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**Assessment of Coastal Access Proposals  
relating to Report AHS 1 Aldeburgh to Sizewell  
and Report AHS 2 Sizewell to Dunwich  
on sites and features of nature conservation concern  
29<sup>th</sup> January 2020**





## Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Aldeburgh and Dunwich

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### About this document

This document should be read in conjunction with the published Reports for the Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea 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:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-aldeburgh-to-hopton-on-sea>

An 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. The map shown in Figure 1 shows the designated site along this stretch of coast. The table of designated sites and features include features which have been considered in the HRA.



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## Introduction

### Designated sites between Sizewell and Dunwich

| Sizewell Marshes SSSI – list of features  |
|---|
| <b>Standing open water and canals</b>   |
| Lowland freshwater ditch systems  |
| Invertebrate assemblage - W314 rich fen   |
| Vascular plant assemblage composed of : -   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft Hornwort <i>Ceratophyllum submersum</i> (nationally scarce)</li> <li>• Whorled Water-milfoil <i>Myriophyllum verticillatum</i></li> <li>• Fen Pondweed <i>Potamogeton coloratus</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Fen, marsh and swamp</b>   |
| National Vegetation Classification (NVC) stand S26 – <i>Phragmites australis</i> – <i>Urtica dioica</i> tall-herb fen   |
| NVC M22 – <i>Juncus subnodulosus</i> – <i>Cirsium palustre</i> fen meadow   |
| NVC M23 – <i>Juncus effusus/acutiflorus</i> – <i>Galium palustre</i> rush-pasture   |
| Assemblages of breeding birds – lowland damp grasslands includes:   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mute swan <i>Cygnus olor</i></li> <li>• mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i></li> <li>• teal <i>Anas crecca</i></li> <li>• pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i></li> <li>• moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i></li> <li>• lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i></li> <li>• snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i></li> <li>• cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i></li> <li>• grasshopper warbler <i>Locustella naevia</i></li> <li>• sedge warbler <i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i></li> <li>• reed warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i></li> <li>• reed bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i></li> <li>• carrion crow <i>Corvus corone ssp. corone</i></li> </ul> |
| Also mentioned on the citation, but not named as part of the assemblage of breeding birds of lowland damp grassland are:  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gadwall <i>Mareca strepera</i></li> <li>• shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i></li> </ul>  |
| Vascular plant assemblage including:  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• marsh dock <i>Rumex palustris</i> (nationally scarce)</li> </ul>   |



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|---|
| <b>Sizewell Marshes SSSI – list of features</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>greater water-parsnip <i>Sium latifolium</i></li></ul>  |
| Outstanding Invertebrate assemblage - W314 rich fen   |
| <b>Invertebrate fauna mentioned on the citation include species from the following taxa:</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>terrestrial and aquatic beetles (Coleoptera)</li><li>flies (Diptera),</li><li>moths (Lepidoptera)</li><li>dragonflies (Odonata)</li><li>spiders (Araneae)</li></ul> |
| <b>Minsmere-Walberswick Heaths and Marshes SSSI, SPA, SAC and Ramsar</b>  |
| Please see separate NCA and HRA for a list of these sites and features  |
| <b>Outer Thames Estuary SPA</b>   |
| See notes below and refer to HRA for details of this site and features  |
| <b>Southern North Sea SAC</b>   |
| See notes below   |
| <b>Suffolk Shingle Beaches County Wildlife Site</b>   |
| Coastal vegetated shingle   |

### Outer Thames Estuary SPA

The qualifying feature for the **Outer Thames Estuary SPA** is the largest aggregation of wintering red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*) in the UK, an estimated population of 6,466 individuals which is 38% of the wintering population of Great Britain. Please see the Habitats Regulations Assessment that accompanies this assessment for further details which is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-aldeburgh-to-hopton-on-sea>

### Southern North Sea SAC

The Southern North Sea Special Area of Conservation has been considered alongside our proposals and we have concluded that there could not be an impact on the special interest (marine) features due to the spatial separation between them and walkers using the proposed route of the England Coast Path. Reference is also made in the HRA.

This NCA will therefore focus on the designated features at Sizewell Marshes SSSI and Suffolk Shingle Beaches County Wildlife Site.



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### Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

#### Suffolk Shingle Beaches County Wildlife Site (CWS)

The sand/shingle beach in front of Sizewell comprises a mixture of naturally established shingle flora to the north and a restoration project in front of the power station. The features are sensitive to trampling.

The area is close to the public car parks and in front of the power station.

#### Sizewell Marshes SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? No

#### Current situation

Assemblages of breeding birds - Lowland damp grasslands are sensitive to changes in access and land use. Species which can be disturbed include lapwing or redshank as part of the breeding bird assemblage. See table for full list.

Other features are sensitive to trampling and can be sensitive to public access. On this site, these features are not readily accessible from the suggested route and are therefore unlikely to be affected by changes in access.

EDF Energy are developing proposals in connection with land on and near Sizewell Marshes SSSI. When final proposals are submitted we will be able to make further comment on the potential impact of plans to re-route the main trail on a temporary/ alternative route when the beach front route is temporarily unavailable (for construction and maintenance purposes).

Whilst firm proposals for the alternative/ temporary route are being advanced by developers, potential impacts are considered further in the HRA and NCA for Minsmere-Walberswick Heaths and Marshes. Potential impacts of development proposals for a nuclear power station are being assessed in a separate HRA by developers as part of the planning process.



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### Current access provisions

The currently walked path and Public Right of Way (PRoW) is separated from the SSSI by Sizewell power plant apart from:

- a. the southern section (just over 320m from the trail) which is separated by Hill Woods, the car park and a water course (marked "Drain" on map);
- b. the northern section (about 195m from the trail) which is separated from the trail by drains, deciduous trees and Sizewell power plant's curtilage.

The PRoW itself runs through the CWS. It is a popular route and forms part of the Suffolk Coast Path.

Visitors to Sizewell often use the beach car park as a base for a variety of walks using the track, the intertidal area or to look at the moored boats. It is particularly popular with dog walkers, so is less prone to seasonal fluctuations in levels of use. There are **medium to high levels** of use around the beach car park. This drops to **low levels** about 1.3km north of Sizewell car park, which marks a popular turning point for walkers. Braided routes seaward of the proposed trail indicate where people cross onto the intertidal area in order to complete a circular walk or just to get closer to, or views of, the sea. There are three boardwalks over the sand/shingle for ease and control of access onto the trail from the car park.

The proposals for the England Coast Path trail uses a mix of these existing walked routes and PRoW. A geo cellular grid type material maintains the integrity of the surface through the sand/shingle and supports use of the surface by vehicles (coastguard and Sizewell security patrols). This surfacing material ends north of Sizewell power plant.

The ECP trail will be promoted and signage will be improved. There are also visitor facilities nearby, thus potentially increasing the numbers of users. If numbers of walkers increase on the trail, there is a potential for a greater number of visits to the coastal margin.

We anticipate that walkers will use the site in the way that they do now meaning there will be minimal impact on the features of the SSSI.

Developers are working on proposals for the alternative/ temporary route for use when the main trail is unavailable during and post-construction and will conduct a separate HRA to identify an appropriate route with any associated mitigation measures required. This work is being carried out in discussion with stakeholders including the Access Authority (Suffolk County Council) and Natural England.





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### Risk analysis

#### Predicted change in use of site for recreation with the advent of ECP

We predict a **medium increase** in the number of users mainly in the peak summer period (May-August) when the route becomes a National Trail. There will be a **possible increase** in use of the coastal margin: people will continue to use it as they currently do - to access the intertidal area and get closer to the sea or to walk on the track and to access facilities.

ECP walkers will be more inclined to stick to a well-signed trail. However, Sizewell car park café and toilets are likely to be a point from which ECP walkers start or finish their journeys or where they wish to break an on-going journey as the location is about 3.5km from Thorpeness and 7km from Dunwich Heath.

#### Possible risks to sensitive features and conclusion

The curtilage of Sizewell A and B Nuclear Power Stations presents a barrier to walkers attempting to walk landward (west) away from the trail. It is highly unlikely that there will be any interaction between walkers and sensitive features on the site.

However it is likely, given the distances to facilities before and after Sizewell, that an England Coast Path walker will aim to start, end or break their walk by using the facilities at Sizewell. This may increase the footfall across the coastal vegetated shingle in the seaward margin which forms part of the County Wildlife Site. The site would therefore benefit from the addition of a carefully sited, high quality interpretation board at a location that has no current information about vegetated shingle, informing walkers about this rare habitat and to encourage walkers to leave and enter the trail using existing paths and boardwalks.

An area of shingle north of Sizewell is regularly fenced off by the RSPB just south of the SSSI boundary to protect vegetation on the shingle ridge and encourage nesting ringed plover and little terns. This management would be expected to continue with the advent of coastal access.

With these measures in place we do not consider any further mitigation measures will be necessary as the trail which will be well-signed and spatially separated from the special interest features of the SSSI site and that there will be no detrimental impact on the SSSI features as a result of our proposals for the ECP.





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### 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:

Once approval for a coastal access report is received from the Secretary of State, any necessary works can be carried out on the ground to make the trail fit for use and prepare for opening. In this case, works on the ground would be carried out by Suffolk County Council or another Natural England–approved person or organisation.

An estimate of the total cost of works needed to establish the trail is given in our coastal access report for the stretch. The cost of establishment works will be met by Natural England.

Suffolk County Council (or another Natural England–approved person or organisation) are responsible for ensuring they take appropriate steps to protect sensitive features whilst works on the ground are carried out, in line with any recommendations or conditions agreed in advance.

We have held preliminary discussions with Suffolk County Council about the works required and believe that it is feasible for them to be carried out without adverse effect on the designated sites considered in this appraisal. This is on the basis that the following special conditions are observed:

Legally protected species are an important consideration where works involve the destruction or maintenance of existing features, or the construction of new features. Where these species are known to be present, or are likely to be, any works carried out should include appropriate mitigation in line with legislative guidelines.

The main considerations with regard to protected sites and species, and on-site working methods, are summarised in the bullet points and table below.

- European Protected Species are those species of plant and animal listed in Annex IV to EC Directive 92/43/EEC ('the Habitats Directive). For a complete list of European Protected Species in England & Wales refer to Schedules 2, 4 and 5 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010.
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, affords protection to wild birds, their eggs, young and nests (the latter whether complete or under construction). Those listed in



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Schedule 1 of the '81 Act receive additional protection against intentional or reckless disturbance while they are nest building or at a nest containing eggs or young. Dependant young are also protected from intentional or reckless disturbance. The timing of any works on habitats which may support birds (particularly breeding birds), and the methodologies employed, should take these factors into account.

- Plants and animals included in Schedules 5 & 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) are protected from killing or injuring, and protection may also apply to their place of shelter.
- Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Under the '92 Act it is an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct a badger sett, or to disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett.
- All bat species, their breeding sites and resting places are fully protected by law and they are European protected species. The presence of bats is often overlooked and it should be remembered that they inhabit crevices in tree trunks and branches as well as built structures (both above and below ground). Where there is uncertainty about their presence, surveys should be carried out beforehand by suitably qualified individuals.
- Activities which may affect any of the above species may require a licence from Natural England's licensing team, from which advice should be sought, as appropriate.

Where necessary, Suffolk County Council or another Natural England approved person or organisation will instigate the SSSI assent/consent 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.



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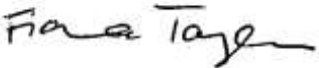
### Conclusion

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Sizewell and Dunwich (Report AHS 2) are fully compatible with our duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of Sizewell Marshes SSSI and Suffolk Shingle Beaches County Wildlife Site, consistent with the proper exercise of our functions<sup>1</sup>.

If our proposals are agreed by the Secretary of State and after commencement of the coastal access rights, further restrictions, exclusions or temporary routes may be necessary locally, if situations arise that could not be foreseen initially. People with a legal interest in the land will have powers to apply to us later for directions to restrict or exclude access, and can appeal to the Secretary of State against our decision if they disagree with it.

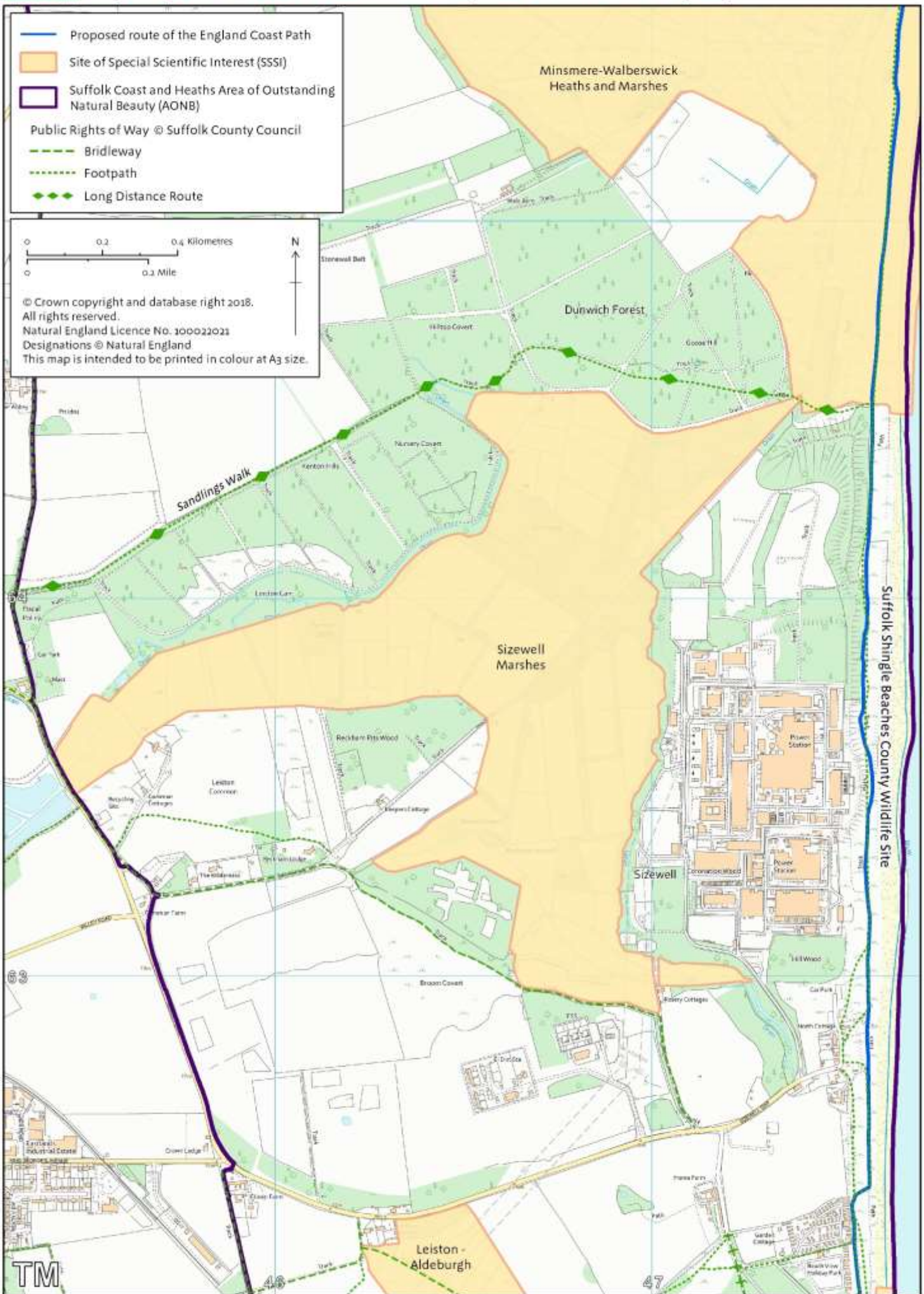
See also, where relevant, the conclusions of the separate HRA relating to common features.

The conclusions of this assessment have been checked by:

|   |            |  |
|---|------------|--|
|  | 6 Jan 2020 | On behalf of the Coastal Access Programme Team         |
|  | 6 Jan 2020 | Senior Officer with responsibility for protected sites |
|  | 6 Jan 2020 | Stretch lead Aldeburgh to Hopton-on-Sea                |

<sup>1</sup> 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.

Key designation - Sizewell Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)



- Proposed route of the England Coast Path
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- Public Rights of Way © Suffolk County Council
- Bridleway
- Footpath
- ◆ Long Distance Route

0 0.2 0.4 Kilometres  
0 0.2 Mile

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Key designation - Sizewell Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)







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### Glossary of terms

AONB Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

CROW Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)

ECP England Coast Path

HRA Habitats Regulations Assessment

MCZ Marine Conservation Zones

NCA Nature Conservation Assessment

PRoW Public Right of Way

SAC Special Area of Conservation

SPA Special Protection Area

SSSI Sites of Special Scientific Interest