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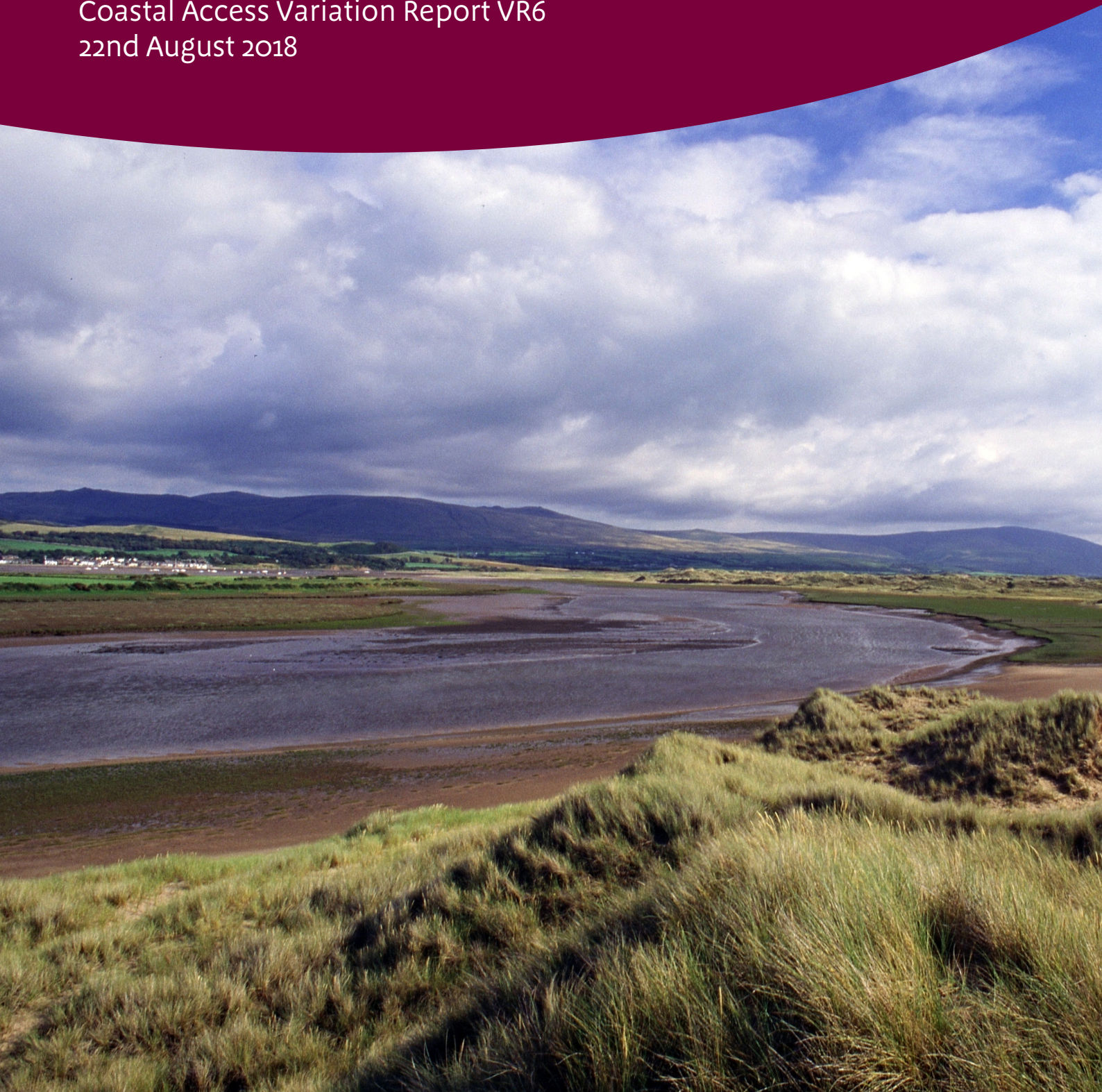
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# Proposed Changes to the England Coast Path at **Drigg, Cumbria**

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report VR6

22nd August 2018



## **Purpose of this report**

Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. The duty is in two parts: one relating to securing a long-distance walking route around the coast; the other to creating an associated “margin” of land for the public to enjoy, either in conjunction with their access along the route line, or otherwise.

On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015 the Secretary of State approved Natural England’s proposals relating to [Whitehaven to Silecroft](#) in Cumbria. The public rights of access to this stretch have yet to commence. Since the approval of the report, it has become clear that changes are necessary to the route of the England Coast Path. This report contains Natural England’s proposals relating to those changes, which are at the following locations shown on the overview map below:

- Drigg, south of Seascale

In order for these proposed changes to come into force they must be approved by the Secretary of State.

It is recommended that Natural England’s approved [report](#) relating to this stretch is read in conjunction with this report. In particular the Overview provides context to many of the issues discussed within this variation report.



## **Protection of sensitive nature conservation features:**

Natural England's approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in section 4.9 of Coastal Access: Natural England's Approved Scheme 2013. We call our internal processes to support this approach 'Access and Sensitive Features Appraisal' (ASFA) and this document is a record of our conclusions. The appraisal includes our Habitats Regulations Assessment wherever relevant to the site in question, as well as documenting our consideration of potential effects on non-European sites or species protected in their own right.

An ASFA was produced in 2014 for the proposals relating to [Whitehaven to Silecroft](#). Relevant sections have been reviewed as we developed our proposals for this variation report, and a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) has been published alongside this report recording our conclusions.

The variation at Drigg is on or adjacent to the following sites, designated for nature conservation:

- Drigg Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Drigg Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its wildlife interest

We have assessed the potential impacts of our proposals along the proposed route on the features for which the affected land is designated and on any which are protected in their own right.

With input from specialists we have considered each of the sites involved and the relevant designations and concluded that for this section of the coast our proposals are compatible with the conservation objectives for the sites concerned.

## Variation 1: Drigg

### Introduction

#### Understanding the proposals and accompanying maps:

<b>Start Point:</b> Track (grid reference: SD 055 980)
<b>End Point:</b> Field corner (grid reference: SD 061 981)
<b>Relevant Maps:</b> VR6a

#### Reason for variation:

The approved route of the England Coast Path would install the England Coast Path within an existing area of open access land on sand dune and grazing marsh near Drigg (see map VR6a).

However, since this alignment was approved, further detailed site investigation preparatory to establishment works has revealed that some modifications would improve the experience for walkers. The proposed variation identifies a line which is drier in wet conditions than the approved route. This variation alters the approved route by up to 50 metres seaward and 20 metres landward across a 780 metre section of trail. Natural England believes that the proposed variation will provide a more pleasant and sustainable walking experience by avoiding areas of ground that are likely to be very wet at times.

#### Proposed variation:

Our proposal (map VR6a) is to slightly re-route the path away from soft, wet ground. The proposed route follows a broadly similar but preferable alignment to the approved route across the grazing marsh (route sections WHS-VR6-S001 & WHS-VR6-S002).

The definition of the landward boundary of the coastal margin would remain the same in relation to both sections (ie. the first landward fence for WHS-VR6-S001 and the landward edge of the trail for WHS-VR6-S002); consequently, there would be a negligible reduction in the extent of the coastal margin as a result of our proposed variation.

#### The Trail:

The proposed trail consists of a path of natural surface across grazing marsh.

#### Accessibility:

As a result of the terrain, in relation to both the proposed variation and the adjacent sections of approved route, the proposed route is likely to be unsuitable for most people with reduced mobility. We will aim to ensure that any access infrastructure will not be the limiting factor for less mobile walkers. We propose to install small bridges at any point where the route would cross a ditch or drain.

**Where we have proposed exercising our discretion:**

We propose to use our discretion such that the landward boundary of the coastal margin adjoining route section WHS-VR6-S001 follows the landward extent of the existing access land (to the first fence landward of the trail). This will make the extent of access rights clearer on the ground and does not alter the approved plans.

**See part 3 of the Overview to the original report - 'Understanding the proposals and accompanying maps', for an 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.**

No restrictions or exclusions were proposed or approved previously in relation to new access rights on this part of the coast, nor do we consider it necessary to propose any such restrictions and exclusions in relation to the newly proposed trail and margin. However, access rights to the spreading room would be subject to the national restrictions on coastal access rights.

**See Annex 2 of the Overview to the original report for detail of the national restrictions on coastal access rights.**

**Future Change:**

At the time of preparing the report, we do not foresee any other need for future changes to the access provisions proposed for the length of coast described in this variation report.

**Physical establishment of the trail:**

Way-markers would be necessary to guide people along the new route. New sleeper bridges would be installed over any ditches or drains, as shown on map VR6a.

Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is £6,100. This is an increase of £100 compared to the original route set out in our report to the Secretary of State on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015. This estimate is informed by advice from Cumbria County Council.

**Maintenance of the trail:**

Ongoing maintenance of the trail would be necessary from time to time. This variation represents no significant change to our overall estimate for the approved route, as set out in our report to the Secretary of State on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

# Commentary on Maps

## Section Details – Map VR6a: Drigg

Notes on table:

Column 6a - 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. These coastal land types are: foreshore, cliff, bank, barrier, dune, beach, flat or section 15 land.

1	2	3	4	5	6a	6b	6c	7
Map(s)	Route section number(s)	Current status of this section	Current surface of this section	Roll-back proposed?	Default coastal land type?	Landward boundary of margin	Reason for landward boundary discretion	Proposed exclusions or restrictions
VR6a	WHS-VR6-S001	Other existing walked route	Grass	No	No	Fence	Clarity and cohesion	None
VR6a	WHS-VR6-S002	Other existing walked route	Grass	No	No	Landward extent of trail (2m)	Not used	None

## **Formal Proposals**

- Below are our formal proposals to the Secretary of State for the variation to the approved route proposed in this report.
- They should be read in conjunction with map VR6a.
- The commentary above explains the practical effect of these proposals.

## **Formal Proposals – Drigg, Cumbria**

### **Discretion to include an estuary**

The coastline subject of this variation is part of the estuary of the river Irt. Natural England exercised its discretion in relation to this estuary as far upstream as the existing ford in the approved 2014 report. This remains unchanged by the proposed variation.

### **Proposed route of the trail**

The route is to be at the centre of the line shown on map VR6a as the proposed route of the trail.

### **Landward boundary of coastal margin**

Adjacent to route section WHS-VR6-S001, the landward boundary of the coastal margin is to coincide with the fence shown landward of the trail on map VR6a.

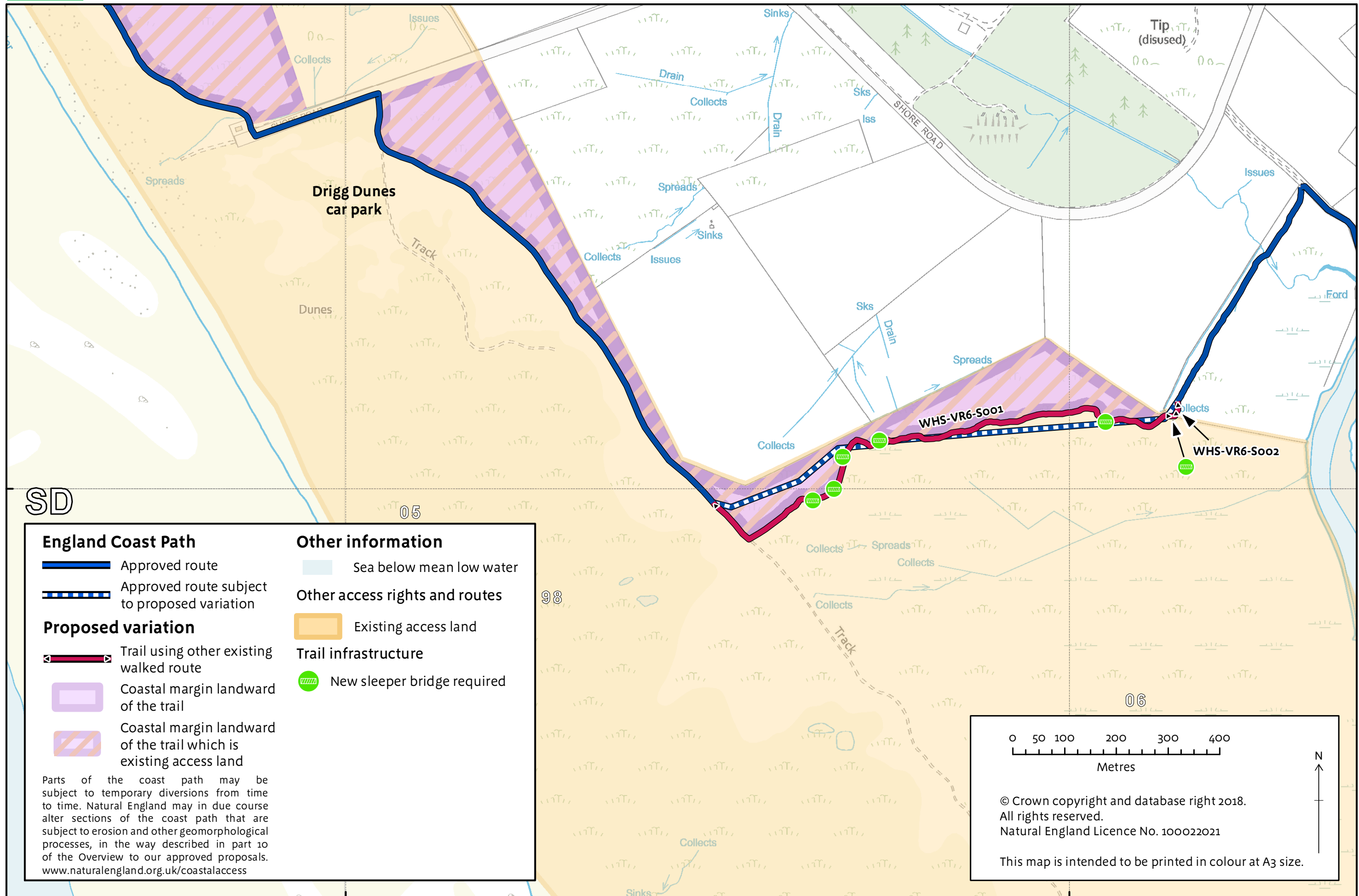
### **Local restrictions and exclusions**

This variation report does not include proposals for any exclusions or restrictions.

### **Alternative routes**

This variation report does not include proposals for alternative routes.





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