned visitor surveys of people at Newtown Quay, undertaken in winter 2017/18 and repeated in 2019/20 [33] [28]. These surveys found that the majority of people visiting the site were either dog walking, walking or wildlife watching. In 2017/18, 60% of interviewees said they visited more than 3 times a week, though in 2019/20 this had dropped to around 34%. Around 30% of people visited because it was close to home, and around 55% because of the scenery.

National Trust visitor engagement is focused on Newtown Quay as this is the most visited part of the reserve. Bird Aware Solent rangers also focus on this part of the harbour as there is greatest opportunity to show people the birdlife, they have also assessed it as a medium risk in terms of disturbance [49].

A Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) requires dogs to be kept on leads along much of the trail between Cassey Bridge and Newtown Quay[11]. The establishment of the ECP will not change or affect this requirement.

There is a public slipway at Cassey Bridge on Causeway Lake. The National Trust's small boat and canoe guide also notes that there is a landing place at Newtown Quay [52]. The number of boats in the harbour is a significant pressure. The National Trust Harbourmaster engaged with an average of 1,469 boats per month between July and September 2020, a figure which does not include seasonal boat owners based at Shalfleet Boat Yard, Newtown Quay and Hampstead Jetty (NT Harbourmaster pers. comm. Oct 20).

The National Trust's Management Plan for Newtown Harbour contains an objective to remove or limit threats of disturbance to wintering and breeding birds. However, disturbance to key breeding birds (terns and gulls) arises mainly from watercraft users as the harbour has a right of navigation and the locations of nesting seabirds are more accessible via water than land. There are advisory signs asking watercraft users to remain in the main channels, but this is difficult to enforce [51].

[11] Map of PSPO area: Dogs on Leads Areas maps 1 to 23.pdf (iow.gov.uk)

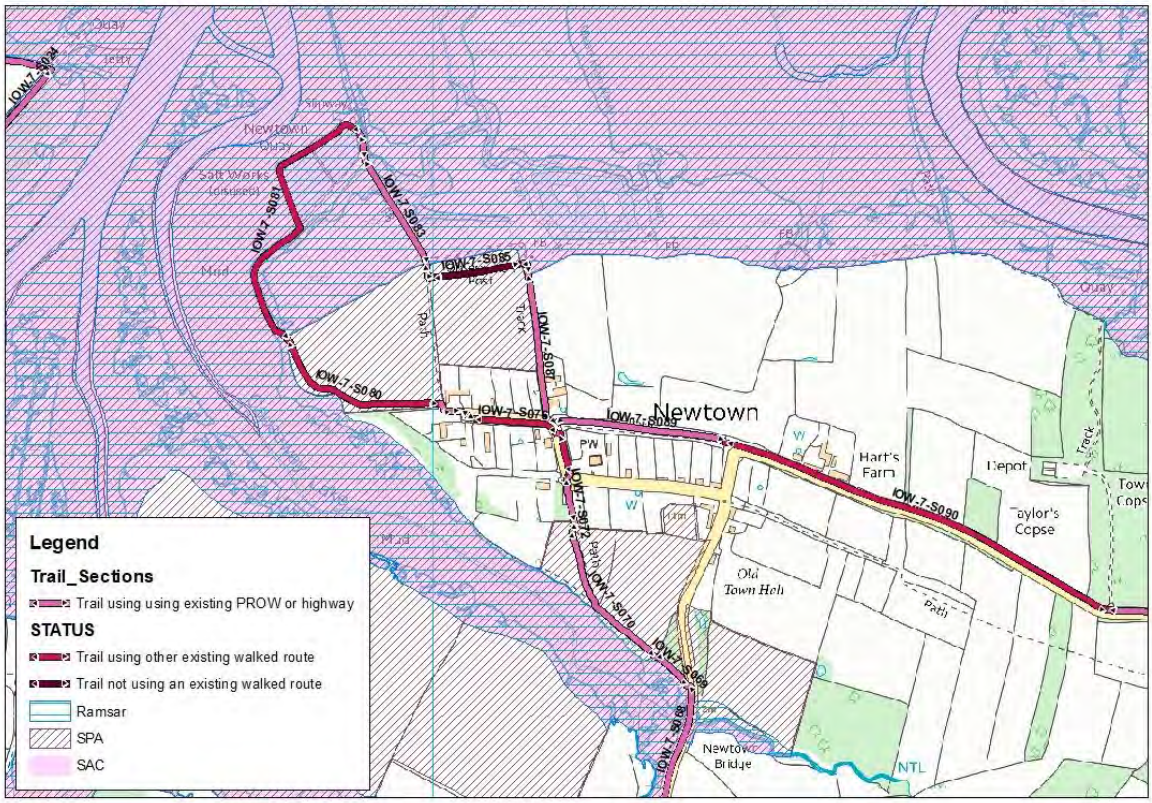


Figure 28: Nature conservation designations at Newtown

Environment baseline

The saltmarsh and mudflats of Causeway Lake and the Newtown Quay frontage form part of the Solent Maritime SAC. At Newtown Quay there are salterns that are all that remains of the salt industry at Newtown. A SSSI condition assessment in 2010 [54] found that these lagoons supported a range of specialist species, including the lagoon sand shrimp *Gammarus insensibilis*. Due to their sheltered nature, the salterns may also provide favoured foraging habitat for terns.

Causeway Lake is used by large numbers of foraging wintering waterbirds that are features of the SPA, including peak counts of 1200 brent geese, 650 wigeon, 325 teal, 139 pintail, 750 lapwing, and 100 black-tailed godwits [51]. In addition, SWBGS core site IOW109, covering Causeway Lake, has recorded peaks of 200 brent geese in 2019, 60 black-tailed godwits in 2018, and 50 lapwings in 2018. SWBGS movement studies have found that the area is important in linking different sites within the harbour [11].

The intertidal habitat around Newtown is particularly important for wintering waterbirds. The extensive, open saltmarsh and mudflats provide ideal foraging habitat, and the relict sea walls and saltmarsh islands are used as high tide roosts. There are a number of SWBGS sites covering the area. Notable counts include 358 brent geese using the intertidal at Newtown Quay in 2018 (IOW16), and 200 brent geese using the intertidal to the west in 2019 (IOW10). The relict sea wall at Newtown Quay is an important roost (IOW29) with counts of 350 brent geese in 2019, and 1500 dunlin, 55 grey plover, and 400 knot in 2007.

The intertidal mud and saltmarsh east of Newtown Quay and in front of the National Trust's 2-storey Mercia Seabroke bird hide is used by large numbers of foraging birds in winter, including counts of 1000 brent geese, 100+ ringed plovers, 100+ curlew, 832 golden plovers, 424 grey plovers, 640 knot, and 1500 dunlin [51].

In addition to the intertidal habitat, the pasture fields outside the SPA at Harts Farm are used by foraging geese and waders. The SWBGS recorded 70 brent geese and 20 lapwings in 2019 (IOW23B).

In the breeding season, the island in front of the Mercia Seabroke hide is used by 200+ pairs of black-headed gulls and 12 pairs of Mediterranean gulls. Small numbers of redshanks breed on the edge of the salterns and saltmarsh west of the gull breeding islands [51].

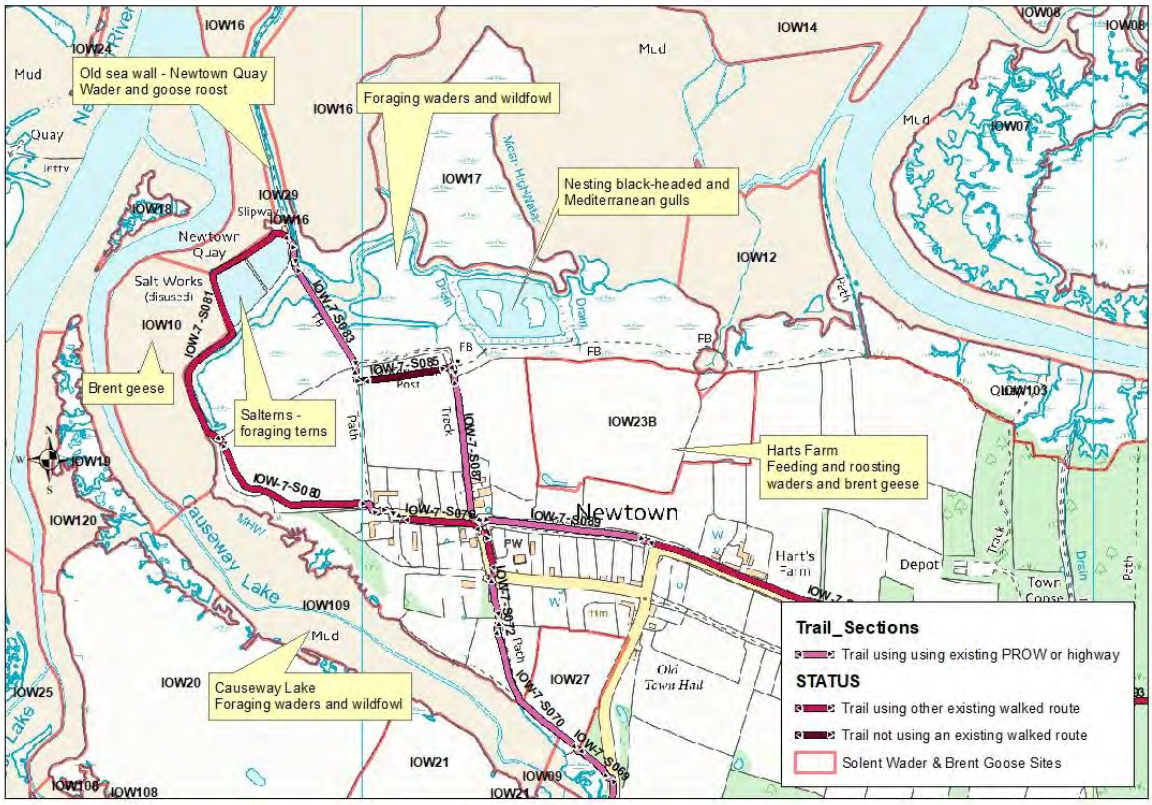


Figure 29: Selected environmentally sensitive features around Newtown

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Additional disturbance of breeding Mediterranean gulls (Solent & Southampton Water SPA)
- Additional disturbance of foraging terns (Solent and Dorset Coast SPA)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Loss of habitat from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar and Solent Maritime SAC)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

Between Cassey Bridge, over Causeway Lake, and Hart's Farm, the trail follows existing PRoW or other walked routes, including a walking route promoted by the National Trust [53]. As this is already a popular destination for visitors to the harbour and no particular improvements are proposed that might attract people to the area, it is not expected that the establishment of the ECP will significantly add to the number of people using the footpaths.

Looking at the route of the trail in more detail:
From Cassey Bridge, the trail follows an existing PRoW along the northern edge of Causeway Lake, before heading inland to Newtown. The intertidal habitat is not screened from the trail as it runs past Causeway Lake, though the trail is landward of a fence. The field landward of the trail is part of the SPA and is SWBGS site IOW27, though only low numbers of curlew have been recorded using the field. Therefore, whilst the trail goes through the SPA, as there is not likely to be a significant uplift in use due to the ECP, significant additional disturbance is unlikely.

After passing through Newtown, the trail (IOW-7-S080) heads west, following an existing footpath, around the edge of a pasture field, which although part of the SPA is not noted for its bird use by the SWBGS. Therefore, it is unlikely that users of the trail in this field will have an adverse effect on the SPA. The field is screened from the intertidal by mature trees, and so brent geese, lapwings and other waders using the mouth of Causeway Lake (SWBGS site IOW109) will not be disturbed by trail users.

The trail then follows the existing PRoW along the seawall, past the salterns, to Newtown Quay. This is a very sensitive area with large numbers of wintering waterbirds foraging in the intertidal habitat seaward of the trail (SWBGS sites IOW10 and IOW16). Landward of the trail is saltmarsh and lagoon habitat that is used by smaller numbers of birds. As this is an existing, well-used footpath, on a route promoted by the National Trust, the creation of the ECP is not likely to draw additional users to the area. At Newtown Quay, where a PRoW extends out along the old seawall, a new interpretation board will be installed. This will inform people of the sensitive bird features, including the high tide roost, and request that they do not walk out onto the sea wall for safety reasons and to minimise disturbance. The messaging will be designed in collaboration with the National Trust and Bird Aware Solent and support their visitor engagement in this location. An existing raised boardwalk then takes walkers back over the saltmarsh, and then crosses into pasture fields.

Although an existing PRoW runs along the upper saltmarsh between the raised boardwalk and the Mercia Seabroke hide, the proposed route of the ECP (IOW-7-S085) is to use the National Trust's permissive footpath landward of this, to avoid disturbance to birds and trampling of habitats.

The National Trust have proposed that the saltmarsh PRoW is realigned and co-located with the ECP. This proposal is currently being consulted on by the IOWC. If approved, this will enable the saltmarsh path to be blocked off, allowing the saltmarsh to recover from the trampling damage that can currently be seen. If the PRoW realignment happens before the ECP establishment works, the precise location of, and need for, signage may change. This will be confirmed on the pre-establishment, 'walk the course' checks.

In either event, clear ECP signage will be used to steer people into the pasture field rather than along the saltmarsh.

The proposed IOW-7-S085 runs along the northern edge of a field within the SPA but which is not noted as regularly supporting SPA birds by either the National Trust or the SWBGS. This route avoids significant disturbance to SPA birds as it runs on the landward site of a fence, which separates users from the large numbers of birds using the intertidal habitats. The National Trust promote the permissive route as part of their walking trail, because although it is within the SPA, it is less disturbing to birds than the PRoW that runs seaward of the hedge. As the ECP follows the permissive route, there will be no change in the level of use or disturbance to the terrestrial part of the SPA. It can, therefore, be concluded that the alignment of the ECP will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. Furthermore, the realignment of the PRoW will have a positive impact and meet the Conservation Objective to reduce impacts on SPA birds from recreational disturbance.

During the course of the evidence gathering for this HRA, the National Trust have informed Natural England that the permissive path gets very muddy, particularly in the western end. This is due to the low-lying location, close to the intertidal habitat. The bogginess underfoot is likely to worsen over time due to sea level rise. Therefore, it is likely that surfacing or infrastructure works will be required to raise the permissive path to National Trail standards. The details of these works will be confirmed at the establishment phase. However, they will be designed to not extend beyond the footprint of the existing permissive path, to ensure that there is no loss of supporting habitat for birds. The mitigation measures set out in table 8 will be followed, to minimise disturbance to birds or habitats.

At the two-storey Mercia Seabroke hide additional willow screening will be installed where there is a gap in the hedge. An interpretation panel will also be installed, designed in collaboration with the National Trust and Bird Aware Solent. These measures will improve the current situation and minimise any risk of additional disturbance resulting from the establishment of the ECP.

From Newtown, the trail follows the road verge past Hart's Farm to Walter's Copse. As the trail is over 200m from the intertidal habitats, there is no risk of additional disturbance to birds.

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Newtown comprises saltmarsh, mudflat and grassland seaward of the trail.

A year-round S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the margin will not add to disturbance of birds using them.

In addition, there is a year-round S26 exclusion at Hart's Farm for nature conservation reasons. This is to minimise disturbance to wintering brent geese and waders (SWBGS core area IOW23B), and also to any breeding waders that potentially use the fields. The exclusion is reinforced by the existing wall alongside the road which makes it unlikely that trail users will attempt to access the margin in this location.

The exclusion from the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflat will support the National Trust's efforts to manage waterborne recreational users and avoid them stepping onto sensitive habitats. In particular, it reinforces the message to canoeists and paddleboarders that access to the land from the water is not appropriate apart from at designated landing points.

<u>Additional disturbance of breeding Mediterranean gulls</u>

Mediterranean gulls are a feature of the Solent & Southampton Water SPA and nest on islands within the scrape to the NW of the Mercia Seabroke hide. Disturbance to nesting birds will be avoided as the trail heads inland from the hide, towards Newtown and away from the scrape rather than running east-west in front of it. Access to the seaward margin will be excluded as the saltmarsh and mudflat is unsuitable for access on foot. As noted above, additional screening will be installed adjacent to the hide to fill a gap in the hedge, which will minimise disturbance and reinforce the exclusion to the margin. An interpretation panel will inform users of the sensitivities, including breeding gulls. With these measures, we can be confident that the ECP will not lead to disturbance that could result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.

Additional disturbance of foraging terns

Breeding terns are a feature of Solent & Southampton Water SPA (which covers the intertidal habitats and salterns), and foraging terns are a feature of Solent and Dorset Coast SPA (which covers the subtidal parts of Newtown Harbour). Whilst terns no longer nest within Newtown Harbour, there are efforts to encourage them to return and meet the 'restore' Conservation Objective for the Solent & Southampton Water SPA. Therefore, it is important that the ECP does not hinder the achievement of this objective.

In this part of the harbour, terns may forage in the subtidal channels or the salterns. The subtidal channels are sufficiently separated from the trail so that walkers are unlikely to cause significant disturbance. Terns foraging in the salterns are closer to the trail, but as this is a well-used part of the site, with users on defined pathways, the establishment of the ECP is unlikely to change the pattern or level of access. Nevertheless, signage is proposed at Newtown Quay which will advise visitors of the environmental sensitivities and how to minimise disturbance by, for example, keeping dogs on the path and out of the salterns. There is an existing PSPO in this location, which requires owners to keep dogs on leads, but this is not advertised on site. Therefore, the ECP interpretation provides the opportunity to improve the current management by ensuring visitors are aware of the PSPO and reasons for it.

With the mitigation measures set out, it can be concluded that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of either the Solent and Southampton Water SPA or Solent and Dorset Coast SPA.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and the Solent Maritime SAC is designated for its important habitats including saltmarsh and transitional habitats. These habitats and communities may be damaged by trampling, causing erosion, where people regularly walk away from established paths.

Saltmarsh is sensitive to trampling and erosion but will be protected by placing a S25A exclusion over intertidal habitats as they are unsuitable for access on foot. This will also apply to canoeists and paddleboarders – there is a landing point at Newtown Quay [52], but the exclusion means they should not cross the saltmarsh on foot to reach land in other areas.

The ECP route extends out into the SAC/Ramsar at Newtown Quay, and so there is saltmarsh habitat either side of the trail. However, the path is on top of the sea wall or on a boardwalk with handrails either side, which means that people are less likely to step off the path onto saltmarsh. As noted above, an existing PRoW runs along the top of the saltmarsh

west of the two-storey hide. The ECP will not follow this PRoW as its use causes erosion to saltmarsh and disturbance to birds. Instead, clear signage will be used to steer people onto the trail (IOW-7-S085) landward of the hedge and off the saltmarsh. The National Trust plans to apply for this section of PRoW to be moved, and the intention is to co-locate it with the ECP (see above p. 102/3).

With the mitigation described, and as no new access rights are created over the saltmarsh, an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC/Ramsar through trampling will be avoided.

Disturbance due to the installation of infrastructure

There are several locations where access infrastructure will be installed close to areas used by large numbers of SPA/Ramsar birds. In general, to minimise any temporary noise and visual disturbance when this infrastructure is installed, the mitigation measures set out in table 8 will apply.

Works to install screening and an interpretation panel at the two-storey Mercia Seabroke hide are in the most sensitive location as both breeding and wintering interest is present. Therefore, to avoid disturbance to nesting gulls and feeding/roosting wintering waterbirds, works should be undertaken in August or September, as these are the least sensitive times of the year.

Other works, and particularly those around Newtown Quay, should avoid the winter (October to March inclusive). If this is not possible, the period 2 hours either side of high tide should be avoided, so that disturbance to high tide roosts (shown on figure 30) is avoided.

Loss of habitat from the installation of infrastructure

As detailed in table 10, there are several places where infrastructure will be installed within the designated sites. At IOW-7-S081 a culvert with a grass bund over the top will be installed to improve drainage. Whilst this is within the SPA, it will not result in any loss of functioning habitat.

As noted on p.102/3, additional infrastructure may be needed at IOW-7-S085 to address the bogginess of the permissive path and raise it to National Trail standards. The nature of this work will be confirmed in the establishment phase. However, the footprint of the works will be designed to keep to the footprint of the current path, to minimise impacts on supporting SPA/Ramsar habitat.

An interpretation panel at Newtown Quay, and willow screening nest to the Mercia Seabroke hide, will be installed within the SAC, SPA and Ramsar. However, the locations do not support any SAC/Ramsar habitats or SPA/Ramsar birds as they are on higher ground adjacent to existing access infrastructure. Therefore, the very small-scale loss will not result in an adverse effect on integrity.

The cumulative effects of losses of habitat due to infrastructure are considered in section D3.2K.

D3.2H - Walters Copse to Clamerkin Fields

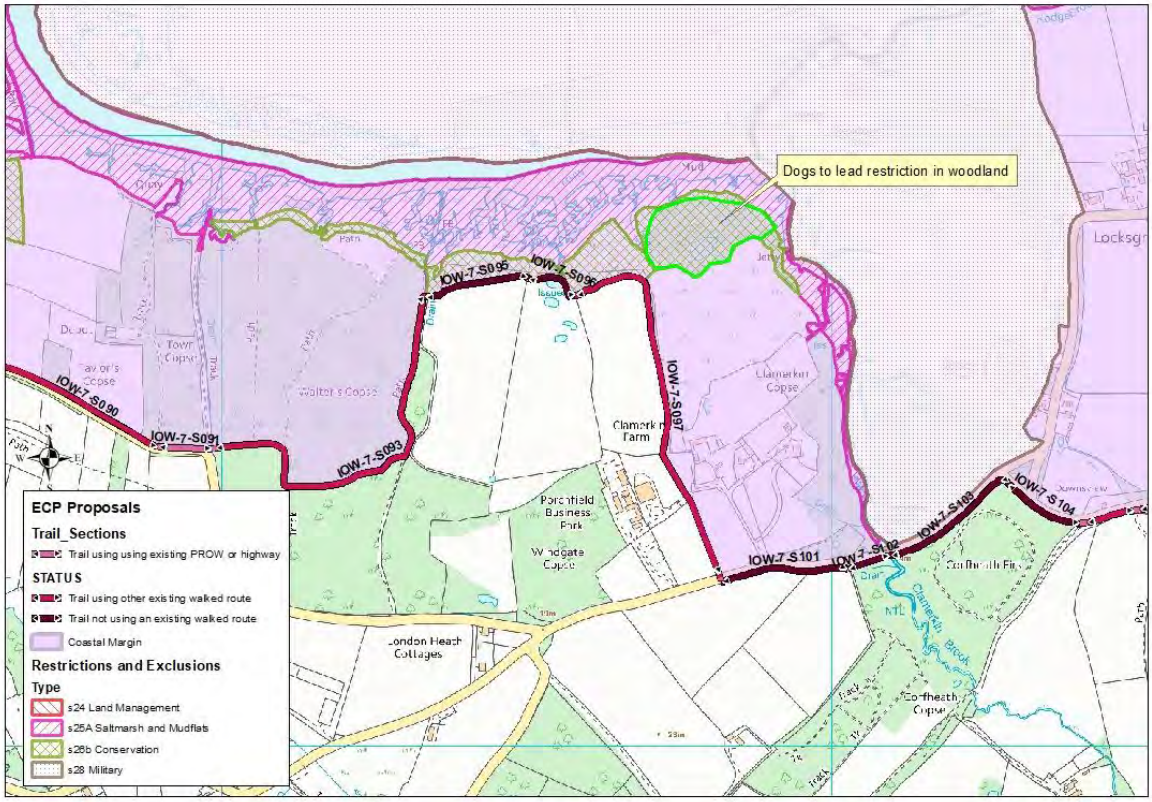


Figure 30: ECP proposals at Walter's Copse and Clamerkin

Natural England proposes to modify the extent of the exclusions and restrictions to the coastal margin in the Walter's Copse and Clamerkin area. An additional S26 exclusion (year-round) is proposed covering upper saltmarsh, scrub and woodland habitat; and an additional dogs to lead restriction (year-round) covering the woodland around the bird hide at Clarmerkin, as shown in figure 31 above. The original proposals are shown on directions map 7A, in the published report (March 2020).

Access Baseline

Walter's Copse is managed by the National Trust with a network of existing PRoW and permissive paths. The National Trust also manage Clamerkin Fields and allow access via a permissive footpath. The fields between these two areas do not currently have public access. The published proposal is for the trail to follow an existing permissive path through Walter's Copse, then establish a new route to link this with Clamerkin Fields, where the trail will use the existing permissive route back to the road.

There is no formal parking at Walter's Copse, but cars can pull in off the road at several gateways and access the rides that run north/south through it, and the adjacent Town Copse. During ECP site visits, people were also observed parking on the road. Walter's Copse is currently well used by local dog walkers. The National Trust policy is that dogs should be kept on leads, and there is a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) requiring this within much of the nature reserve [37], including Walter's Copse. However, the PSPO is not advertised on site and the majority of dogs observed during site visits for this HRA were

not on leads. Walter's Copse is part of an advertised walking route around Newtown Harbour [53] and is about a 20-minute walk from the main National Trust car park (approx. 10 spaces). Clamerkin Fields is a quieter area, with space in the gateway off the road for one car. The National Trust operate a 'no dogs' policy at Clamerkin Fields.

Newtown Harbour is within 5 miles of the towns of Newport and Yarmouth (combined population of approximately 27,000 based on 2011 Census data) [35]. According to MENE research [31], most (71%) visits to the coast, other than to towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5-mile radius [32], giving a smaller catchment. Bird Aware householder survey modelling predicts the eastern half of Newtown Harbour to receive a total of 296,000 annual visits by residents [26].

Visitor engagement effort by National Trust staff is focused at Newtown Quay as this is the most visited part of the reserve. There is a lower staff presence at Walter's Copse, and so there is less compliance with the policy for dogs to be kept on leads on National Trust land [55]. The paths within Walter's Copse become very wet and muddy in winter, and consequently people walk out onto the upper saltmarsh as it can be drier than the path. This has led to loss of vegetation and erosion in front of the trees along the Walter's Copse frontage (HRA site visit 23 Mar 21).

Figure 31: Desire line in front of Walters Copse taken 23 March 2021

At Clamerkin Fields, volunteers run welcome sessions at the bird hide and guided walks, but the National Trust staff presence is low. This means there is nobody to regularly ask people to put dogs on leads and remove them from the area [55].

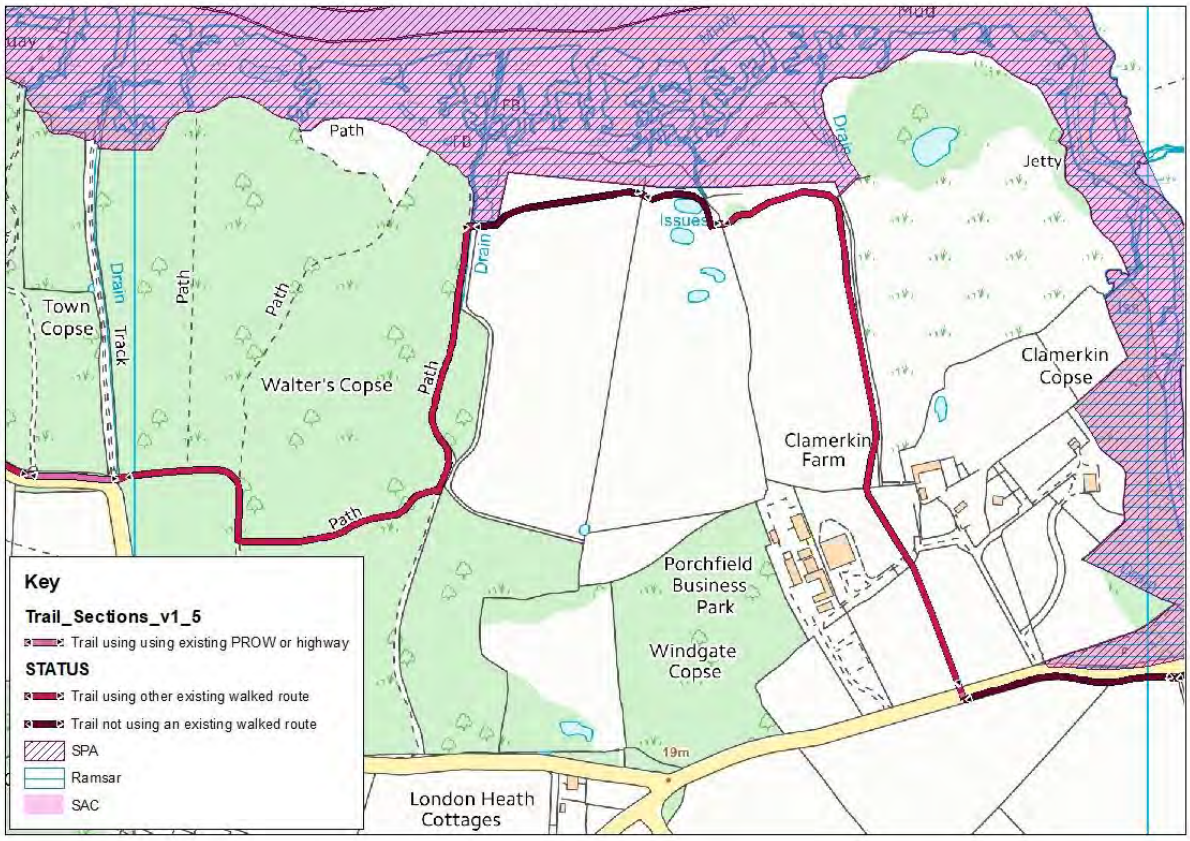


Figure 32: Nature conservation designations at Walter's Copse and Clamerkin

Environment baseline

Clamerkin Lake forms one of the arms of Newtown Harbour, and its intertidal habitat is designated as part of the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. Of all the arms of the harbour, Clamerkin has the greatest width of saltmarsh, which shows clear zonation from upper to lower marsh, with a well-developed creek system. This is a critical remaining location for small cord-grass, *Spartina maritima*, within the SAC. Small cord-grass is a native species which is now highly localised and is only found in significant amounts in two SACs (Solent Maritime and Essex Estuaries) [6]. The area also shows transitions from coastal woodland to saltmarsh (a SAC feature) at Town Copse, Walter's Copse and Clamerkin Copse, though as noted above, there is trampling and erosion of saltmarsh grass habitat in front of Walter's Copse.

The National Trust reports peak numbers of feeding birds as follows: wigeon (1200), teal (1006), brent geese (20), pintail (127), greenshank (14), whimbrel (25) [51]. The sightings book in Clamerkin hide also reports 145 brent geese in Feb 21. The area is used by roosting birds, but in lower numbers: wigeon (600), teal (500), pintail (65), greenshank (14) [51]. The relatively wide expanse of saltmarsh and sheltered nature of the harbour arm makes this one of the most important parts of the site for roosting ducks. The numbers represent significant proportions of the SPA populations: at certain times the area can support 10% of the SPA teal population (qualifying feature), 10% of the SPA pintail population and 8% of the SPA wigeon population (main component assemblage species) [12].

The intertidal area in front of Walter's copse and Town Copse is identified in the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) as a 'core' site (IOW103). It is used by brent geese (peak of 40 birds recorded) and small numbers of waders, but has been designated a core site due to its importance as part of the network of sites. The top of Clamerkin Lake, in front of Clamerkin Fields has also been identified as a core site as it is an important part of

the network. Movement studies by SWBGS show that brent geese move between sites at the mouth of Clamerkin Lake/main harbour and IOW103 [11]. NT also report that birds disturbed by vessels using the slipway at Causeway Lake often take refuge in Clamerkin Lake [55].

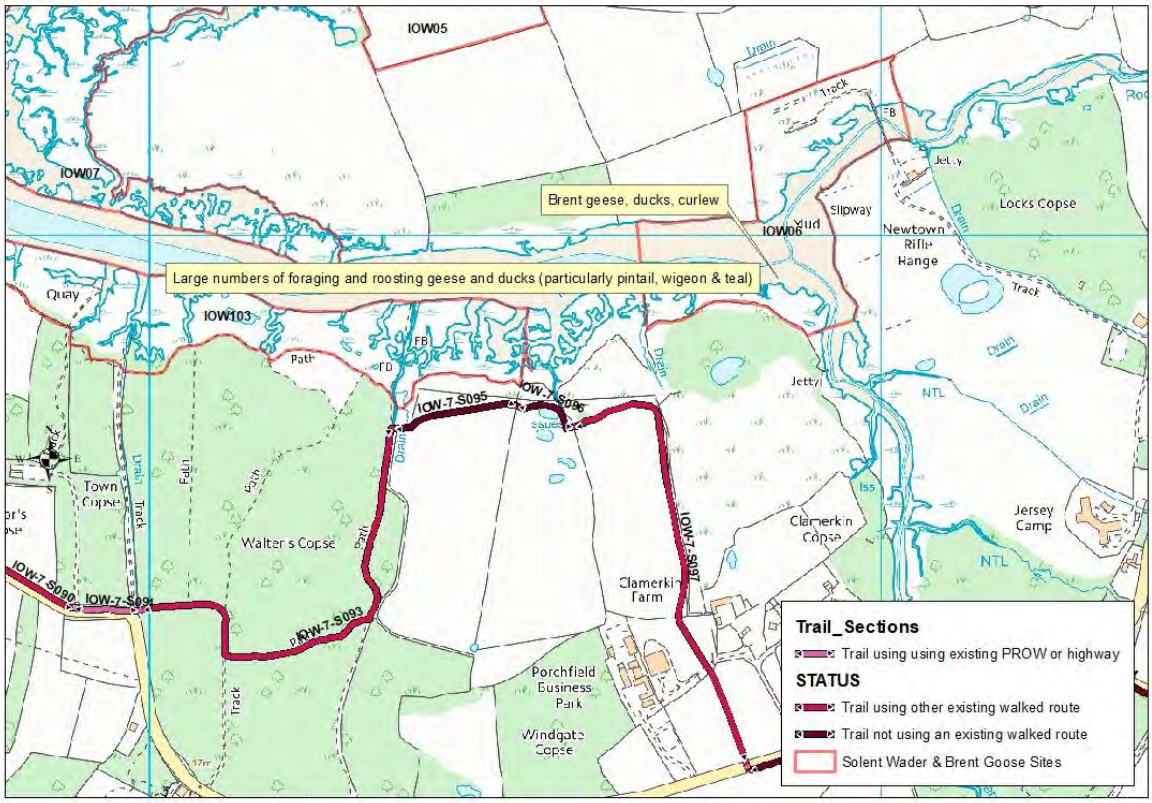


Figure 33: Locations of birds at Clamerkin Lake

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC and Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

<u>Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds</u>

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

Walter's Copse is part of a promoted nature trail and currently well used by local residents and visitors to Newtown Harbour. The establishment of the ECP here is, therefore, unlikely to prove a significant draw for additional visitors, but provides an opportunity to help manage the existing issues. New access will be provided between, and linking, Walter's Copse and Clamerkin Fields. This will result in an increase in use of both the new trail, and Clamerkin Fields. Given the risks, Natural England sought the advice of an independent consultant on

the management of people with dogs in the Walter's Copse and Clamerkin area, which has informed the assessment and mitigation measures described below [56].

Looking at the trail alignment in detail:

From Hart's Farm, the trail uses the verge adjacent to the road, past Town Copse, and then enters Walter's Copse at the bend in the road. The trail follows an existing wide ride through the middle of Walter's Copse before heading northwards towards the coast. The trail is set back at least 300m from the intertidal area in order that there is no additional noise or visual disturbance to feeding and roosting birds from users of the east-west section of IOW-7-S093. Therefore, if new visitors to the area attracted by, or following, the ECP are provided with clear, consistent and credible information in general and enroute, this may actually serve to help make their presence less apparently problematic than existing access users, as they are kept away from the edge of the intertidal habitat.

Walkers come closer to the intertidal as the trail heads north, however, this is part of the advertised Newtown Harbour walking trail and as such, the additional users drawn to the area as a result of the ECP are not likely to represent a significant proportion of existing users. Given the long-standing public access, both statutory and permissive, between Harts Farm and Walter's Copse, it is not considered that access users with, or without, dogs will behave in any way that adds significant or persistent additional adverse impacts, as a result of trail establishment.

Clear waymarking and a sleeper bridge will be installed (including guide fencing designed in collaboration with the National Trust) to encourage people to follow the trail eastwards onto IOW-7-S095 to IOW-7-S096, which are new sections of trail where there is currently no access.

As Walter's Copse is currently well used by walkers and dog walkers, adding new access linking to Clamerkin Fields is likely to add significantly to the recreational use in this area. The intertidal habitat seaward of the new access is important for feeding and roosting wintering waterbirds, particularly ducks, but also brent geese and waders, including whimbrel and greenshank.

Figure 34: View looking west of new access at IOW-7-S095, which will follow a route on the left-hand side of the fence line. The intertidal habitat is to the right of the fence and scrub

As can be seen on figure 35, there is currently thick scrub between the trail and intertidal for most of IOW-7-S095 to IOW-7-S096, this provides an effective visual screen for most of the length. However, additional willow screening or similar (to be confirmed on Walk the Course checks) will be used to fill a gap in the treeline near to the ponds. It will be important that the scrub along this frontage is managed so that it remains thick and impenetrable, and does not become old and leggy. (This structure is also important for breeding nightingales.) The scrub management will be undertaken by the IOW Council, as access authority, and then by the Trail Partnership, once this has been established. The scrub will ensure that people and dogs using the trail will not cause visual disturbance to birds using the adjacent intertidal habitat. However, there may be some residual noise disturbance, which will be considered in the 'in combination' assessment (section D4 of the HRA).

A kissing gate marks the start of IOW-7-S097, where the trail enters the National Trust land at Clamerkin Fields. The trail then follows the edge of the field and heads south, following the current permissive path back towards the road. Whilst this area is currently has permissive access, it has a lower usage than Walter's Copse, and the National Trust operate a 'no dogs' policy. Therefore, linking the two areas will increase the number of people and dogs at Clamerkin.

Between the trail (IOW-7-S097) and intertidal habitat is woodland (designated as part of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar) which forms an effective screen to avoid visual disturbance from people and dogs. The woodland is at least 60m wide, and as such will also reduce the risk of noise disturbance to birds using the intertidal. During site visits with the National Trust, it was agreed that the existing fence adjacent to IOW-7-S097 should be upgraded to ensure dogs cannot get through and cause disturbance to birds. Therefore, the conclusion of this assessment is that additional use of this section of the trail by people and dogs will not cause significant disturbance to SPA/Ramsar birds using nearby intertidal habitats.

The trail is aligned away from the National Trust hide and the field at the eastern end of Clamerkin Lake. This minimises the effect of the trail itself on this quiet section of the NNR.

Back at the road, new access is proposed along the southern side of the existing road bridge, to avoid the route being within the SAC/SPA/Ramsar. Additional disturbance to birds from users of the trail where it crosses Clamerkin bridge is unlikely given the presence of the road.

Coastal access rights

The coastal margin at Walter's Copse and Clamerkin consists of woodland, saltmarsh, mudflat and meadow. A S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats of Clamerkin Lake as they are unsuitable for access on foot. The exclusion will be extended to the treeline along the northern edge of Walter's Copse, which will aid the National Trust's ambition, and the SPA Conservation Objective, to reduce disturbance to birds (see figure 31). The treeline will also provide an easy to recognise boundary to the exclusion. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the margin will not add to disturbance of birds using them. However, measures are necessary to reinforce the exclusion in places, and manage the existing recreational pressure, as discussed below.

In Walter's Copse, the woodland seaward of the trail will become part of the margin. As this area is already well used by local dog walkers, with existing PROW and permissive paths, the introduction of the coastal margin is not likely to change this current pattern of use. Given the screening provided by the trees, any use of this part of the margin will not cause any significant increase in disturbance to birds using the intertidal.

At the northern end of IOW-7-S094, the sleeper bridge will be designed to include guide fencing, path treatment and vegetation management to encourage people to stay on the ECP rather than continue on the permissive path northwards towards the intertidal habitat. Brash from the vegetation clearance that will be required when installing the bridge will placed at the northern end of the permissive path to prevent people from walking out on the saltmarsh (which is excluded from the margin). It is evident from desire lines in the saltmarsh, seen on site visits, that this currently occurs, so the establishment of the ECP provides the opportunity to address this current recreational disturbance issue.

As new access is proposed at IOW-7-S95 and IOW-7-S096, patterns of access should be established that do not cause disturbance. As such, it is important to ensure that the S25A direction to exclude access to the intertidal habitat is reinforced by physical barriers. Therefore, in addition to the existing dense hedgerow and treeline, new stock fencing and a locked gate will ensure that people and dogs stay within the field and do not access the intertidal habitat.

At Clamerkin Fields, meadow and woodland would become part of the margin. The National Trust currently manage this as a quiet area with no dogs. Linking Walter's Copse to Clamerkin Fields means that there is likely to be a significant increase in use of Clamerkin Fields by people and dogs. Whilst use of the trail itself is unlikely to add significantly to disturbance for the reasons set out above, there is a greater risk from use of the margin as this brings people and dogs closer to the intertidal and sensitive bird populations. As noted above, the intertidal habitat is important as a high tide roost and feeding area for significant proportions of the SPA populations of ducks, brent geese and waders, and currently functions as an undisturbed refuge area.

The woodland at Clamerkin Copse provides some screening to limit disturbance from people and dogs in the meadow. However, the woodland is open with easy access through it, including to the bird hide. There are some fringing trees around the eastern edge of Clamerkin Fields, although there are gaps in places and the screening effect will be reduced in the winter when there are no leaves on the trees.

Given the need to mitigate the additional disturbance from the predicted increase in use of the margin at Clamerkin Fields, the following additional measures will be implemented as a result of the review of this HRA:

- Add a S26 exclusion between the S25A exclusion and the edge of the woodland in Walter's Copse, and to the SAC boundary at Clamerkin (ie including the area of transitional woodland) (see figure 31 above);
- Additional willow, or similar, screening should also be installed either side of the bird hide at Clamerkin, as it is currently possible to easily walk out onto the saltmarsh adjacent to the hide.
- Whilst the National Trust fields are fenced, this will be upgraded to stock fencing along the seaward edge of IOW-7-S97, to prevent dogs getting through onto the saltmarsh and disturbing birds.
- Add a S26 dogs to lead restriction in the woodland around the bird hide at Clamerkin (see figure 31 above).

With the above suite of mitigation measures, it is considered that additional significant disturbance from use of the trail and associated margin will be avoided, and so a conclusion of no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA/Ramsar can be reached.

Other options considered

In response to the consultation on the published ECP proposals, several respondents suggested alternative alignments to avoid Clamerkin, due to concerns about disturbance to wildlife. Natural England, therefore, considered options for alternative alignments of the trail that would avoid linking Walter's Copse with Clamerkin, and hence avoid increasing use of Clamerkin by people and dogs. Although it is the route of the existing IOWCP, the road to the south of Wingate Copse and Clamerkin Copse is busy with cars (national speed limit applies) and has no verge. A highways assessment concluded a route along the road was not acceptable from a safety perspective. We investigated installing the trail off the road within adjacent copses, and although this would have been possible for Windgate Copse, extending this along the full length required was not possible due to difficult terrain and existing land uses.

An alternative route through Clamerkin Fields, further south than the proposed alignment, was also rejected on land management grounds.

Natural England considered imposing a 'no dogs' restriction to the trail at Clamerkin, to fit with current NT management. Taking independent advice on this [56], A 'no dogs' restriction on the trail was rejected as it risks people and dogs using the road to the south of Clamerkin Farm instead (with consequent safety implications). It was also considered unnecessary on nature conservation grounds as the meadows are not used by any species that are susceptible to disturbance. The nature conservation interest is in the adjacent intertidal habitats, which are protected from disturbance by the existing and proposed infrastructure set out above.

Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the works at IOW-7-S95 and IOW-7-S096 to install fencing, gate and sleeper bridge are carried out, the mitigation measures set out in table 8 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

In regards to timing of works, the overwintering period is the key time to avoid impacts on the SPA/Ramsar in this location. The works at IOW-7-S95 and IOW-7-S096 will be within 200m of, and partly visible to, the high tide roost on the intertidal. Therefore, if the overwintering season cannot be avoided, work will stop during the period either side of high tide.

Overall, as the works are temporary, and with the mitigation measures set out, an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites from construction disturbance can be avoided.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site is designated for its important wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and the Solent Maritime SAC is designated for its important habitats including saltmarsh. These habitats and communities may be damaged

by trampling, causing erosion, where people regularly walk away from established paths. This damage can be seen currently at Walter's Copse where people walk on the saltmarsh grass when the path along the northern edge of the woods gets too muddy. To avoid adding to this pressure at Walter's Copse, the trail runs through the middle of the wood rather than using the permissive path adjacent to the intertidal, thereby keeping coast path users away from the sensitive habitats. In addition, a S25A exclusion is proposed on the intertidal saltmarsh and mudflats of Clamerkin Lake as they are unsuitable for access on foot. As shown on figure 31, a S26 exclusion will be applied to the upper saltmarsh, with the edge of the trees as the landward boundary. As no new access rights are created over these habitats, the creation of the coastal margin will not add to the trampling and erosion currently seen.

In order to help manage the existing pressure and reduce erosion of the saltmarsh habitat adjacent to Walter's Copse the following additional measures will be applied, which will support the exclusions shown in figure 31:

- At the northern end of IOW-7-S094, the new sleeper bridge will be designed to include guide fencing, path treatment and vegetation management to encourage people to stay on the ECP rather than continue on the permissive path northwards towards the intertidal habitat.
- Brash from the vegetation clearance when installing the new bridge will placed at the northern end of the permissive path to prevent people from walking out on the saltmarsh.
- Signage and an interpretation panel will inform people of the exclusion to the margin and the reasons for it. This will be designed in collaboration with the National Trust.

As noted above, there is currently thick willow scrub between the trail and intertidal for most of IOW-7-S095 to IOW-7-S096, although additional willow screening or similar will be used to fill a gap in the treeline near to the ponds. Stock fencing is also proposed at the western end of IOW-7-S095, where there is a gap in the existing fencing. It will be important that the fencing is maintained and that the scrub along this frontage is managed so that it remains thick and impenetrable. This will be done by the IOW Council and the Trail Partnership. This will ensure that people and dogs remain on the trail and do not create paths through the scrub onto the intertidal habitat.

The proposed trail at Clamerkin Fields avoids the intertidal area, and therefore use of the trail itself will not increase trampling of sensitive habitats in this location. However, increased use of the margin may increase pressure on intertidal habitats. The meadows that will form part of the margin are fenced and so access to, and trampling of, saltmarsh is prevented. However, there is a path through the woodland to the bird hide. Therefore, additional screening is proposed either side of the hide to prevent access to the saltmarsh and minimise the risk of trampling of SAC/Ramsar communities. As part of the maintenance of the trail and associated infrastructure, regular checks will be made to ensure that the screening is still effective at keeping people within the woods.

Given the mitigation measures to prevent access to the saltmarsh set out above, it can be concluded that an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, SPA and Ramsar from trampling of habitats will be avoided.

D3.2l – Thorness Bay

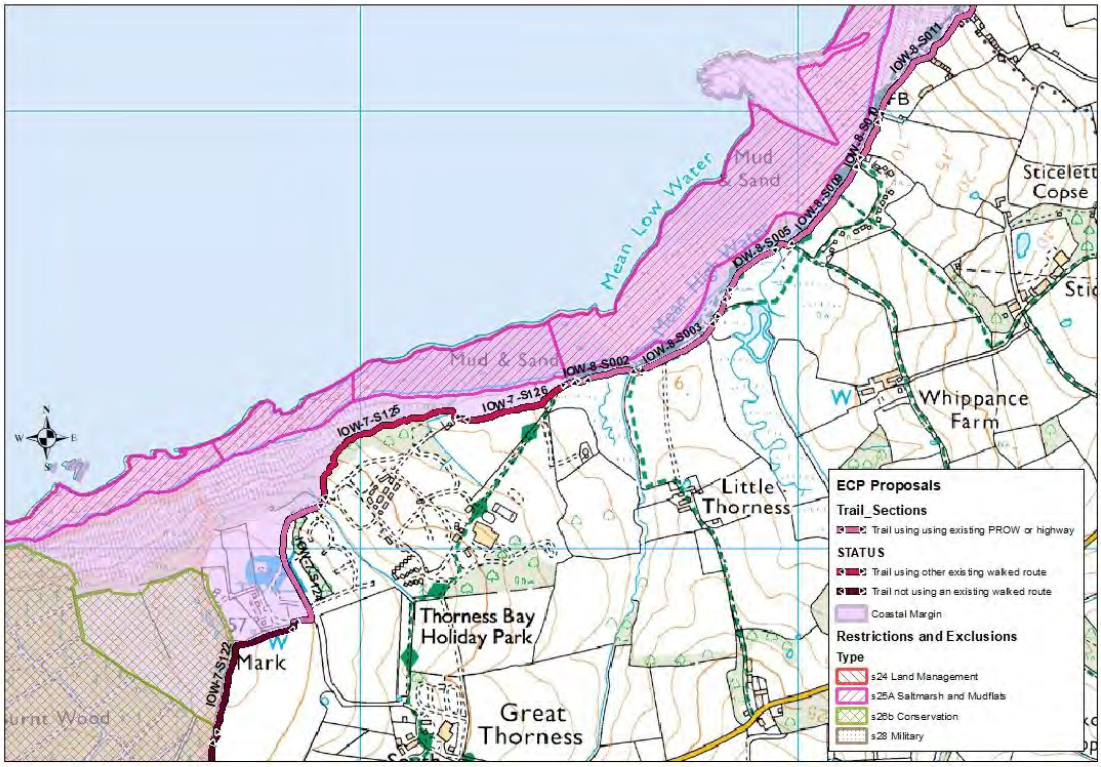


Figure 35: ECP proposals at Thorness Bay

Access Baseline

Thorness beach is accessible by car from Thorness Bay Holiday Park, where there is parking for around 18 cars. A further informal car park at the seaward end of the access road from the holiday park, has recently been shut as the access road gate is now locked [49]. Access for UK Sailing Academy groups is still available, and Thorness Bay is regularly used for water sports activities.

Thorness Bay is within 5 miles of the towns Newport and Cowes (combined population approximately 35,000 based on 2011 census data) [35]. According to MENE research [31] most visits to the coast (71%), other than towns or resorts, are made within 5 miles of home or other place of origin. However, research to develop the Bird Aware Solent Strategy found that 75% of visitors to the Solent came from a 3.5 mile radius [32], giving a smaller catchment for visitors. Bird Aware householder survey modelling shows Thorness Bay to be one of the less visited areas on the N coast of the Isle of Wight, with around 38,000 annual visits by residents predicted [26]. Observations (from site visits to inform the HRA and from Bird Aware Rangers [49]) are that most terrestrial recreational use is by walkers and dog walkers.

Thorness Bay Holiday Park is open all year round for owners of caravans on site but is closed to holiday rentals for part of the winter [57]. There are also groups of holiday cottages on the hill above the bay. Therefore, the relatively low numbers of visits predicted by IoW

residents will be supplemented by large numbers of holiday makers, particularly in the summer season.

The existing IoW Coast Path runs along the shoreline at Thorness beach, with several footpaths leading towards it from further inland. However, as there are few residential properties nearby, access on foot is likely to be mainly by holiday makers.

Apart from a sign at the top of the access road between the holiday park and beach, which welcomes people to the SSSI, there is no signage or interpretation regarding the environmental sensitivities of the area. Bird Aware Solent commissioned Footprint Ecology to review the access arrangements at Thorness Bay and they have made a number of recommendations, including regarding interpretation and refuge areas for birds [58]. The draft report was produced after the publication of proposals for the ECP on the Isle of Wight, and notes that its recommendations align with these.

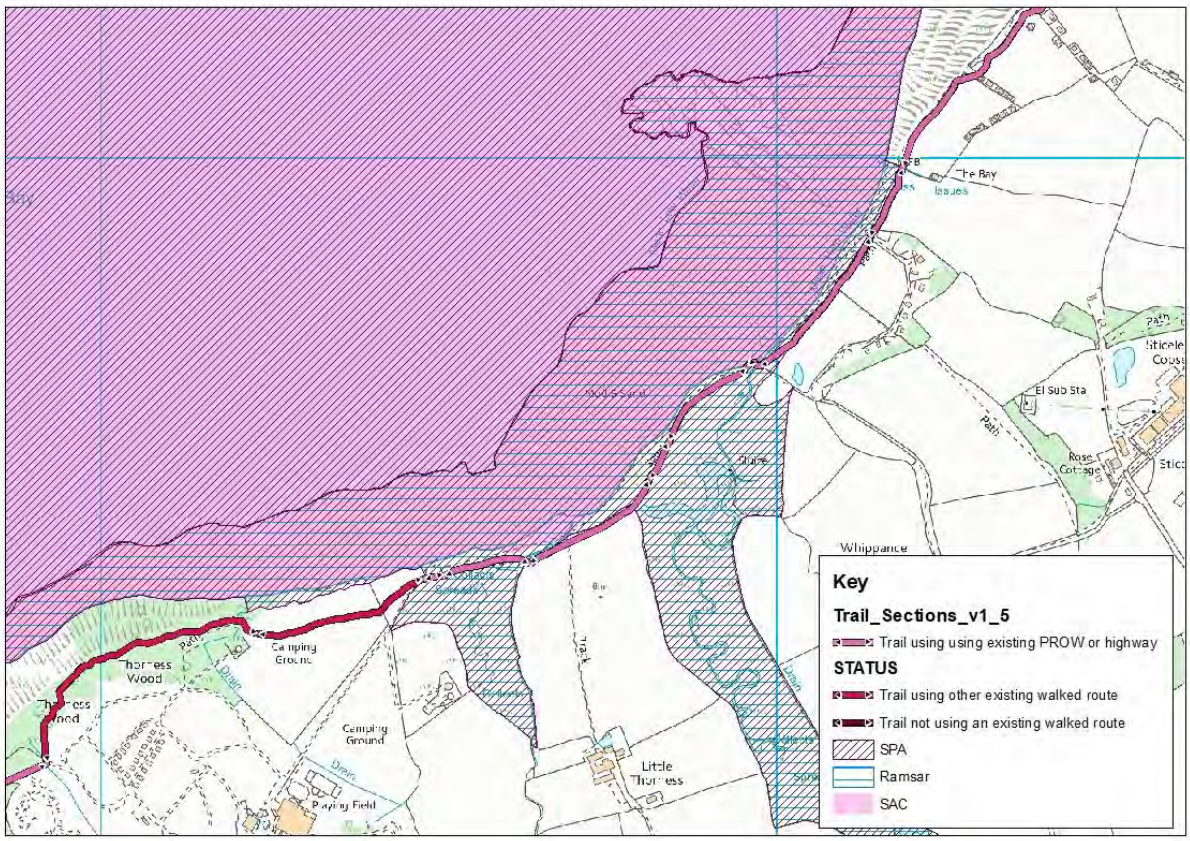


Figure 36: Nature conservation designations at Thorness Bay

Environment baseline

Thorness Bay extends along approximately 3km of undeveloped coastline on the north-west of the Isle of Wight. There are considerable areas of soft maritime cliffs and large expanses of intertidal sand and shingle interspersed with rocky outcrops or ledges composed of Bembridge limestone. A small stream enters the beach, separating a more sandy shore in the north from a predominantly shingle ridge to the south. There are strandline and vegetated shingle communities, with some notable species (eg Ray's knotgrass, *Polygonum oxyspermum*), but these are being degraded due to trampling and vehicle damage [46] (though the latter is being addressed by limiting access via the road from Thorness Bay Holiday Park – see above).

The intertidal area to MHW forms part of the Solent Maritime SAC. The Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar covers the intertidal habitat, but also includes areas of reedbed and transitional marshland.

The main bird interest comprises wintering waders and waterfowl, which use the site for feeding and loafing over the low, rising and falling tide, with no high tide roosts present [58]. The Thorness Bay WeBS core count sector supports significant proportions of the following SPA populations, with 5 year peak means (2015/16 – 2019/20) of: 140 brent geese (2% of the SPA population); 27 turnstones (7% of the SPA); 17 ringed plovers (4% of the SPA population); and 60 teal (1% of the SPA) [12].

The Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) [11] has mapped and ranked sites for importance within and outside the SPA. There are several core areas identified for geese and waders in the intertidal, and on the transitional marsh habitat within the SPA/Ramsar. There is also a secondary support site with curlew and ringed plover recorded on a grassed field outside the SPA/Ramsar.

Ringed plovers have attempted to nest at Thorness Bay, but have been unsuccessful in recent years due to levels of disturbance (pers. com. Mark Larter, SSSI Responsible Officer).

Figure 37: Ecological features at Thorness Bay

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)

- Additional disturbance to ringed plovers in the breeding season (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure (Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)

These risks are considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The route of the ECP around Thorness Bay follows PRoW and existing walked routes. Overall, it is not expected that the creation of the trail will attract significant numbers of new walkers to the area. Visitor numbers are currently limited by the car parking provision, which will not change. Visitors on foot are likely to mainly come from the nearby holiday accommodation. The presence of the ECP is unlikely to add substantially to the tourism draw of the island, because there is already an Isle of Wight coast path, which the ECP follows at Thorness Bay. However, upgrading to national trail standards will improve the experience for walkers.

Considering the route around Thorness Bay in detail:

From Thorness Bay Holiday Park, the trail follows existing walked routes through Thorness Wood, adjacent to the European Sites. No improvements to trail surfacing are required, and so no particular uplift in numbers of users is expected. As the trail is set within the woodland, at the top of the maritime slope, disturbance to birds using the intertidal is avoided.

Travelling eastwards, the trail runs across some rough grassland towards the beach. Again, it is set back from the edge of the field to minimise disturbance from users of the trail. Footprint Ecology [58] recommend encouraging dog walkers to use this area for exercise rather than the beach. Use of the ECP is compatible with this recommendation.

The trail joins the existing IOWCP where it enters the beach. The intertidal area at this location (seaward of IOW-8-S001) is identified as a core site in the SWBGS (IOW75). It is used by brent geese (peak of 71 in 2018) and small numbers of waders, and movement studies have shown it is an important linking site in the network.

The beach in this section is likely to be well used by walkers and dog walkers as it is easily accessed down the concrete track from the Holiday Park (where there is parking that can be used by the public). There is no separation of the path from the beach and intertidal area. However, as the trail follows the existing, well used, IOWCP and no surfacing works are required which might attract additional users, no significant increase in disturbance is expected. An interpretation panel is proposed here, which will be helpful in notifying trail users of the sensitivities: wintering birds (feeding on intertidal muds/sands) and breeding waders at the top of the beach (ringed plovers). This should be designed in collaboration with Bird Aware Solent, and as such will reinforce their messages and may help with managing the current levels of disturbance.

Landward of the trail at IOW-8-S002 is reedbed designated as part of the SPA/Ramsar. This habitat is separated from the trail by a scrubby hedge, and as it is landward does not form part of the margin, therefore, additional disturbance is unlikely.

A metal bridge at the top of the beach is currently in a state of disrepair and will be replaced by a new, raised bridge into a pasture field. This takes the trail (IOW-8-S003) off the beach and will be separated from it by a fence, and for part of the way, a hedge. The alignment will provide an alternative to using the beach, separating users of the trail from birds on the intertidal. Therefore, disturbance impacts from ECP users will be avoided, and current disturbance levels may be reduced somewhat.

The pasture field is identified in the SWBGS as a secondary support site (IOW74) for waders. A peak of 47 curlew were recorded in 2007, and 13 ringed plovers in 2018. As the field is landward of the trail it does not form part of the margin. The trail follows an existing footpath in the field, but gives an additional route to it via the new bridge, therefore some uplift in use is expected. Nevertheless, the field is large so that separation between birds and trail users can be maintained and significant disturbance avoided. As the field already has a footpath within it, the presence of the ECP is unlikely to prompt any change in grazing management that might affect the field's use by waders.

The trail then re-joins the beach at IOW-8-S004. Seaward of the trail the intertidal area (SWBGS site IOW77) is regularly used by brent geese (peak count of 120 in 2018) and turnstones (peak count of 28 in 2006). Landward of the trail the transitional marsh forms part of the SPA/Ramsar, and is used by waders and wildfowl (including teal [58], and redshank, lapwing and curlew [11]).

There is no screening of the trail from birds using habitats either side of the trail sections IOW-8-S004 to IOW-8-S005, therefore there is the potential for disturbance. However, the trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP, and no improvements are proposed that might result in a significant uplift in use. An interpretation panel is proposed at the end of the track from Whippance Farm, which will be helpful in notifying trail users of the sensitivities and encourage responsible recreation. This will be designed in collaboration with Bird Aware Solent, and as such will reinforce their messages and may help with managing the current levels of disturbance.

After crossing a stream flowing into the intertidal, the trail leaves the beach and heads along the edge of a grassed field. This takes the trail outside the designated sites, with a fence and hedge in between. This separation and screening ensures that users of the ECP will not cause disturbance to birds using the intertidal habitat (SWBGS core site IOW03: peak count of 71 brent geese in 2018).

The trail then follows the existing route of the IOWCP further uphill to Gurnard Luck, increasing the separation between users of the ECP and birds using the intertidal area (including SWBGS core site IOW41 used by brent geese). The soft maritime cliff is prone to slumping, and some surfacing works may be necessary in this location. These works may increase use of the trail in winter, when it can currently get muddy and slippery. However, given the separation between the trail and intertidal habitat, any increase in use is not likely to cause disturbance.

Therefore, use of the trail between Thorness Bay Holiday Park and Gurnard Luck is not considered to pose a risk to site conservation objectives, and an adverse effect on site integrity will be avoided.

Coastal access rights

Coastal margin at Thorness Bay comprises of intertidal mudflats, with fringing shingle and sandy beach and soft maritime cliff and slope at either end. A S25A exclusion will be placed over all the intertidal mudflat as it is unsuitable for access (see map in Report 8).

However, the beach is well used at the moment, particularly by residents of the Holiday Park and other nearby holiday accommodation. This is evidenced by the fact there are multiple desire lines down the maritime slope from Thorness Wood, and in front of the holiday cottages in the northern part of the bay. This established use is not likely to change as a result of the ECP, but the S25A exclusion means that no new access rights to the intertidal are created. The proposed interpretation panels will inform users of the exclusion to the margin and encourage people to ensure their dogs do not disturb the birds.

As such, the introduction of the coastal margin is not likely to add to the current levels of use, or change the pattern of access. Therefore, it is not considered to pose a risk to site conservation objectives, and an adverse effect on site integrity will be avoided.

Management of existing pressures

Access management is needed to address and manage wider issues affecting the achievement of Solent and Southampton Water SPA conservation objectives, and particularly the target to reduce disturbance from recreational activities.

Measures to manage current pressures, or additional disturbance associated with new housing, are not precluded by coastal access arrangements. There is an opportunity to deliver some of the actions identified in the draft Access Management Assessment [58] for Bird Aware Solent, ie addressing the current lack of information for visitors about responsible access. Therefore, interpretation panels will be installed at either end of the beach, and messages developed in collaboration with Bird Aware Solent.

Furthermore, route alignment off the beach through the pasture field, and surface improvements to the trail in the northern part of the bay, will encourage people to use the trail rather than the beach, which may have some benefit to existing levels of disturbance.

<u>Additional disturbance to ringed plovers in the breeding season</u>

Ringed plovers have attempted to nest at Thorness Bay in the past, and the beach, particularly between IOW-8-001 and IOW-8-005 contains suitable habitat (site visit by the HRA author made on 20 May 2021). If 2 or 3 pairs have nested in the past, this represents between 0.9% and 1.3% of the wintering SPA population of ringed plovers (5 year mean of 467 individuals (2015/16 - 2019/20)). Therefore, impacts on the breeding population could lead to impacts on the wintering population.

As noted above, the areas of beach which contain suitable habitat are already heavily accessed by the public, particularly users of the large amount of holiday accommodation within close walking distance. The proposed route will take people off a section of beach and into a field further inland, along a current PRoW. This may help to reduce disturbance to those birds that attempt to breed here. Clear way marking will encourage walkers to stick to the path and educational interpretation will be placed on the route to inform walkers of the sensitivities to these birds.

Given that ringed plover breeding at Thorness Bay have been unsuccessful for a number of years, and ECP proposals are not adding to the current levels of disturbance for the reasons set out above, it is not anticipated that disturbance in the breeding season will have consequences for the designated non-breeding population.

<u>Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure</u>

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the new bridge and interpretation panels are installed, the mitigation measures set out in table 8 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

In regards to timing of works, the overwintering period is the key time to avoid impacts on the SPA/Ramsar. However, it is recognised that there may be a need to avoid the breeding season as well, for example if ringed plover attempt to nest on the beach. Therefore, Natural England will liaise with the local authority regarding timing to avoid SPA/Ramsar impacts, and to avoid disturbance to any breeding birds on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure

At Thorness Beach, the SPA/Ramsar extend inland, encompassing terrestrial reedbed and transitional marsh landward of the trail, therefore the trail runs through the designated sites at these locations. As set out in table 10, the two interpretation panels and new bridge will consequently lead to the loss of a small area of SPA/Ramsar habitat.

The two interpretation panels will be installed on shingle/bare ground at either end of the beach, adjacent to the existing PRoW, resulting in a total loss of around 0.02m^2 of habitat. This small loss is considered *de minimus* and will not lead to any loss of functioning of the designated sites.

A new sleeper bridge will be installed across a small stream, in order to take the trail off the beach into a pasture field. The precise location will be chosen to minimise the impact on riparian habitats, but there may be some loss of reedbed. A worst case scenario would be the loss of 15.6m^2 (the area of sleeper bridge required to span the gap into the field). Therefore, there may be a small loss of supporting habitat for the Ramsar wetland plant and invertebrate assemblage feature. However, given the size of the adjacent reedbed, loss of such a small area is not likely to affect the functioning of the habitat as a whole.

See table 10 for consideration of these losses in combination with those as a result of other stretches around the Isle of Wight.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The trail is outside the SAC apart from a small section – IOW-8-S007 – where the route uses an existing concrete bridge across a stream. As such trampling of habitat within the SAC from use of the trail will be avoided.

A S25A direction will exclude access to the intertidal mudflats. This means no new access rights will be created over this part of the coastal margin, and no additional trampling in this part of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar will result.

Thorness Bay supports strandline and vegetated shingle communities, and some sandier habitats. Part of the trail follows the existing IOWCP along the top of the beach and across potential vegetated shingle habitat. These habitats also form part of the coastal margin. As noted above, the vegetated shingle at this site is being impacted by current levels of disturbance, leading to loss of plant species [46].

In order to minimise the trampling effects of the trail, it is routed off the beach where it is possible to do so without impacting other designated habitats. Clear waymarking and interpretation panels will encourage people to use this route rather than the beach. As the installation of the ECP at Thorness Bay is not expected to result in a significant uplift in use, additional trampling of habitats over and above the current levels is not predicted.

Therefore, the use of the trail and associated margin will not lead to additional impacts on the integrity of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar site.

D3.2J – Medina Estuary

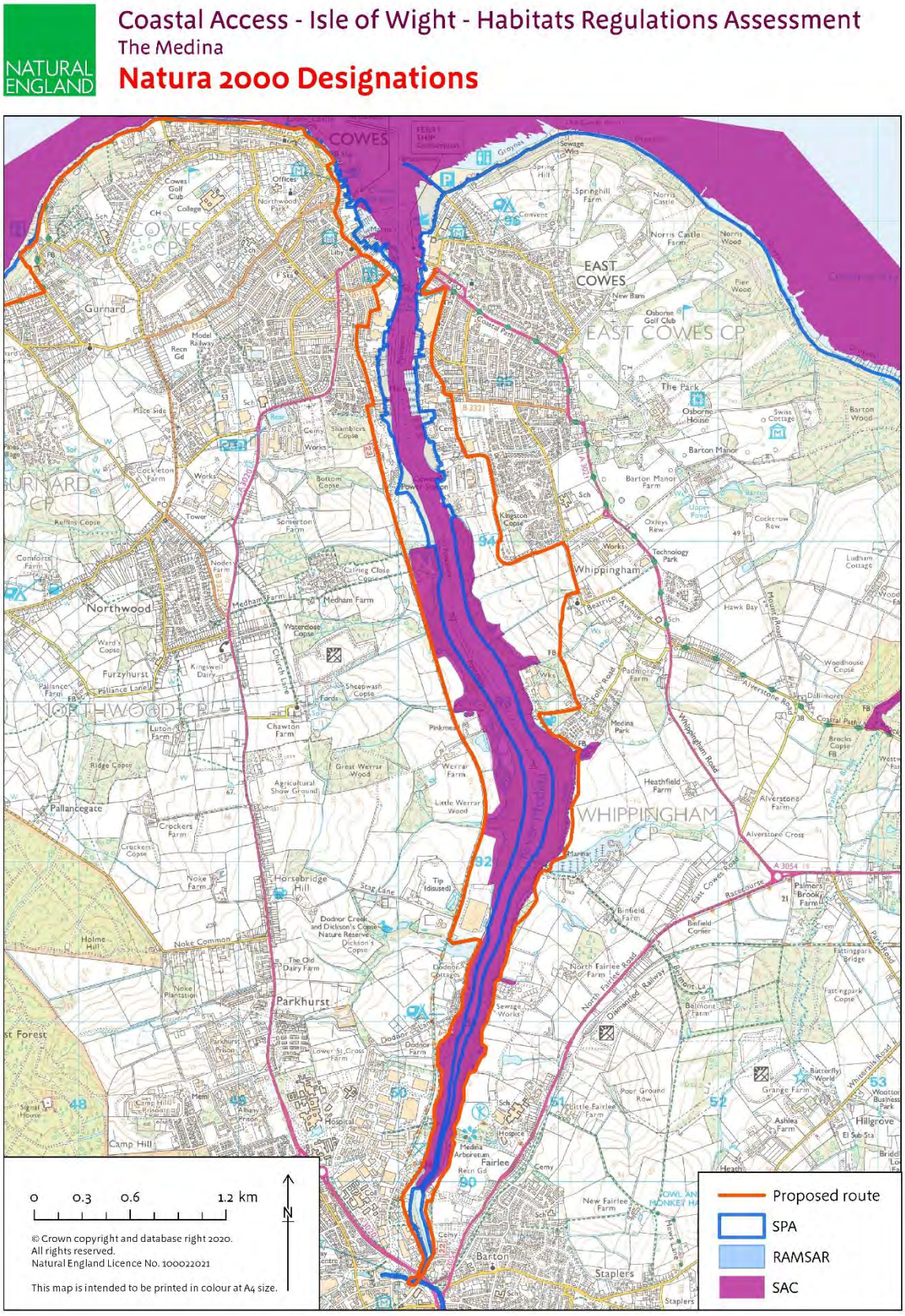


Figure 38: ECP proposals at the Medina Estuary

Access baseline

The Medina Estuary extends 6.8km from its tidal limit at Newport Harbour to the Solent. It is popular for water-based recreational activities, with marinas, a shipyard and a large number of pontoons for mooring boats within the estuary. It is well served by foot- and cycle-paths, with a circular, round estuary, route promoted [59].

With Cowes and East Cowes at the mouth, the county town of Newport upstream, and a combined population of around 41,000 (based on 2011 census data) the Medina is in one of the most densely populated parts of the Isle of Wight [35]. There are many car parks providing access to the Medina: town centre car parks in Cowes, East Cowes, and Newport; free car parks at the Folly Inn, Island Harbour Marina and Medina Arboretum on the east side; or Riverside Park car park on the west side. Therefore, the Medina is easily accessible to the local population and visitors.

The Isle of Wight is a very popular tourism destination. There are an average of 5.45 million day visits and 0.61 million holidays with overnight stays annually (2017-19) [27]. One of the ferry services from the mainland has a terminal at Cowes, and the town is host to the Cowes Week sailing event each year. The Red Squirrel Trail connects Cowes to Newport and further to Shanklin and Sandown. Cycle hire is available at either end of the estuary.

Visitor surveys undertaken for the Isle of Wight Council in 2011 to inform management of recreational disturbance [36] found that there was a significant difference in the volume of visitor usage between the east and west banks of the Medina, with most activity on the west side. Most dog walkers on the west bank had parked in the Riverside car park, with most activity between there and the Medina Valley Centre. On the east side, visitor activity was concentrated at and between the car parks at the Folly Inn and Island Harbour Marina. The report noted that visitors using the west bank cycle path did not cause disturbance as they were screened from, and had limited access to, the water; those on the east bank were either well away from the main bird sites, or present only in small numbers between the Folly Inn and Island Harbour Marina.

Bird Aware Solent installed a people counter on the eastern bank of the Medina, on the footpath south of the Folly Inn [42]. This revealed an average summer usage of 98 on weekdays and 108 on weekends, and an average winter usage of 17 on weekdays and 30 on weekends over the course of 2017-18. These numbers are not total numbers of people as visitors were observed to make there and back journeys at this location. However, they demonstrate the large difference in use between the seasons.
Householder surveys undertaken as the Bird Aware Solent Strategy was being developed indicated that the Medina was one of the less visited areas on the Isle of Wight, compared to other parts of the northern coastline [26].

Environment baseline

The intertidal habitat of the Medina between Cowes Power Station and Newport forms part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site (the latter is slightly larger as it also includes wetland habitat at Dodnor Creek). The subtidal habitat of the estuary from the mouth to the tidal limit at Newport is designated as part of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA for foraging terns. The subtidal and intertidal forms part of the Solent Maritime SAC. As the estuary is relatively narrow, the habitat is mainly mudflat, with some smaller areas of saltmarsh in the mid-section.

The Medina Estuary WeBS core count sector supports significant proportions of the following SPA populations, with 5 year peak means (2015/16 – 2019/20) of: 216 brent geese (3% of the SPA population); 12 little egrets (7% of the SPA); 26 black-tailed godwits (2% of the SPA); 25 turnstones (6% of the SPA) and 40 redshank (5% of the SPA) [12]. Analysis of the trends in WeBS core counts shows that brent geese and black-tailed godwits are doing well on the site with increases in the short-, medium-, and long-term [13], which follows the regional and national trend for these species. However, other designated species have shown declines, some triggering medium or high Alerts. For example, redshanks have declined by 80% over the long term, although as this generally follows the regional trend, it is likely due to broadscale rather than site specific reasons.

WeBS Low Tide Counts were undertaken in 2009/10, which showed that brent geese, lapwing and teal feed between Cowes Power Station and Island Harbour Marina; wigeon and dunlin feed between Folly Inn and Island Harbour Marina; and redshanks feed throughout the estuary [12].

The Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy [11] has mapped and ranked sites of importance within and outside the SPA. These sites are mainly clustered in the mid-part of the estuary, between Cowes Power Station and the Vestas site, though there are a couple of low use/candidate sites upstream on the outskirts of Newport.

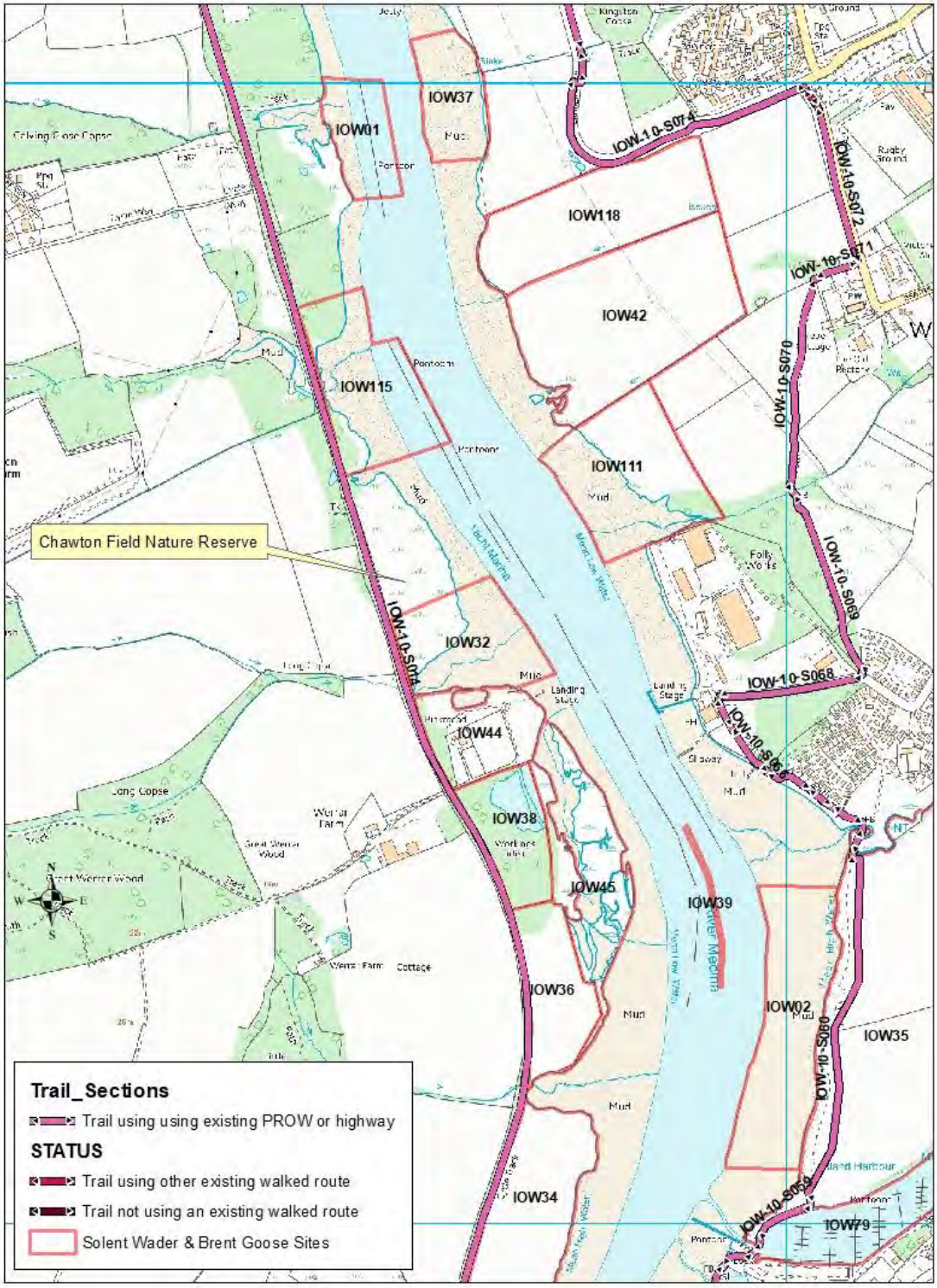


Figure 39: Brent goose and wader sites in lower reaches of the Medina

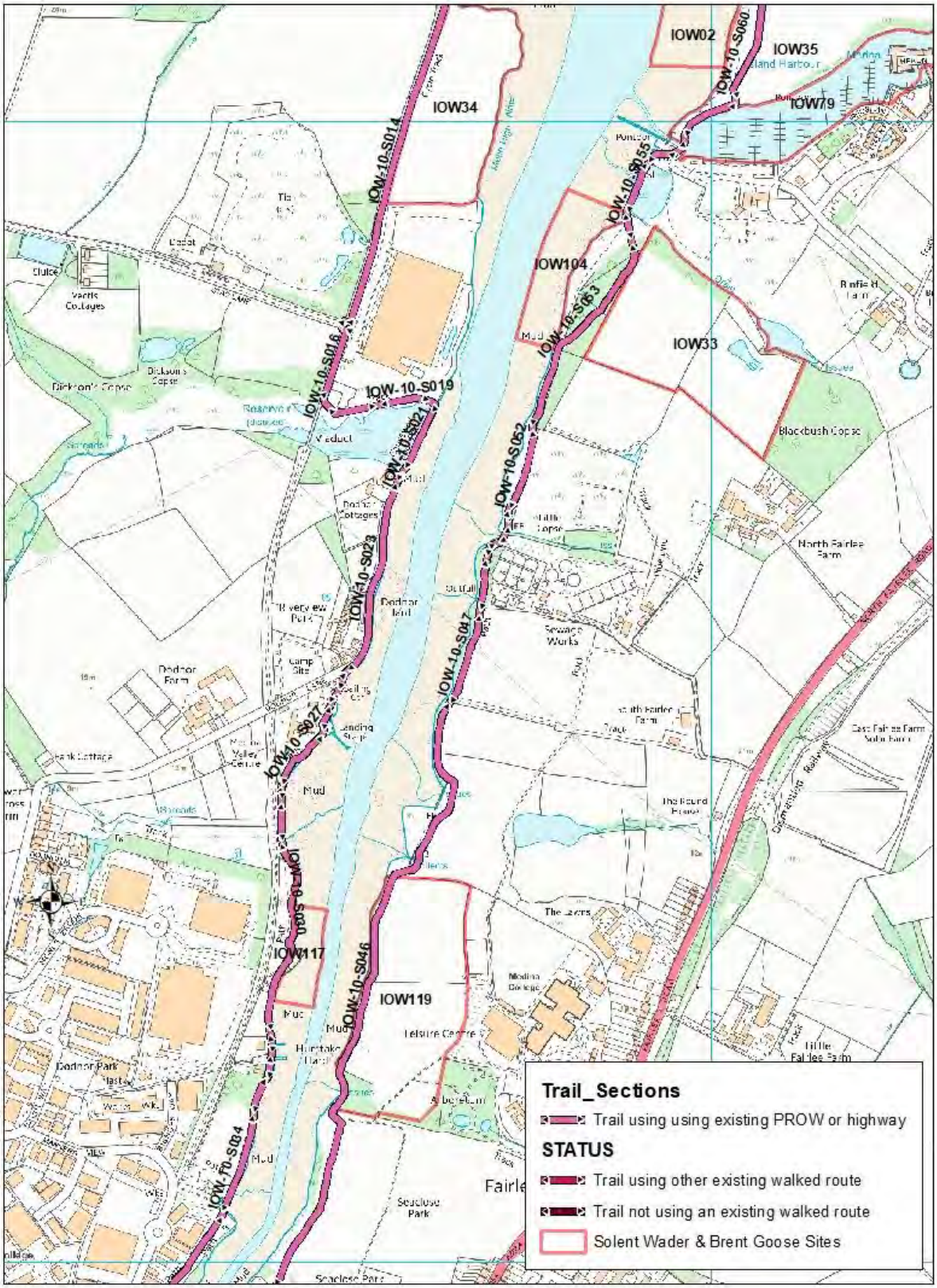


Figure 40: Brent goose and wader sites in upper reaches of the Medina

Detailed design and assessment of possible risks to qualifying features

Possible impacts on European Sites are:

- Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance from the installation of infrastructure (Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Disturbance to foraging terns (Solent & Dorset Coast SPA)
- Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure (Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar)
- Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat (Solent Maritime SAC)

This risk is considered further below:

Additional disturbance of feeding or roosting non-breeding waterbirds

Alignment and creation of the England Coast Path

The alignment, installation and promotion of the trail needs to be considered. From Cowes to Stag Lane and the Vestas site on the western side of the estuary, the trail follows the Medina Cycleway. This is an existing well-used route, with no surface improvements required, and so no significant uplift in use is expected. The trail is largely within trees, which provide screening from birds using the intertidal area and terrestrial sites identified by the SWBGS. Therefore, no additional disturbance is likely as result of trail alignment.

From the Vestas site to Medina Riverside Park, the trail leaves the cycleway and follows existing footpaths closer to the estuary, with little or no screening vegetation between the trail and the SPA/Ramsar. The intertidal habitat adjacent to the industrial estate is identified as a candidate site (IOW117) in the SWBGS [11] as there are records of 25 curlew and 15 oystercatchers using it in 2018, but this is too few records to properly classify it. The footpath in this location can get muddy in the winter, so several lengths of boardwalk are proposed. These improvements in the path surfacing could lead to an increase in use in winter, but this will be offset by the fact that users are likely to stay on the boardwalk rather than walking around muddy areas and potentially straying onto the intertidal area. Interpretation panels at either end of this section will inform of the sensitivities in the area and encourage responsible recreation.

From Medina Riverside Park, to the river crossing in Newport, and Seaclose Park on the eastern side of the Medina, the trail follows the cycleway or roads. The upper part of the estuary is undesignated and little used by waterbirds due to the commercial and recreational activities associated with Newport Harbour. At Seaclose Park the SPA/Ramsar is screened from the path by trees. No improvements are necessary in this section, so negligible uplift in use is expected, and no additional disturbance from trail alignment is expected.

From Seaclose Park to Island Harbour Marina, the trail follows an existing footpath close to the SPA/Ramsar. As no trail improvements are necessary, it is unlikely that there will be a significant increase in use. For most of this section, there are trees between the trail and the intertidal habitat providing some screening. Just south of Island Harbour Marina, the trail is more open, but only low bird use has been recorded in this area (SWBGS site IOW104 seaward of the trail has a peak of 19 brent geese recorded in 2018 [11]). For these reasons an increase in disturbance to birds using the SPA is not considered likely.

There is a SWBGS candidate site (IOW33) landward of trail section IOW-10-S053, used by 65 roosting oystercatchers in 2006 [11]. The site is screened from the path by woodland, and

as it is landward of the trail it does not form part of the margin. Therefore, disturbance from use of the trail is unlikely.

Between Island Harbour Marina and the footbridge south of Medina Park, the trail follows a route adjacent to a fence, set slightly inland of the existing footpath next to the intertidal. The landscape is quite open, but in places there are stands of scrub that provide some screening and separation of people from the birds using the intertidal habitat. The SWBGS recorded 103 brent geese feeding on this intertidal area in 2018 (candidate site IOW02), and WeBS Low Tide Counts show that additionally the middle part of the estuary is used by foraging wigeon, teal, dunlin and lapwing.

Bird Aware Rangers [49] have noted that this path gets very muddy in the winter and so people sometimes walk along edge of the intertidal habitat as it can be drier underfoot, but consequently disturbance to birds can occur. Some path surfacing works have been proposed to address the muddiness, and this will be confirmed during establishment 'walk the course' checks. It may also be necessary to install a short length of boardwalk to address a particular pinch point (see picture below). Resurfacing/boardwalking is likely to increase the attractiveness of this section of path to walkers in the winter, but this will be offset by the reduction in people having to use the intertidal habitat to avoid the mud, and by setting the path back further from the intertidal than it is currently.

Picture showing muddy pinch point at IOW-10-S060, taken on 9 June 2021. The path is squeezed at this point between the fence and saltmarsh (the patch of darker coloured vegetation on the left of the picture), which needs addressing to make it useable in the winter.

Bird Aware Rangers also pointed out that the multi-finger post just north of Island Harbour Marina points in slightly the wrong direction and appears to show the footpath along the foreshore (see picture to the right). This will be rectified during establishment works, directing people landward of the patch of scrub, and ensuring that people follow the new line of the ECP close to the field boundary. An existing interpretation panel north of Island Harbour Marina will be replaced and updated with messaging to be agreed with Bird Aware Solent. A recommendation of this HRA review is that the existing interpretation panel at IOW-10-S060 is also replaced, so that people approaching

this section from either direction receive the same information. In this way, the ECP trail and associated infrastructure will reinforce the messages given by Bird Aware Rangers on site, ensure that the ECP does not add to, but helps address, the existing disturbance issues at this site.

Fields landward of the trail between the Folly Inn and Island Harbour Marina are classified by the SWBGS as a secondary support area (IOW35), and regularly support significant numbers of brent geese (peak 295 in 2012). Waders recorded include peaks of 118 dunlin in 2012 and 20 ringed plovers in 2009. The fields are separated from the trail by a stock fence, and as they are landward, do not form part of the margin. As the fields are large, sufficient separation between people and birds can be maintained, and so significant disturbance is unlikely.

Between the Folly Inn and Cowes Power Station, the trail is aligned along existing PRoW to Beatrice Avenue, landward of fields used as high tide roosts. The SWBGS has identified a core site (IOW42: peak numbers of 175 brent geese in 2011, 36 curlew in 2010, 80 lapwing in 2018 and 112 oystercatchers in 2006), which movement studies have shown is an important linking site within the network and two candidate sites (IOW111: 20 curlew in 2019 and 48 lapwings in 2018; IOW118: 25 curlew recorded in 2018). IOW42 and IOW111 are separated from the trail by fields and hedge boundaries (the trail is 130m away at the closest point). IOW118 is partly screened from the field by a hedge, and the route avoids the part of the field closest to the intertidal, which is the part of this site most likely to be used by birds. Therefore, the routing of the path in this location avoids disturbance to wintering roosting waterbirds.

Between Cowes Power Station and East Cowes Ferry Terminal, the trail aligned along roads through East Cowes, set inland from the estuary. The intertidal habitat in this section is not designated as part of the SPA/Ramsar due to its low bird use. Therefore, significant disturbance to birds is unlikely.

Therefore, the creation of the trail is not considered to pose a significant risk to the site conservation objectives, and is designed to help achieve the objective of reducing recreational disturbance to wintering waterbirds.

Coastal access rights

Coastal margin along the Medina is composed of intertidal mudflats and fringing saltmarsh, and terrestrial habitats including woodland and grassland. A Section 25A exclusion will be placed on all intertidal habitat as it is unsuitable for access on foot, and no new access rights over this area will be created. Along a large part of the trail, access to the intertidal habitat is difficult due to the presence of existing boundary fences, hedges, woodland and fields, which reinforces the S25A exclusion. As noted above, the foreshore between the Folly Inn and Island Harbour Marina is currently used by people when the footpath is too muddy. Path resurfacing will rectify this issue, and interpretation boards will inform people of the nature conservation sensitivities, encouraging people to stay on the path, improving the current situation.

On the western side of the Medina, there are a cluster of SWBGS on fields between the cycleway and the intertidal. Chawton Field Nature Reserve is managed by the HIWWT as wet grassland. It is partly within SWBGS secondary support site IOW32, which regularly supports brent geese (peak of 73 in 2019), and has a record of 38 black-tailed godwits in 2019. This site is separated from the trail by a fence and hedge. Given this existing infrastructure, it is unlikely that people will try to enter the nature reserve. Therefore, it is not considered necessary to exclude the terrestrial fields from the margin, as it is not expected that the current established patterns of recreational use will change.

South of this, there is a core SWBGS (IOW44) at the Pinkmead Estate. Movement studies have shown it is an important part of the network, connecting different sites together for brent geese. Peak counts: 42 black-tailed godwits in 2015, 214 brent geese in 2016, 39 curlew in 2006, 110 lapwing in 2016, 125 oystercatcher in 2012, 70 redshank in 2006, and 2 snipe in 2019. As it is a private estate with holiday accommodation, there is no access for the public and this pattern of access will be unchanged.

Other terrestrial SWBGS sites on the western side of the Medina are a low use site (IOW38) separated from the trail by woodland; a primary support area (IOW36) separated from the trail by a thick bramble hedge; and a secondary support area (IOW34) separated from the trail by a hedge. As such, it is not expected that current established patterns of access will change, and therefore, additional Directions are not considered necessary to avoid significant disturbance.

On the eastern side of the Medina, the only terrestrial areas within the margin and used by birds are those between Folly Works and Saunders Way, where the path follows a route inland to avoid the fields used as high tide roosts. The bird interest of these SWBGS sites (IOW42, IOW111 and IOW118) is described above. The trail is separated from the sites by existing hedge field boundaries, and core are IOW42 is also separated by an additional field, which makes it unlikely that people will make use of this part of the margin.

As access is excluded from the intertidal habitats, and as we do not expect access to increase significantly in the terrestrial part of the coastal margin as a result of the proposals, there is unlikely to be an adverse effect on the SPA/Ramsar due to disturbance to feeding and roosting non-breeding waterbirds on the Medina.

Management of existing pressures

Access management is needed to address and manage wider issues affecting the achievement of Solent and Southampton Water SPA conservation objectives, and particularly the target to reduce disturbance from recreational activities. One of the guiding principles of the Medina Estuary Management Plan [60], is to minimise disturbance to estuarine habitats and wildlife.

Measures to manage current pressures, or additional disturbance from new housing, are not precluded by coastal access arrangements. There is an opportunity to deliver some of the actions identified, for example by Bird Aware Solent, as part of Coast Path establishment works. The following specific measures are incorporated in the access proposals:

- Interpretation panels will be installed at Dodnor Causeway, Medina Riverside Park, Medina Arboretum and north of Island Harbour Marina, explaining the environmental sensitivities and asking people to keep to the path. The panel south of Folly Inn will also be replaced. The panels will be developed in collaboration with Bird Aware Solent and will reinforce the messages given by their Rangers.

<u>Disturbance to wintering waterbirds from the installation of infrastructure</u>

Where access infrastructure is installed close to areas used by SPA/Ramsar birds, temporary noise and visual disturbance can result. Therefore, when the boardwalks between Medina Riverside Park and Dodnor Lane; interpretation panels at Dodnor Causeway, Medina Riverside Park, Medina Arboretum and north of Island Harbour Marina; and gates near Island Harbour Marina, and fields near Whippingham, are installed, the mitigation measures set out in table 8 will apply. In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

Disturbance to foraging terns

The subtidal part of the Medina is designated as part of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA, and Sandwich, common and little terns can be found foraging there [61]. However, given the distance between the subtidal habitat and the trail, disturbance is unlikely for most of the length of the estuary. South of the Vestas site, the estuary is narrow and on the western side there is little or no screening of the trail, but as this is the upper part of the estuary, it is less likely to be used by terns. In the middle part of the estuary, the trail is close to the intertidal between Island Harbour Marina and the Folly Inn and the landscape is open. However, the S25A exclusion over the intertidal habitats ensures that no new access rights are created that would bring people and dogs closer to the subtidal foraging areas. Therefore, the Conservation Objective to restrict disturbance to foraging terns set out in the Supplementary Advice [20] is not compromised.

Loss of habitat from the installation of access management infrastructure

For the majority of the Medina, the trail and associated infrastructure are outside the designated sites. However, as set out in table 10, there are two locations where this is not the case. The interpretation panel at Dodnor Causeway, south of the Vestas site, is situated just inside the Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar site. The installation of the panel will result in the loss of around 0.02m^2 of rough grassland adjacent to the existing footpath. This habitat is not wetland and so does not support any Ramsar bird, plant or invertebrate features. Therefore, the loss of 0.02m^2 of non-priority habitat will not affect the functioning of the site and so will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Ramsar site.

Several lengths of new boardwalk in the section between Medina Riverside Park and the Vestas site will be installed within the Solent and Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar and Solent Maritime SAC. The boardwalk will ensure a safe walking surface for an existing PRoW that can get muddy and slippery, particularly in winter. The interpretation panel adjacent to Medina Riverside Park is also just within the designated sites. A total of around 18m^2 of compacted bare mud within the SAC/SPA/Ramsar will be affected. Whilst this area is within the SAC, it is not intertidal so does not support saltmarsh or mudflat habitat, and the urban location means it does not support transitions from terrestrial to intertidal habitat. The presence of the existing PRoW and urban location means the area does not support Ramsar wetland plants or invertebrates or wintering waterbirds. Therefore, the installation of boardwalk on the existing line of the PRoW will not add to any loss of habitat over and above the existing impact of the PRoW, and so will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar.

The cumulative impacts on habitats within the SAC, SPA and Ramsar site are considered at section D3.2K and table 10.

Trampling of sensitive vegetation and supporting habitat

The Medina Estuary has small amounts of fringing saltmarsh, which is sensitive to trampling, but the intertidal area is mainly mudflat. The whole of the intertidal area is excluded from the margin by a S25A Direction (shown on Directions maps 10A to 10E in the published Report). Therefore, no new access rights will be created over the sensitive SAC habitats or supporting habitats for the Ramsar wetland plant and invertebrate communities, and current access patterns are considered unlikely to change. Therefore, there will be no adverse impacts on the integrity of the SAC.

D3.2K Consideration of the cumulative impacts of infrastructure within designated sites

The published report maps associated with this proposal show larger items of new infrastructure including kissing gates, footbridges, boardwalks and interpretation panels. Whilst multi-finger posts and way markers are not shown on maps, they have been considered in this assessment.

Consideration has been given to the individual locations of infrastructure within designated nature conservation sites in the preceding sections of this report. This section examines the possibility for cumulative impacts on site integrity.

Dimensions of infrastructure items have been derived using Hampshire County Council's Countryside Design Guidelines [62]. Resurfacing and replacement of infrastructure is listed in Appendix 4.

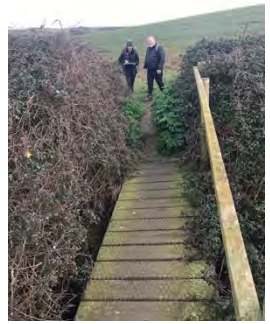
Where the ECP trail is within designated sites, it follows existing PRoWs so that any works needed to upgrade to National Trail standards will not add to the impacts on habitats. Similarly, any replacement infrastructure within designated sites will be constructed on the same footprint and designed to minimise habitat impacts.

Table 10, below, details the infrastructure proposed within the designated sites, and sets out potential impacts and/or mitigation measures. The works needed to upgrade to National Trail standards are confirmed on 'Walk the Course' checks before establishment. As stretches 4 and 5 were approved before the revision of this HRA had been completed, these checks have been done. Therefore, any additional surfacing or infrastructure required, but not in the published proposals, has been added to table 10.

Table 10. Consideration of new infratructure, re-surfacing and habitat loss

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4c IOW-4-S047	Waymark post*	1	0.01	Vegetated maritime slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The broadscale habitat is vegetated maritime cliff and slope, which in this location is grassland. New waymark post to be installed on the southern side of the existing kissing gate. Trail in this location is on the route of the existing IOWCP.	The post will be installed in an area of significant existing footfall as walkers pass through the kissing gate. This existing heavy use means that the vegetation in this area is confined to hardy grasses that can resist the trampling pressure. 0.6m^2 of turf will be removed to allow the post hole to be created but will be retained and placed around the post after the works. Whilst wall in which the gate is set is within the SAC, it can be considered site fabric and prevents the development of maritime slope vegetation. Therefore, the loss of 0.01m^2 of rough grassland in this location will not affect the functioning of the vegetated maritime cliff and slope habitat, and hence will not contribute to an adverse effect to the site integrity.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4c IOW-4-S048	Pedestrian gate	1	0.45	Vegetated maritime slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The broadscale habitat is vegetated maritime cliff and slope, which in this location is scrub. New gate to be installed in existing fence line. The location has been chosen as the fence is not within a mature hedgerow, and so vegetation clearance is minimised.	The fence line separates the habitat from Sandrock Road, and as such is fixed in place. The positioning of the gate within existing boundaries will not affect the integrity of the maritime cliff and slope habitat. Some removal of bramble, ivy and scrub will be required to install the pedestrian gate. However, the location within the existing fence line means that there will be no change in the functioning of the maritime cliff and slope habitat, and no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.	
IOW4c IOW-4-S050	Repair and resurface existing steps. Repair or replace handrail*	176m		Vegetated maritime slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The trail follows an existing PRoW with timber steps. These need improving and repairing, and the handrail repaired or replaced. The steps will be quartered out	The trail runs through a wooded section of the SAC at St Catherine's Point. The proposal is to replace existing worn steps and repair or replace the handrail. As such there will be no additional loss of habitat over the current use. The provision of safe steps with handrail will ensure people stay on the path rather than seeking better terrain adjacent to it. Therefore, trampling and erosion of the adjacent habitat will be avoided. Whilst some scrub vegetation clearance may be required to create a working width, and two trees will be felled,	

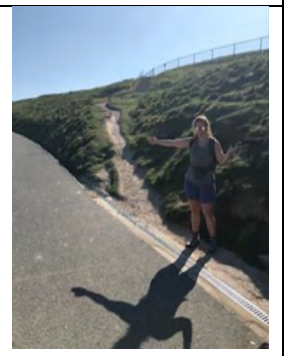
Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					and infilled with aggregate matching the local pH. Two trees require felling for safety reasons: an elm and a sycamore.	this is a temporary loss and will be allowed to recover by natural regeneration. Overall, the works to the steps and handrail will not lead to additional permanent habitat loss from the SAC over and above the existing footpath, and therefore, will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.	
IOW4e IOW-4-S072	Waymark post*	1	0.01	Neutral to acid grassland	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The post will be situated adjacent to an existing PRoW, in an area of grassland that is already subject to trampling pressure.	$0.6m^2$ of turf will be removed to allow the post hole to be created but will be retained and placed around the post after the works. The location on the existing PRoW means the loss of $0.01m^2$ will not contribute an adverse effect to the site integrity. The bridge in this location (shown in picture) needs replacing. But as this will be done on a like-for-like basis, it will not lead to any additional loss of SAC habitat.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4f IOW-4-S075	Resurfacing of road verge*	150m	225	Vegetated maritime cliff and slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The SAC boundary is coincident with the road edge. The broadscale maritime cliff and slope habitat classification comprises grassed road verge and scrub in this location. The works include some scrub clearance to create the necessary width, and the laying of a self-binding gravel footway. The trail here follows the route of the existing IOWCP but requires upgrading for safety reasons as it is adjacent to the road.	The works will result in around 225m^2 loss of grassed road verge and scrub. The presence of the road and associated maintenance of the verge strongly influences the habitat and species composition in this location. The fixed location of the road also inhibits the development of more naturally functioning maritime slope vegetation. Therefore, the loss of habitat due to resurfacing of the road verge will not have any additional effect on the functioning of the habitat, over and above the existing impact of the road. Therefore, it can be concluded that there will be no adverse effect on site integrity.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4g IOW-4-S083	Repair to existing riser steps*	16m		Vegetated maritime cliff and slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The broadscale maritime cliff and slope habitat comprises grassland and scrub in this location. The series of existing steps down the slope of Shepherd's Chine require repair, replacement and top dressing. Aggregate will be locally sourced and commensurate with the pH of the local environment which here is neutral to acid.	The trail in this location follows the route of the existing IOWCP. The repair, providing safe and easy to use steps, will ensure people stay on the path rather than seeking less slippery terrain adjacent to it. Therefore, trampling and erosion of the adjacent habitat will be avoided. Whilst some scrub vegetation clearance may be required to create a working width, this is a temporary loss and will be allowed to recover by natural regeneration. Therefore, the repair of the steps will not lead to any additional permanent loss of habitat from the SAC over and above the existing footpath, and so there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4g IOW-4-S084	Waymark post*	1	0.01	Vegetated maritime cliff and slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The waymark post will be situated adjacent to the existing footpath at Shepherd's Chine. The habitat in this location is acid to neutral grassland.	0.6m^2 of turf will be removed to allow the post hole to be created but will be retained and placed around the post after the works. The positioning of the waymark post adjacent to the existing PRoW will not hinder the functioning of the maritime slope vegetation, and so the loss of 0.01m^2 in this location will not contribute an adverse effect to the site integrity.	
IOW 4g IOW-4-S085	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	Vegetated maritime cliff and slope	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. New interpretation panel to be installed adjacent to the existing footpath and close to buildings at Shepherds Chine. It will highlight the importance and sensitivity of coastal grassland with particular reference to the Glanville Fritillary butterfly.	The interpretation panel will be installed adjacent to an existing path within the SAC in an area of coastal grassland. Turf removed to create the post holes will be retained and replaced around the posts after the works. The location adjacent to the existing PRoW and buildings means that the loss of 0.02m^2 will not contribute to an adverse effect to the site integrity.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW4g IOW-4-S084 to S086	Resurfacing*	180m		None	Within **South Wight Maritime SAC**. The route of the ECP follows an existing agricultural track, which requires resurfacing with aggregates to address wet conditions and rutting. The track does not support SAC habitats. Aggregate will be locally sourced and commensurate with the pH of the local environment.	The resurfacing will not extend beyond the footprint of the existing agricultural track, and so will not lead to loss of SAC habitat. The track has been in place since time of SAC designation and so can be considered site fabric. The aggregate will be chosen so as not to affect the pH of surrounding soils. With these measures in place it can be conclused that the resurfacing will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC.	
IOW 5g IOW-5-S035	Multi finger post	2*	0.02	Chalk grassland	Within **Isle of Wight Downs SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. The area does not support Early Gentian. Fingerposts to be installed on Tennyson Down, at Tennyson Monument. One fingerpost was included in the published proposals, but as there are several possible routes at this point, an additional waymarker was identified on the walk the	The chalk grassland habitat around Tennyson Monument is degraded and subject to erosion due to trampling pressure. As there are a number of desire line paths in this area, the signposts will help minimise this erosion by encouraging people to use one main route. Installation will require two holes to be excavated each removing around 0.6m^2 of degraded calcareous grassland turf. As much of the turf as possible will be replaced once posts are installed. The loss of 0.02m^2 to the posts is not considered to lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					course checks to help keep walkers on the trail.	this site given the location on the existing PRoW. The waymarkers will help manage the existing recreational pressure and may help reduce the trampling pressure from the creation of additional paths.	
IOW5h IOW-5-S044	Multi finger post*	1	0.01	Chalk grassland	Within **Isle of Wight Downs SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. Fingerpost to be installed adjacent to private metalled highway, which gives access to Needles Old Battery. The habitat is in this location is predominantly bare chalk ground with some grassland vegetation.	Installation will require a hole to be excavated removing around $0.6m^2$ of degraded calcareous grassland turf. As much of the turf as possible will be replaced once the post is installed. NB photograph is indicative: the sign post will be installed to right of the NE adviser, closer to existing steps, to avoid encouraging continued use of slope (worn path shown in photo). The location adjacent to the road means that the loss of $0.01m^2$ will not contribute to an adverse effect on the integrity of this site.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW5h IOW-5-S049	Repair of existing steps*	3m		Chalk grassland	Within **Isle of Wight Downs SAC**. Potentially affects the conservation objective to maintain the extent of qualifying natural habitats. Existing riser steps require repair, quartering and possible replacement riser boards.	The trail follows an existing PRoW across the chalk grassland. The existing steps have been significantly eroded. Repair will ensure the trampling pressure is restricted to steps, and the temptation to create new easier-to-use routes either side of the steps will be minimised. Therefore, the existing steps can be considered site fabric[12], and their repair will not lead to any additional habitat loss over the existing use of the PRoW, and so will not lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.	
IOW 6b IOW-6-S029	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	No Priority habitat identified	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. New interpretation panel to inform walkers on sensitivities of sand dunes to be installed close to route at Norton Spit. The substrate is	Given the location next to the existing PRoW, this part of the site does not support the birds, plants or invertebrates associated with the SPA/Ramsar, and it is unlikely that this part of the SAC can be restored to vegetated shingle. The purpose of the panel is to inform and encourage walkers to stay on the path rather than walk on the dune system at Norton Spit, so overall the aim is to reduce recreational impacts on the SAC. Therefore, the loss of	

[12] Site fabric is infrastructure that was in place at time of designation, and so whilst within the designated site, does not contribute towards the habitat features, and removal is not required for favourable condition of the site.

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					disturbed, compacted shingle.	0.1m^2 in this location will not contribute to an adverse effect to the site integrity.	
IOW 7a IOW-7-S006 to S009, S011, S013, S015 to S017, S021	New Boardwalk	65m in total	14.85	Bare soil	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. The trail here follows an existing PRoW, which is also the current IOWCP. Boardwalk at Hamstead Quay is required as the area is boggy and subject to trampling, which has caused erosion of vegetation. By installing boardwalk, with two passing places, raised approximately 1ft from the ground, the saltmarsh will be allowed to recover. The installation will reduce the risk of further trampling to saltmarsh as walkers and dogs will be kept on the new satisfactory surface with space to pass one another.	See photos at Appendix 5. The saltmarsh between the stretches of existing boardwalk is currently in poor condition due to trampling. The presence of the existing PRoW means that this part of the site does not provide supporting habitat for SPA/Ramsar birds, or Ramsar wetland plants or invertebrates. As the boardwalk will be installed on the line of the existing PRoW, the only additional habitat loss will be due to the creation of passing places where the boardwalk will be wider than the current path. However, the design of the boardwalk, raised 1ft off the ground, will minimise the loss of saltmarsh vegetation and ensure that mudflat is maintained under the boardwalk. Therefore, whilst there may be some loss of vegetation to shading, the habitat will remain as intertidal, and the overall function of this part of the SAC will not be harmed. By providing a dry surface, walkers will be kept on the alignment of the path and will not need to step on to adjacent habitat to either pass each other or seek drier terrain. This will limit impacts to the width of the existing footpath, plus passing places, and allow the adjacent saltmarsh to recover from the trampling pressure currently experienced.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
						When installing the boardwalk contractors will have to follow specific mitigation guidelines highlighted in table 8 to avoid further disturbance of the ground. Therefore, the loss of 14.85m^2 in this location, on the route of the existing PRoW will not affect the hydrological functioning of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar, and will allow recovery of adjacent saltmarsh vegetation. Furthermore, the loss of vegetation is not permanent, in that if a decision were made to realign the PRoW and ECP landward at a later date, the boardwalk could be removed and the saltmarsh would regrow.	
IOW 7a IOW-7-S010, S012, S014, S018	Replacement of boardwalk	93m in total	7.14	Bare soil	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. The current boardwalk at Hamstead Quay is in need of replacing as it is in disrepair and could cause people to walk off them causing trampling effects on the saltmarsh. The boardwalk width will be kept the same however three passing places will be established at regular intervals which could result in a small shadowing impact on saltmarsh.	See photos at Appendix 5. The presence of the existing PRoW means that this part of the site does not provide supporting habitat for SPA/Ramsar birds, or Ramsar wetland plants or invertebrates. There will be a small increase in shadowing of saltmarsh from establishment of passing places. Existing bridges will be used where possible as passing places as this will limit the shadowing of saltmarsh. The piles from previous boardwalk will be left in the ground as removing them can cause more disturbance to the substrate beneath. The decking will be replaced. As this is a replacement like for like with a small increase in shadowing this will not adversely affect the continuity and functioning of the habitat as a whole. Mitigation guidelines set out in table 8 will be implemented to ensure no further disturbance during construction. Therefore, the loss of 7.14m^2 in this location, on the route of the existing PRoW will not affect the	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
						hydrological functioning of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar, and will allow recovery of adjacent saltmarsh vegetation.	
IOW 7a IOW-7-S020	Resurfacing with hoggin	36.9m		Bare soil/scrub	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** The surface of the proposed route is currently muddy and does not meet National Trail standards. Some scrub adjacent to the path will need to be cut to allow for aggregate to be administered. Two passing places will be established at regular intervals. By providing passing places for walkers and dogs it will ensure walkers are not forced off onto the surrounding habitat.	See photos at Appendix 5. The presence of the existing PRoW means that this part of the site does not support saltmarsh habitats, nor provide supporting habitat for SPA/Ramsar birds, or Ramsar wetland plants or invertebrates. The surface type in which the aggregate will be applied is bare/compacted earth and scrub along the route of the existing PRoW. As such, the resurfacing will not increase the area of habitat lost over and above the width of the existing footpath, and will not constitute an adverse effect on the site integrity. Furthermore, by providing a dry surface, walkers will be kept on the alignment of the path and will not need to step on to adjacent habitat to either pass each other or seek drier terrain. This will limit impacts to the width of the existing footpath, plus passing places, and allow the adjacent habitat to recover from the trampling pressure currently experienced.	
IOW 7b IOW-7-S035	Stock Fencing	100m in total	0.7	Conifer woodland (not priority habitat)	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** Placed seaward of the trail, at Western Haven, to ensure people and dogs stay on the trail. This will minimise the risk of access to the saltmarsh and transitional habitats and avoid erosion	Location in which fencing will be established is not within priority habitat and does not support SAC/SPA/Ramsar features. By setting the trail and fence away from the edge of the intertidal area, the opportunity to restore the transitional habitat from conifer to native woodland is not compromised. Therefore, the	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					from trampling pressure. The trail and fencing are set back within the tree line, which in this location is conifer woodland. The woodland is not used by wintering birds or wetland plants or invertebrates.	loss of a small area to fence posts will not constitute an adverse effect on site integrity.	
IOW 7b	Foot bridge	1	18.21	Mudflat/ creek	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** In order to minimise impact on intertidal habitats, a new bridge will be installed where the creek narrows and there are few saltmarsh plants due to tree cover and shade. The boundary of the sites is MHW, therefore, the majority of the footings will be outside the designated sites. The detailed design of the bridge will be to minimise the number of footings in the designated sites to both minimise habitat loss and ensure the hydrological function of the creek is not affected. Surfacing will be considered that lets light	Location of this footbridge avoids loss of saltmarsh, minimises the loss of mudflat to footings. The bridge will be designed to minimise impacts on hydrology and so will not impact the wider functioning of the habitat for plants and species. When the detailed design for the installation is planned, the location should avoid removal of fallen trees and woody debris (habitat for Ramsar invertebrates) as far as possible. Where removal is necessary, logs should be left on site. Whilst Aunt Emmy's Creek is within the SPA, the habitat is not suitable for large numbers of wintering birds, though it will be used by small numbers of species such as coots. Therefore, the presence of the	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					through so that shading of the creek is minimised.	bridge will not reduce the available habitat for wintering birds. With the design and mitigation measures, it can be concluded that an adverse effect on designated sites will be avoided.	
IOW 7d IOW-7-S081	Culvert with grass bund over the top	15m		Lowland meadows	Within **Solent & Southampton Water SPA**. The trail is on the route of an existing footpath, which is in a field that gets boggy. This means that infrastructure is needed to make the trail safe to walk on and not slippery.	This area of land is within SPA boundary, but there will be no long term impact to the grassland. Whilst it will be temporarily displaced, there will be no loss of functioning habitat. Therefore, an adverse effect on the site is avoided.	
IOW 7d	Willow screening	1 (10m – 5m each side)	1.02	Grassland either side of a line of scrub.	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** The 2-storey Mercia Seabroke hide is adjacent to scrapes used by nesting Mediterranean gulls, and feeding and roosting wintering waterbirds. Screening is required to minimise disturbance to these features, and to prevent access to the saltmarsh.	The screening will be erected next to the hide in an area of scrub vegetation that does not support SPA/Ramsar birds, and as it is on raised ground does not support SAC habitats. The willow will be used to fill any gaps in the existing scrub vegetation so that disturbance to birds using the adjacent intertidal habitat is avoided, and access onto the marshes is prevented. As the screening will not lead to any loss in designated or	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
						supporting habitat and will have a beneficial impact in terms of reducing disturbance, there will not be an adverse effect on the site integrity.	
IOW 7d IOW-7-S082	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	Bare ground	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** The interpretation panel is beside proposed route alignment at Newtown Quay, adjacent to the existing PRoW. The area is not used by SPA/Ramsar birds and does not support SAC vegetation.	The panel will display information about birds utilising the harbour and ask trail users not to walk on the old sea wall that is used as a high tide roost. As the location of the panel does not support any designated site features, the small loss of area will not contribute to an adverse effect to the site integrity.	
IOW 8a IOW-8-S002	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	Grassland at top of beach	Within **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. The interpretation panel will be located beside the existing public right of way Thorness Bay. Wintering birds tend to use the intertidal area rather than the top of the beach. Due to the existing recreational pressure, the location of the panel is not suitable nesting ringed plover habitat.	The panel will inform users of the need to give wintering and nesting birds space, and as such will help with managing the recreational pressure at the site. The loss of a small area of habitat at the top of the beach will not significantly reduce the available habitat for SPA/Ramsar birds. Therefore it will not constitute an adverse effect on the site integrity.	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
IOW 8a IOW-8-S007	Interpretation Panel	1	0.02	Shingle/bare ground	Within **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. The interpretation panel will be located beside the existing public right of way Thorness Bay. Wintering birds tend to use the intertidal area rather than the top of the beach. Due to the existing recreational pressure, the location of the panel is not suitable nesting ringed plover habitat.	The panel will inform users of the need to give wintering and nesting birds space, and as such will help with managing the recreational pressure at the site. The loss of a small area of habitat at the top of the beach will not significantly reduce the available habitat for SPA/Ramsar birds. Therefore, it will not constitute an adverse effect on the site integrity.	
IOW 8a	Sleeper bridge	1	15.6	Reedbed	Within **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. In this location there is a degraded metal bridge on the shingle (shown in the photo), this is to be moved to allow the vegetated shingle to recover. The new bridge will take the footpath off the beach into the adjacent field, which may reduce disturbance to birds using the beach and intertidal habitats. The creation of the bridge could result in a small loss of reedbed habitat. This habitat	The precise location will be chosen to minimise the impact on riparian habitats, but there may be some loss of reedbed. A worst case scenario would be the loss of 15.6m^2 (the area of sleeper bridge required to span the gap into the field). However, the actual loss of wetland would be smaller than this, and only relate to the footings: whilst some reed removal may be needed, wetland habitat for invertebrates will still be available under the bridge. The design of the bridge will ensure	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					is not used by SPA qualifying features, but is supporting habitat for Ramsar plants and invertebrates.	the hydrology of the site is not affected. Given the size of the adjacent reedbed, loss of such a small area is not likely to affect the functioning of the supporting habitat as a whole. Therefore, an adverse effect on the Ramsar/SPA will be avoided.	
IOW 10c IOW-10-S020	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	Rough grassland	Within **Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar**. The interpretation panel is beside the existing public right of way, west of the Medina causeway. This will inform walkers on the overwintering bird species that use the Medina. The location of the panel is not an area that supports wetland birds, plants or invertebrates.	As the location of the panel is not wetland, it does not support Ramsar features. The existing PRoW and presence of industrial buildings mean that this situation is not likely to change. Therefore, the loss of a small area of grassland in this location will not affect the functioning of the Ramsar wetland and so not lead to an adverse effect on site integrity.	
IOW 10d IOW-10-S030	New Boardwalk	50m		Compacted earth	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar**. The trail is on an existing PRoW, which is prone to becoming muddy making the surface slippery and hard to walk on. By installing a	As the alignment is on an existing footpath, it is not used by SPA/Ramsar birds, and does not support SAC or Ramsar habitats, and can be considered site fabric. Therefore, whilst the boardwalk will be within the SAC/SPA/Ramsar, it will not lead to additional loss of habitat over and above the existing PRoW. Given this, and the fact that the location does not support	

Solent Maritime SAC, South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC and Solent and Southampton SPA and Ramsar site - Consideration of new infrastructure and permanent habitat loss (* asterisked items are additional to the published proposals, identified on walk the course checks)							
Report map and stretch reference	**Item**	**Quantity**	**Area (m^2)**	**Habitat**	**Consideration**	**Conclusion**	
					boardwalk the walkers will have a safer route and are more likely to stick to the path, reducing erosion of adjacent areas.	designated site features, its loss will not contribute to an adverse effect on site integrity.	
IOW 10d IOW-10-S046	Interpretation panel	1	0.02	Scrub	Within **Solent Maritime SAC** and **Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar** The interpretation panel, located along the Medina, is beside the existing PRoW. It will be installed landward of the footpath in an area of scrub/rough grassland that does not support SAC/SPA/Ramsar habitats and species.	The panel will inform walkers about the overwintering bird species that use the Medina. The location of the panel will not lead to the loss of any designated habitats. As it is situated landward of the existing PRoW, scrub removal would not result in SAC habitat or Ramsar wetland habitat being created. Therefore, the installation within the designated sites will not have an adverse effect on site integrity.	

Cumulative assessment of habitat impacts

Total area of each designated site affected, taken from table 10:

- South Wight Maritime SAC – 225.5m^2
- Isle of Wight Downs SAC – 0.03m^2
- Solent Maritime SAC – 41.98m^2
- Solent & Southampton Water SPA – 57.62m^2
- Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar – 57.64m^2

South Wight Maritime SAC

As set out in table 10, the trail within the South Wight Maritime SAC is in areas of mapped as vegetated maritime slope habitat. The main impact on the SAC is at Whale Chine were there are 225m^2 of resurfacing works to the grassed road verge and scrub. The trail here follows the route of the existing IOWCP but upgrades are necessary to improve the safety of walkers given the presence of the road. This stretch of ECP has been approved by the Secretary of State. Whilst this is within the SAC (the road forms the boundary of the designated site) the road, and associated maintenance of the verge, strongly influences the habitat and species composition. Therefore, the resurfacing is in a part of the site that can be considered site fabric due to the presence of the road, the existing IOWCP, and the fact that it does not contribute to the functioning of the maritime slope habitat. As such, the resurfacing will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. The additional 0.5m^2 impact on similarly non-functioning parts of the SAC (due to the presence of the existing PRoW or existing boundary features), will not, individually or cumulatively, result in any adverse effect on the SAC.

Isle of Wight Downs SAC

The only losses of habitat within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC are to additional waymarker posts being installed adjacent to the existing PRoW, total 0.03m^2. As the paths are well used and subject to existing trampling pressure, the posts will not cumulatively result in any significant habitat loss and are not in areas that support Early Gentian or other characteristic SAC plant species. Other path works within the SAC are to repair existing steps on the same footprint, and so will not result in additional habitat impacts. Overall, the infrastructure works are designed to create a trail that is safe to walk on and easy to follow, which will help manage the existing recreational pressure by encouraging walkers to stay on the main path rather than seeking alternative routes. Therefore, it can be concluded that the installation of the posts will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.

Solent Maritime SAC

There is a conservation objective to restore the extent of saltmarsh in the Solent Maritime SAC to 1,095ha [6], which is set to address losses due to coastal squeeze. The only area where coast path infrastructure potentially affects saltmarsh is at Hamstead where new and replacement boardwalks are necessary. However, this will not lead to any significant additional losses of saltmarsh vegetation because the trail here follows the route of the existing PRoW. The route of the trail does not, therefore, support saltmarsh plants due to the existing access, which has been in place since before the site was designated. Furthermore, the infrastructure will help achieve the restore objective by ensuring walkers stay on the defined path, and allowing the adjacent saltmarsh to recover. In other parts of the SAC, the infrastructure proposed will not lead to the loss of any habitat currently, or capable of being restored to, saltmarsh habitat.

The other habitats for which the SAC is designated have objectives to maintain the extent and distribution [6]. The new bridge across Aunt Emmy's Creek, Western Haven, will result in a small loss of mudflat to the bridge footings, but the design of the bridge will minimise this as far as possible, and the hydrological function of the creek will not be affected. Other infrastructure is in areas that can be considered site fabric as they do not support SAC habitats now nor when the site was designated, due to the presence of existing PRoWs. Therefore, the cumulative impact on 41.98m^2 of the SAC will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

Solent & Southampton Water SPA

The infrastructure proposed within the SPA is in locations where the habitat does not support SPA birds due to the presence of existing PRoWs, topography or current habitat being unsuitable. Therefore, the cumulative impact on 57.62m^2 of the SPA will not lead to the loss of any supporting habitat for birds, and hence no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar

In terms of Ramsar habitats, the same conclusions can be reached as for the Solent Maritime SAC. In terms of the Ramsar plants and invertebrates, Hamstead and Western Haven are the only places where wetland habitats are potentially affected that could provide supporting habitat for the assemblages. However, the boardwalks and bridge will be designed to avoid hydrological impacts, dead wood will be retained in the creek, and shading will be minimised. These mitigation measures will ensure that the wetlands of Hamstead and Western Haven continue to provide supporting habitat for plants and invertebrates.

In other parts of the Ramsar site, the infrastructure is associated with existing PRoWs and so not in wetland areas that could support designated plant or invertebrate assemblages. Therefore, the cumulative impact on 57.64m^2 of the Ramsar site will not lead to an adverse effect on the site as a whole.

D3.3 Assessment of potentially adverse effects (taking account of any additional mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the access proposal) alone

In this part of the HRA we draw together our conclusions concerning the risks considered within this Appropriate Assessment, taking account of the detailed design of the access proposals and including any extra or additional 'mitigation measures' specifically intended to avoid or reduce the potential harmful effects of the plan or project and which might enable a conclusion of no adverse effect on the integrity of the European Sites to be reached. In reviewing the ability of any such measures to avoid harmful effects, NE has considered their likely effectiveness, reliability, timeliness, certainty and duration over the full lifetime of the plan or project. A precautionary view has been taken where there is doubt or uncertainty regarding these measures.

Disturbance of non-breeding waterbirds from recreational activities

Risk to conservation objectives:

The access proposals modify how the site and surrounding areas are used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to foraging or resting non-breeding waterbirds which may lead to reduced fitness and reduction in their population and/or distribution within the site.

Qualifying features affected:

Black-tailed godwit, dark-bellied brent goose, ringed plover, teal, waterbird assemblage (all non-breeding features of Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site).

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

The detailed design of the access proposals in relation to pressure from disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds is considered in sections D3.2A to D3.2J of this assessment. In summary, relevant design features include:

Route Alignment and Coastal Margin: All Areas

- Aligning along Public Rights of Way (PRoW) or other existing walked routes wherever possible.
- Clear signage will ensure walkers find it easy to follow the trail and minimise the risk that they accidently access sensitive areas.
- Interpretation panels at appropriate locations will inform people of any restrictions, sensitive habitats/species, and encourage responsible behaviour to minimise disturbance.
- Under S25A of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, access will be excluded to saltmarsh and mudflat as these areas are unsuitable for public access on foot.

Newtown Harbour

- The trail at Western Haven (sections IOW-7-S025 to IOW-7-S037) will be closed between 1 August and 1 March for land management and conservation reasons. An alternative route inland (following the existing Isle of Wight Coastal Path (IOWCP)) will be open during this time.
- Screening will be added at the National Trust's two-storey Mercia Seabroke hide and Clamerkin hide to reduce visual disturbance to birds.
- S26 nature conservation exclusions will be applied:
    - to the shingle spit at Hamstead Dover;
    - to Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy site IOW26 just south of Hamstead Spit;
    - to Harts Farm fields;
    - extending the intertidal exclusion at Walter's Copse and Clamerkin to include upper saltmarsh and woodland within the Solent Maritime SAC. This will be supported by upgraded fencing, as necessary, to prevent dogs getting through onto the intertidal habitat.
    - A dogs to lead restriction will be applied to woodland near the bird hide at Clamerkin Fields.

Medina

- Alignment routed inland to avoid fields used as supporting habitat by wintering geese and waders.
- Signage and surfacing improved (short length of boardwalk) between Folly Inn and Island Marina to keep people away from intertidal habitats.

Thorness Bay

- A new bridge will be installed to take people off the beach and into a field for part of the route.

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

Solent & Southampton Water SPA has site conservation objectives to reduce the frequency, duration and / or intensity of disturbance caused by human activity affecting its non-breeding waterbird qualifying features (black-tailed godwit, dark-bellied brent goose, ringed plover, teal and wintering waterbird assemblage).

Pressure from disturbance can be managed by on-site interventions that affect the distribution, intensity and type of recreational activities, such as by encouraging people to use certain routes and discouraging them from using others. The access proposals have been designed with this is mind and for the reasons explained in D3.2A to D3.2J, including the design features of the access proposals summarised above, we conclude they will not have an adverse effect the achievement of the target to reduce disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds from human activity.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the SAC and SPA objectives. In respect of non-breeding waterbirds we consider that the same conclusions as for the SPA apply to the Ramsar site.

Are there residual effects?

For the reasons explained above, it is unlikely there will be any appreciable adverse effects from the access proposals. However, because there is a target to reduce disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds from human activities in the Solent area, and because environmental conditions over the Solent as a whole, including within Solent & Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar site are dynamic and influenced by a number of human activities and because NE is aware of other plans and projects for which disturbance effects are currently being assessed by other competent authorities, we have carried out a further in-combination assessment - see D4.

Disturbance of breeding waterbirds from recreational activities

Risk to conservation objectives:

The access proposals modify how the site is used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to waterbirds that leads to reduced breeding success of species that make a significant contribution to non-breeding SPA features.

Qualifying features affected:

Ringed plover, diversity of the waterbird assemblage (both non-breeding features of Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site).

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

The detailed design of the access proposals in relation to pressure from disturbance to breeding waterbirds, which may impact on the non-breeding population, is considered in sections D3.2D & I of this assessment. In summary, relevant design features include:

- The key sites for nesting ringed plover fall within the coastal margin. At Newtown Harbour, the alignment avoids the shingle spits either side of the mouth of the harbour where ringed plover nest. In addition, S26 nature conservation exclusions are proposed in these areas. This will support the National Trust's conservation efforts already in place, including fencing off of parts of the Hamstead Dover spit. (see directions map IOW7A). (D3.2D)
- Ringed plovers have attempted to nest at Thorness Bay in the past but have been unsuccessful in recent years due to disturbance. The proposal to take the path off the beach in this location may reduce some of this pressure, though the presence of the holiday park means that recreational use is likely to remain high. (D3.2I)
- Interpretation panels will be installed at Hamstead Spit (Newtown Harbour) and Thorness Bay to inform walkers of the sensitivities regarding breeding ringed plovers. (D3.2D&I)

- Several waterbird species that contribute to the diversity of the non-breeding waterbird assemblage also occur as breeding birds along this stretch of the coast and nest in suitable areas of saltmarsh, grazing marsh and other habitats. The risk of impacts on breeding success of these species is reduced because much of the habitat favoured is physically inaccessible and away from the proposed route of the ECP. (D3.2D)

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

Solent & Southampton Water SPA has site conservation objectives to reduce the frequency, duration and / or intensity of disturbance caused by human activity affecting its non-breeding waterbird qualifying features (including ringed plover and a waterbird assemblage).

For the reasons explained in D3.2D and D3.2I, including the design features of the access proposals summarised above, it is unlikely the access proposals could lead to adverse effects on breeding ringed plover, and less likely still there could be knock on consequences for the non-breeding population.

For the reasons explained in D3.2D it is unlikely the access proposals could lead to an adverse effect the diversity of the non-breeding waterbird assemblage.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the SAC and SPA objectives. In respect of non-breeding waterbirds we consider that the same conclusions as for the SAC apply to the Ramsar site.

Are there residual effects?

No, the access proposals will not result in recreational activities that have appreciable adverse effects on the population of non-breeding ringed plover or diversity of the non-breeding waterbird assemblage as a result of impacts on breeding success.

Disturbance of breeding terns and Mediterranean gull from recreational activities

Risk to conservation objectives:

The access proposals modify how the site is used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to breeding terns and Mediterranean gull which may lead them to abandon nesting areas or reduce their breeding success (for example by causing eggs to become chilled, reducing food supply to chicks, or increasing the vulnerability of eggs, chicks or adults to predation).

Qualifying features affected:

Common tern, little tern, Mediterranean gull (all breeding features of Solent & Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site).

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

The detailed design of the access proposals in relation to pressure from disturbance to breeding terns and Mediterranean gull is considered in sections D3.2D and D3.2G of this assessment. In summary, relevant design features include:

- Alignment of the trail to avoid the shingle spit at Hampstead Dover. (D3.2D)
- The National Trust currently fence off part of the spit at Hamstead Dover in an effort to encourage terns to nest. This will be supported by a S26 direction to exclude access. An interpretation panel will be installed to inform walkers of the exclusion and ask them to keep out of the fenced area. (D3.2D)
- Mediterranean gulls nest near to Newtown Quay, in front of the Mercia Seabroke hide. The route is set inland of existing tree and scrub hedging, which largely screens the nesting area from users of the trail. But there are some gaps adjacent to the hide that will be filled by willow screening. The intertidal area is excluded from the coastal margin by a S25A direction. (D3.2G)

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

Solent & Southampton Water SPA has site conservation objectives to reduce the frequency, duration and / or intensity of disturbance caused by human activity affecting its breeding tern and Mediterranean gull qualifying features (common tern, little tern, Roseate tern, sandwich tern and Mediterranean gull). There is also an objective to restore nesting terns to the Isle of Wight.

The access proposals have been designed with this is mind and for the reasons explained in D3.2D and D3.2G, including the design features of the access proposals summarised above, we conclude they will not have an adverse effect on the achievement of the target to reduce disturbance to breeding terns and Mediterranean gull from human activity, nor hinder the objective to restore nesting terns to the Isle of Wight.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the SAC and SPA objectives. In respect of breeding terns and Mediterranean gull we consider that the same conclusions as for the SPA apply to the Ramsar site.

Disturbance of foraging terns from recreational activities

Risk to conservation objectives:

Repeated disturbance to foraging terns following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposals, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in populations and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying features within the site

Qualifying features affected:

Common tern, little tern, Sandwich tern (Solent and Dorset Coast SPA).

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

Where terns forage in subtidal waters there is sufficient separation between the trail/margin and the birds so that significant disturbance is avoided. However, in certain locations, particularly lagoons and harbours, foraging terns are brought closer to the trail. Therefore, we have focussed on these areas for the assessment. The detailed design of the access proposals in relation to pressure from disturbance to foraging terns is considered in sections D3.2B, D3.2G and D3.2J of this assessment. In summary, relevant design features include:

- At Bembridge Harbour the trail is aligned along existing IOWCP. Lagoons adjacent to Embankment Road are landward of the trail and separated by buildings and existing vegetation. Interpretation panels at Bembridge Causeway will inform walkers of the wildlife sensitivities and ask them to keep dogs out of the intertidal area.
- At Newtown Harbour the trail follows an existing promoted route at Newtown Quay. The lagoons are landward of the trail so are not in the coastal margin and no new access rights are created. Information panels will be installed to request that dogs are not allowed to enter the lagoons.

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

At Bembridge and Newtown, the lagoons are landward of the trail and so are not within the coastal margin. At Bembridge the lagoons are screened from the trail so no additional disturbance is likely. Whilst the lagoons at Newtown Harbour are not screened, the route here follows an existing promoted footpath, and so the introduction of the ECP is not likely to lead to a significant uplift in use.

The trail across Bembridge Harbour and at Newtown Quay is on existing raised walkways with mudflat either side, so people stay on the path. However, signage and interpretation will encourage walkers to keep their dogs out of the lagoons and intertidal areas, to reduce the risk of disturbance to foraging terns.

The Solent and Dorset Coast SPA has an objective to restrict the frequency, duration and / or intensity of disturbance affecting foraging birds so that they are not significantly disturbed. The access proposals have been designed with this is mind and for the reasons explained in D3.2B, G & J, including the design features of the access proposals summarised above, we conclude they support the objective to restrict disturbance to foraging terns, and as such will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.

Are there residual effects?

No, the access proposals will not result in recreational activities that have appreciable adverse effects on the foraging success of terns.

Disturbance of non-breeding waterbirds, breeding terns and Mediterranean gull from construction works

Risk to conservation objectives:

Undertaking works to install access management infrastructure disturbs qualifying features causing temporary or enduring effects on their population and/or distribution within the site.

Qualifying features affected:

Black-tailed godwit, dark-bellied brent goose, ringed plover, teal, waterbird assemblage (all non-breeding features of Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site).

Common tern, little tern, Mediterranean gull (all breeding features of Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site).

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

Local Authority and contractors will adhere to the mitigation measures set out in Table 8 section D3.1 of this assessment.

In summary these are:

- Site design – operator to design access routes and storage areas to minimise disturbance, and to conduct operations out of sight of roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Timing of works – Local authority to plan schedule with Natural England to limit disturbance risk, avoiding the sensitive overwintering period where possible. If not possible, any work within 200m of, and visible to, a roost site will stop during the two hours before and after high tide. Construction activities only in daylight hours.
- Method – Use hand tools preferentially, where practicable. Percussive machinery avoided in overwintering periods or during the two hours before and after high tide.

Where there are works close to sensitive bird features, these are considered in detail at D3.2 B to G, I and J.

Can ‘no adverse effect’ on site integrity be ascertained?

Solent & Southampton Water SPA has site conservation objectives to reduce the frequency, duration and / or intensity of disturbance caused by human activity affecting its non-breeding waterbird qualifying features (black-tailed godwit, dark-bellied brent goose, ringed plover, teal and a waterbird assemblage) and breeding tern and Mediterranean gull qualifying features (common tern, little tern and Mediterranean gull are relevant for the Isle of Wight).

For the reasons explained in D3.2 B to G, I and J, and including the mitigation measures summarised above, we conclude that the proposed construction works will not hinder the achievement of these targets. Therefore, an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA can be ruled out.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the SAC and SPA objectives. In respect of non-breeding and breeding birds we consider that the same conclusions as for the SPA apply to the Ramsar site.

Are there residual effects?

No, disturbance from construction works associated with establishing ECP will not lead to appreciable temporary or lasting adverse effects on the population and/or distribution of non-breeding waterbirds, breeding terns and Mediterranean gull within the site.

Damage to coastal habitats and associated rare wetland invertebrate or plant species following changes in access

Risk to conservation objectives:

Changes in type, pattern and/or intensity of recreational activities as a result of the access proposal causes damage to, or a reduction in the extent and distribution of, qualifying natural habitats and/or associated assemblages of rare, vulnerable or endangered invertebrate or plants such as by trampling.

Qualifying features affected:

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards, Atlantic salt meadows, annual vegetation of drift lines, perennial vegetation of stony banks, Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria ('White dunes'), estuaries (all qualifying features of Solent Maritime SAC).

Estuary, wetland invertebrate assemblage, wetland plant assemblage (Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site features).

Vegetated sea cliffs of Atlantic and Baltic coasts (South Wight Maritime SAC and Isle of Wight Downs SAC)

Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (Isle of Wight Downs SAC)

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

The detailed design of the access proposals in relation to pressure from damage to coastal habitats and associated rare wetland invertebrate or plant species is considered in sections D3.2C, D, E, F, H and I of this assessment. In summary, relevant design features include:

<u>Vegetated shingle:</u>

- Alignment along existing walked coast path and PRoW at Thorness Bay, and installing a new bridge into a pasture field to avoid part of the beach. (D3.2I)

- Alignment of trail avoiding spit, and S26 nature conservation exclusion, at Hamstead Dover, Newtown Harbour. (D3.2D)
- Alignment of trail avoiding Norton Spit, Yarmouth Harbour. (D3.2C)
- Interpretation panels and clear waymarking to encourage walkers to stay on the path.

Sand dunes

- A well-maintained path, following the existing IOWCP at Yarmouth, thereby avoiding the dunes at Norton Spit. Interpretation panels strategically placed where the route meets the PRoW on to the dunes to inform walkers of sensitivities and encourage walkers to stay on the path. (D2.3C)

Saltmarsh, including transitional habitats

- Under S25A of CRoW, access will be excluded to saltmarsh and mudflat as these areas are unsuitable for public access on foot.
- New boardwalk at Hamstead Quay will take walkers off the already damaged saltmarsh (D3.2D)
- Where new access is proposed at Western Haven, this is set back from the shoreline with a woodland buffer between the trail and intertidal habitats. Where necessary, stock fencing seaward of route (eg at Upper Hamstead Plantation) will ensure people and dogs stay on the path and avoid trampling of intertidal habitats or damage to transitional coastal woodland. (D3.2E)
- At Walter's Copse, Newtown Harbour, the trail is aligned inland to keep walkers away from saltmarsh. The exclusion to the margin will be extended to the tree line so that access is excluded from the upper saltmarsh. At Clamerkin the exclusion will follow the SAC boundary so that access is excluded from the upper saltmarsh and transitional woodland. (D3.2H)
- Interpretation panels strategically placed at Hamstead Quay, Newtown Quay, Western Haven and Walters Copse to inform walkers of sensitivities and discourage access on to habitat. (D3.2D, E, G, H)
- On the east side of the Medina, improvements to the condition of the path, including a section of boardwalk, will make it less likely people will seek alternative routes along the foreshore. (D3.2J)

Wetland invertebrate and plant assemblage

- A carefully aligned and well-maintained path that is easy to follow and avoids areas of sensitive wetland habitats. (D3.2C, D, E, H, I, J)
- S25 directions to exclude access from saltmarsh and mudflats as they are unsuitable for public access on foot. In certain areas at Newtown Harbour, these exclusions extend above Mean High Water to include transitional habitats.

Vegetated Maritime Cliffs

- A well-maintained path that is easy to follow and uses the route of the existing IOWCP apart from where land slips require the route to be realigned inland, eg at Bonchurch Landslip. (D3.1, p.51)

Chalk grassland

- A well-maintained path that is easy to follow and uses the route of the existing IOWCP on Tennyson Down, Compton Down, and West High Down as opposed to worn cliff top routes. (D3.1, p.51)

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

Solent Maritime SAC has site conservation objectives to:

- Maintain the presence, total extent and spatial distribution of intertidal mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide.
- Restore the range of *Spartina* swards including natural transitions with other saltmarsh types.
- Maintain the range and continuity of '*Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand' and 'Atlantic salt meadows' habitats and their natural transitions within saltmarsh types and to other habitats seaward and landward.
- Restore the total extent of saltmarsh features (*Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards, Atlantic salt meadows) to at least 1,095 hectares.
- Maintain the total extent of the annual vegetation of drift lines, perennial vegetation of stony banks features and shifting dunes with *Ammophila arenaria*.

The restore target is set to address long-term losses in the area of saltmarsh within the Solent that are thought to be due to a combination of sea level rise and associated coastal squeeze, a depleted sediment budget leading to a narrowing and lowering of the intertidal zone, together with die-back of *Spartina anglica* [6].

Damage to habitats because of trampling in sensitive areas can be managed by on site interventions that limit or reduce footfall from recreational activities away from established paths. The access proposals have been designed with this is mind and for the reasons explained in D3.2D, E, G, H, and J, including the design features of the access proposals summarised above, we conclude they will not have an adverse effect the achievement of the target to restore the extent of saltmarsh features. In addition, for the reasons set out in D3.2C, D and I, and summarised above, the access proposals will not have an adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent of vegetated shingle and sand dunes within the SAC.

The Isle of Wight Downs SAC has an objective to

- maintain and restore the total extent of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia)

Within this objective, maintenance will focus on existing calcareous grassland habitats; restore will focus on existing and recently scrub dominated areas where the reversion to calcareous grassland is considered feasible [22]. The ECP follows the route of the existing IOWCP across the chalk grassland habitat of the Isle of Wight Downs SAC. Much of this area is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW. Therefore, the introduction of the trail and associated margin will not be an additional draw for people to visit these already well-used areas, and the intensity and pattern of access is unlikely to significantly change. By using clear waymarking, we will encourage users to stick to the path and contain the trampling pressure along the trail. Therefore, the ECP proposals will not have an adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent of the chalk grassland habitat within the SAC.

The South Wight Maritime SAC has an objective to:

- maintain the total extent of vegetated sea cliffs of Atlantic and Baltic coasts

Where the ECP is within the South Wight Maritime SAC, it follows the route of the existing IOWCP, apart from at Bonchurch Landslip, where the route will be aligned inland for safety reasons. As the existing PRoW has been closed, there will be no net increase in trampling pressure on habitats. The steep terrain and existing vegetation mean that it is unlikely that the introduction of the coastal margin will lead to a change in use to the extent that habitats will be affected. Therefore, and as described in D3.1, the proposals will not have an adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent of vegetated maritime slope habitat.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent & Southampton Water SPA objectives. In respect of coastal habitats and associated rare wetland invertebrate or plant species we consider that the same conclusions as for the SAC apply to the Ramsar site.

Are there residual effects?

No, the access proposals will not result in trampling from recreational activities that has appreciable adverse effects on the extent or distribution of, qualifying natural habitats and/or associated assemblages of rare, vulnerable or endangered invertebrate or plants.

Damage to coastal habitats due to nutrient enrichment

Risk to conservation objectives:

Changes in type, pattern and/or intensity of dog walking activities as a result of the access proposal causes a change in the species composition of qualifying natural habitats due to nutrient enrichment from dog waste.

Qualifying features affected:

Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (Isle of Wight Downs SAC)

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

The trail alignment uses existing IOWCP on Tennyson Down, Compton Down, and West High Down (D3.1, p.52)

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

The Isle of Wight Downs SAC has objectives to:

- Maintain and restore the frequency/cover of the following undesirable species to no more than occasional or <5% (both as individual species and combined, and prevent changes in surface condition, soils, nutrient levels or hydrology which may encourage their spread.
- Maintain or restore the abundance of the typical species to enable each of them to be a viable component of the calcareous grassland feature.

The ECP follows the route of the existing IOWCP through the Isle of Wight Downs SAC. Much of this area is already dedicated as open access land under CRoW. Therefore, the introduction of the trail and associated margin will not be an additional draw for people to visit these already well-used areas, and the level and pattern of access by dog walkers is unlikely to significantly change. By using clear waymarking, we will encourage users to stick to the path and contain the any nutrient enrichment along the trail. Therefore, it can be concluded that the introduction of the trail and margin will not lead to a change in nutrient levels that could affect the species composition of chalk grassland habitat within the SAC. As such an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC can be ruled out.

Are there residual effects?

No, the access proposals will not result in nutrient enrichment from dog walking activities that has appreciable adverse effects on the species composition of chalk grassland habitat.

Loss of feature extent through installation of new access management infrastructure

Risk to conservation objectives:

The installation of new access management infrastructure above mean high water leads to a permanent reduction in the extent of habitat features.

Qualifying features affected:

Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards, Atlantic salt meadows, annual vegetation of drift lines, perennial vegetation of stony banks, estuaries (all qualifying features of Solent Maritime SAC).

Estuary, wetland invertebrate assemblage, wetland plant assemblage (Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site features).

Vegetated sea cliffs of Atlantic and Baltic coasts (South Wight Maritime SAC)

Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (Isle of Wight Downs SAC)

Relevant design features of the access proposals:

New access management infrastructure may be required where it is proposed to establish a new section of path, or to bring existing paths up to National Trail Quality Standards. New waymarkers and interpretation may also be needed.

A list of proposed infrastructure in the designated sites is set out at table 10 (p.136). Possible impacts are considered in relevant sections of the Appropriate Assessment, and an assessment of the cumulative impacts is set out at D3.2K. In summary:

- Where possible way markers and explanatory signage will be added to existing infrastructure
- Where additional infrastructure within designated sites is necessary, this is located in areas that do not support qualifying habitats.
- Replacement infrastructure and any resurfacing works will use the existing footprint wherever possible.
- The trail within the South Wight Maritime SAC is in areas of mapped as vegetated maritime slope habitat. The main impact is at Whale Chine where resurfacing works are necessary within the SAC. However, in this location the ECP follows the route of the existing IOWCP and the habitat is grassed road verge and scrub. Some repairs of steps are also required, but as these works are on the route of the existing IOWCP, will not result in additional habitat loss. (D3.2K)
- Within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC, the trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP but several new waymarker posts are necessary to encourage people follow the main route rather than other desire lines in the area. (D3.2K)
- At Hamstead, Newtown Harbour, the trail follows the route of the existing IOWCP within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. Works are needed to replace existing and install new boardwalk, and use aggregate to improve the surface of another section. The boardwalk will be designed to minimise the number of footings in the habitat and avoid impacting the hydrological functioning of the habitat. (D3.2D & K)

- The existing bridge at Aunt Emmy's creek (Western Haven, Newtown Harbour) will be removed to allow saltmarsh within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar to re-establish. The new bridge will be further upstream to avoid loss of saltmarsh. It will be designed to minimise the number of footings in the mudflat habitat, minimise shading and avoid any hydrological impacts. Any dead wood that needs to be moved from the working width will be kept on site, as it provides valuable habitat for invertebrates. (D3.2E & K)
- At Thorness Bay, the new sleeper bridge within the Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar will be located to minimise the need to cut back the reedbed, and will be designed to avoid hydrological impacts on the habitat. New information panels will be situated adjacent to the existing PRoW on land that does not support qualifying habitats of the SPA or Ramsar site. (D3.2I & K)
- At the Medina, new boardwalk will be installed on the route of an existing PRoW within the Solent Maritime SAC and Solent & Southampton Water SPA/Ramsar. This is necessary to improve the footpath to National Trail standards. Due to the presence of the footpath and urban edge location, this part of the site does not support any qualifying features. (D3.2J & K)

The precise location of the infrastructure and installation method will be finalised at the establishment stage. Assessment of possible impacts on the European site will need to be checked and confirmed as part of the SSSI assenting process prior to works being carried out.

Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained?

Yes.

The South Wight Maritime SAC has an objective to:

- maintain the total extent of vegetated sea cliffs of Atlantic and Baltic coasts

The main impact on the SAC is at Whale Chine were there are 225m^2 of resurfacing works to the grassed road verge and scrub. The trail here follows the route of the existing IOWCP but upgrades are necessary to improve the safety of walkers given the presence of the road. Whilst this is within the SAC (the road forms the boundary of the designated site) the road, and associated maintenance of the verge, strongly influences the habitat and species composition. Therefore, the resurfacing is in a part of the site that can be considered site fabric due to the presence of the road, the existing IOWCP, and the fact that it does not contribute to the functioning of the maritime slope habitat. The additional 0.5m^2 impact on similarly non-functioning parts of the SAC (due to the presence of the existing PRoW or existing boundary features, as described in table 10), will not, individually or cumulatively, have an adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent of vegetated sea cliff habitat.

The Isle of Wight Downs SAC has an objective to

- maintain and restore the total extent of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia)

Within that objective, maintenance will focus on existing calcareous grassland habitats; restore will focus on existing and recently scrub dominated areas where the reversion to calcareous grassland is considered feasible [22].

There will be an impact on 0.03m^2 of habitat within the SAC, as a result of installation of waymarkers adjacent to the route of the existing IOWCP. As the route is well used and subject to existing trampling pressure, the posts will not cumulatively result in any significant habitat loss. Other path works within the SAC are to repair existing steps on the same footprint, and so will not result in additional habitat impacts. Overall, the infrastructure works are designed to create a trail that is safe to walk on and easy to follow, which will help manage the existing recreational pressure by encouraging walkers to stay on the main path rather than seeking alternative routes. Therefore, it can be concluded that the infrastructure works (described in table 10) will not have an adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent of chalk grassland habitat.

Solent Maritime SAC has site conservation objectives to:

- Restore the range of *Spartina* swards including natural transitions with other saltmarsh types.
- Maintain the range and continuity of '*Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand' and 'Atlantic salt meadows' habitats and their natural transitions within saltmarsh types and to other habitats seaward and landward.
- Restore the total extent of saltmarsh features (*Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand, *Spartina* swards, Atlantic salt meadows) to at least 1,095 hectares.
- Maintain the total extent of the annual vegetation of drift lines and perennial vegetation of stony banks features.
- Maintain the ability of annual vegetation of drift lines habitat to re-establish itself in response to coastal processes and re-colonise after natural events.
- Maintain the ability of perennial vegetation of stony banks to respond to natural seasonal or longer-term changes in extent of habitat.
- Restore the presence and spatial distribution of estuary communities.
- Restore the total extent and spatial distribution of the estuary to ensure no loss of integrity, whilst allowing for natural change and succession.

The restore target is set to address long-term losses in the area of saltmarsh within the Solent that are thought to be due to a combination of sea level rise and associated coastal squeeze, a depleted sediment budget leading to a narrowing and lowering of the intertidal zone, together with die-back of *Spartina anglica* [6].

The only area where coast path infrastructure potentially affects saltmarsh is at Hamstead where new and replacement boardwalks are necessary. However, this will not lead to any significant additional losses of saltmarsh vegetation because the trail here follows the route of the existing PRoW. The route of the trail does not, therefore, support saltmarsh plants due to the existing access, which has been in place since before the site was designated.

Furthermore, the infrastructure will help achieve the restore objective by ensuring walkers stay on the defined path, and allowing the adjacent saltmarsh to recover. In other parts of the SAC, the infrastructure proposed will not lead to the loss of any habitat currently, or capable of being restored to, saltmarsh habitat.

The other habitats for which the SAC is designated have objectives to maintain the extent and distribution [6]. The new bridge across Aunt Emmy's Creek, Western Haven, will result in a small loss of mudflat to the bridge footings, but the design of the bridge will minimise this as far as possible, and the hydrological function of the creek will not be affected. Other infrastructure is in areas that can be considered site fabric as they do not support SAC habitats now nor when the site was designated, due to the presence of existing PRoWs. Therefore, the cumulative impact on 41.98m^2 of the SAC will not adversely affect the conservation objective to maintain or restore qualifying habitats.

The Solent & Southampton Water SPA has an objective to:

- Maintain the extent and distribution of supporting habitats within the site.

The infrastructure proposed within the SPA is in locations where the habitat does not support SPA birds due to the presence of existing PRoWs, topography or current habitat being unsuitable (eg the presence of woodland). Therefore, the cumulative impact on 57.62m^2 of the SPA will not lead to the loss of any supporting habitat for birds, and hence no adverse effect on the objective to maintain the extent and distribution of supporting habitats.

Conservation objectives are not set individually for the Solent & Southampton Water Ramsar site, but are covered by the SAC and SPA objectives. In respect of estuary feature we consider that the same conclusions as for the SAC apply to the Ramsar site.

Are there residual effects?

No, the access proposals will not lead to an appreciable adverse effect on the area of qualifying habitat.

Conclusion:

The following risks to achieving the conservation objectives identified in D1 are effectively addressed by the proposals and no adverse effect on site integrity (taking into account any incorporated mitigation measures) can be concluded:

- Trampling of habitat and species following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposals leads to the reduction in the extent and distribution of qualifying and supporting habitats.
- Loss of species and habitat through installation of access management infrastructure may lead to the reduction in the extent and distribution of the qualifying natural habitats and habitats of the qualifying species
- Disturbance to forging behaviours, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduction in the abundance and distribution of the qualifying features within the site.
- Disturbance to breeding birds at their nesting site, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduction in the abundance and distribution of the qualifying features within the site.
- Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds with a breeding population, which following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying feature within the site.

The following risks to achieving the conservation objectives identified in D1 are effectively addressed by the proposals and no adverse effect on site integrity (taking into account any incorporated mitigation measures) can be concluded, although there is some residual risk of insignificant impacts which will be considered further in combination with other plans and projects:

- Disturbance to feeding and roosting non-breeding waterbirds, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of qualifying feature within the site.

D4 Assessment of potentially adverse effects considering the project 'in-combination' with other plans and projects

The need for further assessment of the risk of in-combination effects is considered here.

Natural England considers that it is the appreciable effects (from a proposed plan or project) that are not themselves considered to be adverse alone which must be further assessed to

determine whether they could have a combined effect significant enough to result in an adverse effect on site integrity.

Residual risk of insignificant impacts from the access proposals

Natural England considers that in this case the potential for adverse effects from the access proposals has not been wholly avoided by the incorporated or additional mitigation measures outlined in section D3. It is therefore considered that there are residual and appreciable effects likely to arise from this project which have the potential to act in-combination with those from other proposed plans or projects. These are:

Table 11. Residual risk of insignificant impacts from the access proposals

Residual risk	Qualifying features affected (nb = non-breeding)
The access proposals modify how the site and surrounding areas are used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to foraging or resting non-breeding waterbirds which may lead to reduced fitness and reduction in their population and/or distribution within the site.	Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site ■ Dark-bellied brent geese (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Black tailed godwit (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)

Combinable risks arising from other live plans or projects

In this section we consider other live plans or projects we are aware of, that might interact with the access proposals, to identify any insignificant and combinable effects that have been highlighted in corresponding Habitats Regulations Assessments.

Table 12. 1Review of other live plans and projects

Competent Authority	Plan or project	Have any insignificant and combinable effects been identified?
Isle of Wight Council	Isle of Wight local Plan 2012 - 2027	**No**. The Appropriate Assessment associated with the plan considers the risk of recreational pressure to qualifying features of all European sites. The plan concludes that is avoidance and mitigation measures are implemented successfully there will be no likely significant effects on the European sites. There is a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy which has developed into the Bird Aware Solent project. As a result, the Appropriate Assessment concludes no adverse effect alone or in combination.
Isle of Wight Council	Draft Island Planning Strategy (July 2021	**No** This is an update to the Local Plan described above. The proposal is to make provision for 7290 additional

	version) Consulted on in Oct 2021.	dwellings over the 15 year plan period. 4862 of these are located within the zone of influence of the Solent & Southampton Water SPA and so will add to the recreational pressure at this site if not mitigated. The housing is distributed proportionally according to the current size of the settlement, ie the bulk of the housing allocations are in Newport and Ryde, with smaller allocations in Cowes, East Cowes, Freshwater and Sandown. This means that the predicted visitor distribution pattern, modelled for Bird Aware Solent, is unlikely to change significantly. Within the draft plan are two key priority sites: Camp Hill (1,200 dwellings next to Parkhurst Forest) and Newport Harbour (250 dwellings). Camp Hill is within easy driving distance of Newtown Harbour, and Newport Harbour is on the Medina. A draft HRA has been produced which concludes no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites due to mitigation measures to minimise recreational disturbance. The primary mitigation is via Bird Aware Solent. However, the policy for Camp Hill requires additional bespoke mitigation in the form of onsite greenspace to provide alternative recreational opportunities for residents.
Environment Agency	Shoreline Management Plan (2010)	**No.** Findings determined the IOW SMP2 will have an adverse effect of integrity within the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site at Yarmouth Mill and Thorley of 31 ha in total. Compensatory habitat creation was necessary to comply with the Habitats Regulations. In light of this, no significant or combinable effects from the plan have been identified.
Isle of Wight Council 19/00193/HOU	Demolition and replacement of slipway, Seaview	**No.** The application was granted as there was no likely significant effect or combinable affects from the proposal identified. No additional habitat would be lost and the proposal would not increase waterborne recreational disturbance.
Isle of Wight Council 19/01205/OUT	New commercial and leisure Park, Sandown	**No**. Application not yet determined and no HRA published yet. The proposal does not include residential accommodation and so will not add to the recreational pressure on nearby European sites.
Isle of Wight Council 19/00922/OUT	Community hub and business park, Ryde	**No**. Application not yet determined and no HRA published yet. The proposal includes residential dwellings and Natural England's advice is that financial contributions to Bird Aware Solent will be sufficient to mitigate recreational disturbance.
Isle of Wight Council 19/00804/OUT	Outline for residential development for 165	**No.** Environmental Impact Assessment may be required, Natural England have advised based on material submitted to date the proposed development

	dwelling, East Cowes	is not likely to significantly affect the notified features. It is likely that this development will adopt the SRMP policy of providing financial contribution towards mitigation impact from recreational use. As a result we conclude no adverse effect in-combination with England Coast Path proposals.
Isle of Wight Council P/00637/14	13 dwellings and shower facilities, Embankment Road, Bembridge	**No.** Approval has been granted on condition of payments to the Bird Aware Solent mitigation strategy, plus additional bespoke wardening given the proximity of the development to the designated site. With these measures, the Council determined that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the sites, and no residual effect. Therefore, there will be no in-combination effect
Isle of Wight Council TCP/01419/U, P/00102/14	Folly Works 14 business units and 99 dwellings, East Cowes	**No**. The application approval letter states no adverse effect of integrity in N2K sites if mitigation package suggested from the environmental assessment are agreed and applied. This includes: • Habitat creation which mimics other areas on the Medina such as Pinkmead which important to birds • 'bird island' will be re-profiled to provide bird roosts • Management company will provide warden/ranger functions within the community to engage with public and residents on season restrictions • Welcome packs will be provided to residents to engage them with wildlife interests • Interpretation centre will be built with a bird hide included which will be accessible at all times and manned by site managers • No construction was to commence until a detailed methodology of construction has been submitted. As a result no adverse effect of in-combination is identified.
Isle of Wight Council 20/01061/FUL	475 dwellings, café, surgery, offices, associated infrastructure, access and greenspace. Land South of Appley Road, North of Bullen Road and East of Hope Road,	**No** As this is a major development 400m from the SPA at Ryde, mitigation measures have been agreed comprising: financial contributions to Bird Aware Solent; 10ha onsite greenspace to provide an alternative recreational space for dog walkers; links to rights of way extending landwards away from the coast. Given these measures, the Council has concluded no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA and has not identified any residual effects.

	Ryde (West Acre Park)	
Natural England	Implementation of coastal access from Highcliffe to Calshot	**Yes.** The HRA for this stretch has identified the following insignificant and combinable risks: • Possible small increase in disturbance to breeding water birds.
	Implementation of coastal access from Calshot to Gosport	**Yes.** The HRA for this stretch has identified the following insignificant and combinable risks: • Possible small increase in disturbance to breeding water birds.
	Implementation of coastal access from Gosport to Portsmouth	**No.** Our proposals for coastal access between Gosport and Portsmouth may also affect designated sites on this stretch. We have previously made an assessment of our proposals for this stretch and no significant and combinable risks were identified in that assessment.
	Implementation of coastal access from Portsmouth to South Hayling	**Yes.** Natural England's HRA (published as part of the Access and Sensitive Features Appraisal) of coastal access proposal for Portsmouth to South Hayling recognised that parts of this stretch may be used by bird features of Solent and Southampton Water SPA. It was concluded that a small increase in disturbance to breeding terns & gulls and non-breeding waterbirds from recreational activities was possible as a result of these proposals, and that this could have residual and appreciable effects on site conservation objectives for Solent and Southampton Water SPA.
	Implementation of coastal access from South Hayling to East Head	**No.** There is no overlap with designated sites between this stretch and the Isle of Wight proposals. The SPA/Ramsar is not mentioned in the HRA. As a result no in-combination impacts have been identified.

In light of this review, we have identified insignificant and combinable effects are likely to arise from the following projects that have the potential to act in-combination with the access proposals:

Table 13. Insignificant and combinable effects from other projects

Risk	**Qualifying features affected** **(nb = non-breeding)**
ECP implementation – Highcliffe to Calshot The following combinable effects were identified:	<u>Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site</u> ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Dark-bellied brent goose (nb)

The access proposals modify how the site and surrounding areas are used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to foraging or resting non-breeding waterbirds which may lead to reduced fitness and reduction in their population and/or distribution within the site.	■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)
ECP implementation – Calshot to Gosport The following insignificant and combinable effects were identified: ■ Possible small increase in disturbance to non-breeding water birds.	<u>Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site</u> ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Dark-bellied brent goose (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)
ECP implementation – Portsmouth to Hayling The following combinable effects were identified: ■ Possible small increase in disturbance to non-breeding water birds.	<u>Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site</u> ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb) ■ Dark-bellied brent geese (nb) ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Teal (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb)

Assessment of in-combination effects

In light of the conclusions above, we have made an assessment of the risk of in combination effects. The results of this risk assessment, taking account of each qualifying feature of each site and in view of each site's Conservation Objectives, are as follows:

Table 14. Risk of in-combination effects

Qualifying Feature affected	In-combination pressure	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	Adverse effect in-comb?
<u>Solent and Southampton Water SPA/ Ramsar site</u> ■ Black-tailed godwit (nb) ■ Dark-bellied brent goose (nb) ■ Ringed plover (nb)	The combined effect of access proposals for Highcliffe to Calshot, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth to South Hayling and Calshot to Gosport modify how the site and surrounding areas are used for recreation, causing repeated disturbance to foraging or resting non-breeding waterbirds which may lead to reduced fitness and	Proposals for the ECP are divided into stretches and at earlier stages of the programme there was some uncertainty about the details of unmade proposals for the Solent region. The only outstanding section in the Solent region is the short section from East Cowes to Wootton Bridge on the Isle of Wight where discussions with those who have a legal interest in the land are ongoing at the time of writing. Because most proposals have	No

■ Teal (nb) ■ Waterbird assemblage (nb)	reduction in their population and/or distribution within the site.	now been made, it is possible to confirm that a full suite of access management measures have been incorporated into the detailed designs to avoid or mitigate possible impacts. To help ensure a consistent approach to establishment works across the Solent region, NE has commissioned Bird Aware Solent to advise on the design and placement of new information panels at key access points.	

The possibility of adverse effects arising in combination with other plans and projects is thus ruled out.

D5. Conclusions on Site Integrity

Because the plan/project is not wholly directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European site and is likely to have a significant effect on that site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), Natural England carried out an Appropriate Assessment as required under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations to ascertain whether or not it is possible to conclude that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of a European Site(s).

Natural England has concluded that:

It can be ascertained, in view of site conservation objectives, that the access proposal (taking into account any incorporated avoidance and mitigation measures) will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar**,** Solent Maritime SAC; South Wight Maritime SAC; Isle of Wight Downs SAC; Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC; Briddlesford Copses SAC and Solent and Dorset Coast SPA either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) ('Habitats Regulations Assessment')

PART E: Permission decision with respect to European Sites

Natural England has a statutory duty under section 296 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. To fulfil this duty, Natural England is required to make proposals to the Secretary of State under section 51 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. In making proposals, Natural England, as the relevant competent authority, is required to carry out a HRA under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations.

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Wootton Creek and East Cowes are fully compatible with the relevant European site conservation objectives. It is open to the Secretary of State to consider these proposals and make a decision about whether to approve them, with or without modifications. If the Secretary of State is minded to modify our proposals, further assessment under the Habitats Regulations may be needed before approval is given.

Certification

HRA prepared by:

Name: Alison Giacomelli Senior Ornithologist, Specialist Services	Date: 1 June 2022

HRA approved by:

Name: Graham Horton Manager, Thames Solent Area Team	Date: 17 June 2022

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Appendix 1. New data and evidence collected

The following new data and evidence has been taken into account when revising and updating in this assessment:

Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data

Updated WeBS counts for sectors on the Isle of Wight [12].

Latest WeBS Alerts for the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and constituent SSSIs [13]

The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) Data

The SWBGS 2020 strategy, published in 2020 [11]

SWBGS site classifications and survey data (2010-2019 Positive and Negative records)

SWBGS movement studies

Data provided by the National Trust

Meeting with National Trust staff and volunteers on 15 September 2020 and subsequent follow-up correspondence provided information on access management at Newtown Harbour. The National Trust also provided numbers and detailed locations of the feeding, roosting and breeding birds of Newtown Harbour

Bird Aware Solent

Meeting on 8 June 2021 to discuss mitigation measures.

Natural England site visits

- Site visit on 22 March 2021 to Bembridge Harbour and Yarmouth Harbour by the HRA author
- Site visits on 23 March, 19 May and 9 June 2021 to Newtown Harbour by the HRA author and ECP stretch lead
- Site visits on 8 Sept 2021 and 3 March 2022 to Newtown Harbour by HRA author, ECP stretch lead and S Jenkinson[13], to inform report on people and dog management.
- Site visit on 2 Nov 2021 to Walter's Copse and Clamerkin Fields, and on 3 March 2022 to Shalfleet Fields, Newtown Harbour, to discuss proposals with the National Trust.
- Site visit on 20 May 2021 to Thorness Bay by HRA author.
- Site visit on 9 June 2021 to the Medina Estuary by HRA author.

[13] Consultant with expertise in access management providing advice to Natural England on how to best manage recreational access for people, and particularly those with dogs.

Appendix 2: Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy Classification List and Definitions

The following list defines the terms used to classify fields across the Solent under the in-preparation 2018 SWBGS (HIOWWT, 2018). As the strategy is still being prepared the below terms and definitions are subject to change.

Core Sites: These are considered essential to the continued function of the Solent Wader and Brent Goose ecological network and have the strongest functionally-linkage to the designated Solent SPAs in terms of their frequency and continuity of use by SPA features.

Primary Support Sites: Contain land that, when in suitable management, make an important contribution to the function of the Solent Wader and Brent Goose ecological network.

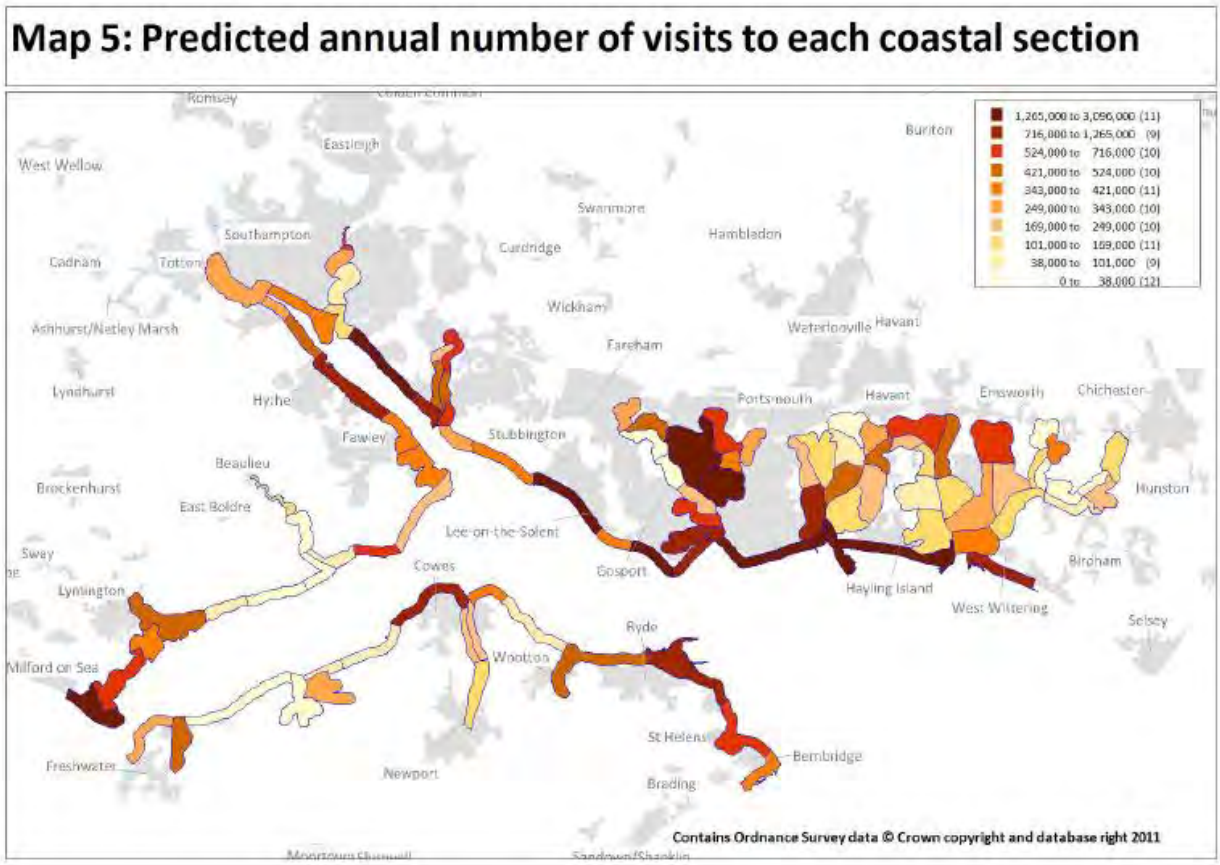
Secondary Support Sites: Offer a supporting function to the Core and Primary Support ecological network, but are generally used less frequently by significant numbers of SPA geese and waders. These sites become important when wader or brent goose populations are higher or when the habitat is in suitable management.

Low Use Sites: sites have the potential to be used by waders or brent geese. These sites have the potential to support the existing network and provide alternative options and resilience for the future network.

Candidate Sites: Sites that have records of high numbers of birds (max count equal to or greater than 100) and/or a total score equal to or greater than 3 but have less than 3 records in total

SPA Sites: sites within the SPA area that have bird records and form part of the ecological network

Appendix 3: Predicted annual number of visits to each section of coast in the Solent



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Appendix 4: Replacement infrastructure within SAC/SPA or Ramsar – published proposals

Location	Infrastructure item & length	SAC/SPA/Ramsar
Bembridge causeway	bridge upgrade	SPA & Ramsar
Luccombe landslip	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC
Luccombe landslip	Replace exiting stone steps with stone steps	SAC
Luccombe landslip	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC
Luccombe landslip	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC
Niton, Sandrock Road	replace existing steps with timber retaining steps	SAC
Chale Bay	Replace existing wooden footbridge (5m)	SAC
Shepherd's Chine	replace existing steps with timber retaining steps	SAC
Shepherd's Chine	replace existing steps with timber retaining steps	SAC
Hamstead Dover	replace high boardwalk (65m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Dover	replace stile with kissing gate	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Replace boardwalk (4m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Replace boardwalk (30m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Replace boardwalk (20m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Replace boardwalk (2.5m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Replace boardwalk (39m)	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Hamstead Quay	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Western Haven	Removal of old bridge	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
Newtown Salt Works	Surface works - aggregate/stabilised gravel	SAC & SPA & Ramsar

Thorness Bay	replace bridge with new bridge into field (13m)	SPA & Ramsar
The Medina	Replace footbridge (5m) like for like	SAC & SPA & Ramsar
The Medina	Replace steps (5m) like for like	SAC & SPA & Ramsar

Appendix 5: Photos of Hamstead Quay