

Proposed changes to the England Coast Path at Canal Road, Strood, Medway, Kent

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report IGR VR15
May 2022

Part 1: Purpose of this report

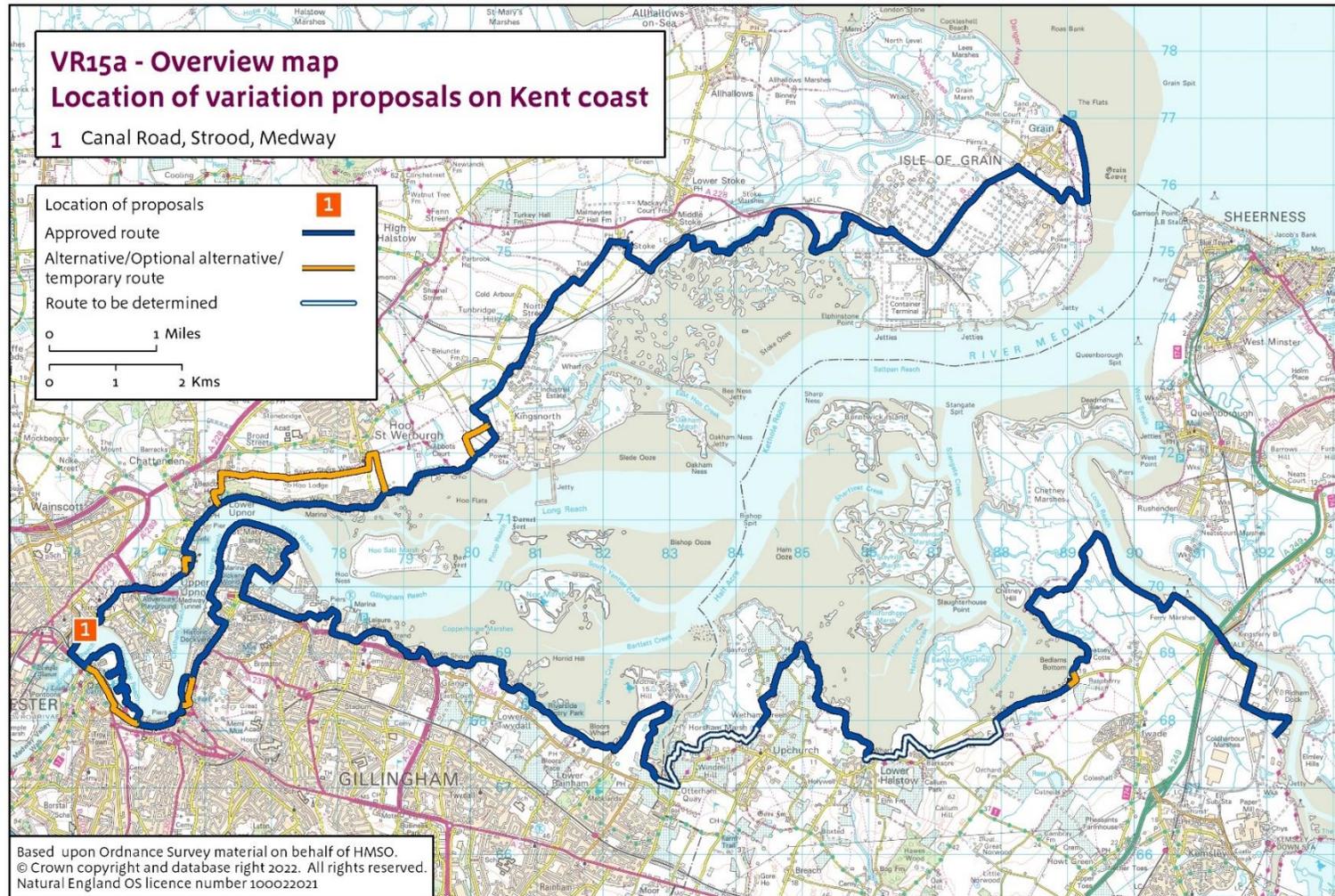
1.1 Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. The duty is in two parts: one relating to securing a long-distance walking route around the coast; the other to creating an associated “margin” of land for the public to enjoy, either in conjunction with their access along the route line, or otherwise.

1.2 On 12th November 2020 the Secretary of State approved Natural England's proposals relating to IGR 8: The Strand Leisure Park to Frindsbury which formed part of our proposals for the Iwade to Grain stretch: [England Coast Path: Iwade to Grain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk). Whilst the proposals have been approved, Natural England and Medway Council are currently working to prepare the trail for public use and as such the coastal access rights for this stretch have yet to commence.

1.3 Since the approval of the report, it has become clear that a change is necessary to the route of the England Coast Path. This report contains Natural England's proposals relating to that change at Canal Road, Strood, which is at the location shown on the Variation Location Map below (VR15a – Overview map).

1.4 In order for this proposed change to come into force it must be approved by the Secretary of State.

1.5 The original stretch Overview provides vital context to the proposal set out in this Variation Report: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/855188/iwade-grain-overview.PDF.



Part 2: Proposed variation at Canal Road, Strood

Start Point: **Grid reference: 574001 169052**

End Point: **Grid reference: 574284 169452**

Relevant Original Proposal Map: **Map IGR 8e Rochester Riverside to Frindsbury**

2.1 Introduction

Reason for variation:

2.1.1 Since our original proposals were approved, land in the Canal Road area of Strood, Medway has been cleared, raised and prepared for future housing development (known as the 'Strood Riverside'). This included the provision of a new flood defence barrier which has been constructed over the approved alignment. In addition, the alignment of Canal Road has changed where it previously supported the approved trail. The trail is therefore required to change to reflect these developments.

Proposed variation:

2.1.2 The approved route of the England Coast Path along section IGR-8-S101, north of Watermill Gardens, follows Canal Road pavement, looking over the Medway Estuary towards Rochester Bridge and Castle.

2.1.3 Due to the placement of the new flood barrier and the recently realigned section of Canal Road, the varied route would be located upon the pavement along Canal Road at the southern end of Watermill Gardens. It would then follow the pavement on the east side of the realigned Canal Road to Riverside Road. Due to the location of the flood barrier, Watermill Gardens will not be used for the trail, however it will be part of the coastal margin.

2.1.4 As a consequence of these proposed changes, all land seaward of the trail would become part of the coastal margin. As Canal Road has been moved slightly inland from the coast, this would slightly increase the size of the coastal margin seaward of the road, north-east of The Boathouse Public House.

2.1.5 The effect of the variation on user experience would be limited. The trail route for the variation is close to the original approved route except it does not use Watermill Gardens. The variation route north of the pub is on a raised section of realigned highway, offering elevated views of the Estuary. Land north-east of the pub will be developed in the future, and at that point, the trail may be able to be re-aligned to follow the seaward edge of the Strood Riverside development area.

Considering the options:

2.1.6 We have worked closely with the access authority and landowner, Medway Council, for this length of coast, who are supportive of the variation route. Part 4 of the Overview explains the process that we follow in more detail.

2.1.7 Below we set out the alignment options that we considered:

Option 1: We considered an alignment through Watermill Gardens, similar to the approved alignment and then seaward of the new sea wall between Watermill Gardens and the Boathouse Public House along the waterside, before joining the realigned Canal Road across a grass verge and through a car park/turning area. This option would provide direct sea views between Watermill Gardens and the pub.

We chose the alignment along the pavement of the new Canal Road as although slightly inland with fewer estuary views, it would offer an easy access route close to the coast, with dropped kerbs over the Boathouse Public House road entrance which avoids the need to walk through the pub car park. The waterside would remain accessible as part of the seaward spreading room.

Option 2: We considered an alignment extending north-east of The Boathouse Public House, along the estuary frontage of the new 'Strood Riverside' development. However, this land is currently being cleared and prepared for development and no detailed design plans are yet available to identify the location of a likely riverside walkway.

2.2 Proposals Narrative

The Trail:

2.2.1 The proposed variation to the approved trail:

- Follows a pavement along Canal Road, between section IGR-8-S097 at the southern end of Watermill Gardens and the start of Riverside Road at section IGR-8-S102.
- Follows existing walked routes, which provide a firm surface on level ground.
- Follows the coastline quite closely with some views of the Medway estuary.
- Extends for a length of 455 metres at a maximum of 20 metres inland of the approved route.

Protection of the environment:

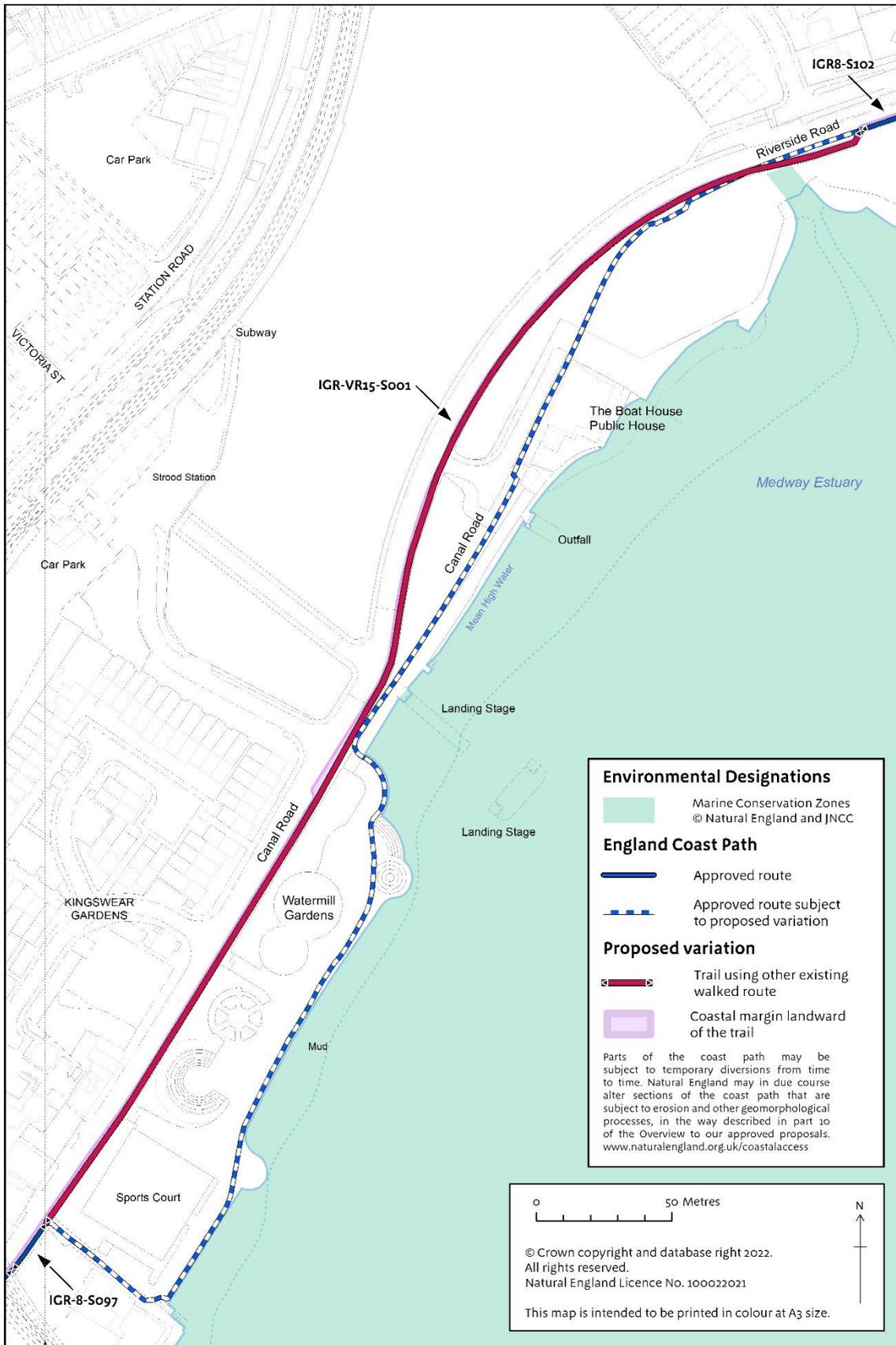
2.2.2 In this part of the report, we explain how we have taken account of environmental protection objectives in developing our proposals to vary the line of the trail.

2.2.3 The section of trail affected by this variation passes close to an important estuarine habitat, designated for its rock habitats and intertidal sediments as well as subtidal interests.

2.2.4 The following designated sites affect this length of coast:

- Medway Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

Map IGR-VR15b Key Statutory Environmental Designations - shows the extent of these designated sites in relation to the proposal.



2.2.5 The proposed alignment follows Canal Road which is located to the landward side of the approved route. Canal Road is located outside of the designated site and further from sensitive intertidal habitats than the approved route. In addition, the intertidal mud in this area is unsuitable for public access and as part of the approved report it is subject to an all-year exclusion. As such, walkers are unlikely to access the intertidal and no special measures are needed in respect of our proposals.

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

Accessibility:

2.2.7 The trail follows a new tarmac pavement along the realigned Canal Road with dropped kerbs at the junction to The Boathouse Public House. These surfaces are mostly comparable to the original proposed alignment. The trail route is level with a firm surface, with no steps and no obvious barriers to people with reduced mobility.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

2.2.8 **Landward boundary of the coastal margin:** We have used our discretion to map the landward extent of the coastal margin to an adjacent physical boundary such as a fence line, pavement or track to make the extent of the new access rights clearer. See Table 2.3.1 below.

See part 3 of the Overview to the original report - 'Understanding the proposals and accompanying maps', for an explanation of the default extent of the coastal margin and how we may use our discretion to adjust the margin, either to add land or to provide clarity.

2.2.9 **Restrictions and/or exclusions:** Access rights to the seaward margin would be subject to the excepted land rules and the national restrictions on coastal access rights. We do not propose any additional local restrictions or exclusions.

2.2.10 **Coastal erosion:** Natural England is able to propose that the route of the trail would be able to change in the future, without further approval from the Secretary of State, in response to coastal change. This would happen in accordance with the criteria and procedures for 'roll-back' set out in part 7 of the Overview.

Natural England may only propose the use of this roll-back power:

- as a result of coastal erosion or other geomorphological processes or encroachment by the sea, or
- in order to link with other parts of the route that need to roll back in direct response to such changes.

2.2.11 We have chosen not to make any such proposal in this variation report. Accordingly, the route is to be at the centre of the line shown on Map IGR-VR15c as the proposed route of the trail.

Establishment of the trail:

2.2.12 Below we summarise how our proposed route for the re-positioned part of the trail would be physically established to make it ready for public use before any new rights come into force along it.

2.2.13 The additional establishment costs are estimated at £500. Medway Council, the relevant Access Authority has already installed waymark posts and signs at all the necessary locations on Canal Road in preparation for the partial opening of the Iwade to Grain stretch in Summer 2022, as the approved alignment was no longer available due to development.

There is one main element to the overall capital costs:

- Signage: remove two way-marking signs in Watermill Gardens and near The Boathouse pub and correct the direction of the way-marking signs on Canal Road.

Maintenance of the trail:

2.2.15 Ongoing maintenance of the varied sections of trail would be necessary from time to time. This variation would make no significant change to the annual costs associated with maintaining the approved route.

Part 2.3: Proposals Tables

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

Table 2.3.1: Map IGR-VR15c Canal Road, Strood, Medway, Kent

Key notes on table:

1. Column 4 – ‘No’ means no roll-back is proposed for this route section. ‘Yes – normal’ means roll-back is proposed and is likely to follow the current feature (e.g. cliff edge/beach) for the foreseeable future as any coastal change occurs.
2. Column 4 – ‘Yes – see table 2.3.2’ means roll-back is proposed, but refer to that table below about our likely approach to implementing it for this route section. This is because a more complex situation exists in this case and consideration must be given to how roll-back may happen in relation to excepted land, a protected site etc.
3. Column 5a - Certain coastal land types are included automatically in the coastal margin where they fall landward of the trail if they touch it at some point. The relevant land type (foreshore, cliff, bank, barrier, dune, beach, flat or section 15 land – see Glossary in Annex B to the 2017 Overview) is shown in this column where appropriate. “No” means none present on this route section.
4. Columns 5b and 5c – Any entry in these columns means we are proposing to align the landward boundary of the coastal margin on this route section with the physical feature(s) shown in 5b, for the reason in 5c. No text here means that for this route section the landward edge of the margin would be that of the trail itself - or if any default coastal land type is shown in 5a, that would be its landward boundary instead.

1	2	3	4	5a	5b	5c	6
Map	New route section number(s)	Current status of route section(s)	Roll-back proposed? (See part 8 of 2017 report Overview)	Landward margin contains coastal land type?	Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin	Reason for landward boundary proposal	Explanatory notes
IGR-VR15c Canal Road, Strood, Medway, Kent	IGR-VR15-S001	Public footway (pavement)	No	No	Landward edge of pavement	Clarity and cohesion	

