

Marine Planning

A guide for local councils



Marine
Management
Organisation

www.gov.uk/mmo

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I. Marine planning

Marine planning is important for many areas, and not just those at sea. It relates to planning decisions for the coast, estuaries and tidal waters (which sometimes extend a long distance inland), as well as developments that impact on these areas, such as infrastructure.

Marine planning has important links and interactions with land-use planning. For example, the intertidal zone between high water and low water mark is covered by both planning systems.

As with land-use planning, marine planning is a statutory requirement. A new marine planning system was introduced in 2009 through the Marine and Coastal Access Act. The Act gave the Marine Management Organisation delegated functions for marine planning from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Whilst marine plans are being developed, planning decisions for the marine area must take into account the Marine Policy Statement (published 2011). The Marine Policy Statement includes a summary of national policies relevant to marine planning and decision-making in the marine areas.



2. Marine plans

There are 11 English marine plan areas including inshore and offshore areas. Each area will be covered by a marine plan by 2021 with a 20 year view of activities.

Like land-use plans, marine plans consist of a main strategy document and supporting documents, including a statement of public participation and a sustainability appraisal.

Marine plans address the key issues for the area, setting a vision and objectives. Detailed policies set out how these will be achieved and how issues will be managed or mitigated.

The policies inform decision-making for any activity or development which is in, or impacts on, a marine area.

Whilst the marine plans are 20 year plans, there is the opportunity to assess and respond to changes in the marine plan areas. Each plan is monitored with three yearly reviews to allow enough time to see their impact, and allow them to be responsive to local and national change.



3. Marine plans and land-use plans

Marine plans are similar to land-use plans. The principles of both systems are the same; enabling sustainable development.

They are established and accountable to primary legislation (the Marine and Coastal Access Act and the Planning Acts). They are also both evidence based, with their visions, objectives and policies being consistent with national policy. For marine planning this is set out in the Marine Policy Statement in the same way the National Planning Policy Framework does for land-use plans.

Marine plans also need to be in accordance with other UK national policy including the Planning Act 2008, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Policy Statements.

As with land-use plans, all marine plans must take into account the requirements of the Localism Act 2011, which requires local authorities and other public bodies to work together on planning issues under the duty to cooperate.

Land-use and marine planning also both place stakeholder participation at the centre of plan development. This includes a legal requirement to prepare a statement of how people can get involved throughout plan production (referred to as a Statement of Public Participation).



4. Working together

Marine plans take into account land-use plans and vice versa. As part of this the MMO are statutory consultees for land-use plans. This includes consultation through the development management process prior to determination of applications where they are likely to impact on the marine area. Similarly, councils * are a key stakeholder for marine planning.

To help co-ordinate and improve consenting processes for both marine and land-use planning for coastal developments, the Coastal Concordat was launched in 2013, and updated in December 2019.

The Coastal Concordat sets out key principles which marine regulators, advisors and councils will follow when working together to enable coastal development in England. These principles include reducing unnecessary regulatory duplication, providing better sign-posting, streamlining assessment and increasing transparency and consistency of advice. More information is available from:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-coastal-concordat-for-england

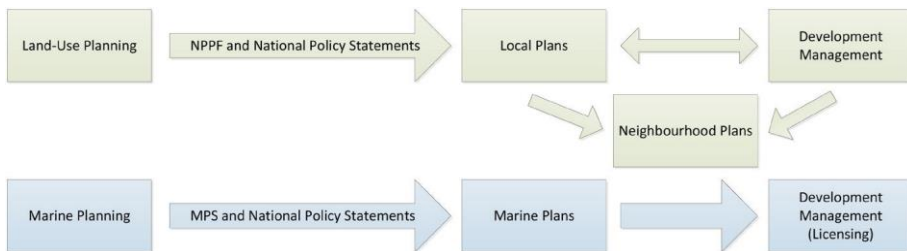
** Councils refer to county council, district, borough or city councils; unitary authorities; London boroughs; metropolitan boroughs; Parish, community and town councils.*



5. Marine planning and land-use planning systems

Both land-use and marine planning systems are there to ensure planning decisions are made strategically and not on a project-by-project basis. This enables both systems to support sustainable development and work to a set of high level objectives within a framework of national policies. The two systems work alongside and support each other and share many common economic, environmental and social goals.

Land-use and marine planning systems in practice



However there are necessary differences in the two systems, due to the specific needs and complex nature of the marine environment. These include:

Size: The area covered by the marine plans is much larger than that for local development documents. The area covered by the East Inshore and Offshore plans, for example, equates to over 40% of England's land area.

Ownership: Land ownership issues are not as complex within the marine area as they are on land. There are no resident populations directly within the marine area, though we all depend on it.

Co-existence: In the marine area, specific space allocations are less of a requirement than on land. The potential for more than one structure or activity to co-exist in the same location is increased due to the transient/ temporal nature of marine activities and the nature of the marine area (surface, water column and seabed).

Remit: Marine plans cover not only licensable development within the marine area, but also activities such as fishing and shipping that are not subject to a marine licence. Land-use plans are primarily concerned with development and/or use of land.

Targets: Marine plans do not include specific targets for various activities as would be the case on land (for example housing allocations).

Evidence: Marine planning policies are based on the most robust evidence available. Due to the nature of the marine environment, evidence may be limited by the amount, consistency and quality available. This may subsequently affect the degree of detail within policies.

Marine plans are written in a way that ensure all areas, those that have had extremely detailed investigation (such as oil and gas exploration sites) and those with little or no detailed information, are given the same level of coverage. The marine environment is dynamic and ever changing with sandbanks, shoals and spits constantly being altered by the winds and tides.

By contrast, land-use plans are predominantly spatial because of the extensive evidence base available allowing for more spatially detailed and specific policies such as commercial requirement.



6. Integrated systems

The integration of land-use and marine planning systems is critical. The economic, environmental, and social benefits from the marine area may only be realised with supporting development on land (and vice versa).


The marine planning system has been designed to support and work alongside the land-use planning system. It is a requirement of the Marine and Coastal Access Act that the MMO must take all reasonable steps to ensure marine plans are compatible with land-use plans. The Act also makes no distinction between public authorities which have a coastal area of responsibility and those which do not. Even councils that are far away from the sea can affect and be affected by the marine area. For example, a land-based development that affects a river may eventually discharge into the sea.

As well as this, marine plans must have regard to any other relevant plan prepared by a council or other public authority.

By including these requirements in the Act it encourages both systems to support each other and enable greater success in implementation.

To help achieve better integration, councils are included as early as possible in marine plan development. This means council policies that relate to the marine area, and current or future activities, are identified as early as possible and are taken into account in the marine plan objectives and policies.

Similarly for the land-use planning system, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has updated the soundness self-assessment tool to include the Marine and Coastal Access Act. This will ensure that new or revised local plans take into account the Marine Policy Statement and related marine plans.



7. How to use the plans

Marine plans must be used as part of existing regulatory and decision-making processes. It is important that the marine plans are considered as a whole and that individual policies are not applied in isolation.

To support public authorities with implementation of the plans the Explore Marine Plans digital service has been developed.

Explore Marine Plans is a dedicated interactive website that brings adopted and consultation draft marine plans, their policies, supporting data evidence base and information together in one place.

www.gov.uk/guidance/explore-marine-plans

In many cases additional site specific assessments will be required to inform proposals. Supplementary information and evidence are also available from: <https://www.gov.uk/mmo>

The screenshot displays the 'Explore Marine Plans' web application. At the top left, there are two tabs: 'Map data' and 'Marine plan policies'. The main content area is titled 'Marine activity data' and includes a search filter 'Filter map data'. Below the filter, there is a list of activities, with 'Tourism and recreation' currently expanded. On the right side of the map, there are links for 'Contact' and 'Marine planning documents'. The map itself shows the United Kingdom and parts of Europe, with various marine plan areas outlined in blue. Major cities like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, London, Manchester, Birmingham, and Paris are labeled. The map is powered by Esri, HERE, and the Marine Management Organisation.

8. Contact

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