



Assessment of England Coast Path proposals between Silecroft and Silverdale

On Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC

January 2020

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Summary

I) Introduction

This is a record of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (‘HRA’) undertaken by Natural England (in its role of competent authority) in accordance with the assessment and review provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (‘the Habitats Regulations’).

Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. This assessment considers the potential impacts of our detailed proposals for coastal access from Silecroft to Silverdale on the following sites of international importance for wildlife: Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC.

The following sites are also affected by our proposals for coastal access from Silecroft to Silverdale: Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA), Morecambe Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Morecambe Bay Ramsar. The impact of the proposals on these sites is considered within the Morecambe Bay & Duddon Estuary HRA, published alongside our proposals.

This assessment should be read alongside Natural England’s related Coastal Access Reports which between them fully describe and explain its access proposals for the stretch as a whole. The Overview explains common principles and background and the reports explain how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths within the stretch. These Reports can be viewed here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-coast-path-from-silecroft-to-silverdale-comment-on-proposals

II) Background

The England Coast Path is aligned through woodland at Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC, and an area of woodland falls within the proposed coastal margin.

III) Our approach

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 Coastal Access: Natural England’s Approved Scheme 2013 [Ref 1].

Our final published proposal for a stretch of England Coast Path is preceded by detailed local consideration of options for route alignment, the extent of the coastal margin and any requirement for restrictions, exclusions or seasonal alternative routes. The proposal is thoroughly considered before being finalised and initial ideas may be modified or rejected

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during the iterative design process, drawing on the range of relevant expertise available within Natural England.

Evidence is also gathered as appropriate from a range of other sources which can include information and data held locally by external partners or from the experience of local land owners, environmental consultants and occupiers. The approach includes looking at any current visitor management practices, either informal or formal. It also involves discussing our emerging conclusions as appropriate with key local interests such as land owners or occupiers, conservation organisations or the local access authority. In these ways, any nature conservation concerns are discussed early and constructive solutions identified as necessary.

The conclusions of this assessment are approved by a member of Natural England staff who is not a member of coastal access programme team and who has responsibility for protected sites.

This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

IV) Aim and objectives for the design of our proposals

The new national arrangements for coastal access will establish a continuous well-maintained walking route around the coast and clarify where people can access the foreshore and other parts of the coastal margin. These changes will influence how people use the coast for recreation and our aim in designing our detailed proposals has been to secure and enhance opportunities for people to enjoy their visit whilst ensuring appropriate protection for affected European sites.

A particular concern during the development of our proposals through the SAC has been damage to woodland habitat due to trampling. The SAC is also a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and access is currently managed using a permit system. Visitors must stay on waymarked routes and dogs must be kept on short leads to prevent disturbance to wildlife. Ospreys nest on the site, and at times paths may be closed to prevent disturbance to the birds. Our aim in developing our proposals has been to secure and enhance opportunities for people to enjoy their visit and actively engage with the natural environment whilst ensuring appropriate protection for the designated site features. Objectives for design of our detailed local proposals have been to:

- develop proposals that take account of risks to sensitive nature conservation features and incorporate mitigation as necessary in our proposals;
- avoid causing trampling damage at sensitive locations by making use of established tracks where possible;
- where practical, incorporate opportunities to raise awareness of the importance of the qualifying features of the site, and how people can help efforts to protect them.

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V) Conclusion

We have considered whether our detailed proposals for coastal access between Silecroft and Silverdale might have an impact on Roudsea Woods SAC. In Part C of this assessment we identify some possible risks to the relevant qualifying features and conclude that proposals for coastal access, without incorporated mitigation, may have a significant effect on these sites. In Part D we consider these risks in more detail, taking account of avoidance and mitigation measures incorporated into our access proposal, and conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity of either site. These measures are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of risks and consequent mitigation built in to our proposals

Risk to conservation objectives	Relevant design features of the access proposal
More frequent trampling in areas of woodland, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (ground flora, tree and shrub species, rare and threatened fungi and nationally scarce bryophytes)	ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track. A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage people from leaving the ECP. Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.
More frequent disturbance by people and dogs, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (hazel dormouse).	A year round dogs on leads restriction is proposed along the line of the ECP. Access will be excluded year round from the coastal margin, to prevent disturbance of dormice. ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track. A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage people from leaving the ECP. Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.
If effective deer management is compromised by the new access proposals, this could eventually lead to a change in key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site, and may also lead to loss of extent of woodland habitat.	ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track. A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage people from leaving the ECP. Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.

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VI) Implementation

Once the coastal access proposals have been confirmed by the Secretary of State, we will work with Cumbria County Council to ensure any works on the ground are carried out with due regard to the conclusions of this appraisal and relevant statutory requirements.

VII) Thanks

The development of our proposals has been informed by input from people with relevant expertise within Natural England. The proposals have been thoroughly considered before being finalised and our initial ideas were modified during an iterative design process.

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PART A: Introduction and information about the England Coast Path

A1. Introduction

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 whole coast: we call this the England Coast Path; the other relating to a margin of coastal land associated with the route where in appropriate places people will be able to spread out and explore, rest or picnic.

To secure these objectives, we must submit reports to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recommending where the route should be and identifying the associated coastal margin. The reports must follow the approach set out in our methodology (the Coastal Access Scheme), which – as the legislation requires – has been approved by the Secretary of State for this purpose.

Where implementation of a Coastal Access Report could impact on a site designated for its international importance for wildlife, called a ‘European site¹’, a Habitat Regulations Assessment must be carried out.

The conclusions of this screening are certified by both the member of staff responsible for developing the access proposal and the person responsible for considering any environmental impacts. This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

Natural England’s approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in the Coastal Access Scheme [Ref 1]. Note that, following a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union (Case C-323/17 – usually cited as *People over Wind*), we have issued a technical memorandum concerning the application of this methodology where assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required.

¹ Ramsar sites and proposed Ramsar sites; potential Special Protection Areas (pSPA); candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC); and sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on European sites are treated in the same way by UK government policy.

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A2. Details of the plan or project

This assessment considers Natural England's proposals for coastal access along the stretch of coast between Silecroft and Silverdale on Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC. This assessment is concerned with **Coastal Access Report SCS 5 Greenodd Footbridge to Kents Bank. Report maps SCS 5a to 5b and restriction map SCS 5L in the SCS 5 Coastal Access Report show relevant details of the access proposals.**

Our proposals for coastal access have two main components:

- alignment of the England Coast Path; and
- designation of coastal margin.

England Coast Path

A continuous walking route around the coast – the England Coast Path National Trail - will be established by joining up existing coastal paths and creating new sections of path where necessary. The route will be established and maintained to National Trail quality standards. The coastal path will be able to 'roll back' in response to coastal erosion, solving long-standing difficulties with maintaining a continuous route on this stretch of coast.

Coastal Margin

An area of land associated with the proposed trail will become coastal margin, including all land seawards of the trail down to mean low water. In certain locations, land on the landward side of the trail will also form part of the coastal margin.

Coastal margin is typically subject to new coastal access rights, though there are some obvious exceptions to this. The nature and limitations of the new rights, and the key types of land excepted from them, are explained in more detail in Chapter 2 of our Coastal Access Scheme [Ref 1]. Where there are already public or local rights to do other things, these are normally unaffected and will continue to exist in parallel to the new coastal access rights. The exception to this principle is any pre-existing open access rights under Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) over land falling within the coastal margin: the new coastal access rights will apply in place of these.

Where public access on foot already takes place on land within the margin without any legal right for people to use the land in this way, the new coastal access rights will secure this existing use legally. Access secured in this way is subject to various national restrictions. It remains open to the owner of the land, should they wish, to continue tolerating other types of established public use not provided for by coastal access rights.

Promotion of the England Coast Path

The Coast Path will be promoted as part of the family of National Trails. On the ground, the path will be easy to follow, with distinctive signposting at key intersections and places people

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can join the route. Directional way markers incorporating the National Trail acorn symbol will be used to guide people along the route. The coastal margin will not normally be marked on the ground, except where signage is necessary to highlight dangers that might not be obvious to visitors, or clarify to the scope and/or extent of coastal access rights.

Information about the Coast Path will be available on-line, including via the established National Trails website that has a range of useful information, including things for users to be aware of, such as temporary closures and diversions. The route is depicted on Ordnance Survey maps using the acorn symbol. The extent of the coastal margin is also depicted, together with an explanation about coastal access, where they do and don't apply and how to find out about local restrictions or exclusions.

Maintenance of the England Coast Path

The access proposals provide for the permanent establishment of a path and associated infrastructure, including additional mitigation measures referred to in this assessment and described in the access proposals. The England Coast Path will be part of the National Trails family of routes, for which there are national quality standards. Delivery is by local partnerships and there is regular reporting and scrutiny of key performance indicators, including the condition of the trail.

Responding to future change

The legal framework that underpins coastal access allows for adaptation in light of future change. In such circumstances Natural England has powers to change the route of the trail and limit access rights over the coastal margin in ways that were not originally envisaged. These new powers can be used, as necessary, alongside informal management techniques and other measures to ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained in light of unforeseen future change.

Establishment of the trail

Establishment works to make the trail fit for use and prepare for opening, including any special measures that have been identified as necessary to protect the environment, will be carried out before the new public rights come into force on this stretch. Details of the works to be carried out and the estimated cost are provided in the access proposals. The cost of establishment works will be met by Natural England. Works on the ground to implement the proposals will be carried out by Cumbria County Council, subject to any further necessary consents being obtained, including to undertake operations on a SSSI. Natural England will provide further advice to the local authority carrying out the work, as necessary.

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PART B: Information about the European Site(s) which could be affected

B1. Brief description of the European Sites(s) and their Qualifying Features

Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC

Roudsea consists of a complex of raised bogs and woodland on the northern shore of Morecambe Bay containing areas of both active and degraded raised bog. Although the majority of the bog complex has undergone extensive drainage in the past, with domestic peat-cutting around the margins, drainage was abandoned many years ago and much of the area has recovered to a considerable degree. Within the site there are transitions between acid bog and limestone woodland, with a number of scarce plant species including the rare large yellow-sedge

Woodland at Roudsea is represented by *Tilio-Acerion* forests on Carboniferous limestone. Although close to the northern limit of lime distribution, the ash *Fraxinus excelsior* dominated woodland around Morecambe Bay contains many patches of small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, which survive sometimes with elm *Ulmus spp.*, often along outcrop edges.

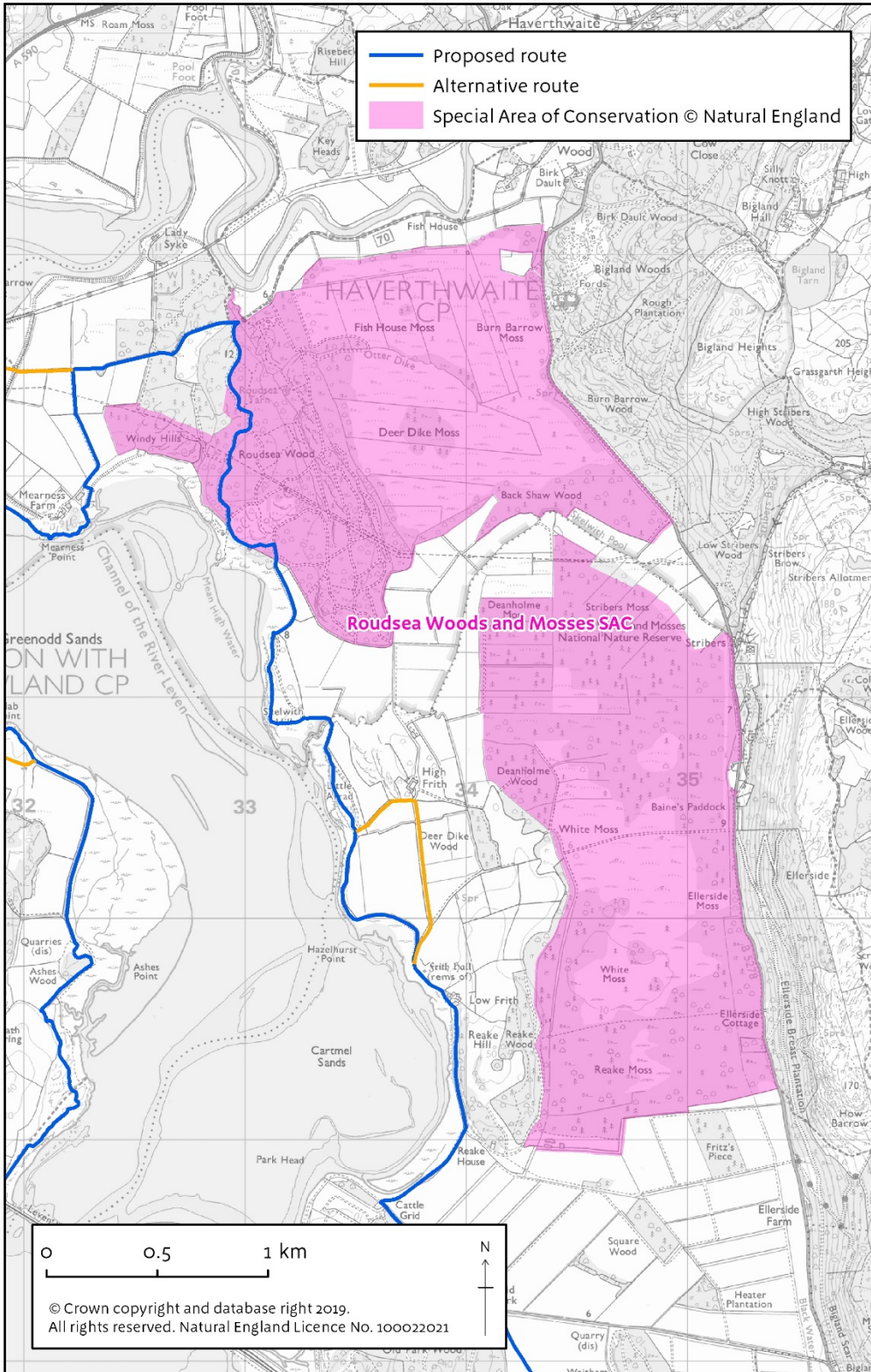
The yew *Taxus baccata* woods at Roudsea have strong similarities with the yew stands at the nearby Morecambe Bay Pavements. They are both on northern Carboniferous Limestone and, as in the Wye Valley, occur both as dense groves and as scattered trees in the understorey of ash or ash-elm *Fraxinus-Ulmus* woodland.

Table 2. Qualifying features of Roudsea Woods & Mosses SAC

Qualifying features
7110 Active raised bogs
7120 Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles

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Map showing Roudsea Wood & Mosses SAC and the route of the ECP



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B2. European Site Conservation Objectives (including supplementary advice)

Natural England provides advice about the Conservation Objectives for European Sites in England in its role as the statutory nature conservation body. These Objectives (including any Supplementary Advice which may be available) are the necessary context for all HRAs.

The overarching Conservation Objectives for every European Site in England are to ensure that the integrity of each site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that each site contributes to achieving the aims of the Habitats Regulations, by either maintaining or restoring (as appropriate):

- The extent and distribution of their qualifying natural habitats,
- The structure and function (including typical species) of their qualifying natural habitats,
- The supporting processes on which their qualifying natural habitats rely,
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of their qualifying features rely,
- The population of each of their qualifying features, and
- The distribution of their qualifying features within the site.

Where Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice is available, which provides further detail about the features’ structure, function and supporting processes mentioned above, the implications of the plan or project on the specific attributes and targets listed in the advice will be taken into account in this assessment.

In light of the European Sites which could be affected by the plan or project, this assessment will be informed by the following site-specific Conservation Objectives, including any available supplementary advice;

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5161325151911936>

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**PART C: Screening of the plan or project for appropriate
assessment**

**C1. Is the plan or project either directly connected with or
necessary to the (conservation) management (of the European
Site’s qualifying features)?**

The Coastal Access Plan is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European or Ramsar sites for nature conservation listed in B1 above.

Conclusion:

As the plan or project is not either directly connected or necessary to the management of all of the European site(s)’s qualifying features, and/or contains non-conservation elements, further Habitats Regulations assessment is required.

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C2. Is there a likelihood [or risk] of significant [adverse] effects (‘LSE’)?

This section details whether those constituent elements of the plan or project which are (a) not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European Site(s) features and (b) could conceivably adversely affect a European site, would have a **likely significant effect**, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, upon the European sites and which could undermine the achievement of the site’s conservation objectives referred to in section B2.

In accordance with case law, this HRA has considered an effect to be ‘likely’ if it ‘*cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information*’ and is ‘significant’ if it ‘*undermines the conservation objectives*’. In accordance with Defra guidance on the approach to be taken to this decision, in plain English, the test asks whether the plan or project ‘*may*’ have a significant effect (i.e. there is a risk or a possibility of such an effect).

This assessment of risk therefore takes into account the precautionary principle (where there is scientific doubt) and **excludes**, at this stage, any measures proposed in the submitted details of the plan/project that are specifically intended to avoid or reduce harmful effects on the European site(s).

Each of the project elements has been tested in view of the European Site Conservation Objectives and against each of the relevant European site qualifying features. An assessment of potential effects using best available evidence and information has been made.

C2.1 Risk of Significant Effects Alone

The first step is to consider whether any elements of the project are likely to have a significant effect upon a European site ‘alone’ (that is when considered in the context of the prevailing environmental conditions at the site but in isolation of the combined effects of any other ‘plans and projects’). Such effects do not include those deemed to be so insignificant as to be trivial or inconsequential.

In this section, we assess risks to qualifying features, taking account of their sensitivity to coastal walking and other recreational activities associated with coastal access proposals, and in view of each site’s Conservation Objectives.

Table 3: Assessment of likely significant effects alone

Site: Roudsea Woods and Mosses SAC			
Features:			
7110 Active raised bogs			
7120 Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration			
Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
n/a	n/a	These habitats are outside the project area and therefore will not be affected by the proposals.	No
Features:			
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines			
Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles			
Trampling	Damage to ground flora due to trampling. An increase in trampling could also damage the flora/butterfly habitat beside the tracks in the limestone woodland. The proposed ECP passes through ancient woodland, and areas of wet woodland. Research suggests that the most vulnerable woodlands are those with an ancient woodland ground flora, and where the canopy is relatively dense. In addition, wet woodland, where excessive poaching may occur from relatively few people, and woodland on steep hillsides are likely to be more sensitive. [REF 2]	<p>There is a risk of impact on the woodland features from an increase in trampling.</p> <p>There is a network of waymarked permitted routes through the woodland at Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC / NNR, access is restricted to the waymarked routes, dogs must be on short leads and visitors must obtain a permit before they can access the site.</p> <p>The ECP is aligned through the SAC on an existing vehicle track, a section of which forms part of one of the existing permitted routes.</p> <p>It is expected that use of this track will increase as a result of the proposals, as the route will be promoted and visitors will no longer require a permit to walk on the line of the ECP.</p> <p>There is concern that people using the ECP could start using the other tracks and paths within the reserve without permission, leading to an increase in access across the reserve.</p> <p>An area of woodland falls within the proposed coastal margin. There is concern that people accessing the coastal margin will lead to an increase in trampling of woodland flora.</p>	Yes

Damage and loss of extent of habitat due to infrastructure works.	Creation of a path could lead to loss of extent of habitat.	The ECP has been aligned on surfaced tracks which avoids the need for major establishment works. Signage, way-markers, gates and a replacement section of fencing are required, which will lead to small scale loss of habitat.	Yes
Disturbance by people and dogs	Disturbance to key influential or distinctive features of the woodland (hazel dormice). Disturbance / displacement of browsing species (deer). Deer are attracted to certain areas of the woodland to browse. Deer stalking takes place in those areas in order to manage deer populations and allow the woodland to recover from overgrazing.	Dormice can be affected by disturbance by people and dogs. Deer management is required in order to maintain the area of woodland. Regular disturbance of deer in one of these key areas would impact on the success of such deer management.	Yes

Conclusion:

- The plan or project alone is likely to have a significant effect on the following qualifying features:
- Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines
- Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 Taxus baccata woods of the British Isles
- The plan or project alone is unlikely to have a significant effect on the following qualifying features groups:
- 7110 Active raised bogs
- 7120 Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration

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C2.2 Risk of Significant Effects in-combination with the effects from other plans and projects

The need for further assessment of the risk of in-combination effects is considered here.

Natural England considers that it is the appreciable risks of effects (from a proposed plan or project) that are not themselves considered to be significant alone which must be further assessed to determine whether they could have a combined effect significant enough to require an appropriate assessment.

Step 1 – Are there any appreciable risks from the access proposals that have been identified in C2.1 as not significant alone?

Further to the risks identified as being significant alone (in C2.1), it is considered that there are no other residual and appreciable risks likely to arise from this project which have the potential to act in-combination with similar risks from other proposed plans or projects to also become significant. It has therefore been excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project is likely to have a significant effect in-combination with other proposed plans or projects.

C3. Overall Screening Decision for the Plan/Project

On the basis of the details submitted, Natural England has considered the plan or project under Regulation 63(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations and made an assessment of whether it will have a likely significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

In light of sections C1 and C2 of this assessment above, Natural England has concluded:

As the plan or project is likely to have significant effects (or may have significant effects) on some or all of the Qualifying Features of the European Site(s) ‘alone’, further appropriate assessment of the project ‘alone’ is required.

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PART D: Appropriate Assessment and Conclusions on Site Integrity

D1. Scope of Appropriate Assessment

In light of the screening decision above in section C3, this section contains the Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project in view of the Conservation Objectives for the European Site(s) at risk.

The Sites and the Qualifying Feature for which significant effects (whether ‘alone’ or ‘in combination’) are likely or cannot be ruled out and which are initially relevant to this appropriate assessment are:

Table 4. Scope of Appropriate Assessment

Environmental pressure	Qualifying Feature(s) affected	Risk to Conservation Objectives
Trampling of vegetation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles 	More frequent trampling in areas of woodland, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (ground flora, tree and shrub species, rare and threatened fungi and nationally scarce bryophytes).
Installation of infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles 	Infrastructure installation as a result of the access proposals leads to permanent loss of extent of habitat.
Disturbance by people and dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland: 9180 <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests of slopes, screes and ravines Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland.: 91J0 <i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles 	<p>More frequent disturbance by people and dogs, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (hazel dormouse).</p> <p>More frequent disturbance of deer by people and dogs, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, changes the areas which are regularly used by deer. This has an impact on deer management, which currently takes place in areas of the SAC where access is currently not allowed, and therefore deer are undisturbed.</p> <p>The target for grazing and browsing by herbivores is to restore browsing to a (low)</p>

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		<p>level that allows well developed understorey with no obvious browse line, & lush ground vegetation with some grazing sensitive species evident (bramble, ivy etc), and tree seedlings and sapling common in gaps.</p> <p>If effective deer management is compromised by the new access proposals, this could lead to a change in key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site, and may also lead to loss of extent of woodland habitat.</p>
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D2. Contextual statement on the current status, influences, management and condition of the European Site and those qualifying features affected by the plan or project

H9180 Tilio-Acerion forests of slopes, screes and ravines * Priority feature (‘Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes’)

Tilio-Acerion ravine forests are generally woods of ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and lime (mainly small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* but more rarely large-leaved lime *T. platyphyllos*). The habitat type typically occurs on nutrient-rich soils that often accumulate in the shady micro-climates towards the bases of slopes and ravines.

Although close to the current northern limit of lime distribution, the ash *Fraxinus excelsior*-dominated woodland of this SAC contains small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and elm *Ulmus* spp. There is a rich assemblage of rare plant species, including fingered sedge *Carex digitata*. A notable feature of this wood is the sudden vegetation change across the boundaries between the limestone, where the *Tilio-Acerion* occurs, and acid peats or Silurian slates.

The woodland type corresponds on this site to either or both National Vegetation Classification types **W8 *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis* woodland** and **W9 *Fraxinus excelsior-Sorbus aucuparia-Mercurialis perennis* woodland**, which can be hard to differentiate in south Cumbria.

H9110 *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles * Priority feature (‘Yew-dominated woodland’)

Yew *Taxus baccata* woodland generally occurs on shallow, dry soils usually on chalk or limestone slopes, but in a few areas stands on more mesotrophic soils are found. Within this community yew tends to be overwhelmingly dominant and is usually associated with a very sparse shrub and tree layer. Only a few species can survive beneath the dense shade cast by the canopy of mature yew trees.

Yew at Roudsea Wood occurs both as dense groves and as scattered trees within the ash woodland. The ground flora is usually absent or confined to species tolerant of dense shade such as dog’s mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and hart’s tongue *Asplenium (Phyllitis) scolopendrium*. This type of yew stand in northwest England is described in ‘British Plant Communities’ as being part of

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the variation of **W8 *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis* woodland**, although is sometimes considered to be **W13 *Taxus baccata* woodland**.

The areas of woodland affected by the project are in unfavourable declining condition. The direction of change is currently towards decline as deer browsing continues to affect the cover of shrub layer, climbers such as honeysuckle, ivy and bramble and regeneration potential throughout the unit (especially as canopy gaps formed by fallen trees are no longer fenced).

D3. Assessment of potential adverse effects considering the plan or project 'alone'

This section considers the risks identified at the screening stage in section C and assesses whether adverse effects arising from these risks can be ruled out, having regard to the detailed design of proposals for coastal access.

In reviewing the ability of any incorporated measures to avoid harmful effects, Natural England has considered their likely effectiveness, reliability, timeliness, certainty and duration over the full lifetime of the plan or project. A precautionary view has been taken where there is doubt or uncertainty regarding these measures.

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D3.1 Design of the access proposal to address possible risks

I) Baseline situation

Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC is an NNR and is managed to allow some public access. There is a network of way-marked permitted routes through the site. Visitors must stay on way-marked routes and dogs must be kept on short leads to prevent disturbance to wildlife. Ospreys nest on the site and, at times, paths may be closed to prevent disturbance to the birds.

This is a fairly remote site with limited parking and visitors must obtain a permit before they can access the site. Therefore current levels of access on the permitted routes are fairly low. The level of access in the areas of the SAC away from the permitted routes is very low.

II) Detailed design features of the access proposal and consideration of possible risks to qualifying features at this location in light of the access proposal

The ECP is aligned on an inland route through Roudsea Woods, on an existing vehicle track. Sections of the track are part of one of the existing way-marked trails.

The following infrastructure is required to establish the route:

- 5 fingerposts
- 1 way-marker post
- 5 signs
- 1 new and 2 replacement gates
- 10m section of replacement fence

The replacement of gates and fencing is unlikely to lead to any additional loss of habitat.

Installation of the new infrastructure will cover 2.45m² of ground. The new infrastructure will be installed within the existing site fabric (existing track and car park) and therefore will not result in loss of woodland habitat.

The inland route was chosen because, to be any closer to the estuary, a new route would have had to be created through the SAC woodland. Options were considered, but ruled out on a variety of grounds including nature conservation and sustainability of any route that might be created through wetter, low-lying areas.

It is expected that access along the proposed route will increase as a result of the proposals, as the route will be promoted and visitors will no longer require a permit to walk on the line of the proposed ECP.

An area of woodland will fall within the proposed coastal margin.

Roudsea Wood and Mosses SAC is home to the most northerly known natural population of hazel dormice in England and is of national importance. In the supplementary advice on conservation objectives, hazel dormouse is listed as a key structural, influential or distinctive feature whose abundance should be maintained. It is also a European Protected Species.

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The UK dormouse population is in decline and the population at Roudsea Wood is small and vulnerable. Additional disturbance at this site may be detrimental to the population. The hazel dormouse is protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and disturbance of this species may result in causing an offence under either of these pieces of legislation.

Any activity which involves repeated disturbance to hibernation sites (October – April) or repeated disturbance of active dormice, such as those in maternity nests (May –September) in areas of the country where there are very low numbers of dormice, as is the case at Roudsea Wood and Mosses NNR, is likely to adversely affect the local distribution and population of dormice. Small, isolated populations are particularly at risk.

In order to minimise trampling of ground flora, disturbance of dormice and other wildlife in the coastal margin, and to ensure that people and dogs to stay on the line of the ECP, the following mitigation is proposed:

- A year round dogs on leads restriction is proposed along the line of the ECP;
- Access will be excluded year-round from the coastal margin, to prevent disturbance dormice;
- A land management access track leads into the coastal margin from the proposed ECP. The entrance to the track will be blocked with brash. The track is infrequently used by vehicles, and brash can be temporarily removed if access is needed; and
- Signage at entrance and exit points and at strategic locations along the ECP within the woods will inform people about the access restrictions in the coastal margin, the requirement for a permit to access the other permissive routes, the nature conservation interest of the site, and that they should stay on the line of the ECP and keep dogs on leads.

The effect of the access exclusion in the coastal margin is that coastal access rights will be limited to the existing vehicle track. Furthermore, the dogs-on-leads restriction to the line of the trail will ensure that there is no new, unintended disturbance to the protected features of the site.

The increased use of this track by walkers will not lead to an increase in trampling or disturbance of dormice and other wildlife by people and dogs within the woodlands.

D3.2 Assessment of potentially adverse effects (taking account of any additional mitigation measures incorporated into the design of the access proposal) alone

Table 5. Assessment of adverse effect on site integrity alone

Risk to conservation objectives	Relevant design features of the access proposal	Can 'no adverse effect' on site integrity be ascertained? (Yes/No) Give reasons.	Residual effects?
More frequent trampling in areas of woodland, following	ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track.	Yes	No

<p>changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (ground flora, tree and shrub species, rare and threatened fungi and nationally scarce bryophytes)</p>	<p>A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage people from leaving the ECP. Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.</p>	<p>The ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track means that people using the ECP will not be causing any additional trampling of ground flora. Clear signage and way-marking will make it clear that walkers should keep to the ECP only and that a permit is needed to walk on other permissive routes in the SAC. Informal paths will be blocked with brash to discourage people from following them.</p>	
<p>Infrastructure installation as a result of the access proposals leads to permanent loss of extent of habitat.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Yes Installation of the new infrastructure will cover 2.45m² of ground. There is not considered to be a loss of qualifying feature as the new infrastructure will be installed within the existing site fabric (existing track and car park).</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>More frequent disturbance by people and dogs, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (hazel dormouse).</p>	<p>A year round dogs on leads restriction is proposed along the line of the ECP. Access will be excluded year round from the coastal margin, to prevent disturbance, injury or killing of dormice. ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track. A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage people from leaving the ECP. Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.</p>	<p>Yes The ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track and dogs on lead restriction means that people walking on the ECP will not be causing any additional disturbance to dormice. The access exclusion in the coastal margin means that there will be no new access rights created in the areas used by dormice. Clear signage and way-marking will make it clear that walkers should keep to the ECP only and that a permit is needed to walk on other permissive routes in the SAC. Informal paths will be blocked with brash to discourage people from following them.</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>If effective deer management is compromised by the new access proposals, this could lead to a change in key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site, and may also lead to</p>	<p>ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track. A land management access track which leads into the coastal margin will be blocked with brash to discourage</p>	<p>Yes The ECP alignment on an existing vehicle track means that people using the ECP will not be entering the areas where deer management takes place, and will not cause displacement of deer. Clear signage and way-marking will make it clear that walkers</p>	<p>No</p>

loss of extent of woodland habitat.	<p>people from leaving the ECP.</p> <p>Clear signage and way-marking to show the extent of coastal access rights.</p>	<p>should keep to the ECP only and that a permit is needed to walk on other permissive routes in the SAC. Informal paths will be blocked with brash to discourage people from following them.</p>	
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Conclusion:

- The following risks to achieving the conservation objectives identified in D1 are effectively addressed by the proposals and no adverse effect on site integrity (taking into account any incorporated mitigation measures) can be concluded:
- More frequent trampling in areas of woodland, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (ground flora, tree and shrub species, rare and threatened fungi and nationally scarce bryophytes).
- Infrastructure installation as a result of the access proposals leads to permanent loss of extent of habitat.
- More frequent disturbance by people and dogs, following changes in recreational activities as a result of the access proposal, leads to a loss of key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site (hazel dormouse).
- If effective deer management is compromised by the new access proposals, this could eventually lead to a change in key structural, influential or distinctive features within the site, and may also lead to loss of extent of woodland habitat.

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D4 Assessment of potentially adverse effects considering the project ‘in-combination’ with other plans and projects

The need for further assessment of the risk of in-combination effects is considered here.

Natural England considers that it is the appreciable effects (from a proposed plan or project) that are not themselves considered to be adverse alone which must be further assessed to determine whether they could have a combined effect significant enough to result in an adverse effect on site integrity.

Step 1 – Are there any appreciable risks from the access proposals that have been identified in D3.3 as not themselves considered to be adverse alone?

Natural England considers that in this case the potential for adverse effects from the plan or project has been wholly avoided by the incorporated or additional mitigation measures outlined in section D3. It is therefore considered that there are no residual and appreciable effects likely to arise from this project which have the potential to act in-combination with those from other proposed plans or projects. It has therefore been excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project can have an adverse effect on site integrity in-combination with other proposed plans or projects.

**Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the
Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended)
(‘Habitats Regulations Assessment’)**

PART E: Permission decision with respect to European Sites

Natural England has a statutory duty under section 296 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. To fulfil this duty, Natural England is required to make proposals to the Secretary of State under section 51 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. In making proposals, Natural England, as the relevant competent authority, is required to carry out a HRA under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations.

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Silecroft and Silverdale are fully compatible with the relevant European site conservation objectives.

It is open to the Secretary of State to consider these proposals and make a decision about whether to approve them, with or without modifications. If the Secretary of State is minded to modify our proposals, further assessment under the Habitats Regulations may be needed before approval is given.

Certification

Assessment prepared by:	Sarah Wiseman	Coastal Access Lead Adviser
Date:	04/12/2019	
HRA approved by:	Mark Hesketh	Deputy Area Manager
Date:	04/12/2019	

Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) (‘Habitats Regulations Assessment’)

References to evidence

1. NATURAL ENGLAND. 2013. Coastal Access Natural England’s Approved Scheme 2013. Published by Natural England Catalogue Code: NE446
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5327964912746496?category=50007>
2. NATURAL ENGLAND. 2009. Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 Part 1: Access to the Countryside. Guidance for statutory authorities involved in assessing the nature conservation implications of a statutory right of access in England and Wales Under Clause 26. Natural England Commissioned Report NECR012 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/41007>