



England Coast Path Stretch: Grain to Woolwich

Report GWO 5: Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings

Part 5.1: Introduction

Start Point:	Dartford Marshes (Grid reference 555348 177135)
End Point:	Erith Saltings (Grid reference 552758 177719)
Relevant Maps:	GWO 5a to GWO 5e

5.1.1 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.

5.1.2 This report covers length GWO 5 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.

5.1.3 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 (“roll-back”), if this proves necessary in the future because of coastal change.

5.1.4 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 5.2: Proposals Narrative

The trail:

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

5.2.2 Generally follows the water's edge quite closely and maintains good views of the estuary.

5.2.3 Between GWO-5-S005 and GWO-5-S042 a significant inland route is necessary to take the trail around the rivers Darent and Cray, as there is currently no crossing point near the Thames.

Protection of the environment:

5.2.4 We consider that the coastal environment along this length of coast is unlikely to be sensitive to the improvements to coastal access envisaged and that no special measures are needed in respect of our proposals.

5.2.5 Natural England is satisfied that the proposals for coastal access in this report are made in accordance with relevant environmental protection legislation.

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

Accessibility:

5.2.6 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 seawall and floodbanks

5.2.7 At various locations, kissing gates will be installed or improved, so as to make the trail easier to use. 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:

5.2.8 **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.

5.2.9 **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 path edge, pavement edge or fence line to make the extent of the new access rights clearer. See Table 5.3.1 below.

5.2.10 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 5.3.1. 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 5.3.1) 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.

5.2.11 **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 between Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings.

5.2.12 Access to the saltmarsh and mudflat in the coastal margin seaward of route sections GWO-5-S001 to GWO-5-S047 is to be excluded all year-round by direction under s25A 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 Map GWO 5A.

5.2.13 The mudflat in this area is soft and sinking. It does not provide a safe walking surface and is subject to frequent tidal inundation. RNLI and Coastguard data indicates incidents of people being rescued from the mud. Areas of saltmarsh have deep channels and creeks, some of which would not be readily apparent to walkers and can pose a significant risk.

5.2.14 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.

5.2.15 The directions we give under section 25A are intended to avoid any new public rights being created over the areas in question in view of the hidden dangers of mudflats

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

5.2.16 **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.

5.2.17 Column 4 of table 5.3.1 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 map GWO 5a as the proposed route of the trail.

5.2.18 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 not proposed in table 5.3.1, the route is to be at the centre of the line shown on maps GWO 5a to GWO 5e as the proposed route of the trail.

Other future change:

5.2.19 There are also places described in this report where we foresee the need for future changes to the proposed access provisions.

5.2.20 We understand that a new pedestrian river crossing may be installed across the mouth of the River Darent. This would provide us with an opportunity to review the trail and consider the option of realigning across the bridge, thereby reducing the diversion around the Rivers Darent and Cray.

5.2.21 A potential commercial development alongside the River Cray may also provide a new bridge over the river (Map GWO 5c, between sections GWO-5-S016 and GWO-5-S034) in the shorter term, if approved. There is an opportunity to review the trail alignment to follow this bridge over the River Cray.

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

Establishment of the trail:

5.2.22 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.

5.2.23 Our estimate of the capital costs for physical establishment of the trail on the proposed route is £9,338 and is informed by:

- information already held by the access authorities, Kent County Council and the London Borough of Bexley, 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.

5.1.24 There are three main elements to the overall cost:

- **New Signs:** A 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 gates are needed to improve the trail on the ground.
- New surfacing: There is one place where we will need to remove a trip hazard in the industrial area. The surfaces and access furniture of the existing paths and footways on the rest of the proposed route are generally of a suitable standard for the trail.

Significant items of establishment works 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	£5,513
Gates	£2,107
Surfacing works	£500
Project management	£1,218

Total **£9,338 (Exclusive of any VAT payable)**

5.2.25 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, Kent County 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:

5.2.26 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).

5.2.27 We estimate that the annual cost to maintain the trail will be £5,047 (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 5.3: Proposals Tables

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

5.3.1 Section Details – Maps GWO 5a to GWO 5e: Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings

Key notes on table:

1. Column 2 – an asterisk (*) against the route section number means see also table 5.3.2: Other options considered.
2. Column 4 – ‘No’ means no roll-back is proposed for this route section. ‘Yes – normal’ means roll-back 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 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.
4. 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 5a	GWO-5-S001*	Cycle track (pedestrian)	Yes - Normal	Yes - bank			
GWO 5a	GWO-5-S002* to GWO-5-S005*	Public footpath	Yes - Normal	Yes - bank			
GWO 5b	GWO-5-S006	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5b	GWO-5-S007	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5b	GWO-5-S008	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			

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 5c	GWO-5-S009	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S010	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S011	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S012	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S013	Public footway (pavement)	No	No			
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S014	Public footpath	No	No	Path edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S015 to GWO-5-S017	Public footpath	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S018 and GWO-5-S019	Other existing walked route	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S020 and GWO-5-S021	Public footpath	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S022	Public footpath	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S023	Public footpath	No	No	Pavement edge	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)	Landward margin contains coastal land type?	Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin (See maps)	Reason for landward boundary proposal	Explanatory notes
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S024	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S025	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S026	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S027	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S028	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S029	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S030	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S031	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S032	Byway open to all traffic	No	No	Pavement edge	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c	GWO-5-S033	Cycle track (pedestrian)	No	No	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	
GWO 5c and GWO 5d	GWO-5-S034	Cycle track (pedestrian)	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5d	GWO-5-S035 to GWO-5-S041	Cycle track (pedestrian)	No	Yes - bank			

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 5e	GWO-5-S042 to GWO-5-S043	Cycle track (pedestrian)	No	Yes - bank			
GWO 5e	GWO-5-S044 to GWO-5-S047	Cycle track (pedestrian)	No	Yes - bank	Fence line	Clarity and cohesion	The fence line provides a clearer boundary than the landward edge of bank (which extends beyond the fence line)

5.3.2 Other options considered: Maps GWO 5a to GWO 5e: Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings

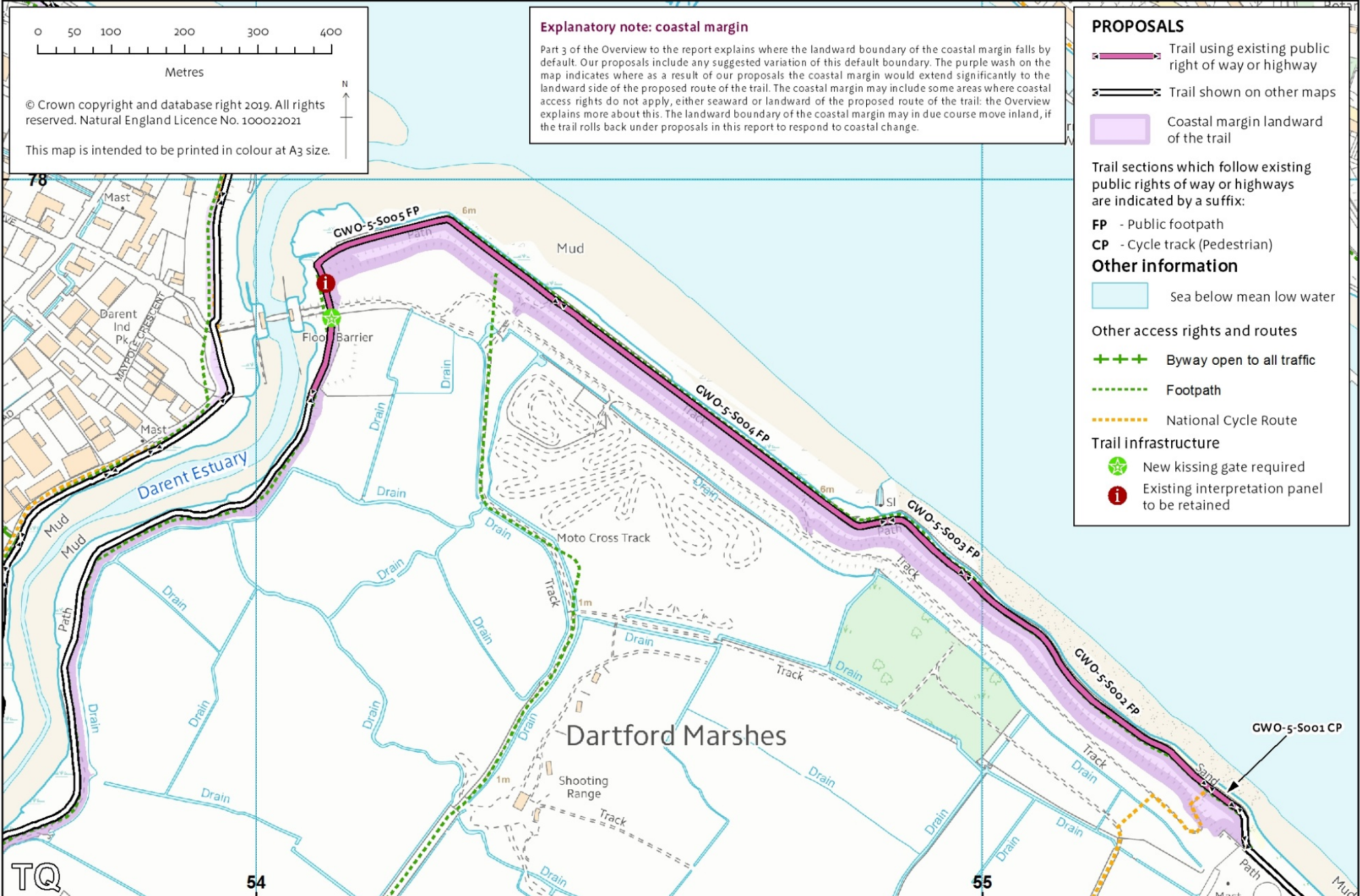
Map(s)	Route section numbers(s)	Other option(s) considered	Reasons for not proposing this option
GWO 5a	GWO-5-S001 to GWO-5-S005	<p>We considered aligning the trail along the sea defence bank, which runs slightly inland of the proposed route. The higher bank is less susceptible to erosion than the proposed route.</p> <p>No other options were identified for the trail in relation to this map.</p>	<p>We opted for the proposed route because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ it follows an existing public footpath ■ it is closer to the sea and maintains better views of the sea and isolated beaches ■ we propose to apply roll back in this location in case of erosion, which would enable the route to move back to the higher bund. ■ this proposal is made with the support of the landowner ■ 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

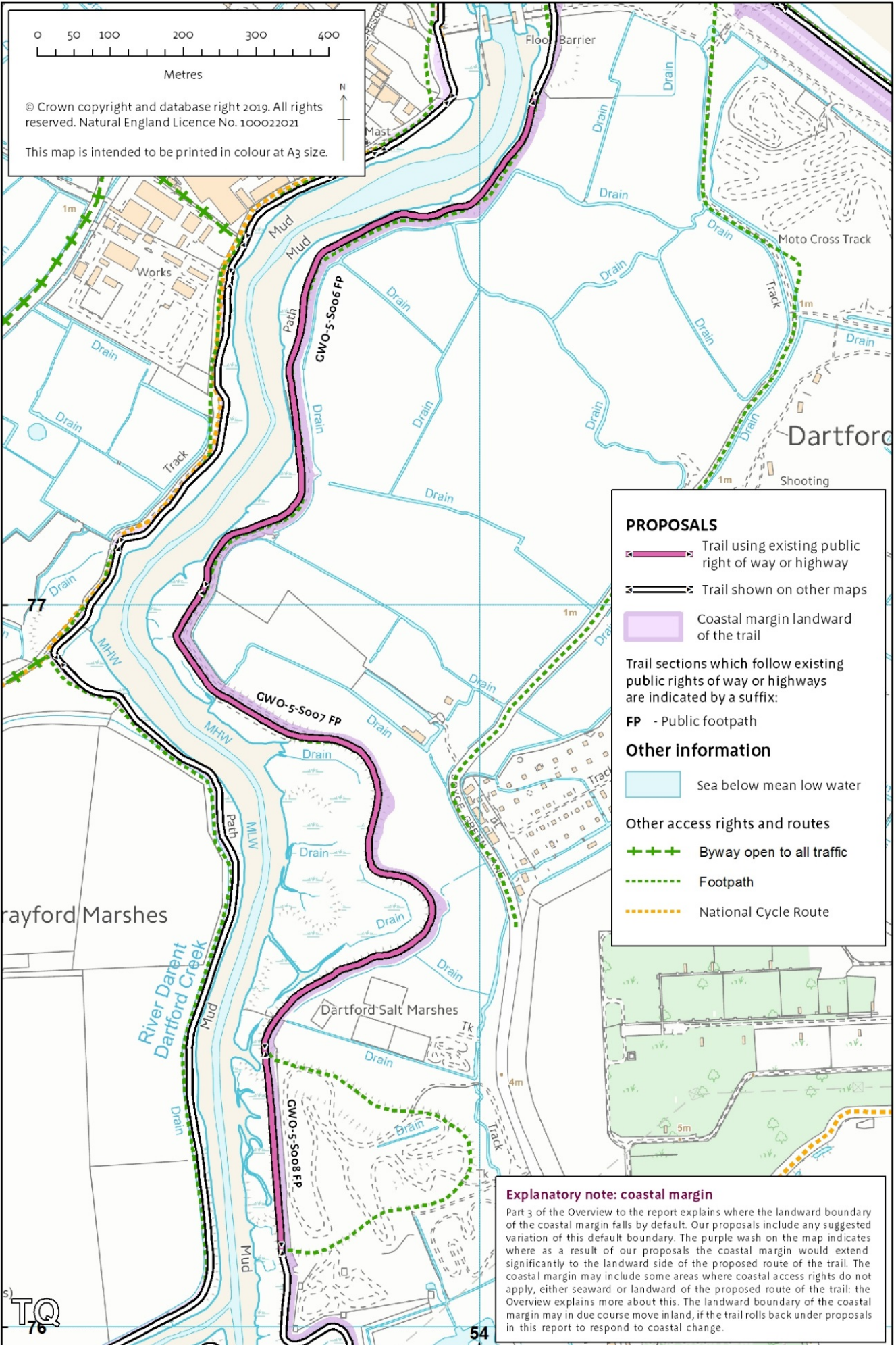
Note: Any public rights of way not forming part of the proposed trail would remain available for people to use under their pre-existing rights.

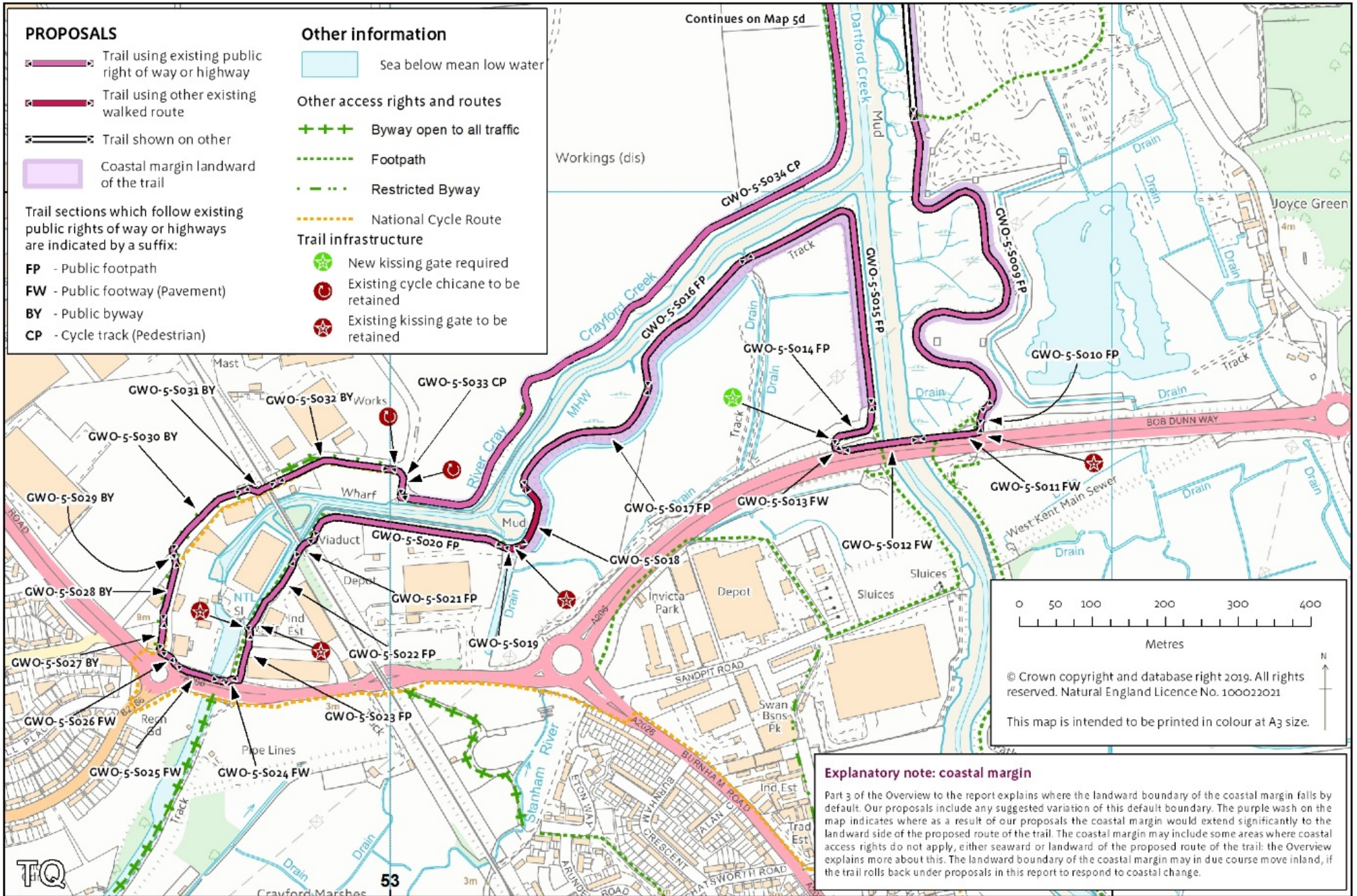
Part 5.4: Proposals Maps

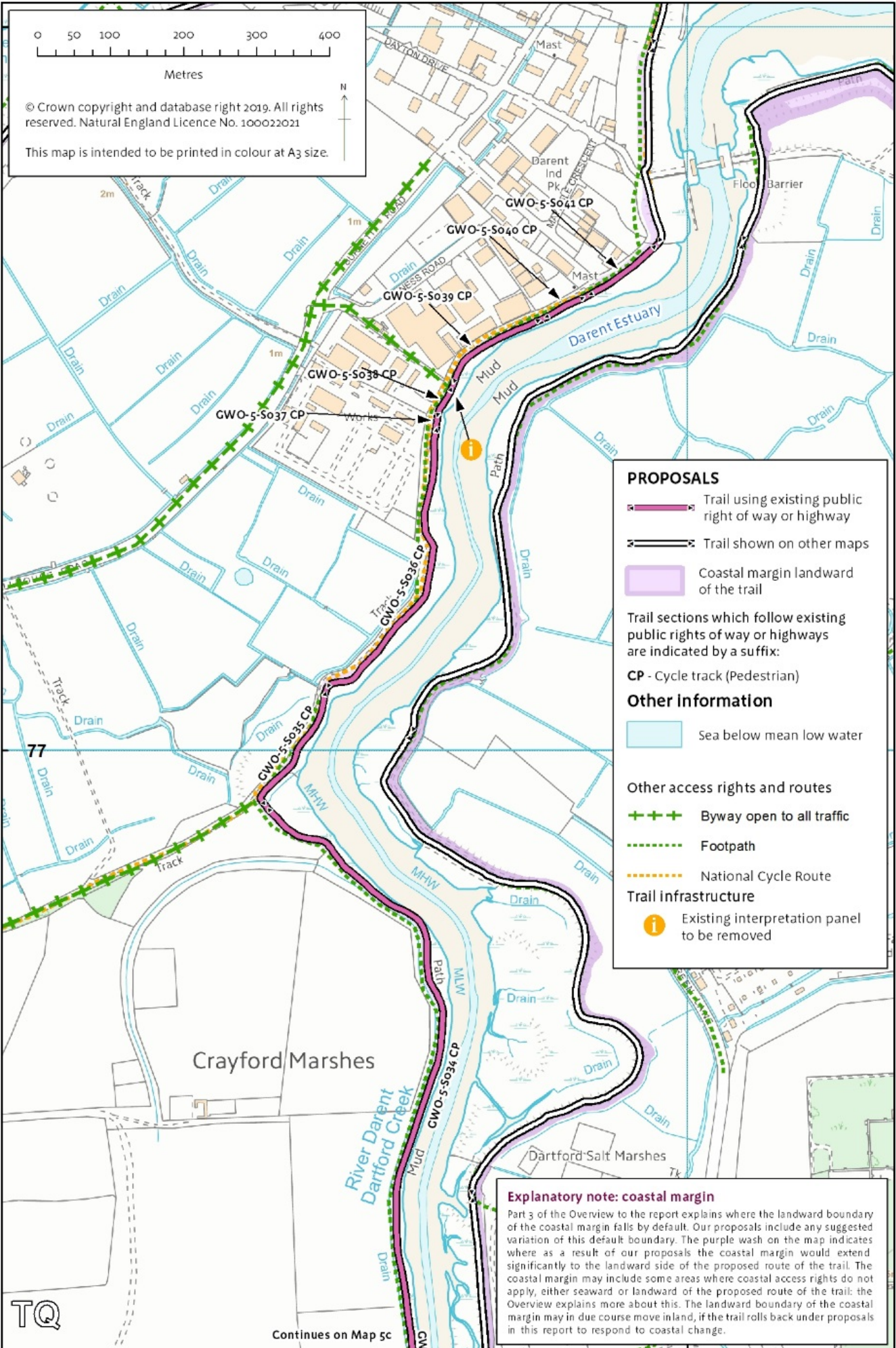
5.4.1 Map Index

Map reference	Map title
GWO 5a	Dartford Marshes to Darent Estuary (East)
GWO 5b	Darent Estuary (East) to Dartford Saltmarshes
GWO 5c	Dartford Creek to Crayford Creek
GWO 5d	Dartford Creek to Darent Estuary (West)
GWO 5e	Darent Estuary (West) to Erith Saltings
Directions Map GWO 5A	Directions for Report GWO 5: Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings









PROPOSALS

- Trail using existing public right of way or highway
- Trail shown on other maps
- Coastal margin landward of the trail

Trail sections which follow existing public rights of way or highways are indicated by a suffix:

CP - Cycle track (Pedestrian)

Other information

Sea below mean low water

Other access rights and routes

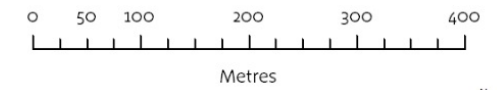
- Byway open to all traffic
- Footpath
- National Cycle Route

Trail infrastructure

- Existing barrier to be retained
- Existing interpretation panel to be retained

Explanatory note: coastal margin

Part 3 of the Overview to the report explains where the landward boundary of the coastal margin falls by default. Our proposals include any suggested variation of this default boundary. The purple wash on the map indicates where as a result of our proposals the coastal margin would extend significantly to the landward side of the proposed route of the trail. The coastal margin may include some areas where coastal access rights do not apply, either seaward or landward of the proposed route of the trail: the Overview explains more about this. The landward boundary of the coastal margin may in due course move inland, if the trail rolls back under proposals in this report to respond to coastal change.



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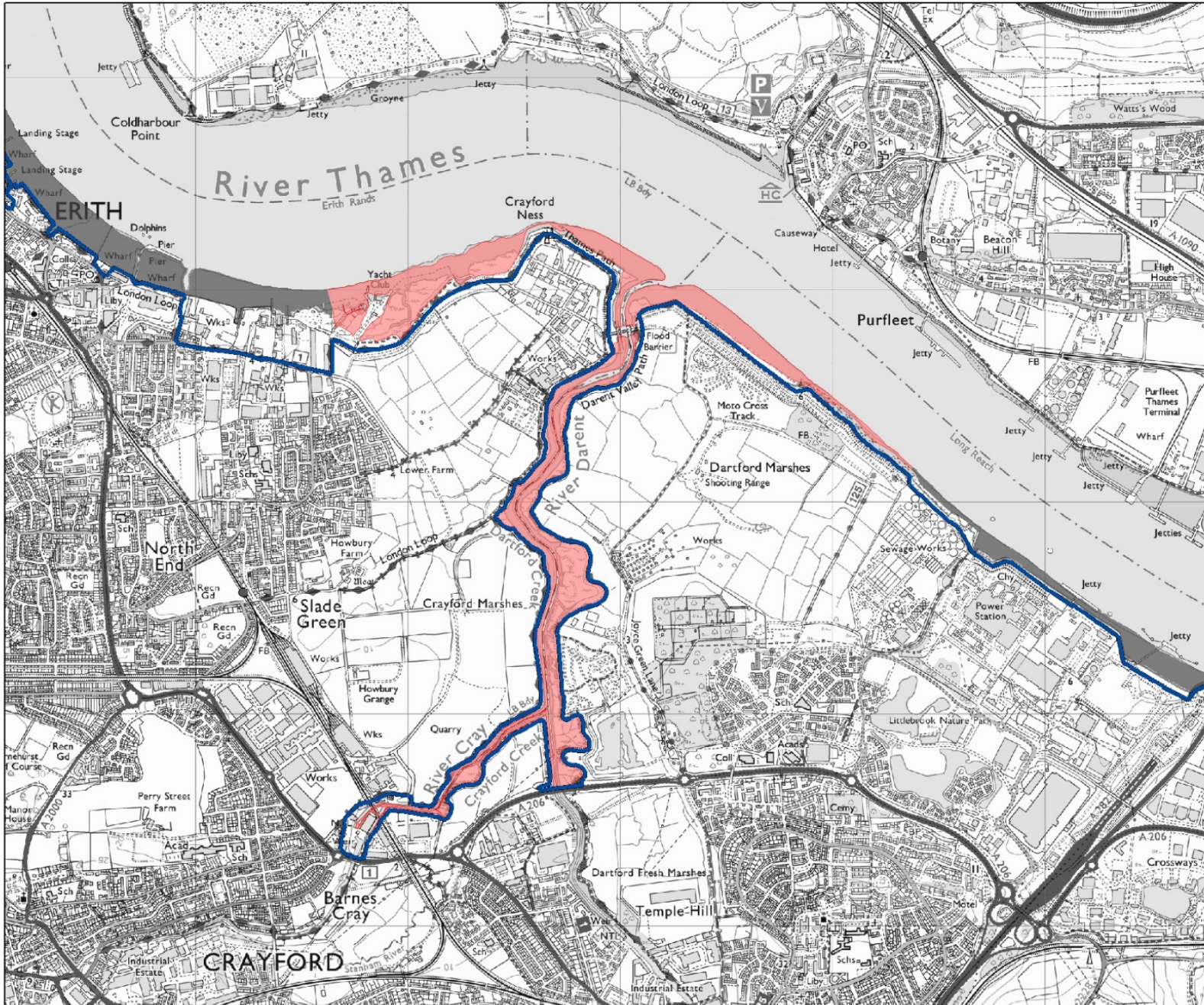
This map is intended to be printed in colour at A3 size.



Coastal Access - Grain to Woolwich - Natural England's Proposals

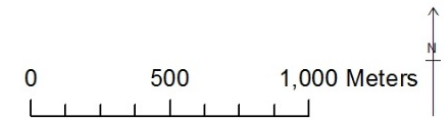
Report GWO 5: Dartford Marshes to Erith Saltings

Directions Map GWO 5A



- Proposed Route
- Directions shown in
- Proposed long-term access exclusion, Unsuitable for Public Access, Section 25A, No Public Access, Year

These directions only affect land where coastal access rights apply and will not affect existing rights of access, such as on public rights of way.



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