



**Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access
Proposals between Aust and Brean Down**

**Assessment of Coastal Access Proposals between
Aust and Brean Down
on sites and features of nature conservation concern**

25 July 2019



Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Aust and Brean Down

About this document

This document should be read in conjunction with the published Reports for the Aust to Brean Stretch and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

The Coastal Access Reports contain a full description of the access proposals, including any additional mitigation measures that have been included. These Reports can be viewed here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-from-aust-to-brean-down-comment-on-proposals

A HRA is required for European sites (SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites). The HRA is published alongside the Coastal Access Reports.

This document, the Nature Conservation Assessment (NCA), covers all other aspects (including SSSIs, MCZs and undesignated but locally important sites and features) **in so far as any HRA does not already address the issue for the sites and feature(s) in question.**

The NCA is arranged site by site. Map A shows Sites of Special Scientific Interest along this stretch of coast.

See Annex 1 for an index to designated sites and features for this stretch of coast, including features that have been considered within any HRA.



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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Severn Estuary SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is within the boundary of the Severn Estuary Special Area for Conservation (SAC), the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Severn Estuary Ramsar site. In general the boundaries of the SSSI and the European sites is coincident. There are two minor differences:

- There is a small intertidal area at Royal Portbury Docks which is SSSI and SAC but not SPA or Ramsar - this area is not affected by the coast path proposals
- There are several fields between Wain's Hill, Clevedon and St Thomas Head which are SSSI, SPA and Ramsar but not SAC, because the interest features there are birds.

Both areas are included within the scope of the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Notified features of the SSSI that are also qualifying features of the European sites are omitted from this assessment – see Annex 1 for details of these features. Assessment of possible impacts on qualifying features of the European sites are made in the accompanying Habitats Regulation Assessment.

There are two remaining notified features of the SSSI – curlew *Numenius arquata* and grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. Both species were recommended for inclusion in the Severn Estuary SPA citation when it was reviewed and form part of the waterbird assemblage feature of the SPA. For these reasons they are considered in detail in the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment and no further assessment is necessary here.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **Yes.**

If yes, describe any special conditions that have been identified concerning how or when the works are to be carried out:

- Operator to design access routes, storage areas and site facilities to minimise disturbance impacts to waterbirds.
- Operator to conduct operations out of sight of waterbird roosting and feeding areas where possible.
- Local authority to plan works schedule with Natural England to limit waterbird 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.



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- 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.
- 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.
- Operator to follow Pollution Prevention Guidance PPG5

Where necessary, North Somerset Council, Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council will instigate the SSSI assent process by writing to us to confirm the timing of works and how operations to be undertaken in line with these conditions. Natural England will provide further advice as necessary.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Aust Cliff SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is within the boundary of the Severn Estuary SAC, the Severn Estuary SPA and the Severn Estuary Ramsar sites. It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD1 of the proposals.

Current situation

<p>Geological features of coastal cliffs and foreshore (EC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Marine Permian Triassic (Red Beds) • Palaeoentomology • Permian - Triassic Reptilia • Rhaetian 	<p>The site is designated exclusively for its geological interest. It was last assessed in 2009 and considered to be in favourable condition. It is easily accessible from New Passage Road and is a popular site to collect geological specimens including fossils. This activity is not considered to be damaging the features of interest. The definitions of favourable condition note that interpretation panels at the access points would enhance the site. There is currently a panel at the foot of the cliffs.</p>
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Risk analysis

The proposed route of the England Coast Path is outside the boundary of the SSSI on the fields above the site. The SSSI is within the coastal margin and would be subject to access rights. The near-vertical cliffs will continue to deter people from approaching from the cliff top, but access along the foot of the cliff will continue as currently. Fallen boulders on the beach provide easily accessible material for study, reducing the need for collectors to disturb the rock strata.

The notified features could be affected if works were proposed that could obscure the geological features. No such works are proposed. Therefore it is concluded that there will be no impacts on the site from the coastal access proposals.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is within the boundary of the Severn Estuary SAC, the Severn Estuary SPA and the Severn Estuary Ramsar sites. It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD5 of the proposals.

Current situation

<p>Geological features of coastal cliffs and foreshore (EC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westphalian. • Variscan structures. • Non-Marine Devonian. • Silurian - Devonian Chordata. 	<p>The site is designated exclusively for its geological interest. The site was last assessed in 2010 and was considered to be in favourable condition. It is easily accessible from the existing public rights of way. Recreational activities are not considered to present any risk to the features of interest. The only concern is where removal of the vegetation could destabilise the exposures.</p>
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Risk analysis

The proposed route of the England Coast Path follows the existing public footpath through Portishead (part of the Gordano Round). The route falls within the boundary of units 3, 4 and 5 of the SSSI. It will result in an increase in use of the path and a corresponding but smaller increase in use of the coastal margin. The notified features are not sensitive to these changes.

The notified features could be impacted if works were proposed that could obscure the geological feature. No such works are proposed. Therefore it is concluded that there will be no impacts on the site from the coastal access proposals.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Walton Common SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **No.**

It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD5 of the access proposals.

Current situation

<p>Biological Interest:</p> <p>1. Lowland calcareous grassland communities:</p> <p>CG1 <i>Festuca ovina</i> – <i>Carlina vulgaris</i> grassland</p> <p>CG2 <i>Festuca ovina</i> – <i>Avenula pratensis</i> grassland</p> <p>CG3 <i>Bromus erectus</i> grassland</p> <p>2. Nationally rare bryophyte</p> <p><i>Cheilothela chloropus</i></p>	<p>Walton Common is designated for its botanical interest. It includes a mosaic of grassland, scrub and woodland, and is of high botanical and entomological interest. The site is one of only two known locations in Britain for the nationally rare moss <i>Cheilothela chloropus</i>.</p> <p>It was considered to be in ‘unfavourable – declining’ condition when last assessed in 2010. The reasons given were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scrub, tree seedlings and bracken encroaching onto the grassland which needs to be grazed, as the cutting regime is not maintaining the sward in a favourable condition. • tree seedlings are also taking over in the Quarry area. • scrub needs to be cleared from the rare moss site, and monitoring needs to be commenced again. <p>It is an Avon Wildlife Trust reserve and is currently grazed by cattle. It is open to the general public and three public footpaths cross the reserve.</p>
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Risk analysis

Walton Common SSSI could only be affected by England Coast Path proposals if part of the proposed route were lost to coastal erosion and it were necessary to adjust the route using roll-back. Natural England will take possible impacts on Walton Common SSSI into account when considering options for realigning the trail in response to future changes as and when the need arises.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Clevedon Shore SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is within the boundary of the Severn Estuary SAC, the Severn Estuary SPA and the Severn Estuary Ramsar sites. It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD5 of the access proposals.

Current situation

<p>Geological interest feature: Minerology (FM)</p>	<p>The site is designated exclusively for its geological interest. was last assessed in 2010 and considered to be in favourable condition. It is accessible from the shingle beach/rocks at the foot of the cliff but not from the pavement/promenade by Clevedon Pier. Historically there have been concerns that there has been too much collecting of minerals from the mineralised fault.</p>
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Risk analysis

The proposed route of the England Coast Path passes landward of the site on the roadside pavement. It will result in an increase in use of the path and a corresponding but smaller increase in use of the coastal margin. The notified features are not sensitive to these changes. Physical access to the geological exposures will in any case remain challenging due to the foreshore terrain.

The notified features could be impacted if works were proposed that could obscure the geological feature. No such works are proposed. Therefore it is concluded that there will be no impacts on the site from the coastal access proposals.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Middle Hope SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

This site overlaps with the Severn Estuary SAC, SPA and Ramsar site, but the features of interest are different. It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD7 of the access proposals.

Current situation

Overall site	The area is already well-used by walkers being a National Trust site with unrestricted access on foot. None of the interest features are currently considered at risk from recreation on foot.
Geological features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coastal Cliffs and Foreshore (EC) - Dinantian and quaternary of Somerset Static (fossil) Geomorphological (IS) - Quaternary of Somerset 	The geological interest of the site is great as Middle Hope affords some fine carbonate exposures and features of fundamental importance for geological demonstration. These features are intact and were in favourable condition at the last assessment in 2009. They not considered to be at risk from recreational activities.
Calcareous Grassland – lowland: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CG1 <i>Festuca ovina-Carlina vulgaris</i> lowland calcareous grassland CG2 <i>Festuca ovina-Avenula pratensis</i> lowland calcareous grassland 	Middle Hope supports a calcareous grassland community with a restricted British distribution. The western end of the site was assessed as in favourable condition in 2009. The eastern end of the site was assessed as in unfavourable but recovering condition due to the introduction of grazing to control scrub, which restricts the extent of calcareous grassland at the eastern end of the site.
Vascular Plant - Honewort <i>Trinia glauca</i>	Honewort is mainly found on the steep rocky south-facing part of Swallow Cliff. This is removed from the paths which visitors tend to use and is not currently considered at risk from recreational activity.

Risk analysis

The site is already open to the public and the proposed route adopts an existing walked route. We consider it unlikely that there will be a significant change in patterns of use, but there will be an increase in use of the proposed route arising from its association with the England Coast Path and a smaller corresponding increase in use of the surrounding land included in the coastal margin.

<p>Geological interest features</p>	<p>The geological features are not sensitive to the expected changes in recreational activity. They could be impacted if works were proposed that could obscure the geological feature. No such works are proposed. Therefore it is concluded that there will be no impacts on the site from the coastal access proposals.</p>
<p>Calcareous Grassland – Lowland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CG1 Festuca ovina-Carlina vulgaris lowland calcareous grassland • CG2 Festuca ovina-Avenula pratensis lowland calcareous grassland 	<p>The calcareous grassland could be damaged by very frequent trampling. However, the expected increase in use more likely to expand the areas of short turf and the balance between scrub and grassland areas, providing additional habitat for a range of species. Therefore, these features are not considered to be at risk from the proposal.</p>
<p>Vascular Plant</p> <p>Honewort <i>Trinia glauca</i></p>	<p>Honewort is principally found on the steep rocky south-facing part of Swallow Cliff, it is unlikely that walkers will impact on the species and they will tend to stay on the flatter areas, notably the proposed route.</p>

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**



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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Spring Cove Cliff SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is within the boundary of the Severn Estuary SAC, the Severn Estuary SPA and the Severn Estuary Ramsar sites. It is located on the length of coast described in reports ABD7 and ABD8 of the access proposals.

Current situation

<p>Geological features of coastal cliffs and foreshore (EC):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dinantian• Permian-Carboniferous Igneous	<p>Spring Cove Cliffs are of geological importance because of the stratigraphic and igneous features which are displayed. The site was last assessed in 2010 and considered to be in favourable condition. Access to the exposure from the road is currently prevented by a wall, metal railings and fencing. It is possible to approach it from the foreshore, but doing so is challenging in view of the rocky terrain.</p>
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Risk analysis

The proposed route of the England Coast Path passes along the road to landward. It will result in an increase in use of the path and a corresponding but much smaller increase in use of the coastal margin. The notified features are not sensitive to these changes. Physical access to the geological exposures will in any case remain challenging due to the foreshore terrain.

Vegetation clearance could destabilise the exposures, but this is not proposed. We therefore conclude that there will be no impacts on the site from the coastal access proposals.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Ellenborough Park West SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **No.**

It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD8 of the access proposals.

Current situation

<p>Population of Red Data Book (RDB) plant <i>Herniaria glabra</i> (Smooth Rupturewort)</p> <p>Population of RDB and Schedule 8 plant <i>Equisetum ramosissimum</i> (Branched Horsetail)</p> <p>Nationally Scarce Plant <i>Trifolium glomeratum</i> (Clustered Clover)</p>	<p>This SSSI supports populations of <i>Hernaria glabra</i>, <i>Equisetum ramosissimum</i> and <i>Trifolium glomeratum</i>.</p> <p>The site was last assessed in 2011 and was considered to be in favourable condition.</p> <p>Ellenborough Park (West), known locally as Corpus Christi Playing Field, is not open to the public. It is used as the playing field for the local primary school.</p>
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Risk analysis

The site is located approximately 70 metres landward of the proposed route of the England Coast Path and would not be part of the coastal margin. Accordingly it would not be sensitive to impacts from the coastal access proposals for this area.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Uphill Cliffs SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is part of the Mendip Grasslands SAC. The site is adjacent to the Severn Estuary SAC, SPA and Ramsar site but does not overlap with it. It is located on the length of coast described in report ABD9 of the access proposals.

Note that notified features of the SSSI that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, including the calcareous grassland community *CG1 Festuca ovina – Carlina vulgaris & CG2 Festuca ovina - Avenula pretensis*. Assessment of possible impacts on qualifying features of the European site are made in the accompanying Habitats Regulation Assessment.

Current situation

Whole site description	<p>This site consists of species-rich calcareous grassland and rock-face situated on Carboniferous Limestone. Steeper banks and knolls in the grassland have a flora which includes salad burnet, fairy flax, kidney vetch, yellow-wort and scabious. There are small colonies of green-winged orchid, bee orchid and pyramidal orchid.</p> <p>Thin soils associated with rock outcrops support wild thyme, wild clary and wall-pepper.</p> <p>Uphill Cliff is an outstanding locality for rare plants. A number of species listed in the British Red Data Book of Vascular Plants are associated with stony grassland along the cliff-top and ledges. These include <u>somerset hair grass</u> and <u>honewort</u> which are largely confined to the Somerset/Avon borders, and goldilocks aster of which there are now only 8 colonies in Britain.</p> <p>Other rarities include rock hutchinsia and curtis’s mouse-ear chickweed (a.k.a. dwarf mouse-ear).</p> <p>The site is of considerable entomological interest, and several local species of butterfly and weevil (Curculionoidea) have been recorded.</p>
Vascular Plant Assemblage	Plants in bold (underlined) are listed in the SAC citation.

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<p>Five rare plant species of the limestone grassland and associated open ground and rock faces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goldilocks aster <i>Aster lynosyris</i> • Dwarf mouse-ear <i>Cerastium pumilum</i> • Hutchinsia <i>Hornungia petraea</i> • <u>Somerset hair-grass</u> <i>Koeleria vallesiana</i> • <u>Honewort</u> <i>Trinia glauca</i> 	<p>Goldilocks aster <i>Aster lynosyris</i> – a vascular plant species of limestone pavements, limestone cliffs, limestone scree and shillow</p> <p>Dwarf mouse-ear <i>Cerastium pumilum</i> – a vascular plant species of disturbed/heavily managed grasslands, crumbly turf, path edges, etc</p> <p>Hutchinsia <i>Hornungia petraea</i>, Somerset hair-grass <i>Koeleria vallesiana</i> and honewort <i>Trinia glauca</i> - vascular plant species of CG1 grassland.</p> <p><i>Hornungia</i> it is also suited by conditions that favour <i>Cerastium pumilum</i> while <i>Koeleria</i> favours rocky limestone outcrops.</p>
<p>Current condition and access</p>	<p><u>Condition assessment</u></p> <p>The site was last assessed in 2009 and considered to be in favourable condition.</p> <p><u>Current access</u></p> <p>The site, in particular the open grassland area by the disused windmill, is popular with walkers. The path along the foot of the cliff is also well-used. The 1982 survey of the site showed that honewort, Somerset hair-grass and goldilocks aster were concentrated and the base of the cliffs immediately landward (eastward) of the existing cycle path. route section ABD-9-S015.</p> <p>Route section ABD-9-S016 is the only part of the proposed route that is within the boundary of the SSSI.</p>

Risk analysis

<p>Vascular Plant Assemblage</p> <p>(Inland Rock – a supporting feature for the rare plant assemblage)</p>	<p>The proposed England Coast Path follows the cycleway at the foot of the cliffs. The cliffs are fenced off from the cycleway restricting access. A 1982 survey indicates that the rare plant species are found on/at the foot of the cliffs at this location and the SSSI citation states that they are ‘associated with stony grassland along the cliff-top and ledges’.</p>
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Whole site	<p>The proposed England Coast Path follows existing trails across and adjacent to the SSSI. The location of the rare plant assemblage (on the fenced off cliffs) means there is no scope for interaction with path users.</p> <p>Therefore it is concluded that the coastal access proposals will not impact on the SSSI.</p>

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? No

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Brean Down SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? **Yes.**

The site is part of the Mendip Limestone SAC. Almost the whole site (apart from 1.5ha) is within the SAC.

Note that notified features of the SSSI that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment. These include *CG1 Festuca ovina – Carlina vulgaris* & *CG2 Festuca ovina - Avenula pretensis* grasslands which are incorporated within the SAC qualifying feature described as semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates.

Current situation

<p>Vascular plant assemblage, including the following listed species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Somerset hair-grass</u> <i>Koeleria vallesiana</i> • <u>White rock-rose</u> <i>Helianthemum apenninum</i> • Dwarf sedge <i>Carex humilis</i> • Goldilocks aster <i>Aster linosyris</i> • Dwarf mouse-ear <i>Cerastium pumilum</i> • White horehound <i>Marrubium vulgare</i> • <u>Honewort</u> <i>Trinia glauca</i> • Soft brome <i>Bromus hordeaceus ssp. ferronii</i> 	<p>The steep, craggy south-facing slopes support a unique community dominated by three nationally rare species of plant, two of which are listed in the British Red Data Book. Somerset Grass <i>Koeleria vallesiana</i>, a species which in Britain is confined to the Somerset/Avon borders, and White Rock-Rose <i>Helianthemum apenninum</i>, which is found only on coastal limestone in Devon and Somerset, occur in great abundance together with the very local Dwarf Sedge. The sole British representative of a sub-family of Groundbug (Lygaeidae) is associated with the White Rock-Rose.</p>
<p>Supralittoral rock Maritime cliff Limestone sea cliffs</p>	<p>Geological Beds of Devensian age contain abundant remains of horse, reindeer, lemmings and other mammals in an excellent state of preservation. An outstanding feature of the site is that the fossiliferous deposits very probably extend for a considerable distance inland along the Sand Cliff and there is great potential for excavation. The discovery of bone containing collagen sufficient for radiocarbon dating would considerably enhance the value of this site. Reindeer Rift in addition</p>

	provides fissure deposits with a 'cold' fauna, including reindeer of probable Devensian age.
Finite mineral or fossil site (FM) Pleistocene Vertebrata The Pleistocene (Devensian) deposits containing vertebrate fossils are located in a series of beds which lie at an angle against the Carboniferous Limestone cliff	There is a reported increase in surface vegetation but fresh exposures are visible. No changes in sea defences. Features still freely accessible.
Coastal Cliff & Foreshore (EC) Quaternary Stratigraphy This SSSI is also a Geological Conservation Review site for Quaternary stratigraphy this interest is NOT included in the citation. The boundary of this interest is more or less coincident with the above interest.	The site unit is in favourable condition maintained by goat grazing and periodic scrub control.
Current condition and access	<p><u>Condition assessment</u></p> <p>The site was last assessed in 2008 and 2009 and was considered to be in favourable condition.</p> <p><u>Current access</u></p> <p>The National Trust owns the whole site. It is a very popular walking destination. Dogs are welcome and the 'northern track' is suitable for all terrain mobility scooters/buggies. The whole site is subject to open access rights.</p>

Risk analysis

Whole site	<p>The route of the proposed ECP follows the track running east to west on the northern side of Brean Down. The approved route of the England Coast Path (from Brean Down to Minehead) follows the path east-west on the southern side of Brean Down).</p> <p>The site is already a very popular destination for walkers. There may be a small increase in public access, principally long-distance walkers. However, any change in public access would only be likely to increase the areas of short turf and the balance between scrub and grassland areas, providing additional suitable habitat for a range of calcareous grassland species.</p> <p>The plant species of interest at the site are primarily found on the steep south-facing slopes, seaward of the existing open part of the England Coast Path.</p> <p>Therefore, there is not considered to be an impact from the coastal access proposals.</p>
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Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? **No.**



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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Breeding Waterbirds

Is this site or feature also part of a European site? **Yes.**

Non-breeding waterbirds are a qualifying feature of the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area or Ramsar site are fully considered within the associated HRA.

Juvenile shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* gather in significant numbers on the Congresbury Yeo (see report ABD6) and are considered within the HRA. Other waterbirds breed in smaller numbers at various coastal sites between Aust and Brean and accordingly they are considered below.

Current situation

There is evidence that waterbirds have attempted to breed in the coastal locations listed below between Aust and Brean Down.

- Pilning wetland (report ABD1)
- Orchard Pools (report ABD2)
- Avonmouth Docks (report ABD3)
- Royal Portbury Docks and Ashlands (Portbury Wharf) Nature Reserve (report ABD4)
- Dowlais Farm, Wharf Farm, Blakes Pools and Mill Leaze (report ABD6)
- Bleadon Levels nature reserve (report ABD9)

These sites are currently at low risk of disturbance by recreational activity, either because access is managed (Pilning, Ashlands, Blakes Pools, Bleadon levels) or because there is no existing lawful means of access (Orchard Pools, Avonmouth and Royal Portbury Docks, Wharf Farm, Mill Leaze).

Risk analysis

When disturbed, adult birds may leave eggs or chicks more vulnerable to mortality from cold weather or predation. It can also discourage birds from nesting in a place where the conditions are otherwise suitable.

The detailed design of the access proposals at locations where there are breeding waterbirds is therefore considered in the risk assessment below.

Location (report number)	Assessment
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<p>Northwick Warth</p>	<p>There are records of broods of shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> on Northwick Warth [Ref. 1, 2]. Shelduck are thought to breed away from Northwick Warth and it is not anticipated that the access proposals would disturb the breeding population. However, of concern is that once hatched, young birds are brought to the estuary on foot by adults and can be disturbed or predated by dogs. There are records of small broods of shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> on Northwick Warth towards the end of the breeding season [Ref. 1, 2].</p> <p>The proposed route is an existing path, already promoted as a long-distance route, on the bank. Juvenile shelduck must cross the path in order to reach the intertidal areas where they feed and roost.</p> <p>We will install notices along the path in this area to alert walkers to the sensitivity. The notices will stimulate interest in the estuary’s waterbirds and ask people to stick to the path in areas of sensitivity, keeping their dogs with them using a lead if necessary.</p> <p>Doing so will avoid any significant increased risk. Many new users will follow the path without causing disturbance; some will read the information and consciously adopt the required behaviour. Long-term, there may be a reduction in disturbance as some existing users modify behaviour in response to the new information.</p>
<p>Pilning wetland (ABD1)</p>	<p>Pilning wetland is a privately owned freshwater nature reserve south of the Severn Bridge. There is evidence of breeding tufted duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i> [Ref. 1, 2].</p> <p>The proposed route is an existing path, already promoted as a long-distance route, on the bank seaward of Pilning wetland which is separated from it by a fence and ditch. No new access rights to the wetland are proposed.</p> <p>Waterbirds sometimes respond to the presence of walkers on the bank, for example by showing increased alertness, but such effects are temporary and insignificant, and the wetland is often used as a refuge by birds disturbed from nearby sites. There is no reason to suppose that increased use of the path would affect breeding success.</p>
<p>Orchard Pools (ABD2)</p>	<p>Orchard Pools is a privately owned wetland area of freshwater habitats approximately 500 metres from the coast to the south of Severn Beach. It is known to bird watchers but not of general public interest. There is evidence that gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i> and tufted duck breed [Ref. 1, 2, 4].</p>

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	<p>The proposed route is an existing path, already promoted as a long-distance route, which is separated from the wetland by the railway and main road. No new access rights to the wetland are proposed.</p> <p>We conclude that there is no appreciable risk to birds breeding in the wetland area.</p>
Avonmouth Docks (ABD3)	<p>There are records of the following species breeding within the operational area of Avonmouth Docks: ringed plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>, little ringed plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>, shelduck, redshank <i>Tringa tetanus</i> and oystercatcher <i>Haemotopus ostralegus</i> [Ref. 1, 2]. The site is secure for operational reasons and there is therefore no exiting recreational activity which could disturb nesting birds. These circumstances would not be affected by the access proposals.</p>
Royal Portbury Docks (ABD4)	<p>Ringed plover and oystercatcher are known to nest on gravel beds within Royal Portbury Docks [Ref. 1, 2]. The site is secure for operational reasons and there is therefore no existing recreational activity which could disturb nesting birds. These circumstances would not be affected by the access proposals.</p>
Ashlands (Portbury Wharf) Nature Reserve (ABD4)	<p>Ashlands (Portbury Wharf) Nature Reserve is an are of mixed freshwater and grassland habitats to the east of Portishead Marina. It is popular destination for local people. Public access around the wetland areas is restricted to a network of paths and observation hides. There is evidence that ducks, including gadwall and teal <i>Anas crecca</i>, breed in the freshwater areas [Ref. 5].</p> <p>The proposed route is an existing path along the sea bank overlooking part of the reserve and separated from it by a substantial ditch and hedgerow. No new access rights to the nature reserve are proposed.</p> <p>Waterbirds sometimes respond to the presence of walkers on the bank, for example by showing increased alertness, but such effects are temporary and insignificant. There is no reason to suppose that increased use of the path would affect their breeding success.</p>
Dowlais Farm (ABD6)	<p>Dowlais Farm is a farm which includes a field with scrapes which is specifically designed and managed to provide habitat for waterbirds. There is evidence that lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> and redshank have nested there [Ref. 10]. There is no public access to the field itself but there is a permissive path seaward of it, separated from the field by a fence and screened by a high bank. There is also a short path , and on the southern side by a</p>

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	<p>hedgerow. around the wetland areas is restricted to a network of paths and observation hides.</p> <p>The proposed route is the existing path seaward of the bank crest and hence screened from the nesting area. There would be access rights to the boundary fence of the field, in view of the nesting area, but no further. It is unusual for anyone to walk along the bank crest in view of the birds.</p> <p>To the south of the field is a short path between the coast and a layby. People sometimes park in the layby and walk up to the seawall or use the two paths as part of a circular running route from Clevedon. Some people pause at the junction of the two paths to observe birds on the farmland.</p> <p>Waterbirds sometimes respond to the presence of people on the linking path, for example by showing increased alertness, but such effects are temporary and insignificant. There is no reason to suppose that increased use of the path would affect their breeding success.</p>
Wharf Farm (ABD6)	<p>There are reports of both oystercatcher and redshank attempting to breed on the saltmarsh at Wharf Farm [Ref. 9]. There is no public access to the saltmarsh, although Avon Wildlife Trust licence holders may pass along the adjoining seawall to reach Blake's Pools nature reserve. Existing disturbance is therefore minimal.</p> <p>The report proposes a route landward of the farm and out of sight of the saltmarsh area. Access rights to the intervening farmland would be excluded for land management reasons and access rights to the saltmarsh would be excluded because it is unsuitable for access.</p> <p>There is a low risk of disturbance to breeding birds from path users on Wick Warth, on the opposite side of the Congrsbury Yeo river mouth, more than one hundred metres from the saltmarsh at its nearest point and separated from it by the main river channel. The disturbance risk is accordingly considered very low.</p>
Blake's Pools (ABD6)	<p>Blake's Pools are publicly owned land leased to Avon Wildlife Trust to manage as a nature reserve. It is thought that various waterbird species attempting to breed on the freshwater part of the reserve, including redshank, lapwing and shelduck [Ref. 6].</p> <p>The proposed route passes along the northern edge of the freshwater part of the reserve. Path users will be separated from waterbirds by a willow screen and fabricated observation hide and there will be no wider access</p>

	rights on this part of the reserve. Accordingly the risk of disturbance to breeding birds is considered very low.
Mill Leaze (ABD6)	<p>Lapwing and redshank have been observed attempting to breed on the saltmarsh by Mill Leaze sluice [Ref. 9]. The proposed route will pass along the landward toe of the flood embankment here, out of sight of any nests. The risk of disturbance to breeding birds is accordingly considered very low.</p> <p>Lapwing are also reported attempting to breed on an arable field on the other side of the flood embankment [Ref. 9]. The proposed route will pass along one edge of this field. Path users will be visible to any birds prospecting or attempting to nest but will have no access rights except to the path. We will supply notices which can be hung on the field entrances in the event that birds appear to be nesting there, or prospecting for a nest site. These will ask people to keep strictly to the path and keep dogs on leads.</p>
Bleadon Levels Nature Reserve (ABD9)	<p>There are freshwater lagoons at Bleadon Nature Reserve with recorded breeding of waterbirds including coot <i>Fulica atra</i>, little grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>, mute swan <i>Cygnus olor</i> [ref. 8], shelduck, lapwing and oystercatcher [Ref. 1, 2]. Access around the lagoons is restricted to marked paths and observation hides and disturbance risk is therefore minimal.</p> <p>An area of saltmarsh between the treatment works and the river also appear suitable for breeding waterbirds but there are no records. In recent years Wessex Water have erected fences to discourage people from walking along the flood bank in this area, which has reduced recreational activity along it.</p> <p>The proposed route will pass along an existing path on the other side of the treatment works from the saltmarsh area, but will offer views over the saltmarsh at one point, and over the lagoons at others. Disturbance risk is likely to remain at the same low levels.</p>

Establishment works

At Blake’s Pools, it will be necessary to time works so as to limit disturbance to nesting as well as non-breeding birds. This will be decided in consultation with Avon Wildlife Trust, the site managers.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Ashlands (Portbury Wharf) Nature Reserve

Is this site or feature also part of a European site? **No.**

Portbury Nature Reserve is very close to the Severn Estuary SPA, SAC SSSI and Ramsar site and functionally linked to the SPA/Ramsar because it provides roosting and feeding habitat for non-breeding waterbirds. We discuss risks to non-breeding waterbirds in the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment.

The nature reserve also supports breeding waterbirds – see the section on breeding birds earlier in the report.

During the development of the access proposals concerns were also raised about potential disturbance to great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* and water vole *Arvicola amphibious/terrestris*. These concerns are discussed below.

Current situation

<p>Great crested newt <i>Triturus cristatus</i></p> <p>Water vole <i>Arvicola amphibious/terrestris</i></p>	<p>Great crested newt and their breeding sites or resting places are protected under Regulation 41 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.</p> <p>Water voles are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and are a priority conservation species.</p> <p>At Ashlands both species are present around the numerous ditches and ponds on the nature reserve and adjoining land in private ownership.</p> <p>Ditches adjacent to public paths are subject to some disturbance, in particular when dogs enter the ditches to drink or play. Disturbance is believed to inhibit breeding success and may result in animals deserting the habitat. Notices are used to encourage people to keep dogs out of the ditches.</p>
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Risk analysis

<p>Great crested newt <i>Triturus cristatus</i></p>	<p>The proposed route from Portishead Marina follows an existing walked route along the sea wall between the freshwater habitats of concern and the sea. There are ditches below the sea wall which probably contain water voles and great crested newts. The path's inclusion as part of the England Coast Path will attract long-distance walkers, but is unlikely to result in a</p>
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<p>Water vole <i>Arvicola amphibious/terrestris</i></p>	<p>significant increase in local use of the site, which is already well-known and popular. Long-distance walkers often bring dogs, but their dogs are generally less inclined to explore off the path because they are on a long walk. Disturbance risk is therefore unlikely to increase significantly on the nature reserve as a result of the proposals.</p> <p>At the east end of the seawall the proposed route follows a mixture of new and existing paths in the direction of Portbury village, crossing privately owned land which is managed for wildlife including water vole and great crested newt. There is a risk that the promotion of new routes could increase disturbance significantly. We have therefore agreed with the land owner to install fences alongside some new sections of path to reduce this risk.</p>
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Establishment works

It may be necessary to conduct a survey prior to works commencing in areas very close to waterbodies in this area to ensure that any water vole burrows are identified and damage or disturbance is avoided.



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Conclusion

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Aust and Brean Down are fully compatible with our duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest discussed in this document, consistent with the proper exercise of our functions¹.

In respect of other sites and features discussed in this document, we are satisfied that in developing the new access proposals the appropriate balance has been struck between Natural England's conservation and access objectives, duties and purposes.

See also, where relevant, the conclusions of the separate HRA relating to common features.

The conclusions of this assessment have been checked by:

Andrew Chester	2 July 2019	On behalf of the Coastal Access Programme Team
Claire Newill	5 th July 2019	Senior Officer with responsibility for protected sites

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

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Full details of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest referred to in this assessment, including the citation, conservation objectives and definitions of favourable condition for designated features of interest for each site can be found by searching on the relevant site name at the following address:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteSearch.aspx>

Map A. Designated sites



Annex 1. Index to designated sites and features

Note: columns in grey are European sites for which a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment has been carried out.

	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
	Intertidal features																		
Sandbanks slightly covered by water all of the time	✓																		
Estuaries	✓		✓	✓															
Mudflats and sandflats uncovered by water at low tide (littoral sediment)	✓			✓															
Atlantic Salt Meadows	✓			✓															
Littoral rock and inshore sublittoral rock				✓ ¹															

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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar site	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
Reefs	✓			✓															
	Fish																		
Assemblage of fish			✓																
Twaite shad <i>Alosa fallax</i>	✓		✓	✓															
Sea Lamprey <i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	✓		✓	✓															
River Lamprey <i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>	✓		✓	✓															
Atlantic salmon <i>Salmo salar</i>			✓	✓															
Sea trout <i>Salmo trutta</i>			✓	✓															



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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
Allis shad <i>Alosa alosa</i>			✓	✓															
European eel <i>Anguilla Anguilla</i>			✓	✓															
	Waterbird features																		
Bewick's swan <i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i>		✓					✓												
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓															
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓																
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>						✓	✓												
Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>					✓														



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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC
Ringed plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓	✓														
Golden plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>						✓												
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>						✓	✓											
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>		✓	✓	✓														
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓															
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓														
European white fronted goose <i>Anser albifrons albifrons</i>		✓	✓															
Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>				✓														

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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
Grey plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓															
Waterbird Assemblage		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓												
Terrestrial habitats and plants																			
Assemblage of vascular plants				✓ ²											✓				
Herniaria glabra (Smooth Rupturewort)														✓					
Equisetum ramosissimum (Branched Horsetail)														✓					
Trinia glauca (Honewort)												✓							

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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates ³										✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Caves not open to the public																	✓	✓	
Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines																	✓	✓	
Nationally rare bryophyte <i>Cheilothela chloropus</i>										✓									
	Bats																		
Lesser horseshoe bat																			✓



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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	
Greater horseshoe bat																	✓	✓	
Invertebrates																			
Wetland invertebrate assemblage							✓												
Geological features – coastal cliffs and foreshore (EC)																			
Non-Marine Permian Triassic (Red Beds)								✓											
Palaeoentomology								✓											
Permian - Triassic Reptilia								✓											
Rhaetian								✓											
Non-Marine Devonian									✓										
Silurian - Devonian Chordata									✓										
Variscan Structures									✓										



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	Severn Estuary SAC	Severn Estuary SPA	Severn Estuary Ramsar	Severn Estuary SSSI	Chew Valley Lake SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors SPA	Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar	Aust Cliff SSSI	Portishead Pier to Black Nore SSSI	Walton Common SSSI	Clevedon Shore SSSI	Middle Hope SSSI	Spring Cove Cliff SSSI	Ellenborough Park West SSSI	Uphill Cliffs SSSI	Brean Down SSSI	Mendip Limestone Grassland SAC	North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC
Westphalian									✓									
Dinantian												✓	✓					
Quaternary of Somerset												✓						
Carboniferous - Permian Igneous													✓					
Pleistocene Vertebrata																✓		
Geological features - other																		
FM - Mineralogy											✓							
ED - Pleistocene Vertebrata																✓		
FM - Pleistocene Vertebrata																✓		
IS - Quaternary of Somerset												✓						

¹ Hard substrate habitats (littoral and sublittoral rock) is a subfeature of estuaries, a qualifying feature of the Severn Estuary SAC: impacts are assessed in the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment.



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² The assemblage of vascular plants is a subfeature of estuaries, a qualifying feature of the Severn Estuary SAC: impacts are assessed in the accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment.

³ Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates incorporates both calcareous grassland communities (CG1 and CG2) which are notified features of the SSSIs