

**Assessment of coastal access proposals from
Amble to Bamburgh
on sites and features of nature conservation concern**

31 July 2019



Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Amble and Bamburgh

About this document

This document should be read in conjunction with the published Coastal Access Reports for the Amble to Bamburgh Stretch and the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

The reports and HRA 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/publications/england-coast-path-from-amble-to-bamburgh-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 and [map 1](#) shows the designated sites 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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Introduction

The dramatic coastline is exceptionally varied, with rocky headlands and cliffs contrasting with long, sweeping sandy beaches backed by dunes. The nationally important Whin Sill outcrops both inland and at the coast, supporting rare Whin grassland.

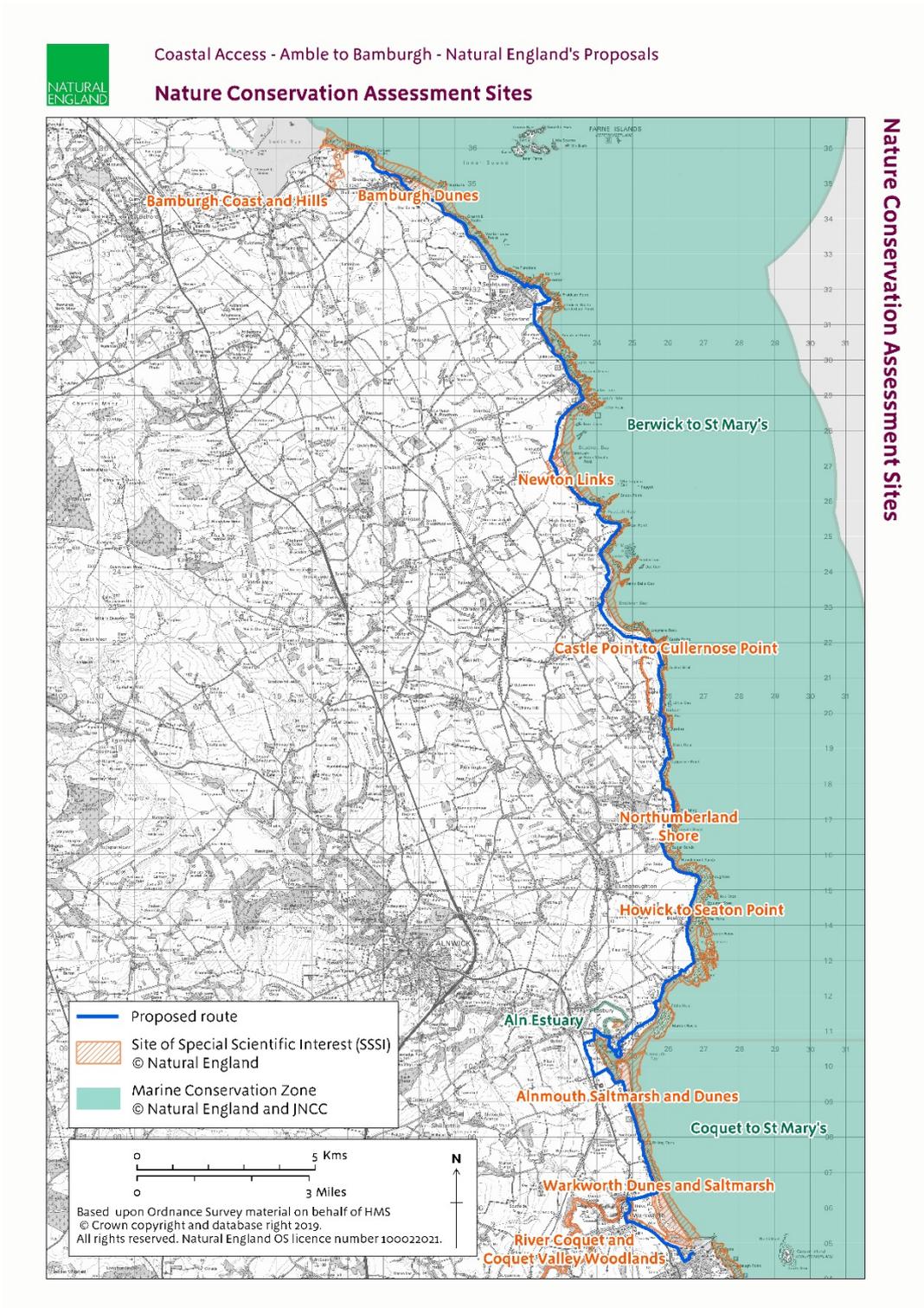
The coast and coastal fringe are of national and international nature conservation importance for their geology, dune and coastal cliff habitats and intertidal habitats which support internationally significant populations of birds, grey seals and scarce plants. The coastline is therefore covered by a number of designations: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites.

The coastal settlements of Amble, Warkworth, Alnmouth, Boulmer, Craster, Low Newton-by-the-Sea, Beadnell, Seahouses and Bamburgh all act as access points for tourists and recreational use. This means the whole coastline here is subject to extensive recreational use. The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership invests much time and resource, such as their 'Coast Care' volunteer team into sensitive recreational management and visitor engagement. The Northumberland Coast Path and National Cycle Route 1 'Coast & Castles' are both very popular and have already been developed with the sensitive features in mind.

In striking an appropriate balance between access and nature conservation, the England Coast Path proposals follows existing public rights of way or walked routes in the most sensitive locations and considers limiting access at the most sensitive times, if an alternative route couldn't be found.

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Map 1: SSSI and MCZ designated sites within the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals



Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Northumberland Shore SSSI

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

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European designated site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 1: Northumberland Shore SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Golden plover, <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	SSSI	
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Purple sandpiper, <i>Calidris maritima</i>	SPA/SSSI	Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar site
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Redshank, <i>Tringa totanus</i>	SSSI	
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Ringed plover, <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	SSSI	
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Sanderling, <i>Calidris alba</i>	SSSI	
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Turnstone, <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	SPA/SSSI	Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar site

The assessment covers the following features:

- Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Golden plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*
- Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Redshank, *Tringa totanus*
- Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Ringed plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*
- Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Sanderling, *Calidris alba*

Current situation

The Northumberland Shore SSSI covers the differing habitats of the foreshore to mean low water and is split into 21 units from Lynemouth to the Scottish Border. It provides important wintering grounds for



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waders of which six occur in nationally important numbers. The notified features for the SSSI are in favourable condition even though the foreshore has high levels of recreational access from beach users. There is a current threat to the SSSI that recreational disturbance by the general public including dog walking is increasing and displacing feeding wintering waders along the Northumberland shore. Sanderling, ringed plover, redshank and golden plover are distributed throughout the SSSI, but mainly between the Coquet estuary and Seahouses and prefer feeding and resting in muddy or sandy locations, while redshank prefer arable or grassland above the shore.

Risk Analysis

Risk to Notified Features

Visual disturbance and noise from people and people with dogs are risks to the over-wintering waders with repeated disturbance leading to reduced fitness and reduction in population and/or contraction in the distribution of notified features within the site. The magnitude of the pressure depends on the temporal scale, intensity and proximity of the activity to the waders.

Consideration

The proposed England Coast Path passes on or outside the landward boundary of the SSSI, so putting the land seaward of this into the coastal access margin. The proposed path follows well-defined and way-marked routes with a suitable surface for easy onward travel either on promoted public rights of way or existing walked routes. The access assessment for Amble to Bamburgh predicts the England Coast Path proposals would not significantly increase or change the pattern of use from the current highly accessed status. It is known that people generally prefer to follow a clearly defined and well maintained route, as the England Coast Path would be. The coastal access proposals will help maintain the paths and improve way-marking, allowing walkers to continue on the path and encourage them not to linger in sensitive areas.

The proposed path deviates away from the promoted Northumberland Coast Path to follow the coastline at Longhoughton Steel, on an existing walked route and Newton Point, where it follows a clear existing walked path on National Trust owned land, this could increase a risk of dogs being allowed to roam on the intertidal habitat disturbing overwintering waders.

At Warkworth harbour a pinch point has been identified due to the narrow nature of estuary and the saltmarsh bringing walkers and overwintering waders into closer proximity leading to an increased risk of displacement and longer flights to relocate to more open ground, which in turn leads to reduced feeding and productivity.

Conclusion

The coastal access proposals are designed to facilitate responsible recreation in ways that minimise disturbance to non-breeding waders, by having well-defined and way-marked routes. Sanderling, ringed plover, redshank and golden plover move around the open Northumberland coast to utilise feeding areas. People also use the area for outdoor recreation and there is some interaction with wintering waders. Most common are minor behavioural responses (increased alertness: birds walk away: short flights) and these are short-lived and localised and occur at levels inconsequential to the fitness or distribution of non-breeding waterbird populations. However at Warkworth harbour where the feeding area is more enclosed



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this interaction is closer in proximity and could lead to a more intense interaction, reducing the birds' feeding ability and fitness. Therefore it has been agreed to restrict the coastal access rights under the CRoW Act to the public during the most sensitive times from 31st August to 31st May each year and to install interpretation boards at the access points in Warkworth dunes car park and at the access track to the saltmarsh and mudflats.

To minimise the risk of disturbance in the coastal access margin at Longhoughton Steel and Newton Point signs to promote responsible dog walking by putting dogs on leads during the most sensitive times will be added.

Following guidance from Stephen Jenkinson (a specialist in managing dogs in the outdoors) a higher degree of compliance to signs at these sections is predicted, as they are short (approximately 500m and 800m), discrete, easily defined with gates at each end and there are areas close by where dogs can be off the lead. Explaining the reasoning and promoting wanted behaviours in the signs increases the effectiveness of compliance further, which will be done in collaboration with the access authority. This is further supported by information produced in visitor guides and leaflets promoting responsible dog-ownership on the Northumberland Coast, as well as the possible use of the Public Spaces Protection Order for non-compliance, which states that authorised officers or agents of the Council or police officers can order a dog to be put and kept on a lead no longer than 1.5m to prevent the worrying of any animal or bird in any open space within the County.

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:

River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- Northumberland Marine SPA

There are no overlapping features with European designated sites or SSSI notified features.

The assessment covers the following features:

- Atlantic salmon, *Salmo salar*
- Brook lamprey, *Lampetra planeri*
- Otter, *Lutra lutra*
- River supporting habitat
- Rivers and streams
- Sea lamprey, *Petromyzon marinus*
- Upland mixed ashwood
- Upland oakwood
- Wet woodland

Current situation

The River Coquet runs about 90km across Northumberland, from its tributaries south of Cheviot summit to reach the sea below Warkworth. The scope of this assessment covers the features in unit 5 the River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI. This unit is unfavourable recovering, due to its reduced water quality, however the features of this unit (Atlantic salmon, brook lamprey, otter, river supporting habitat, rivers and streams and sea lamprey), are deemed in favourable condition.

The England Coast Path travels around unit 5 along public highways from Amble to Warkworth beside the A1068, through Warkworth beside the narrow gorged estuary, which is walled from the path, and crossing at the road bridge to head up to Old Helsay.

Risk Analysis

Risk to Notified Features

The condition threats to the notified features are based on water quality and invasive species with no access issues raised.

Consideration

The coastal access proposals do not extend to the water column of the estuary, so therefore do not affect the features that wholly depend on this habitat. The nature of the path and landscape mean that the trail is separated from the SSSI estuary and does not create new access points to reach the estuary.

Conclusion



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The coastal access proposals do not impact on unit 5 of the River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woodlands SSSI.

Establishment works

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

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- North Northumberland Dunes SAC
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Units 1 and 2 of this SSSI overlap with unit 8 of the Northumbria Coast SSSI.

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 2: Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Fixed dune grassland	SAC/SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Sand dune; strandline, embryo and mobile dunes	SAC/SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Lowland wetland including basin fen, valley fen, floodplain fen, water-fringe fen, spring/flush fen and raised bog lagg	SSSI	
Saltmarsh	SSSI	
Vascular plant assemblage	SSSI	

The assessment covers the following features:

- Lowland wetland including basin fen, valley fen, floodplain fen, water-fringe fen, spring/flush fen and raised bog lagg
- Saltmarsh
- Vascular plant assemblage

Current situation

Situated at the mouth of the River Coquet the site comprises of un-grazed dune ridge extending into a kilometre-long spit, which shelters an area of saltmarsh. The saltmarsh is the third largest in the county and is one of only five substantial areas on the coast of North-East England. An intrinsic feature of the site is the plant community at the interface between sand dunes and saltmarsh. North of Castles Dike was a small



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brackish lagoon with lowland wetland with fen communities. This area has been opened up to allow for coastal inundation and further formation of saltmarsh. The open tidal flats to the south form the main intertidal feeding area for waders and wildfowl within the Coquet estuary. All the notified features have been assessed in favourable condition.

The SSSI is situated close to a well-used car park, which provides access to the dune with a public right of way, running north alongside Warkworth golf course and beach beyond. South toward Amble and the saltmarsh is a stone access track to Amble's North Pier, which cuts between the saltmarsh and dune. The track is used regularly by locals and holiday-makers from the nearby caravan park, including walkers with dogs to either complete a circuit walking back along the beach or to cut through the dunes to reach the beach.

Risk Analysis

Risk to Notified Features

Threats to the saltmarsh are based on water quality with no access issues raised.

Consideration

The England Coast Path alignment avoids the dune spit and saltmarsh leading walkers away from this area on clearly way-marked public rights of way. The saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats of the estuary have been recognised as supporting habitats to over-wintering waders notified under the Northumberland Shore SSSI and it has been agreed to install interpretation boards at the access points in the car park and the gate to the track, as well as restricting access for nature conservation under CROW Act during 1st August to the 31st May annually.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the England Coast Path access proposals for this SSSI will not affect the condition of the notified features.

Establishment works

Is SSSI assent needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works? No, the interpretation boards are to be installed outside the SSSI boundary.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- North Northumberland Dunes SAC
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Units 1 and 3 of this SSSI overlaps with unit 8 of the Northumbria Shore SSSI.

Unit 3 overlaps with Aln Estuary MCZ.

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposal, see annex 1.

Table 3: Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Fixed dune grassland	SSSI/SAC	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Sand dune; strandline, embryo and mobile dunes	SSSI/SAC	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Saltmarsh	SSSI	

The assessment covers the following features:

- Saltmarsh

Current situation

The saltmarsh within this SSSI and England Coast Path proposals focus on unit 3, with unit 4 being landward and, so not affected by the proposals. The saltmarsh to the West of Alnmouth (unit 3) has a diverse range of species across the area reflecting a range of intertidal zones. There are natural creeks and pans across the area with no negative attributes. The area is hard to access, being intertidal, bound by farmland for the majority of its length and fenced at the southern tip, however a public bridleway crosses the estuary to Alnmouth at this southern tip.

The saltmarsh and associated mudflats are also supporting habitat for the notified over-wintering waders in the Northumberland Shore SSSI.



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Risk analysis

Risk to notified features

There are no condition threats identified for this SSSI.

Consideration

The path mainly follows the way-marked Northumberland Coast Path over grass, stone and tarmac surfaces with the only access point within unit 3 being the public bridleway. Where the path deviates closer to the saltmarsh it is screened by a mature hedge and fence, so not to allow a new access point to the area.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the England Coast Path access proposals for this SSSI will not affect the condition of the notified features.

Establishment works

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

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Howick to Seaton Point SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Unit 1 of this SSSI overlaps unit 6 of the Northumbria Shore SSSI.

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 4: Howick to Seaton Point SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites
Features from overlapping sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping Designated Site
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - golden plover, <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	SSSI	Northumbria Shore SSSI
EC - Namurian	SSSI	

The assessment covers the following features:

- EC - Namurian

Current situation

This section of coast provides one of the few shoreline exposures of the Namurian, and is of particular value as it shows the true relationship between the Yoredale-type sedimentation and the overlying arenaceous ‘Millstone Grit’ sediments. Natural processes continue to operate along the length of this unit. There is no evidence of any damage to the geological interest features and the SSSI is in favourable condition. The only coastal defences in this unit are in Boulmer, protecting the line of houses and a small line of coastal works at Rumbling Kern.

Nationally important numbers of golden plover are known to use this section of coast.

This a highly popular well walked section of the Northumberland Coast Path and the proposal is to mainly follow this route, only deviating for approximately 800m toward the coastline, to follow an existing walked route through a grass field. The features are currently accessible and can be used for recreational purposes.



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The path sits slightly landward of the SSSI boundary, so bringing it into the coastal access margin, once the England Coast Path is opened. It is way-marked and mainly on a stable surface of either grass or stone to provide easy onward travel. Where the trail is on bare ground it is intended to improve the surface to meet the standard of the trail at either end of the SSSI.

Risk analysis

Risk to notified features

No threats have been identified for this SSSI.

Consideration

The hard rock features forming cliffs and stacks are within the coastal access margin. They are subject to natural processes, particularly within the intertidal zone and are at a scale such that any increased recreational impacts would be negligible. It is not foreseen that the England Coast Path will increase walkers on this section of coastline.

Conclusion

The coastal access proposals do not impact on the Namurian geological features of the Seaton Point to Howick SSSI, as access within the SSSI is unlikely to increase from this proposal and the features are able to withstand recreational activity.

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:

Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Units 2 to 6 of this SSSI overlap with units 2 and 3 of the Northumbria Coast SSSI.

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 5: Castle Point to Cullernose Point SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Reefs	SAC /SSSI	Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
Aggregations of breeding birds - Kittiwake, <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	SPA/SSSI	Northumberland Marine SPA
EC - Carboniferous - Permian Igneous	SSSI	
Hard maritime cliff and slope	SSSI	
Lowland dry acid grassland	SSSI	
Soft maritime cliff and slope	SSSI	

This assessment covers:

- EC - Carboniferous - Permian Igneous
- Hard maritime cliff and slope
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Soft maritime cliff and slope



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Current situation

Castle Point to Cullernose Point SSSI holds classic exposures of the whin sill, which support whin grassland. Some of the best examples of maritime (sea-cliff) grassland between the Tees and the Scottish Border are also represented here. In places these grade to cliff-top heath, another very rare habitat almost unknown elsewhere in the area. Natural processes continue to operate and the unit is in favourable condition. Again, this is a highly popular well walked section of the Northumberland Coast Path and the proposal is to follow this route. Craster at the mid-point of the SSSI receives 250,000 visitors annually. The path sits slightly landward of the SSSI boundary, so bringing it into the coastal access margin, once England Coast Path is opened. The features are currently accessible and can be used for recreational purposes. It is well defined and way-marked and mainly on a stable surface of either grass, stone or tarmac to provide easy onward travel.

Castle Point and Cullernose Point are noted for their breeding kittiwake and are considered as part of the Habitat Regulation Assessment.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

A low risk threat to the condition of the SSSI has been found in unit 6, where there is a thistle infestation, close to the public right of way.

Consideration

The rock features forming cliffs and maritime slope are within the coastal access margin. The geology is subject to natural processes, particularly within the intertidal zone and is at a scale such that any increased recreational impacts would be negligible. It is not foreseen that the England Coast Path will increase walkers on this section of coastline. The associated acid grassland is also subject to access, however the nature of trail here allows walkers to spread out, so reducing erosion pressure, and also encourages walkers onward the views of Craster and Dunstanburgh Castle.

Conclusion

The coastal access proposals do not impact on the notified features of the Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI, as access within the SSSI is unlikely to increase from this proposal and the features are able to withstand recreational activity.

Establishment works

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

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Newton Links SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European sites of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- North Northumberland Dunes SAC
- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

Unit 3 of this SSSI overlaps with unit 3 of the Northumbria Shore SSSI.

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 6: Newton Links SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Aggregations of breeding birds - little tern, <i>Sterna albifrons</i>	SPA / SSSI	Northumbria Coast SPA / Newton Links SSSI
Fixed dune grassland	SAC / SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Sand dune; strandline, embryo and mobile dunes	SAC / SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Saltmarsh	SSSI	

This assessment covers:

- saltmarsh

Current situation

The area of saltmarsh contained within the access proposal is approximately 0.4ha in the landward margin at the northern end of the Newton Links dune system. The remaining 8.4ha of saltmarsh is within unit 1 of the SSSI, fenced from access and not within the proposals. The proposed trail follows the SSSI boundary of



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unit 1 and 2, which is also the Northumberland Coast Path, on fixed dune grassland and is accessed throughout by walkers from Beadnell and Newton Links car park, as well as long distance walkers.

The little tern nesting site is managed by the National Trust and during the breeding season (1st April until 31st August each year) a restriction of coastal access right under the CROW Act to public access has been given as part of the Habitats Regulation Assessment.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

The condition threat to the notified features are based on a change in land management and seen as a medium risk threat. The saltmarsh is in favourable condition.

Consideration

The trail or landward coastal access margin does not encroach on to the main area of saltmarsh. By the nature of the landscape walkers are encouraged away from the small area of saltmarsh that lies within the coastal access margin with the beach and Beadnell village close by as attractions.

Conclusion

The coastal access proposals do not impact on the notified feature of saltmarsh in the Newton Links SSSI, as the majority of the saltmarsh is outside the scope of the proposal. The small area included in the proposals will not attract access, being muddy and landward of the trail, with walkers passing by on a well-defined route wanting to reach Beadnell, Embleton Bay or Low Newton-by-the-Sea.

Establishment works

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

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Bamburgh Dunes SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European site of

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC

Notified SSSI features that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment, as they are considered as part of the habitat regulation assessment.

For a full list of overlapping features and designated sites in the Amble to Bamburgh coastal access proposals, see annex 1.

Table 7: Bamburgh Dunes SSSI features with overlapping features from other designated sites

SSSI Notified Feature	Site Designation	Overlapping European Designated Site
Fixed dune grassland	SAC / SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Humid dune slacks	SAC / SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC
Invertebrate assemblage (bare sand & chalk)	SSSI	
Invertebrate assemblage (open short sward)	SSSI	
Sand dune; strandline, embryo and mobile dunes (SD1-6)	SAC / SSSI	North Northumberland Dunes SAC

This assessment covers:

- Invertebrate assemblage (bare sand & chalk)
- Invertebrate assemblage (open short sward)

Current situation

A variety of invertebrates are associated with Bamburgh dune communities; nearly 500 species have been identified including 15 nationally rare or scarce species. The older grey dune areas are particularly rich in invertebrates with over half the scarce species found here. The wet areas within the dunes hold a number of associated specialist species, including several different beetles, whilst the grey dune and marram areas are particularly important for many species associated with dry habitats.

Bamburgh Dunes is not currently covered by any specific invertebrate monitoring schemes, although a baseline survey was undertaken in 1995 prior to notification. Bamburgh Dunes SSSI has high levels of recreational access with the castle attracting 150, 000 visitors annually and increasing. The dunes are criss-crossed with de facto access providing bare sand to create and maintain the other key invertebrate habitat



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feature; a mosaic of flower-rich coastal grassland with extensive areas of sparsely vegetated sand. This mosaic provides an excellent suite of 'micro' habitats for many invertebrates and includes a plentiful supply of nectar and pollen, nesting sites and heated bays within the bare patches of ground and forage sites amongst the herb-rich grassland, which are sheltered by the topography of the dunes.

The dunes are conservation grazed to reduce and prevent rank grass and scrub encroachment.

The trail passes at the back of the dunes on de facto access and uses the current fixed entry points where the site is grazed. The whole of the dune will be within the coastal access margin.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

The SSSI is in unfavourable recovering condition with a medium risk threat from lack of continued scrub control and a high risk threat from recreational disturbance.

Consideration

Bamburgh Dunes SSSI is a publicly accessed site. Localised impacts could occur, if changes in access lead to excessively churned up sand in sensitive areas. However, it is anticipated that some of the bare sand habitat will be maintained by heavy public usage of footpaths, which is favourable for invertebrates. The proposed trail follows well defined, well walked routes on stable fixed dunes grassland. It avoids sensitive areas, such as a humid dune slacks and embryonic dune habitat.

Conclusion

It is recognised that some access is beneficial to invertebrates to provide bare ground and short swards by trampling and compaction. The access patterns are unlikely to change on this highly accessed dune from the England Coast Path proposals. Therefore it can be concluded that the coastal access proposals do not impact on the invertebrate assemblage (bare sand & chalk) and invertebrate assemblage (open short sward) notified features of Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSI.

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:

It is proposed that 10 new way-markers and 60 back-filled steps will be installed to improve the trail and help guide walkers through the designated habitat. This has been considered, as part of the HRA, and assessed as an inconsequential loss of habitat in the context of the conservation objectives for the feature and the nature of the works will not adversely affect the continuity and functioning of the habitats as a whole. The location and installation methods will be finalised at establishment stage and an assessment of



Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Amble and Bamburgh

the possible impacts will be checked and confirmed as part of the SSSI assenting process prior to the works being carried out.

Northumberland County 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:

Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSI

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This SSSI overlaps with the European site of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- North Northumberland Dunes SAC
- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA
- Lindisfarne SPA

Unit 1 and 2 of this SSSI overlaps with part of unit 2 for Northumbria Shore SSSI.

There are no overlapping features with European designated sites or other SSSI notified features.

This assessment covers:

- EC - Carboniferous - Permian Igneous
- Lowland dry acid grassland

Current situation

Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSI is one of several sites throughout the north east of England that display outcrops of whin sill. These are hard geological features that form cliffs and stacks as well as platforms occurring on the foreshore. They are subject to natural processes, particularly within the intertidal zone and the platforms provide important foraging and resting areas for over-wintering shore birds. The features are currently accessible from the beach and 'The Wynding', which links the golf course to Bamburgh village and includes several car parking areas. The features are used for recreational purposes with benches amongst the whin grassland, however the sandy beaches form the main attraction for walkers and holidaymakers. This part of the proposal ends at the entrance to the golf course and includes unit 1 and 3.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

Unit 1 of the Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSI is notified for its geological feature of Carboniferous - Permian Igneous rock. This is in favourable condition and no threat to it has been identified. The natural processes operate across the whole unit and no damaging operations are noted.

Unit 3 is notified for its lowland acid grassland, which is characteristic of the Whin sill in this area. A high risk threat is noted for the site not being in an agri-environment scheme for management.



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Consideration

The proposed trail follows 'The Wynding' tarmacked road and sits on the landward edge of the SSSI boundary bringing the seaward area into the coastal access margin. The area of whin sill and associated acid grassland already has high levels of access and it is not foreseen that the England Coast Path will increase walkers on this section of coastline. The Whin Sill formation is a hard rock, subject to natural processes and resilient to access on foot.

Conclusion

The coastal access proposals do not impact on the notified features of the Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSI, as access within the SSSI is unlikely to increase from this proposal and the features are able to withstand recreational activity.

Establishment works

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

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Coquet to St Mary's MCZ

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This MCZ overlaps with the European sites of:

- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

There are no MCZ features that overlap with qualifying European site features.

This assessment covers MCZ features:

- High energy infralittoral rock
- High energy intertidal rock
- Intertidal coarse sediment
- Intertidal mixed sediments
- Intertidal mud
- Intertidal sand and muddy sand
- Intertidal under boulder communities
- Low energy intertidal rock
- Moderate energy circalittoral rock
- Moderate energy infralittoral rock
- Moderate energy intertidal rock
- Peat and clay exposures
- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal mixed sediments
- Subtidal mud
- Subtidal sand

Current Situation

Coquet to St Mary's MCZ is an inshore site that runs along the southern half of the Northumberland Coast, within the northern North Sea in the north-east of England. The site covers approximately 192 km² of intertidal and subtidal habitats, stretching from Alnmouth in the north to Whitley Bay to the south, and from mean high water out to approximately 7.5km at its seaward-most extent. Coquet to St Mary's MCZ contains a mosaic of sediment and hard substrate benthic habitats, which in turn support a wide range of diverse communities.

The England Coast Path from Amble to Alnmouth follows on public rights of way and existing walked routes, bringing the land seaward of the trail into the coastal access margin. This margin is readily accessible containing mainly wide open sandy beaches with a small outcrop of rock at Birling Carrs.

The MCZ boundary overlaps with the coastal access boundary between mean high water and mean low water.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

From the advice on operations the following are not relevant to the risk assessment for recreation: walking

- High energy infralittoral rock
- Intertidal under boulder communities
- Moderate energy circalittoral rock
- Moderate energy infralittoral rock
- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal mixed sediments
- Subtidal mud
- Subtidal sand

Table 8: Advice on operations – recreation: walking

Qualifying Feature Pressure	High energy intertidal rock	Intertidal coarse sediment	Intertidal mixed sediments	Intertidal mud	Intertidal sand and muddy sand	Low energy intertidal rock	Moderate energy intertidal rock	Peat and clay exposures
Visual disturbance	Not relevant	Not relevant	Not relevant	Not relevant	Not sensitive	Not relevant	Not relevant	Not sensitive
Abrasion/ disturbance of substrate on the surface of the seabed	Low sensitivity	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity
Organic enrichment	Low sensitivity	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Insufficient evidence
Penetration/ disturbance of the substratum below the level of the seabed	Low sensitivity	Not sensitive	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity
Removal of non-target species	Not relevant	Not relevant	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Not relevant	Not relevant	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity



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Consideration and Conclusion

The qualifying features are not sensitive to visual disturbance and either low sensitivity or not sensitive to penetration/ disturbance of the substratum below the level of the seabed and abrasion/disturbance of substrate on the surface of the seabed. Trampling of the features through walking can cause disturbance to the surface and shallow sub-surface of the foreshore. This impact will generally be intertidal or very shallow sub tidal. The amount of physical disturbance will be dependent on the intensity of the activity, in most cases the extent of the 'footprint' will be relatively localised.

Organic enrichment has been assessed as not sensitive or insufficient evidence for intertidal sediments, mud and sand, and low sensitivity for intertidal rock. Removal of non-target species is low sensitivity for intertidal sediments, moderate energy intertidal rock and peat and clay exposures. It is noted that dogs can potentially prey on non-target species, such as birds, and that dog excrement and urine may lead to localised organic enrichment on the qualifying features.

More information can be found at: [https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/Coquet to St Mary's MCZ](https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/Coquet%20to%20St%20Mary's%20MCZ)

The Coquet to St Mary's MCZ is a highly visited stretch of coastline and readily accessed from public rights of way at various points from Amble to Alnmouth. It is not foreseen that the England Coast Path proposals will significantly increase or change the pattern of activity to impact on this already well accessed coastline.



Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Amble and Bamburgh

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Aln Estuary MCZ

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This MCZ overlaps with the European sites of:

- Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC
- North Northumberland Dunes SAC
- Northumbria Marine SPA

There are no MCZ features that overlap with qualifying European site features.

This assessment covers MCZ features:

- Coastal saltmarshes and saline reedbeds
- Estuarine rocky habitats
- Intertidal mud
- Sheltered muddy gravels

Current situation

The Aln Estuary Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is an estuarine site located on the Northumberland Coast. The site extends from the upper tidal limit at Lesbury to the estuary mouth at Alnmouth where the boundary aligns with Coquet to St Mary's MCZ. The Aln Estuary MCZ represents the smallest designated MCZ in the United Kingdom, covering an area of 38.5 ha. The site was designated in 2013, to protect intertidal estuarine and saltmarsh habitats which act as spawning and nursery areas for a range of fish species and support migratory and over-wintering water birds.

The estuary currently has limited access from the eastern edges at Waterside House, but can be accessed from the west at Lovers' Walk and the south from Alnmouth sand dunes. The proposed England Coast Path follows public rights of way and existing walked routes around the estuary. The MCZ boundary overlaps with the Coastal access boundary between mean high water and mean low water.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

Table 9: Advice on operations – recreation: walking

	Coastal saltmarshes and saline reed beds	Estuarine rocky habitats	Intertidal mud	Sheltered muddy gravels
Abrasion/disturbance of substrate on the surface of the seabed	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Not relevant
Litter	Low sensitivity	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not relevant
Organic enrichment	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Low sensitivity	Not relevant
Penetration/disturbance of the substratum below the surface of the seabed	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Not relevant
Removal of non-target species	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Low sensitivity	Not relevant

Consideration and Conclusion

The AIn estuary MCZ has been assessed as mainly low sensitivity to walking with any issues likely to be localised and of low impact, however the risk depends on the timing, scale, intensity and proximity of the activity to the feature. It is noted that dogs can potentially prey on non-target species, such as birds, and that dog excrement and urine may lead to localised organic enrichment on estuarine rocky habitats.

More information can be found at: [https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/AIn Estuary MCZ](https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/AIn%20Estuary%20MCZ)

The AIn Estuary MCZ and the surrounding coastline is highly visited, however access on foot to the estuary is limited to two access points. The England Coast Path proposals do not alter these and follows existing promoted routes. It is not foreseen that the England Coast Path proposals will significantly increase or change the pattern of activity to impact this estuary.



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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Berwick to St Mary's MCZ

Is this site also part of a European site? Yes

This MCZ overlaps with the European sites of:

- Northumbria Coast SPA
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar site
- Northumberland Marine SPA

There are no MCZ features that overlap with qualifying European site features.

This assessments covers the MCZ features of the common eider.

Current situation

The Berwick to St. Mary's MCZ is an inshore site extending from Berwick-upon-Tweed in the north to St Mary's Island in the south and covers an area of 634 km². The area holds nationally important numbers of breeding common eider (*Somateria mollissima*) and also supports regionally and nationally (England) important numbers of non-breeding common eider. The conservation aim of the MCZ is to provide a critical seaward maintenance and foraging extension surrounding Coquet Island and Farne Islands to allow the birds to recover to a favourable condition.

Risk analysis

Risk to Notified Features

The activities likely to affect the population recovery of the common eider are powerboating, jet skiing, sailing, angling and kayaking.

Consideration and Conclusion

Common eider are seabirds spending most of their time at sea or using Coquet Island and the Farne Islands as breeding locations. The England Coast Path proposals do not extend beyond mean low water on the mainland, so will not affect the conservation aims of this MCZ.

More information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-berwick-to-st-marys>



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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Supporting habitat and high tide roost at Castle Dike, Warkworth Harbour

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

This site partly overlaps with the European sites of North Northumberland Dunes SAC and Northumberland Marine SPA and the SSSI site of Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh, as well as being undesignated in places. ([See map 2](#)).

There are no overlapping features with European designated sites or SSSI notified features.

This assessment covers: supporting habitat and high tide roost for overwintering waterbirds, including redshank, curlew, lapwing and wigeon.

Current situation

Currently the area of saltmarsh at Castle Dikes, Warkworth harbour is partly designated for dune, fen and saltmarsh habitat, as well as vascular plant assemblage, however it is noted as a locally important supporting habitat and high tide roost for a range of overwintering waterbirds, such as redshank, curlew, lapwing and wigeon.

The area of saltmarsh is narrow (approx. 200m wide) nestling between a 1km long dune spit and the headland of Old Helsay. A stone access track to reach the north pier is readily used by walkers, including walkers with dogs. The proposed England Coast Path turns north away from Castle Dike, however in doing so creates coastal access margin across the saltmarsh.

The area of mud in Warkworth harbour abutting the saltmarsh has had public access under CRoW Act restricted to prevent disturbance to overwintering waterbirds during 31st August to 31st May each year.

Risk analysis

Risk to features

The overwintering waterbirds move around the sheltered areas of Warkworth harbour and Castle Dike for foraging at low and high tide. The waders using the area of mud in Warkworth harbour have been assessed as sensitive to disturbance from human activity, leaving the foraging birds using the saltmarsh at Castle Dike unprotected to disturbance.

Consideration and Conclusion

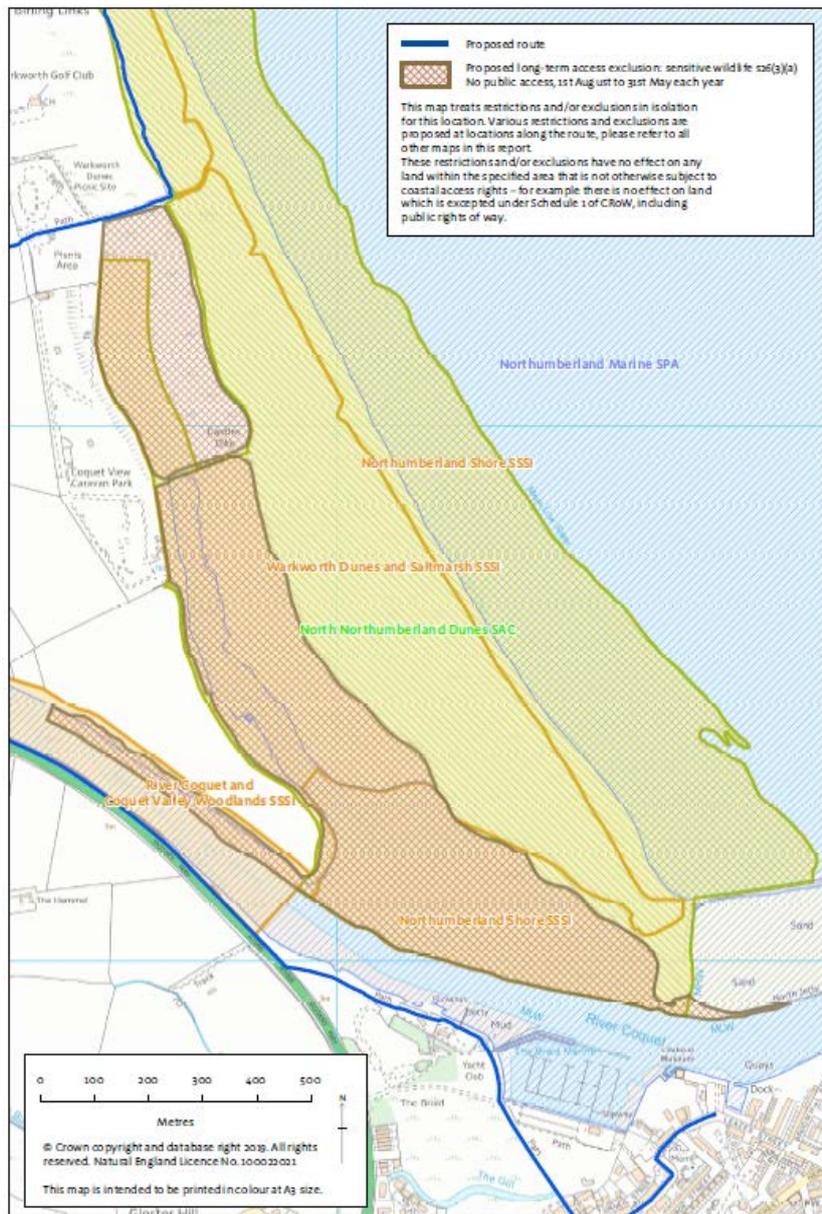
Although the Castle Dike saltmarsh is not designated for overwintering waders, it is a locally important supporting habitat providing low and high tide foraging areas and is used in conjunction with the Northumberland Shore SSSI designated mud in the harbour. It would be inconsistent not to protect the area as a whole. Therefore the CRoW restriction for no public access from 31st August to 31st May each year to prevent disturbance to overwintering waders has been applied across the two habitats. To support this

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two interpretation boards will be installed at key access points. Map E in the Amble to Bamburgh overview shows the extent of the restriction.

The restriction to public access covers the saltmarsh area only, allowing use of the stone access track and Warkworth dunes.

Map 2: Map of over-lapping designated sites at Warkworth Harbour and the restricted access area





Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Amble and Bamburgh

Conclusion

Northumberland Shore, River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woodlands, Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh, Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes, Howick to Seaton Point, Castle Point to Cullernose Point, Newton Links, Bamburgh Dunes and Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSIs

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Amble to Bamburgh are fully compatible with our duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of Northumberland Shore, River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woodlands, Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh, Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes, Howick to Seaton Point, Castle Point to Cullernose, Newton Links, Bamburgh Dunes and Bamburgh Coast and Hills SSSIs, consistent with the proper exercise of our functions¹.

Coquet to St Mary's, Aln Estuary and Berwick to St Mary's MCZs

In respect of any duties that may arise under section 125 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, Natural England has concluded for Coquet to St Mary's, Aln Estuary and Berwick to St Mary's MCZs that the access proposals (including any mitigation measures specified) is the one that, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions under section 296 of the same Act, is least likely to hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives for the Marine Conservation Zone - and accordingly may proceed.

Castle Dike saltmarsh, Warkworth harbour

In respect of Castle Dike saltmarsh 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:

Name: Rachel Webster	Date: 13 th June 2019	On behalf of the Coastal Access Programme Team
Name: Stephanie Bird-Halton	Date: 13 th June	On behalf of Natural England: Northumbria Area Team

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.

Annex 1. Index to European and SSSI designated sites and features

European Designated Site Qualifying Features	Northumberland Marine SPA	North Northumberland Dunes SAC	Northumbria Coast SPA	Northumbria Coast Ramsar site	Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast SAC	Northumberland Shore SSSI	Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	Alnmouth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI	Howick to Seaton Point SSSI	Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI	Newton Links SSSI	Bamburgh Dunes SSSI	Bamburgh Coast and Hill SSSI
A169 Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i> (non-breeding)														
A191 Sandwich tern <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> (breeding)														
A192 Roseate tern <i>Sterna dougallii</i> (breeding)														
A193 Common tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> (breeding)														
A194 Arctic tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> (breeding)														
A195 Little tern <i>Sterna albifrons</i> (breeding)														
A199 Common guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i> (breeding)														
A204 Atlantic puffin <i>Fratercula arctica</i> (breeding)														

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European Designated Site Qualifying Features	Northumberland Marine SPA	North Northumberland Dunes SAC	Northumbria Coast SPA	Northumbria Coast Ramsar site	Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast SAC	Northumberland Shore SSSI	Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	Alnmouth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI	Howick to Seaton Point SSSI	Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI	Newton Links SSSI	Bamburgh Dunes SSSI	Bamburgh Coast and Hill SSSI
A670 Purple sandpiper <i>Calidris maritima</i> (non-breeding)														
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Sanderling, <i>Calidris alba</i>														
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Ringed plover, <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>														
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Redshank, <i>Tringa totanus</i>														
Aggregations of non-breeding birds - Golden plover, <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>														
Aggregations of breeding birds - Kittiwake, <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>														
Seabird assemblage														
H1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide														
H1160 Large shallow inlets and bays														
H1170 Reefs														
Saltmarsh														



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European Designated Site Qualifying Features	Northumberland Marine SPA	North Northumberland Dunes SAC	Northumbria Coast SPA	Northumbria Coast Ramsar site	Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast SAC	Northumberland Shore SSSI	Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	Alnmouth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI	Howick to Seaton Point SSSI	Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI	Newton Links SSSI	Bamburgh Dunes SSSI	Bamburgh Coast and Hill SSSI
H2110 Embryonic shifting dunes														
H2120 Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ('White dunes')														
H2130 Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('Grey dunes')														
H2170 Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> (<i>Salicion arenariae</i>)														
H2190 Humid dune slacks														
H8330 Submerged or partially submerged sea caves														
S1364 Grey seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>														
S1395 Petalwort <i>Petalophyllum ralfsi</i>														
Vascular Plant Assemblage														
Brook lamprey, <i>Lampetra planeri</i>														
Sea lamprey, <i>Petromyzon marinus</i>														
Rivers and streams														
River supporting habitat														



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European Designated Site Qualifying Features	Northumberland Marine SPA	North Northumberland Dunes SAC	Northumbria Coast SPA	Northumbria Coast Ramsar site	Berwickshire & North Northumberland Coast SAC	Northumberland Shore SSSI	Warkworth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	Alnmouth Dunes and Saltmarsh SSSI	River Coquet and Coquet Valley Woods SSSI	Howick to Seaton Point SSSI	Castle Point to Cullernose SSSI	Newton Links SSSI	Bamburgh Dunes SSSI	Bamburgh Coast and Hill SSSI
Otter, <i>Lutra lutra</i>														
Atlantic salmon, <i>Salmo salar</i>														
Invert. assemblage (open short sward)														
Invert. assemblage (bare sand & chalk)														
Lowland dry acid grassland														
Upland mixed ashwood														
Upland oakwood														
Wet woodland														
Lowland wetland including basin fen, valley fen, floodplain fen, waterfringe fen, spring/flush fen and raised bog lagg														
Hard maritime slope														
Soft maritime slope														
EC - Namurian														
EC - Carboniferous - Permian igneous														



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