

**Assessment of Coastal Access Proposals between
Salcott and Jaywick
on sites and features of nature conservation concern
October 2020**





Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Salcott and Jaywick

About this document

This document should be read in conjunction with the published stretch reports for the Salcott to Jaywick Stretch and the associated and accompanying Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

The Coastal Access Reports contain a full description of the access proposals, including any additional mitigation measures that have been included. These Reports can be viewed here www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-salcott-to-jaywick

A HRA is required for European sites (Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar sites (designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance).

This document, the Nature Conservation Assessment (NCA), covers all other aspects including SSSIs, NNRs, 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 features in question**. Where relevant it covers geological as well as biological sites and features.

The NCA is arranged site by site. Map A shows 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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Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Blackwater Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

This site is also part of a European site.

Current situation

The area of the Blackwater Estuary SSSI that is considered in this report is wholly congruent with the Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar site in this area. Intertidal parts of the SSSI are within the Essex Estuaries SAC.

The Blackwater Estuary SSSI is a large estuarine complex, of some 4400 hectares in size. Only a small part, the northern flank of this SSSI, has the potential to be impacted upon by the alignment of the England Coast Path as considered in the Salcott to Jaywick reports.

The Blackwater Estuary SSSI mud flats, fringed by saltmarsh on the upper shores, support internationally and nationally important numbers of waterfowl which overwinter here. Shingle and shell banks and offshore islands are also a feature of the tidal flats. The surrounding terrestrial habitats such as the sea wall, ancient grazing marsh and its associated fleet and ditch systems, plus semi-improved grassland are also of high conservation interest. The rich mosaic of habitats supports an outstanding assemblage of nationally scarce plants and a nationally important assemblage of rare invertebrates, with 16 Red Data Book species and 94 notable and local species.

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1004426.pdf>

Almost 99% of the whole 4400 hectares are recorded as favourable or favourable recovering. All areas of land affected by this stretch report are either favourable or favourable recovering.

Risk analysis

The majority of the area of the Blackwater Estuary SSSI that is seaward of the proposed trail and therefore subject to spreading room is saltmarsh and mud flat. This broad habitat will have a long term Section 25A health and safety restriction on public access (see the individual coastal access reports for details). Whilst this is not a measure applied to protect wildlife it has the outcome of protecting wildlife as public access rights are restricted.

The area hosts an Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve at Abbots Hall farm and the Natural England Blackwater Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR). Abbots Hall is a mix of terrestrial habitats and intertidal areas, some relatively newly created from deliberate breaches in the seawall. There are visitor facilities and trails laid out around this reserve. Dogs are either not permitted or required to be on the designated dog walk area. The NNR is intertidal mud and subject to the above Section 25A restriction on coastal access rights.

Bearded tit (breeding bird) is a notified feature of the SSSI that is not detailed within the European designations and therefore requires further consideration. There are fewer than 650 nesting pairs in the UK. It nests and feeds exclusively in areas of reedbed. Whilst some of the reed fringes, particularly along the borrow dykes may be close to interaction with the trail, the major areas are wet all year round and in generally inaccessible areas where the public will either not be able to access or have limited interest in changing their current use of sites (due to wet ground conditions, fences etc). The main risk to the species that might result from changes in coastal access is probably from dogs, which may wander off the alignment or spread wider than the spreading room

and could cause a degree of disturbance. This could already be an existing issue from the rights of way in the area and is controlled through wardening and trail alignment and dogs on lead restrictions in other areas.

Within the Blackwater Estuary SSSI, the nearest regularly used bearded tit nesting area to the Salcott to Jaywick stretch is the RSPB's Old Hall Marshes nature reserve, which appears to hold the large majority of the SSSI's breeding pairs in most years [Refs 2, 14, 16]. The reserve is well separated from this stretch by the Salcott Channel. Bearded tit is not a notified feature of the Colne Estuary SSSI but now breeds within it on the MOD Fingringhoe Ranges training area [Refs 7, 14], which lies within the coastal margin of this stretch. There is likely to be frequent interchange between the Old Hall and Fingringhoe Ranges populations. However all the Colne Estuary MOD land is either restricted under military byelaws (and therefore excepted land) or access will be excluded by direction on nature conservation or safety grounds. We have found no records of bearded tits nesting at other locations along this stretch within the last 20 years [Refs 2, 5, 7, 14, 16]. The species is therefore unlikely to be adversely impacted by the proposals within the Salcott to Jaywick stretch.

A range of waterbird species, as identified in Annex 1 are notified features of the SSSI but are not qualifying features of the Blackwater Estuary SPA or Ramsar site as individual species. These are though covered in the HRA through the SPA and Ramsar site waterbird assemblage feature and therefore not considered further in this Nature Conservation Assessment.

Bird species covered by the Ramsar Convention's Strategic Framework definition of 'waterbird' are included in SPA and Ramsar site waterbird assemblage features. 'Main component species' of an assemblage are those which regularly occur on the site in internationally or nationally important numbers or regularly exceed 2,000 individuals. The main component species for the Blackwater are: brent goose, shelduck, wigeon, gadwall, teal, pintail, shoveler, goldeneye, red-breasted merganser, (smew), cormorant, little egret, avocet, ringed plover, golden plover, grey plover, lapwing, knot, dunlin, ruff, black-tailed godwit, bar-tailed godwit, curlew, (green sandpiper), (spotted redshank), (greenshank), redshank, turnstone, black-headed gull.

Species in brackets in the lists above are those with very low thresholds for national importance (<10 birds).

There are a range of tidally inundated and influenced habitat communities that are notified features of the SSSI. The large majority of these, including all those within this SSSI between Salcott and the Strood, are covered by the broader habitat definitions of the Essex Estuaries SAC and considered in the HRA. These areas are also subject to the S25A access restriction.

The Blackwater Estuary SSSI is also notified for its invertebrate assemblage, its vascular plant assemblage, its ditch systems and Mesozoic geological interest. The invertebrate and plant assemblages correspond with equivalent features of the Blackwater Estuary Ramsar site, so were considered in the HRA. Parts of the SSSI's ditch system near this stretch are almost all inland of the coastal margin and are also considered in the HRA as important supporting habitat for SPA birds and Ramsar site invertebrates and plants. The notified geological interest of this SSSI is found further west, in the upper estuary, over 10 km from this stretch. Therefore no extra risk to these notified features is anticipated from the England Coast Path between Salcott and Jaywick.

Establishment works

SSSI assent may be needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works

Where necessary, Essex County Council as highway authority undertaking establishment works will instigate the SSSI assent process by writing to us to confirm the proposed timing of works and how operations are to be undertaken in line with these conditions. Natural England will provide further advice as necessary.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Colne Estuary SSSI

This site is also part of a European site.

Current situation

The Colne Estuary is comparatively short and branching, with five tidal arms which flow into the main river channel. The estuary is of international importance for wintering brent geese and black-tailed godwit and of national importance for breeding little terns and five other species of wintering waders and wildfowl. The variety of habitats which include mudflat, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, sand and shingle spits, disused gravel pits and reed beds, support outstanding assemblages of invertebrates and plants. Two areas of foreshore at East Mersea are of geological importance. Colne Point and St. Osyth Marsh are of geomorphological interest.

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1000666.pdf>

The Colne Estuary SSSI also contains the Colne Estuary National Nature Reserve. This reserve has three distinct areas, two of which fall within this report area. Please see map for details.

This site is almost 3000 hectares in size, with 99.8% of the area in favourable or recovering condition.

Risk analysis

A large part of the area of the Colne Estuary SSSI is seaward of the proposed trail. This is a mix of terrestrial and intertidal habitats. As it is seaward of the trail it is therefore subject to spreading room. Where it is saltmarsh and mud flat, this broad habitat will have a long term Section 25A restriction on public access (see the individual coastal access reports for details). Whilst this is not a measure applied to protect wildlife it has the outcome of protecting wildlife as public access rights are restricted.

There are a few areas of land that also have specific restrictions under the Coastal Access rights, as well as the MOD's Fingringhoe Ranges, an area covered by military bylaws south of Fingringhoe where access rights do not apply.

A large part of the Colne Estuary surrounds Mersea Island and is therefore subject to consideration under a separate coastal access report for this island.

A range of waterbird species, as identified in Annex 1 are notified features of the SSSI but are not qualifying features of the Colne Estuary SPA or Ramsar site as individual species. These are though covered in the HRA through the SPA and Ramsar site waterbird assemblage feature and therefore not considered further in this Nature Conservation Assessment.

Bird species covered by the Ramsar Convention's Strategic Framework definition of 'waterbird' are included in SPA and Ramsar site waterbird assemblage features. 'Main component species' of an

assemblage are those which regularly occur on the site in internationally or nationally important numbers or regularly exceed 2,000 individuals. The main component species for the Colne are: mute swan, brent goose, shelduck, goldeneye, cormorant, little egret, avocet, ringed plover, golden plover, grey plover, lapwing, sanderling, dunlin, black-tailed godwit, curlew, (green sandpiper), (greenshank), redshank.

Species in brackets in the lists above are those with very low thresholds for national importance (<10 birds).

There are a range of tidally inundated and influenced habitat communities that are notified features of the SSSI. These are mainly covered by the broader habitat definitions of the Essex Estuaries SAC and considered in the HRA. One that is not, and is also not subject to the S25A access restriction, is the *Honkenya peploides* – *Cakile maritima* strandline community. The largest and most species-rich area of this community on the SSSI lies along the sand and shingle spit at Essex Wildlife Trust's Colne Point nature reserve, which forms part of the Colne Estuary NNR. Public access to this area, and to adjacent habitats immediately inland that are SAC features and support SPA and Ramsar site species, will be restricted by direction on nature conservation grounds. Smaller and less species-rich areas of the strandline community occur in adjacent parts of the coastal margin, mainly around Point Clear and also east of the Colne Point reserve. These areas have much higher current levels of public use as they are close to existing coastal paths and public beaches. Proposals for the stretch are unlikely to increase footfall on them significantly.

The Colne Estuary SSSI is also notified for its outstanding dragonfly assemblage, its invertebrate assemblage, and its vascular plant assemblage. The invertebrate and plant assemblages correspond with equivalent features of the Colne Estuary Ramsar site, so were considered in the HRA. The dragonfly (Odonata) assemblage only overlaps slightly with the Ramsar site invertebrate interest, because most of its component species are not scarce or threatened. However, the main Odonata hotspots are EWT's Fingringhoe Wick nature reserve and areas of grazing marsh mainly on other EWT, NNR and MOD land. These locations are also important for SPA birds and Ramsar site invertebrates and plants, so the Odonata feature benefits from alignment choices and mitigation measures put in place, where necessary, to avoid adverse effects on those European site features. Therefore no extra risk to these notified invertebrate and plant assemblage features is anticipated from the England Coast Path between Salcott and Jaywick.

The Colne Estuary SSSI also has notified geomorphological and geological interest features: saltmarsh geomorphology and deposits from the Quaternary of the Thames respectively. The SSSI's geological interest is centred on soft cliffs and intertidal flats with fossiliferous deposits at East Mersea, on the Mersea Island Coast Path stretch. The geomorphological interest applies to the extensive saltmarshes on the Colne Point EWT reserve and St Osyth Beach to the east. Access to the saltmarsh behind St Osyth Beach will be restricted by direction for safety reasons. On the reserve, access to all habitats inland of the beach will be restricted on nature conservation grounds. Therefore no extra risk to these earth science features is anticipated from the England Coast Path between Salcott and Jaywick.

Establishment works

SSSI assent may be needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works.

Where necessary, Essex County Council as highway authority undertaking establishment works will instigate the SSSI assent process by writing to us to confirm the proposed timing of works and how operations are to be undertaken in line with these conditions. Natural England will provide further advice as necessary.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Upper Colne Marshes SSSI

This site is not part of a European site. It is important as 'functionally linked land' for some SPA waterbirds (because it provides supporting habitat for them near but outside the boundaries of the Colne Estuary SPA) but that aspect of the site's value is considered in the HRA, so is not discussed here.

Current situation

This 114 hectare site is split into a small number of isolated yet functionally linked areas of similar habitats scattered along the edge of the River Colne near Wivenhoe and Rowhedge. All areas have the ability to interact with the England Coast Path through virtue of the proposed trail either passing through the blocks or from the impacts of spreading room.

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1006373.pdf>

It is considered to be of special interest as it supports an outstanding assemblage of nationally scarce plants and an unusual diversity of brackish ditch-types. Additional interest is provided by the terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates found within the site, and breeding and wintering birds.

Overall the whole site is considered to either be favourable or unfavourable but recovering. The unfavourable recovering areas are noted as being two units of lowland grassland, assessed as recovering in 2010.

Risk analysis

The site has two notified features: lowland ditch systems and vascular plant assemblage.

The majority of the area of the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI that is seaward of the proposed trail and therefore subject to spreading room, is saltmarsh and mud flat. This broad habitat will have a long term Section 25A restriction on public access (see the individual coastal access reports for details). Whilst this is not a measure applied to protect wildlife it has the outcome of protecting wildlife as public access rights are restricted.

One small field on the section of this SSSI near Fingringhoe will not have any restriction on public access. It is though perimeter fenced and some distance from the nearest access point, requiring multiple field boundaries to be crossed to get to this field. It is highly unlikely the public will access this field.

In other areas the trail alignment is within the SSSI. This alignment is on existing public rights of way and in the majority of areas is on surfaced tracks. The site, particularly in the more popular locations such as the area at Hythe marshes already has good numbers of visitors and the England Coast Path is unlikely to bring a significant change to any visitor impact. A small part of the SSSI, near Wivenhoe is designated as a Local Nature Reserve, promoted locally by Colchester Borough Council to encourage visitors to the site. A car park and promoted trails bring visitors into close contact with the natural environment.

The proposal includes surfacing with inert material of an approximately 300 m long section of existing public footpath on an old, low seabank between Fingringhoe and Rowhedge. This popular path runs just outside the SSSI boundary but becomes very muddy and difficult to walk in wet

conditions, causing users to walk on and damage the adjacent SSSI saltmarsh, which is of high quality. The proposal includes interpretation panels at both ends of this section to raise awareness of the sensitive saltmarsh habitat. One species in the notified plant assemblage (dittander, *Lepidium latifolium*) is present on the seabank either side of the footpath. But the number of plants that might be damaged during the resurfacing work represents a very small proportion of the species' population in and around the SSSI.

Neither of the notified features will be adversely impacted by the England Coast Path proposals, due to the location of the trail alignment, restrictions on spreading room access and the accessibility of areas not covered by a restriction.

The list of operations requiring Natural England consent to protect this site does list recreation as an operation that requires further consideration and this document considers this impact. The list also states a need for permission to be obtained for any cutting of vegetation, requiring consideration to be given to ongoing maintenance once the establishment works below are undertaken.

Establishment works

SSSI assent will be needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works that directly impact within the SSSI boundaries.

Where necessary, Essex County Council as highway authority undertaking establishment works will instigate the SSSI assent process by writing to us to confirm the proposed timing of works and how operations are to be undertaken in line with these conditions. Natural England will provide further advice as necessary.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI

This site is not part of a European site.

Current situation

This is a site notified for its geological interest. The Clacton channel deposits are a sequence of freshwater and estuarine sediments occupying a channel cut into an earlier gravel accumulation and the underlying Tertiary London Clay. They have yielded abundant molluscan and mammalian fossil remains, fossil plants and pollen, all of which indicate a Hoxnian interglacial age.

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/PDFsForWeb/Citation/1003908.pdf>

The 26 hectare site is separated into three blocks, only one of which has the potential to interact with this section of the England Coast Path between Salcott and Jaywick. This is the 1.5 hectare foreshore area around Lion Point, which would be in spreading room created by the trail.

The whole site is in favourable condition, with this smaller unit benefiting from coastal engineering works and the planting of marram grass to stabilise and enhance the beach.

Risk analysis

This site, with its buried deposits and interest is unlikely to be adversely impacted upon by the creation of the England Coast Path and the creation of spreading room over the already popular

beach. The list of operations requiring Natural England consent to protect this site do not list any actions that would be associated with coastal access rights.

Establishment works

SSSI assent would be needed to implement any specific proposals for establishment works, but as this site is in spreading room, no establishment works in this England Coast Path stretch will be undertaken that impact upon this site.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Blackwater Estuary National Nature Reserve (NNR)

The Blackwater Estuary NNR is wholly within the boundary of The Blackwater Estuary SSSI and as such any impacts on this reserve are considered by the entry above for this SSSI. All parts of the NNR adjacent to the Salcott to Jaywick stretch are intertidal flats subject to the S25A access restriction. The NNR interest of these flats is covered by the SPA, SAC, Ramsar site and SSSI features considered above or in the HRA.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Colne Estuary NNR

The Colne Estuary NNR is wholly within the boundary of The Colne Estuary SSSI and as such any impacts on this reserve are considered by the entry above for this SSSI. The Brightlingsea Marsh unit of this NNR is grazing marsh inland of the coastal margin. The adjacent trail follows a popular public footpath along the seabank. It provides good views across the NNR but is separated from it by fencing and a borrow dyke. The Colne Point NNR unit has the same boundaries as the Colne Point EWT reserve and falls within the coastal margin. It is a complex mosaic of shingle, sand dune, saltmarsh and flats that supports a wide variety of sensitive SAC, SPA, Ramsar site and SSSI habitats and species. Therefore access will be restricted by direction on nature conservation grounds, from the vegetated shingle at the top of the beach to the inland boundary along the seabank. Details are given in the HRA. Intertidal flats beyond the beach are subject to the S25A access restriction.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

This site is part of a European site.

Current situation

The Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ compliments existing national and international designated sites, which provide protection to a mosaic of intertidal and subtidal habitats. The area contains a wide range of marine and estuarine sediment habitats and communities, as well as other important coastal habitats.

Subtidal areas are rich in invertebrate fauna. This includes the reef building worm *Sabellaria spinulosa*, brittlestars, crustaceans, and bivalves such as the native oyster.

The site is regarded as one of the most important areas for both wild and cultivated native oyster in the south-east of England, with native oysters distributed throughout the MCZ. Their beds provide habitat for a variety of other species, such as sea snails, crabs and sea urchins.

To the west of Clacton-on-Sea, the MCZ extends the existing protection of the internationally important Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore into the subtidal area. This geological feature contains an abundance of mollusc and mammalian fossil remains.

Risk analysis

The landward boundaries of the MCZ in the area of this report align with the mean high water mark. In many areas this overlaps with the European and domestic notified sites and as such the risk to the MCZ is detailed within either the HRA or against the SSSI above (such as the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI).

There are some areas, mainly concentrated on the upper reaches of the River Colne, south of Colchester where the MCZ does not overlap with any other designated site.

The interest features of intertidal mixed sediments are unlikely to be impacted by any spreading room created by the England Coast Path. These areas will benefit from a S25A restriction on coastal access rights, which although not a restriction to protect wildlife will have a secondary benefit of doing so through the restriction on access. The native oyster features are spatially separated from interaction with users of the England Coast Path in part due to the habitat being below the mean low water mark and the S25A restriction.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on local sites:

Locally designated geological and wildlife sites are considered in the sections below if:

- a) the proposed Coast Path route crosses them; or
- b) they fall at least partly within spreading room; or
- c) they lie immediately inland with no fence or other barrier separating them from spreading room.

For Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), we have used information from the local authorities' LoWS reviews [Refs 3, 4]. For Local Geological Sites, information available on the GeoEssex website was used (www.geoessex.org.uk/index).

Many of the local sites assessed below play a role as 'functionally linked land' for birds that are SPA, Ramsar site and SSSI features. That is, they provide important areas of supporting habitat for feeding or roosting birds near but outside the protected sites' boundaries. That aspect of their function was considered in the HRA.

Local Geological sites

Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve (TM 045 195)

Current situation: Fingringhoe Wick was a working gravel quarry until 1959. Visible in many places are mounds and banks of glacial sand and gravel (known locally as Upper St. Osyth Gravel)

which was deposited some 450,000 years ago by torrents of meltwater issuing from the Anglian ice sheet, the edge of which was then situated only 12 kilometres west of here. The gravel therefore provides evidence of an exceptionally cold period of the Ice Age. A permanent vertical section through the gravel exists in the centre of the reserve.

Risk analysis: The geological interest of this site will not be adversely impacted by the England Coast Path proposals as users on foot are unlikely to cause damage to the interest. The site is also part of the Colne Estuary SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site. Route choices and mitigation measures included in the proposals on land management grounds and to prevent adverse impacts on the reserve's SPA, Ramsar site and SSSI features and other wildlife will also protect its geological interest.

Local Wildlife Sites

Abbotts Hall Marshes (TL 965 137)

Current situation: Following the initial coastal realignment project carried out in 2002, a large area of saltmarsh habitat has become established complemented by the associated mudflats and coastal grassland. The pioneer saltmarsh is dominated by glassworts and annual seablite. This habitat grades into upper saltmarsh characterised by common saltmarsh-grass. Abbotts Hall Marshes represents an important additional area of saltmarsh which is continuous with the Blackwater Estuary SSSI and provides habitat for a range of marine life and species associated with intertidal areas

Risk analysis: Lies within the seaward coastal margin. A large proportion of the site is intertidal and covered by the S25A restriction on public access suggested for saltmarsh and flats. This will have the benefit of protecting the wildlife interest. A small area of the site boundary is adjacent on the landward side to the saltmarsh and flat and therefore does not have this access restriction. A no dogs all year round restriction is to be applied over this area, whilst a complete exclusion on public access will be applied over the remnant seawall.

The site is an Essex Wildlife Trust reserve, with wardening, defined surfaced trails and signposting. This complements the proposed restrictions to reduce the impact on the wildlife interest of the Abbotts Hall Marshes wildlife site.

Strood Marsh (TM 013 153)

Current situation: Strood Marsh is contained within sea walls that separate it from the adjacent SSSI. It consists of freshwater scrapes and ditches concentrated in the eastern half and a peripheral area of tussocky rough grassland. The western area contains mounds and disturbed bare ground where the site has previously been subject to tipping and earth movement. A public right of way flanks the site on the seawall.

A large population of water voles has been recorded throughout the network of ditches and the margins of the open water habitat and snipe are known to occur in this wetland habitat. It is a minor high water roost for wildfowl and waders associated with the adjacent saltmarsh and mudflats.

Risk analysis: Lies within the seaward coastal margin and restrictions on access are not proposed. The site is unlikely to be attractive to walkers looking to leave the trail and venture over the spreading room as it is fenced in part, has rough uninviting vegetation and offers no features of interest to attract users off the trail. Natural England considered if a restriction on public access was required for this site and concluded that one is not currently needed and that advisory signage will provide sufficient mitigation, but is willing to keep this under review once any new access rights are conferred.

Fingringhoe Ranges (TM 029 203)

Current situation: This site consists of an extensive area of grassland and grazing-marsh, as well as woodland and scrub habitats which represent a significant extension to the SSSI marshes to the south and east.

The meadows in the northern half exhibit the greatest diversity and are subject to periodic grazing which maintains the grassland diversity. The large central and southern areas used as rifle ranges are regularly mown. Here the short sward has reduced wildlife interest in comparison to the adjacent grasslands, but they are included here as foraging habitat for birds, invertebrates and also reptiles. Areas of rank grassland and tall ruderals are also included and these provide valuable habitat for invertebrates.

An area of rough grassland and scrub which abuts the SSSI to the south has been added as additional habitat. The site also includes Woodland Risings Grove, a coppice woodland with standards, and Grimps Grove, a recent valley woodland with a mixed canopy.

Risk analysis: Although this site lies within the coastal margin it lies entirely within the military byelaw and except for the line of the trail on the public right of way, public access is strictly excluded at all times.

Brickhouse Farm Pits (TM 041 205)

Current situation: This large site comprises worked out gravel pits in the latter stages of succession, containing a mosaic of scrub, woodland, wet woodland, reedbed, grassland and freshwater habitats. The area to the west of the conveyor has been left largely unmanaged since it was abandoned in the 1970s.

Sea wall and borrow-dyke make up the eastern boundary of the site which abuts onto the Colne Estuary SSSI. Adjacent to this, an extensive area of reedbed has formed in old silt ponds. Rough grassland contained within the site provides additional habitat for wildlife such as invertebrates and reptiles.

Risk analysis: Lies largely within the seaward coastal margin. The eastern section, mainly flooded gravel workings, has a proposed public access exclusion on public safety grounds. The western section is woodland and rough grassland and has no restriction proposed. The area may prove of interest to the public, but this is likely to be low level and unlikely to impact adversely on the wildlife interest of the site.

Barrage Marsh (TM 040 211)

Current situation: This is an area of grazing-marsh adjacent to the Upper Colne Marshes SSSI. Included in the Local Wildlife Site are the sea wall and a small area of saltmarsh. The site is used by coastal birds that inhabit and pass along the Colne wildlife corridor.

Risk analysis: Lies within the seaward coastal margin and does not have any access restrictions proposed. The site is generally uninviting and inaccessible to the public, as entrance points are within the boundaries of the working quarry and the area is fenced. The saltmarsh areas are covered by the S25A public access restriction.

Roman River East, Fingringhoe (TM 021 204)

Current situation: The key part of this site is a band of former grazing-marsh bordering the tidal Roman River, which still retains a flora characteristic of this scarce and declining habitat. The grassland includes some scattered and dense scrub as well as tussocky sections with anthills. To the north of the river are two large pastures which form part of the flood plain, but also rise to form areas of dry acid grassland on their upper slopes.

Risk analysis: Only a very small area of this much larger site lies within the coastal margin and is subject to spreading room. No restriction is proposed over the small area of grassland, and the intertidal saltmarsh and flat will be restricted for public safety under Section 25A restriction. The site interests are unlikely to be impacted by public access as there is no feature of interest within the fenced field that is seaward of the trail.

Hythe Lagoons, Colchester (TM 025 229)

Current situation: These lagoons hold breeding little ringed plover and avocet in some years, as well as lapwing, shelduck and linnet. The main lagoon also provide a high tide roost and feeding habitat for a variety of coastal birds, including a significant proportion of the estuary's population of black-tailed godwits through autumn and winter. Although artificially created by the construction of embanked lagoons to take dredging material from the adjacent river Colne, the ecology of this site is very much one of coastal grazing marsh. It is managed by Colchester Borough Council as a Local Nature Reserve.

Risk analysis: Lies partially within the seaward coastal margin. The great majority of the site is landward of the trail and not affected by the proposals. The trail follows a well used public right of way on the very edge of the site and will not create any additional impact on the sites interests, particularly as waterbirds using the main lagoon are screened from the public footpath by embankments.

University Marshes (TM 023 237)

Current situation: This relict grazing-marsh retains many typical species, whilst the larger drains support broad bands of common reed.

The Wivenhoe Trail runs along the top of the seawall along the site's eastern boundary and allows views across the whole site. The northern edge is viewable from the public highway.

Risk analysis: Lies partially within the seaward coastal margin. The trail follows an existing well used public right of way on the seaward flank of this site and therefore does not create any spreading room over the area and has no additional impact risks.

Lower Farm Marshes (TM 106 175)

Current situation: This area of former coastal grazing marsh is described in the local wildlife site database as now mainly a sward comprising perennial rye-grass. However from site visits and aerial photography it is noted as now being mainly under arable cultivation. The inland facing side of the sea wall provides a strip of rough grassland with scattered scrub. There is a good network of borrow dykes and ditches fringed with common reed. The fields provide supporting habitat for waterbird species that feed on farmland, such as lapwing and golden plover, and the ditches and ponds are used by ducks and other waterfowl.

Risk analysis: The great majority of the site is landward of the trail, which follows the seawall on the seaward side of this site. The trail is a new section of access along the seawall and includes default landward spreading room on the landward side of the seawall embankment. This landward spreading room also includes the flat area of land between the wall and the borrow-dyke (the folding). This has been provided in order to protect the adjacent SPA and SSSI from disturbance from trail users in this location. The proposal includes signage to inform walkers of the sensitivity of the area and how to reduce bird disturbance.

Flag Creek Marsh (TM 114 170)

Current situation: This site is a mosaic habitat incorporating areas of reed beds with rough grassland, scrub and silt ponds.

Risk analysis: Lies within the seaward coastal margin and does not have any access restrictions proposed. The site is fenced and access is difficult because there is a waste transfer site just to the north and an SSSI grazing marsh field to the south where access will be excluded by direction on nature conservation grounds. The site is close to a large county park, which draws visitors, principally for dog walking as few other facilities other than a car park are available. This local attraction is likely to reduce the desire for the public to venture off the trail into other areas of habitat, particularly a site like this with its wetland habitats and general inaccessibility. Flag Creek Marsh site interest is unlikely to be adversely impacted upon by the coast path proposals.

Jaywick Beach (TM 139 126)

Current situation: This site comprises spits of sandy beach and some inner seawall grassland that are sparsely vegetated with a characteristic coastal flora. Although not a classic sand dune landform, these sections of beach are felt to be good representatives of classic sand dune flora and form part of Essex's resource with respect to the appropriate UK BAP habitat.

Towards the western end, a section of inner seawall grassland has developed an interesting community of plants in association with the block-faced seawall. Of note are a large population of frog rush (an Essex Red Data List species), along with sea pearlwort and the moss *Hennediella heimii*.

Risk analysis: This site lies seaward of the proposed route in spreading room. This is a beach already accessed by the public and coastal access rights will not bring extra impact on this site.

Assessment of coastal access proposals on:

Undesignated species

This section covers species that are neither qualifying features of designated sites, nor constituents of species assemblages that are qualifying features, and so have not been considered in the HRA for this stretch or in the sections above. Our approach when screening species for risk assessment has been to: (i) consider those which, because of their habitat requirements, may be concentrated close to the proposed route or within spreading room and which are scarce or threatened; (ii) pay special attention to parts of the proposed route that do not follow existing public rights of way or other walked routes, so implementation may result in an appreciable increase in levels of use.

When considering threat status, we have taken into account bird species given legal protection against intentional or reckless disturbance during the breeding season under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) ('Schedule 1 species') and those that are Red or Amber listed as Birds of Conservation Concern [Ref 1] ('red/amber list species'). For other vertebrates we have paid special attention to species protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('European Protected Species') or the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).

Table 1. Current situation and risk analysis

Species or species group	Current situation	Risk analysis
<p>Schedule 1 and red/amber listed breeding birds</p>	<p>Three Schedule 1 or red listed species (little tern, ringed plover and pochard) are SPA breeding birds considered in the HRA. But in addition to them, we know of breeding records within a few 100 m of this stretch, or in its coastal margin, for the following Schedule 1 species [Refs 2 - 7 and 14]: avocet, little ringed plover, Mediterranean gull, marsh harrier, barn owl, Cetti's warbler and bearded tit. We also know of breeding records near the stretch for at least 11 additional red listed species (lapwing, herring gull, turtle dove, cuckoo, skylark, yellow wagtail, nightingale, song thrush, mistle thrush, linnet, yellowhammer) and at least 13 more amber listed species (mute swan, shelduck, gadwall, teal, mallard, shoveler, oystercatcher, redshank, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull, common tern, meadow pipit, reed bunting).</p> <p>Disturbance during the breeding season to one of the latter (redshank) is considered in the HRA because of possible knock-on effects on the species' non-breeding population, which is a SPA feature.</p>	<p>We do not expect any appreciable increase in disturbance to these breeding species as a result of the access proposal, for the following reasons:</p> <p>The route follows existing rights of way or other walked routes for most of its length. In these areas promotion of the Coast Path is unlikely to result in more than small increases in levels of use.</p> <p>Route choices and mitigation measures described in the HRA to ensure no significant increase in disturbance to SPA birds will protect other species using the same locations.</p> <p>Several of the listed species breed mainly or exclusively on the MoD Fingringhoe Ranges training area, either on excepted land subject to military byelaws or on MoD land where access will be excluded by direction on nature conservation or safety grounds.</p> <p>Several species also breed mainly on the five EWT reserves on the stretch. Access on these reserves will be restricted by direction on land management or nature conservation grounds to ensure there is no appreciable increase in disturbance to the birds and other sensitive wildlife these reserves support.</p> <p>The gulls and some of the terns and waders listed nest mainly or exclusively on small islands which are either surrounded by subtidal channels (and therefore outside the coastal margin) or will be restricted by direction on safety or nature conservation grounds.</p> <p>Wetland passerines that nest in thick cover, (such as Cetti's warbler, reed bunting and bearded tit) are generally tolerant of moderate levels of access in open areas near their nest sites,</p>

Species or species group	Current situation	Risk analysis
		<p>provided the stands of vegetation they are nesting in are not disturbed.</p> <p>Other red/amber listed birds recorded near this stretch which are farmland rather than wetland species (such as skylark and yellowhammer) are unlikely to have breeding territories concentrated close to the route.</p>
Overwintering raptors	<p>The Essex Coast supports important numbers of several raptor species during the winter, including short-eared and barn owls, peregrine, merlin, and marsh and hen harriers. Most are red or amber listed species but only the last is a designated site qualifying feature on the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries.</p> <p>Overwintering raptors hunt over large areas and are generally widely and thinly dispersed across the coastal zone in semi-natural and farmed habitats.</p>	<p>These species are generally sensitive to disturbance and our proposal includes several km of new access. But we do not expect any appreciable increase in disturbance because the alignment of the route and directions to exclude access on nature conservation grounds (proposed primarily to reduce disturbance to SPA features including hen harrier) will also limit disturbance to other overwintering raptors.</p> <p>Applied to the overwintering period, the first four reasons mentioned above are also relevant to the risk analysis for overwintering raptors.</p>
SPA Review species	<p>Based on data from the 1990s, the second SPA Review [Ref 15] identified the following species as potential qualifying features of the SPAs on this stretch because their passage or overwintering populations had reached internationally important status since the SPAs were first designated:</p> <p>Blackwater Estuary SPA: avocet, golden plover, ringed plover, ruff.</p> <p>Colne Estuary SPA: avocet, golden plover.</p>	<p>Individually, these species are not qualifying features of the SPAs but they are all main component species of the SPAs' non-breeding waterbird assemblages. Their use of habitats along this stretch and potential sensitivity to changes in coastal access are therefore taken into consideration in the HRA.</p>

Species or species group	Current situation	Risk analysis
Common seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i> and grey seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Small numbers of common seals and the occasional grey seal forage in the wider estuary channels along this stretch and sometimes use haul-outs on the saltmarsh. Both species are protected along the UK coast by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Conservation of Seals Act 1970.	Seals foraging offshore are unlikely to be sensitive to changes in land-based coastal access but changes that allow people closer to their haul-outs could cause increased disturbance. However, on this Coast Path stretch the only regularly used haul-out locations we know of are on extensive areas of saltmarsh and flats at least 200 m from the proposed route. Therefore we do not expect any appreciable increase in disturbance as a result of the proposal.
Water vole	A European Protected Species threatened by habitat loss and mink predation. Scattered populations survive in borrow dykes and grazing marsh ditches along the Essex Coast.	<p>Appreciable adverse effects are only likely where coastal access proposals allow new public access, particularly by dog walkers, immediately adjacent to good quality water vole habitat, or if establishment works damage or disturb the habitat.</p> <p>On this stretch, most of the ditches and borrow dykes adjacent to sections of proposed new access are unsuitable for water voles because they are either too saline or are narrow ditches that dry out in summer.</p> <p>The main areas of good habitat are either inland of the coastal margin, are on excepted land such as the Fingringhoe Ranges, or on EWT reserves and other areas where access with dogs will be restricted by direction on land management or nature conservation grounds. Therefore we do not expect any appreciable increase in disturbance.</p>
Native reptiles and amphibians	Great crested newt (a European Protected Species) is known from Fingringhoe Wick EWT reserve and the Fingringhoe Ranges MoD land. Of the other native species (all protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act), adder, common lizard and slow worm are often found on Essex seabanks and in rough grassland near the coast, while	<p>On this stretch, most borrow dykes and ditches adjacent to seabanks and close to the proposed route are too saline to provide habitat for great crested newts or other amphibians.</p> <p>The main areas of suitable freshwater wetland habitat within the coastal margin are on excepted land, as at Fingringhoe Ranges, or on EWT reserves and other areas where access with dogs will be restricted by direction on land management or nature conservation grounds.</p>

Species or species group	Current situation	Risk analysis
	grass snake, common frog and other amphibians can occur around flooded gravel pits and the less brackish grazing marsh areas.	<p>Reptiles on the seabanks are unlikely to be affected appreciably because along much of this stretch the trail uses existing walked routes and promotion of the Coast Path is unlikely to result in more than small increases in use.</p> <p>Gravel workings and similar habitats in the coastal margin that may hold good reptile populations are either on excepted land or in areas where access with dogs will be restricted by direction, as at Fingringhoe Wick EWT reserve. Therefore we do not expect any appreciable increase in disturbance to reptiles or amphibians.</p>

This table outlines the species or species groups under consideration, with an explanation of why they are under consideration and analyses the risk for each species / species group.

Establishment works

When carrying out establishment works Essex County Council will comply with Natural England's standing advice on protected species and we will provide additional site-specific advice as required.

Conclusion

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Salcott and Jaywick are fully compatible with our duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of The Blackwater Estuary, The Colne Estuary, The Upper Colne Marshes and The Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSIs, consistent with the proper exercise of our functions¹.

In respect of any duties that may arise under section 125 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, Natural England has concluded for the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ that the access proposal (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.

In respect of the local geological and wildlife sites as identified above 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: Darren Braine

Date: 27th September 2020



on behalf of the Coastal Access Programme Team

Name: John Torlesse

Date: 27th September 2020



Senior Officer with responsibility for protected sites

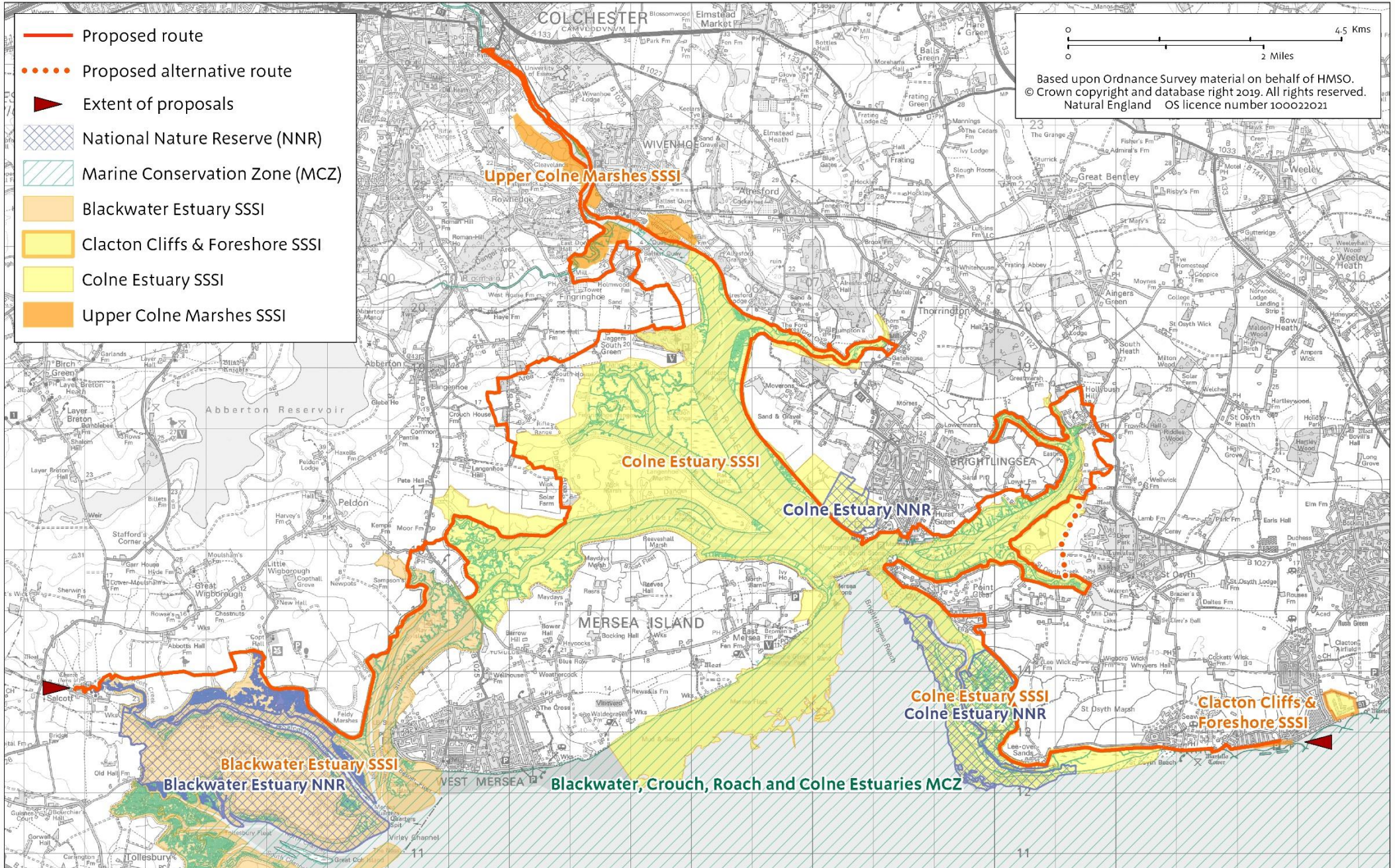
¹ Natural England's functions includes its balanced general purposes for access, nature conservation and landscape under the NERC Act 2006, any specific statutory duties it may have to deliver specific improvements to public access, and the access-related policies and priorities it periodically agrees with Defra.

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Annex 1. Index to designated sites and features

Key:

X	Qualifying feature of site.
	SPA, Ramsar site or SAC considered within the HRA.
X	SSSI or MCZ feature covered within the HRA under a separate description, assemblage or habitat type.
X	SSSI or MCZ feature not within scope of HRA.

Table 1. Index to avian features of designated sites

Site or feature	Blackwater Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Blackwater Estuary SSSI	Colne Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Colne Estuary SSSI	Essex Estuaries SAC	Upper Colne Marshes SSSI	Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI	Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne MCZ
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> ; Ringed plover (Breeding)	X		X					
<i>Sternula albifrons</i> ; Little tern (Breeding)	X		X	X				
<i>Aythya ferina</i> ; Common pochard (Breeding)	X	X	X					
<i>Panurus biarmicus</i> ; Bearded tit (Breeding)		X						
<i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i> ; Dark-bellied brent goose (Non-breeding)	X	X	X	X				
<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> ; Grey plover (Non-breeding)	X	X		X				
<i>Limosa limosa islandica</i> ; Black-tailed godwit (Non-breeding)	X	X		X				
<i>Calidris alpina alpina</i> ; Dunlin (Non-breeding)	X	X		X				
<i>Tringa totanus</i> ; Common redshank (Non-breeding)		X	X	X				
<i>Circus cyaneus</i> ; Hen harrier (Non-breeding)	X		X					
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i> ; Shelduck (Non-breeding)		X						

Site or feature	Blackwater Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Blackwater Estuary SSSI	Colne Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Colne Estuary SSSI	Essex Estuaries SAC	Upper Colne Marshes SSSI	Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI	Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne MCZ
<i>Anas crecca</i> ; Teal (Non-breeding)		X						
<i>Anas strepera</i> ; Gadwall (Non-breeding)		X						
<i>Bucephala clangula</i> ; Goldeneye (Non-breeding)		X						
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> ; Ringed plover (Non-breeding)		X		X				
<i>Numenius arquata</i> ; Curlew (Non-breeding)		X						
<i>Calidris alba</i> ; Sanderling (Non-breeding)				X				
<i>Tringa erythropus</i> ; Spotted redshank (Non-breeding)		X						
Waterbird assemblages (Non-breeding)	X		X					

This table lists the avian features of the designated sites and identifies those which are qualifying features of the site. The table also shows, (with colour coding described in the key above), which features are considered within the separate HRA and which are not within the scope of the HRA.

Table 2. Index to avian features of designated sites

Site or feature	Blackwater Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Blackwater Estuary SSSI	Colne Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Colne Estuary SSSI	Essex Estuaries SAC	Upper Colne Marshes SSSI	Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI	Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne MCZ
Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time (Subtidal sandbanks)					X			
Estuaries					X			
Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide (Intertidal mudflats and sandflats)					X			

Site or feature	Blackwater Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Blackwater Estuary SSSI	Colne Estuary SPA/Ramsar site	Colne Estuary SSSI	Essex Estuaries SAC	Upper Colne Marshes SSSI	Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore SSSI	Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne MCZ
Intertidal mixed sediments								X
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)								X
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>) beds								X
<i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand (glasswort and other annuals colonising mud and sand)					X			
<i>Spartina</i> swards (<i>Spartinion maritimae</i>) (cord-grass swards)					X			
Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glaucopuccinellietalia maritimae</i>)					X			
<i>Puccinellia maritima</i> saltmarsh, <i>Puccinellia maritima</i> dominant sub-community		X		X				
<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i> saltmarsh		X		X				
Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub)					X			
<i>Honkenya peploides</i> – <i>Cakile maritima</i> strandline community		X		X				
Outstanding dragonfly assemblage				X				
Invertebrate assemblage	X	X	X	X				
Vascular plant assemblage	X	X	X	X		X		
Lowland ditch system		X				X		
IA – Saltmarsh morphology				X				
EC – Mesozoic - tertiary fish/amphibian		X						
EC – Quaternary of the Thames				X			X	X

This table lists the non avian features of the designated sites and identifies those which are qualifying features of the site. The table also shows, (with colour coding described in the key above), which features are considered within the separate HRA and which are not within the scope of the HRA.