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England Coast Path Stretch: Grain to Woolwich

Report GWO 1: Grain to Allhallows



Part 1.1: Introduction

Start Point:	Grain Esplanade (Grid reference 588926 177004)
End Point:	Allhallows Leisure Park (Grid reference 583119 178752)
Relevant Maps:	GWO 1a to GWO 1e

1.1.1 This is one of a series of linked but legally separate reports published by Natural England under section 51 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, which make proposals to the Secretary of State for improved public access along and to this stretch of coast between Grain and Woolwich.

1.1.2 This report covers length GWO 1 of the stretch, which is the coast between Grain and Woolwich. It makes free-standing statutory proposals for this part of the stretch, and seeks approval for them by the Secretary of State in their own right under section 52 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

1.1.3 The report explains how we propose to implement the England Coast Path ("the trail") on this part of the stretch, and details the likely consequences in terms of the wider 'Coastal Margin' that will be created if our proposals are approved by the Secretary of State. Our report also sets out:

- any proposals we think are necessary for restricting or excluding coastal access rights to address particular issues, in line with the powers in the legislation; and
- any proposed powers for the trail to be capable of being relocated on particular sections ("rollback"), if this proves necessary in the future because of coastal change.

1.1.4 There is also a single Overview document for the whole of this stretch of coast, explaining common principles and background. This and the other individual reports relating to the stretch should be read in conjunction with the Overview. The Overview explains, among other things, how we have considered any potential environmental impacts of improving public access to this part of the coast, and this report, and other separately published assessments we refer to, then provides more detail on these aspects where appropriate.

Part 1.2: Proposals Narrative

The trail:

1.2.1 Generally follows existing walked routes, including public rights of way, along most of this length.

1.2.2 Mainly follows the coastline quite closely and maintains good views of Yantlet Creek and the Thames Estuary.

1.2.3 Includes 14 sections of new path, at Grain and across Yantlet Creek. See Map GWO 1b and associated tables below for details.

1.2.4 At GWO-1-S001 to GWO-1-S019 (maps GWO 1a and GWO 1b), a significant inland diversion is necessary to avoid the disused and unrestored sand and gravel pit with its associated health and safety risks, as well as the important wildlife sites in and adjacent to North Level and Grain Marshes.

Protection of the environment:

1.2.5 In this part of the report, we explain how we have taken account of environmental protection objectives in developing our proposals for improved coastal access.

1.2.6 The following designated sites affect this length of coast (See Overview Maps C and D):

- Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar site
- South Thames Estuary and Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Coastal artillery defences on the Isle of Grain Scheduled Monument (SM)
- Second World War QF P-series oil bombing decoy SM
- Slough Fort and wing batteries SM

The following table brings together design features of our access proposals that will help to protect the environment along this length of the coast.

1.2.7 Measures to protect the environment

Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Design features of the access proposals	Reason included
Maps GWO 1a to GWO 1d	GWO-1- S001 to GWO-1- S023	 The following design features are described elsewhere in this report: The trail at Grain is aligned inland. Coastal access rights would be excluded over the marshes and shoreline at Grain (see para 1.2.19 and 1.2.20 and Directions Map GWO 1B). In addition, we will install: 	To prevent disturbance, by recreational users, of wintering and on passage birds which are found roosting and feeding at high tide along the shoreline of Grain and Yantlet Creek. To prevent disturbance and trampling, by recreational users, of nests of breeding birds which are found along the shoreline of Grain

Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Design features of the access proposals	Reason included
		An advisory sign and interpretation panel at Yantlet Creek and the Allhallows shoreline (map GWO 1d) explaining the sensitivity of the site and asking people to keep to the path and observe the requirement to keep dogs under close control.	and in the marshes of Grain and Allhallows.

1.2.8 Natural England is satisfied that the proposals for coastal access in this report are made in accordance with relevant environmental protection legislation. In respect of the cultural environment, we have taken advice from Historic England and others before confirming this conclusion. For more information about how we came to this conclusion in respect of the natural environment; see the following assessments of the access proposals that we have published separately:

- A Habitats Regulations Assessment relating to any potential impact on the conservation objectives of European sites.
- Our Nature Conservation Assessment, in which we document our conclusions in relation to other potential impacts on nature conservation.

Part 6b of the Overview includes some contextual information about protecting the environment along this length of coast.

Accessibility:

1.2.9 There are few artificial barriers to accessibility on the proposed route. However, the natural coastal terrain is often challenging for people with reduced mobility and this is the case on sections of our proposed route because:

- The trail would follow an uneven grass or bare soil path along the top of the seawalls;
- There are steps in places where it would be necessary to ascend/descend.

1.2.10 Existing stiles along the Allhallows footpath will be replaced or improved, so as to make the trail easier to use (see maps GWO 1d and GWO 1e). We envisage this happening as part of the physical establishment work described below.

See part 6a of the Overview - 'Recreational issues' - for more information.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

1.2.11 Estuary: This report proposes that the trail should contain sections aligned on the estuary of the River Thames and its tributaries, extending upstream from the open coast. Natural England proposes to exercise its functions as if the sea included the estuarial waters of that river as far as *the Woolwich Foot Tunnel in the Royal Borough of Greenwich*, as indicated by the extent of the trail shown on map GWO 6h.

See part 5 of the Overview for a detailed analysis of the options considered for this estuary and our resulting proposals.

1.2.12 **Landward boundary of the coastal margin:** We have used our discretion on some sections of the route to map the landward extent of the coastal margin to an adjacent physical boundary such as a fence line, pavement or track to make the extent of the new access rights clearer. See Table 1.3.1 below.

1.2.13 The Proposals Tables show where we are proposing to alter the default landward boundary of the coastal margin. These proposals are set out in columns 5b and 5c of table 1.3.1. Where these columns are left blank, we are making no such proposals, so the default landward boundary applies. See the note relating to Columns 5b & 5c (above Table 1.3.1) explaining what this means in practice.

See also part 3 of the Overview - 'Understanding the proposals and accompanying maps', for a more detailed explanation of the default extent of the coastal margin and how we may use our discretion to adjust the margin, either to add land or to provide clarity.

1.2.14 **Restrictions and/or exclusions:** We have proposed to exclude access by direction under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) in certain places along this section of coast.

Exclusion of access to the saltmarsh/flat at Grain and Allhallows.

1.2.15 Access to the mudflat and saltmarsh in the coastal margin seaward of route sections GWO-1-S001 to GWO-1-S027 is to be excluded all year round by direction under section 25A of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) as it is unsuitable for public access. The exclusion does not affect the route itself and will have no legal effect on land where coastal access rights do not apply. See Directions Maps GWO 1A and 1B.

1.2.16 The mudflat in this area is soft and sinking. It does not provide a safe walking surface and is subject to frequent tidal inundation. Areas of saltmarsh have deep channels and creeks, some of which would not be readily apparent to walkers and can pose a significant risk.

Exclusion of access at the disused and unrestored sand and gravel pit at Grain

1.2.17 Access is to be excluded all year round at the disused and unrestored sand and gravel pit, adjacent to route sections GWO-1-S001 to GWO-1-S007 under s25(1)(b) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) for the purposes of ensuring public safety from the hidden hazards of an unrestored sand and gravel pit, including risks associated with the deep water bodies on site. This exclusion will not affect the route itself and will have no legal effect on land where coastal access rights do not apply. See Directions Map GWO 1A.

1.2.18 This site has dangers which are not immediately clear, including deep quarried pools with steep slumping sides and cold standing water. Such features present a danger to human health and cannot adequately be managed informally.

Exclusion of access to the marshes and beaches at the north coast of the Isle of Grain

1.2.19 Access is to be excluded on the marshes and beaches along the north coast of the Isle of Grain, between route section GWO-1-S008 and GWO-1-S017 by direction under s26(3)(a) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) all year to avoid disturbance to significant populations of breeding birds and internationally important numbers of on-passage and wintering birds. The exclusion does not affect the route itself and will have no legal effect on land where coastal access rights do not apply. See Directions Map GWO 1A.

1.2.20 Protected birds use the beaches and grazing marsh north of Grain village year round. Grain is favoured by large numbers of wintering black-tailed godwit, oystercatchers, dunlin and knot and on passage black-tailed godwit for roosting. The beaches north of Grain have records of breeding ringed plover and oystercatcher. The Nature Conservation Assessment and the Habitats Regulation Assessment for the site concluded that allowing access would cause a significant effect by disturbing the internationally-protected bird species using the site. These Assessments will be published alongside this report.

1.2.21 These directions will not prevent or affect:

- any existing local use of the land by right: such use is not covered by coastal access rights;
- any other use people already make of the land locally by formal agreement with the landowner, or by informal permission or traditional toleration; or
- use of any registered rights of common or any rights at common law or by Royal Charter etc.

Any such use is not prohibited or limited by these arrangements.

1.2.22 The directions we give under section 25 are intended to avoid any new public rights being created over the areas in question in view of the hidden dangers of mudflats and salt marsh (section 25A) as well as the hidden risks from deep water bodies on the disused and unrestored sand and gravel pit (section 25(1)(b)).

See part 8 of the Overview - 'Restrictions and exclusions' - for a summary for the entire stretch.

1.2.23 **Coastal erosion:** Natural England is able to propose that the route of the trail would be able to change in the future, without further approval from the Secretary of State, in response to coastal change. This would happen in accordance with the criteria and procedures for 'roll-back' set out in part 7 of the Overview.

Natural England may only propose the use of this roll-back power:

- as a result of coastal erosion or other geomorphological processes or encroachment by the sea, or
- in order to link with other parts of the route that need to roll back in direct response to such changes.

1.2.24 Column 4 of tables 1.3.1 indicates where roll-back has been proposed in relation to a route section. Where this is the case, the route, as initially determined at the time the report was prepared, is to be at the centre of the line shown on maps GWO 1a to GWO 1e as the proposed route of the trail.

1.2.25 If at any time in the future any part of a route section upon which roll-back has been specified needs, in Natural England's view, to change in order for the overall route to remain viable, the new route for the part in question will be determined by Natural England without further reference to the Secretary of State. This will be done in accordance with the criteria and procedures described under the title 'Roll-back' in part 7 of the Overview and section 4.10 of the Coastal Access Scheme. If this happens, the new route will become the approved route for that section for the purposes of the Order which determines where coastal access rights apply.

On sections for which roll-back is <u>not</u> proposed in tables 1.3.1, the route is to be at the centre of the line shown on maps GWO 1a to GWO 1e as the proposed route of the trail.

1.2.26 We are aware that stretches of seawall along this low lying coast have been shortlisted for future 'managed re-alignment' within local Shoreline Management Plans. The exact locations and timings are

currently being refined as part of the Thames Estuary 2100 Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy. The trail is likely to be adjusted to follow any new seawall or re-alignment design.

Other future change:

1.2.27 At the time of preparing the report, we do not foresee any need for significant future changes to the access provisions that we have proposed within this report. Some temporary measures to ensure the continuity of the trail may be required along West Lane during the construction of an electricity converter station near Perry's Farm (map GWO 1a).

See parts 7 - 'Future changes' of the Overview for more information.

Establishment of the trail:

1.2.28 Below we summarise how our proposed route for the trail would be physically established to make it ready for public use before any new rights come into force.

Establishment works will only start on this length of coast once these proposals have been approved by the Secretary of State. The works may therefore either precede or follow the start of establishment works on other lengths of coast within the stretch, and detailed in their separate reports.

1.2.29 Our estimate of the capital costs for physical establishment of the trail on the proposed route is $\pounds 8,309$ and is informed by:

- information already held by the access authority, Medway Council, in relation to the management of the existing public rights of way;
- the conclusions of our deliberations in relation to potential impacts on the environment; and
- information gathered while visiting affected land and talking to the people who own and manage it about the options for the route.

1.2.30 There are three main elements to the overall cost:

- New Signs: A significant number of new signs would be needed on the trail, in particular on route sections where the proposed route differs from that of the existing public right of way network. New road safety signs will also be installed where the route is aligned on a road and new interpretation panels are required as part of the proposed mitigation detailed in the Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- New steps will be installed where we are proposing new access on a seawall.
- New gates and barriers are needed where we are introducing new access. The surfaces and access furniture of the existing paths and footways on the proposed route are generally of a suitable standard for the trail, but there are some places where replacing step stiles with pedestrian gates would enhance the convenience of the trail.

Significant infrastructure items are shown on the relevant maps accompanying this report. Table 1 shows our estimate of the capital cost for each of the main elements of physical establishment described above.

Table 1: Estimate of capital costs

Item	Cost
Signs & interpretation	£4,504
Steps	£350
Gates and barriers	£2,371
Project management	£1,084

Total£8,309 (Exclusive of any VAT payable)

1.2.31 Once the Secretary of State's decision on our report has been notified, and further to our conversations with land managers during the route planning stage, Medway Council will liaise with affected land owners and occupiers about relevant aspects of the design, installation and maintenance of the new signs and infrastructure that are needed on their land. Prior to works being carried out on the ground, all necessary permissions, authorisations and consents will be obtained. All such works would conform to the published standards for National Trails and the other criteria described in our Coastal Access Scheme.

Maintenance of the trail:

1.2.32 Because the trail on this length of coast will form part of the National Trail being created around the whole coast of England called the England Coast Path, we envisage that it will be maintained to the same high quality standards as other National Trails in England (see The New Deal; Management of National Trails in England from April 2013: details at Annex A of the Overview).

1.2.33 We estimate that the annual cost to maintain the trail will be £3545 (exclusive of any VAT payable). In developing this estimate we have taken account of the formula used to calculate Natural England's contribution to the maintenance of other National Trails.

Part 1.3: Proposals Tables

See Part 3 of Overview for guidance on reading and understanding the tables below

1.3.1 Section Details – Maps GWO 1a to GWO 1e: Grain to Allhallows

Key notes on table:

- 1. Column 2 an asterisk (*) against the route section number means see also table 1.3.2: Other options considered.
- Column 4 'No' means no roll-back is proposed for this route section. 'Yes normal' means rollback is proposed and is likely to follow the current feature (e.g. cliff edge/beach) for the foreseeable future as any coastal change occurs.
- 3. Column 4 'Yes see table 1.3.3' means roll-back is proposed, but refer to that table below about our likely approach to implementing it for this route section. This is because a more complex situation exists in this case and consideration must be given to how roll-back may happen in relation to excepted land, a protected site etc.
- 4. Column 5a Certain coastal land types are included automatically in the coastal margin where they fall landward of the trail if they touch it at some point. The relevant land type (foreshore, cliff, bank, barrier, dune, beach, flat or section 15 land see Glossary) is shown in this column where appropriate. "No" means none present on this route section.
- 5. Columns 5b and 5c Any entry in these columns means we are proposing to align the landward boundary of the coastal margin on this route section with the physical feature(s) shown in 5b, for the reason in 5c. No text here means that for this route section the landward edge of the margin would be that of the trail itself or if any default coastal land type is shown in 5a, that would be its landward boundary instead.

1	2	3	4	5a	5b	5c	6
Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Current status of route section(s)	Roll-back proposed? (See Part 7 of Overview)	Landward margin contains coastal land type?	Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin (See maps)	Reason for landward boundary proposal	Explanatory notes
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S001*	Other existing walked route	Yes - Normal	No	Path edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S002*	Public highway	Yes - Normal	No	Landward edge of road	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S003* to GWO-1- S004*	Public highway	No	No	Landward edge of road	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S005*	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S006* and GWO-1- S007*	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 1.3.3	No	Landward edge of road	Clarity and cohesion	

1	2	3	4	5a	5b	5c	6
Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Current status of route section(s)	Roll-back proposed? (See Part 7 of Overview)		Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin (See maps)	Reason for landward boundary proposal	Explanatory notes
GWO 1a	GWO-1- S008*	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1b	GWO-1- S009* to GWO-1- S012*	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1b	GWO-1- S013* to GWO-1- S015*	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 1.3.3	No	Track edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 1b	GWO-1- S016 to GWO-1- S019	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1c	GWO-1- S020 to GWO-1- S021	Public footpath	Yes – see table	Yes - bank			
GWO 1d	GWO-1- S022	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1d	GWO-1- S023	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1d	GWO-1- S024	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1e	GWO-1- S025	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	Yes - bank			
GWO 1e	GWO-1- S026	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	No			
GWO 1e	GWO-1- S027	Public footpath	Yes – see table 1.3.3	No	Fence	Clarity and cohesion	

1.3.2 Other options considered: Maps GWO 1a to GWO 1e: Grain to Allhallows

Map(s)	Route section numbers(s)	Other option(s) considered	Reasons for not proposing this option
GWO 1a and 1b	GWO-1- S001 to GWO-1- S015	We considered a number of options to align the trail along the north coast of the Isle of Grain. This included alignments both along the seaward edge and through the disused and unrestored sand and gravel pit, as well as alignments both around the seawalls and through the marshes of North Level and Grain Marsh. No other options were identified for the trail in relation to these maps.	 We opted for the proposed route because: Advice from Medway Council raised concerns in relation to managing public safety within the disused sand and gravel pit, especially in relation to its deep, unrestored water bodies. It avoids disturbance to areas of national and international importance for the overwintering, feeding and breeding of resident and migratory birds. It provides some long reaching views of the coast. we concluded that overall the proposed route struck the best balance in terms of the criteria described in chapter 4 of the Coastal Access Scheme

Note: Any public rights of way not forming part of the proposed trail would remain available for people to use under their pre-existing rights.

1.3.3 Roll-back implementation – more complex situations: Maps GWO 1a to GWO 1e: Grain to Allhallows

Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Feature(s) or site(s) potentially affected	Our likely approach to roll-back
GWO 1a	GWO-1-S006 to GWO-1- S008	Farmland	Stretches of seawall along this low lying coast have been shortlisted for future 'managed re-alignment' within local Shoreline Management Plans. The exact locations are currently being refined as part of the Thames Estuary 2100 Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy. The trail is likely to be adjusted to follow any new seawall or re-alignment design. If this is not appropriate, we will look for a different alignment. In the event that it is not possible to find a viable route seaward of the leisure park or farmland, we will choose a new route after detailed discussions with all relevant interests, either (a) to pass through the leisure park/farmland, or (b) if this is not practicable or interferes with the operation of the leisure park, to pass somewhere on the landward side of it. In reaching this judgement we will have full regard to the need to seek a fair balance between the interests of potentially affected owners and occupiers and those of

Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Feature(s) or site(s) potentially affected	Our likely approach to roll-back
			the public. The details of any roll back with be subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment.
GWO 1b	GWO-1-S009 to GWO-1- S019	Farmland, South Thames Estuary and Marshes SSSI, SPA, & Ramsar	As above
GWO 1c	GWO-1-S020 to GWO-1- SO21	Farmland, South Thames Estuary and Marshes SSSI, SPA, & Ramsar	As above
GWO 1d to GWO 1e	GWO-1-S022 to GWO-1- SO27	Farmland, Leisure Park, South Thames Estuary and Marshes SSSI, SPA, & Ramsar	As above

In relation to all other sections where roll-back has been proposed, any later adjustment of the trail is likely to follow the current feature (e.g. cliff edge/beach) for the foreseeable future as any coastal change occurs.

Part 1.4: Proposals Maps

1.4.1 Map Index

Map reference	Map title
GWO 1a	Grain Esplanade to Rosecourt Farm
GWO 1b	Rosecourt Farm to Yantlet Creek
GWO 1c	Yantlet Creek to Allhallows Marshes
GWO 1d	Allhallows Marshes to Allhallows-on-Sea
GWO 1e	Allhallows-on-Sea to Allhallows Leisure Park
Directions Map GWO 1A	Directions for Report GWO 1: Grain to Allhallows.
Directions Map GWO 1B	Directions for Report GWO 1: Grain to Allhallows.



Map GWO 1a: Grain Esplanade to Rosecourt Farm

Explanatory note: coastal margin



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Map GWO 1b: Rosecourt Farm to Yantlet Creek





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Map GWO 1c: Yantlet Creek to Allhallows Marshes





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Map GWO 1d: Allhallows Marshes to Allhallows-on-Sea





Map GWO 1e: Allhallows-on-Sea to Allhallows Leisure Park



Coastal Access - Grain to Woolwich - Natural England's Proposals Report GWO 1: Grain to Allhallows **Directions Map GWO 1A**

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Coastal Access - Grain to Woolwich - Natural England's Proposals Report GWO 1: Grain to Allhallows

Directions Map GWO 1B

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