

# Proposed changes to the England Coast Path at

## Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report VR17  
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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 the Secretary of State approved Natural England's proposals relating to EBC 5: Tackleway, Hastings to Cliff End, Pett Level which formed part of our proposals for the [Eastbourne to Camber stretch](#). Whilst the proposals have been approved, Natural England and East Sussex County 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 desirable to the route of the England Coast Path. This report contains Natural England's proposals relating to that change at Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park, East Sussex which is at the location shown on the VR17a Overview map - Location of Variation Proposals.

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 VR.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/868303/eastbourne-camber-overview.PDF](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868303/eastbourne-camber-overview.PDF)



**VR17a Overview map**  
**Location of variation proposals**

Location of proposals 1

Approved route

Based upon Ordnance Survey material on behalf of HMSO.  
 © Crown copyright and database right 2022. All rights reserved.  
 Natural England OS licence number 100022021

## Part 2: Proposed variation at Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park

**Start Point:**                      **Grid reference: 583542 109967**

**End Point:**                        **Grid reference: 583812 110054**

**Relevant Original Proposal Map: Map EBC 5a Tackleway, Hastings to Ecclesbourne Glen (east)**

### 2.1 Introduction

#### Reason for variation:

2.1.1 At the time of the original proposals, a section of public footpath in Hastings Country Park, adjacent to the coast at Ecclesbourne Glen, was closed for safety reasons due to a landslip in 2013. The proposals, published in February 2020, followed a route inland of Ecclesbourne Glen.

2.1.2 Following report publication, we received several representations including from the Ramblers and Open Spaces Society, requesting that whenever this public footpath was re-opened by the access authority, the trail should be realigned to follow this coastal footpath at Ecclesbourne Glen. Natural England's comments on these representations confirmed that if the public footpath is considered safe and stable enough to be re-instated and maintained in a safe manner on a long-term basis, a variation report would be considered to realign the ECP closer to the sea.

2.1.3 The access authority (East Sussex County Council) reconstructed the path and steps lost during the land slip and re-opened the section of public footpath at Ecclesbourne Glen in autumn 2021. Following a site visit with the access authority, we now consider this coastal footpath to be stable and suitable for the England Coast Path.

#### Proposed variation:

2.1.4 The approved alignment is routed inland of the coast and is located mostly landward of Ecclesbourne Glen. It uses public footpaths and the trail includes a section alongside a stream and through woodland, with occasional distant views of the sea.

2.1.5 The varied route would follow the reinstated public footpath close to the coast at Ecclesbourne Glen.

2.1.6 The variation creates a more direct route along the coast, without having to walk inland around the glen. It is closer to the coast and has clear views of the sea and the mouth of the glen where the stream meets the sea. This proposed variation has the support of the access authority and the landowner Hastings Borough Council.

2.1.7 There will be no overall change to the extent of coastal margin as a consequence of these proposed changes. The varied trail will be closer to the sea and the landowner has confirmed their support for retaining the original extent of coastal margin landward of the trail.

#### Considering the options:

2.1.8 We have worked closely with the access authority (East Sussex County Council) and the landowner Hastings Borough Council. In addition, we have contacted a number of groups that have an

interest in this area of Hastings Country Park, including the Ramblers, Friends of Hastings Country Park and relevant individuals. We have also consulted those organisations that we are required by legislation to consult. Part 4 of the Overview explains the process that we follow in more detail.

2.1.9 Those that we have spoken to agree that this is the preferred route option for the England Coast Path at Ecclesbourne Glen. This re-enforces the views put forward in various representations to the proposals, when published in 2020. The new alignment follows the most seaward footpath available and provides views of the sea. No other alignment options have been considered.

## 2.2 Proposals Narrative

### The Trail:

2.2.1 The proposed variation to the approved trail:

- Would follow an existing public footpath that uses a series of recently constructed wooden steps to cross Ecclesbourne Glen valley.
- Follows the coastline quite closely and maintains good views of the sea.
- Extends for a length of 307 metres at a maximum of 417 metres seaward 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 crosses the valley of Ecclesbourne Glen, which contains bryophyte-rich ghyll woodland and maritime scrub. See Map VR17b – Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park – Key Environmental Designations.

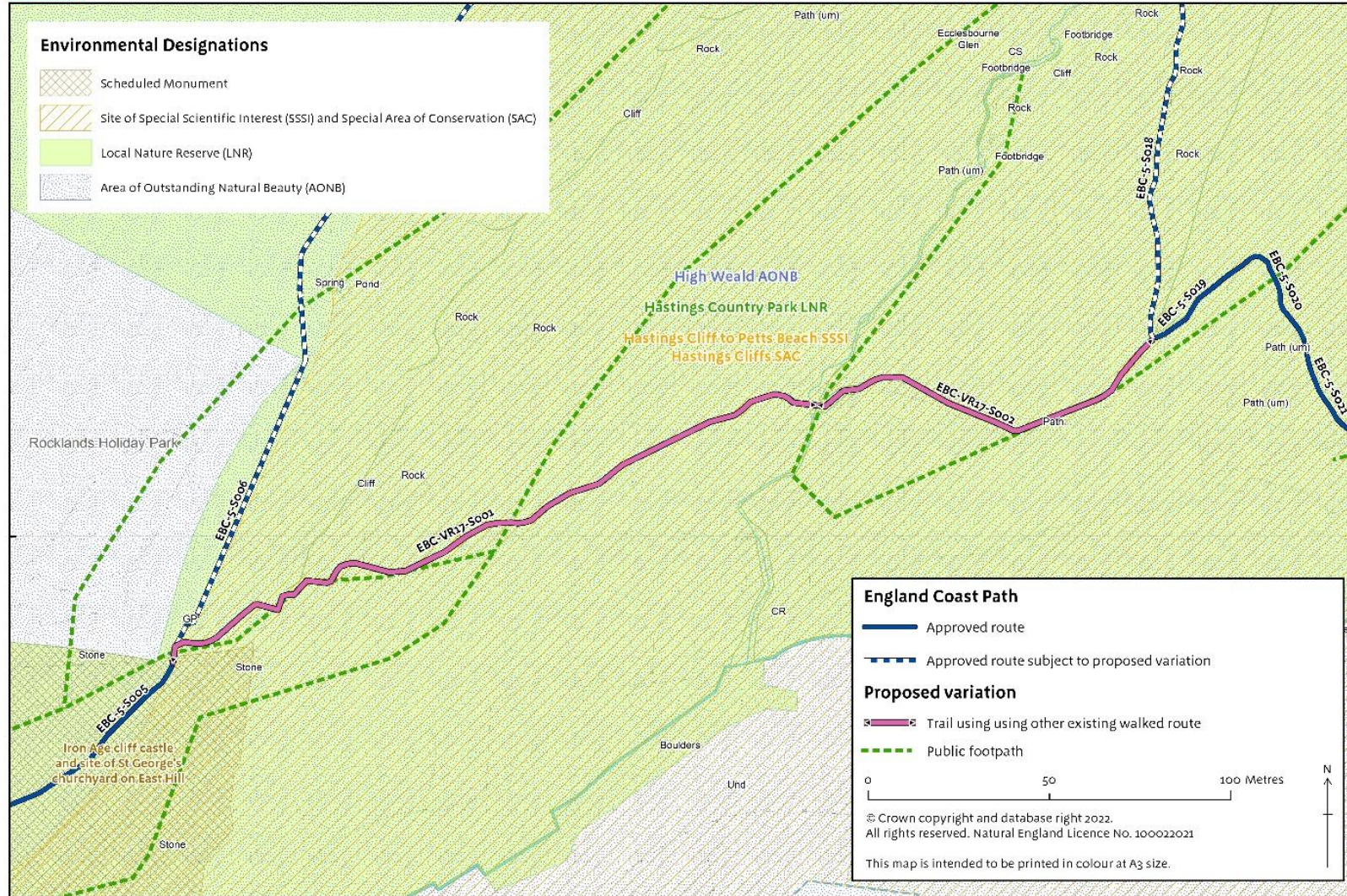
2.2.4 The following designated sites affect this area of the coast:

- Hastings Cliffs SAC
- Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA
- Hastings Cliffs to Pett Beach SSSI
- Iron Age cliff castle and site of St George's churchyard on East Hill Scheduled Monument
- High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Hastings Country Park Local Wildlife Site
- Hastings Country Park Local Nature Reserve

2.2.5 We consider that the coastal environment, including features of the sites listed above, along this length of coast is unlikely to be sensitive to the improvements to coastal access envisaged and that 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 report are made in accordance with relevant environmental protection legislation. In respect of cultural heritage, the changes to the route do not affect land close to the Scheduled Monument.







## Accessibility:

2.2.7 The proposed trail route is made up of a path across the steep valley slopes of Ecclesbourne Glen. This consists of a series of steps with a natural clay surface, which can become muddy. Like the original approved route, the variation is likely to be unsuitable for some people with reduced mobility because of the steep terrain at Ecclesbourne Glen and the long flight of steps.

2.2.8 Hastings Borough Council manages this Country Park and has focused on providing easy access facilities at the eastern end of the Country Park, providing circular routes close to the new interpretation centre. In that location there are also toilets and parking and an easy access route to the coastline.

2.2.9 We have investigated whether there are any more accessible options available to utilise for the trail or signpost as an easy access route around Ecclesbourne Glen. Unfortunately these would also require use of steps which are often waterlogged due to the clay surfaces. In order to facilitate access for those with reduced mobility to the Country Park, we therefore propose to highlight the difficult nature of the ECP in this area on the National Trails website and provide a link to Hastings Borough Council's Country Park website so that visitors are able to decide in advance where they choose to go.

## Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

2.2.10 **Landward boundary of the coastal margin:** This variation report is not making any new proposals in relation to the extent of the landward coastal margin. The coastal margin will remain the same as that approved by the Secretary of State in October 2021. See Map VR17c – Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park: extent of landward margin.

2.2.11 **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.

2.2.12 **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.

2.2.13 Column 4 of tables 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 indicates where the roll-back power has been proposed in relation to a newly proposed route section. Where this is the case, the route, as initially determined at the time this report was prepared, is to be at the centre of the line shown on map VR17d as the proposed route of the trail.

If at any time in the future any part of a route section upon which roll-back has been specified needs, in Natural England's view, to change in order for the overall route to remain viable, the new route for the part in question will be determined by Natural England without further reference to the Secretary of State. This will be done in accordance with the criteria and procedures described under the title 'Roll-back' in part 7 of the approved Overview and section 4.10 of the Coastal Access Scheme. If this happens, the new route will become the approved route for that section for the purposes of the Order which determines where coastal access rights apply.

## **Establishment of the trail:**

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

2.2.15 Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is £300. This route would have the effect of decreasing the overall establishment cost for Report EBC 5: Tackleway, Hastings to Cliff End, Pett Level by ~£2500. These estimates are informed by information already held by the access authority.

2.2.16 There is one main element to the overall capital costs:

- Provision of waymarking

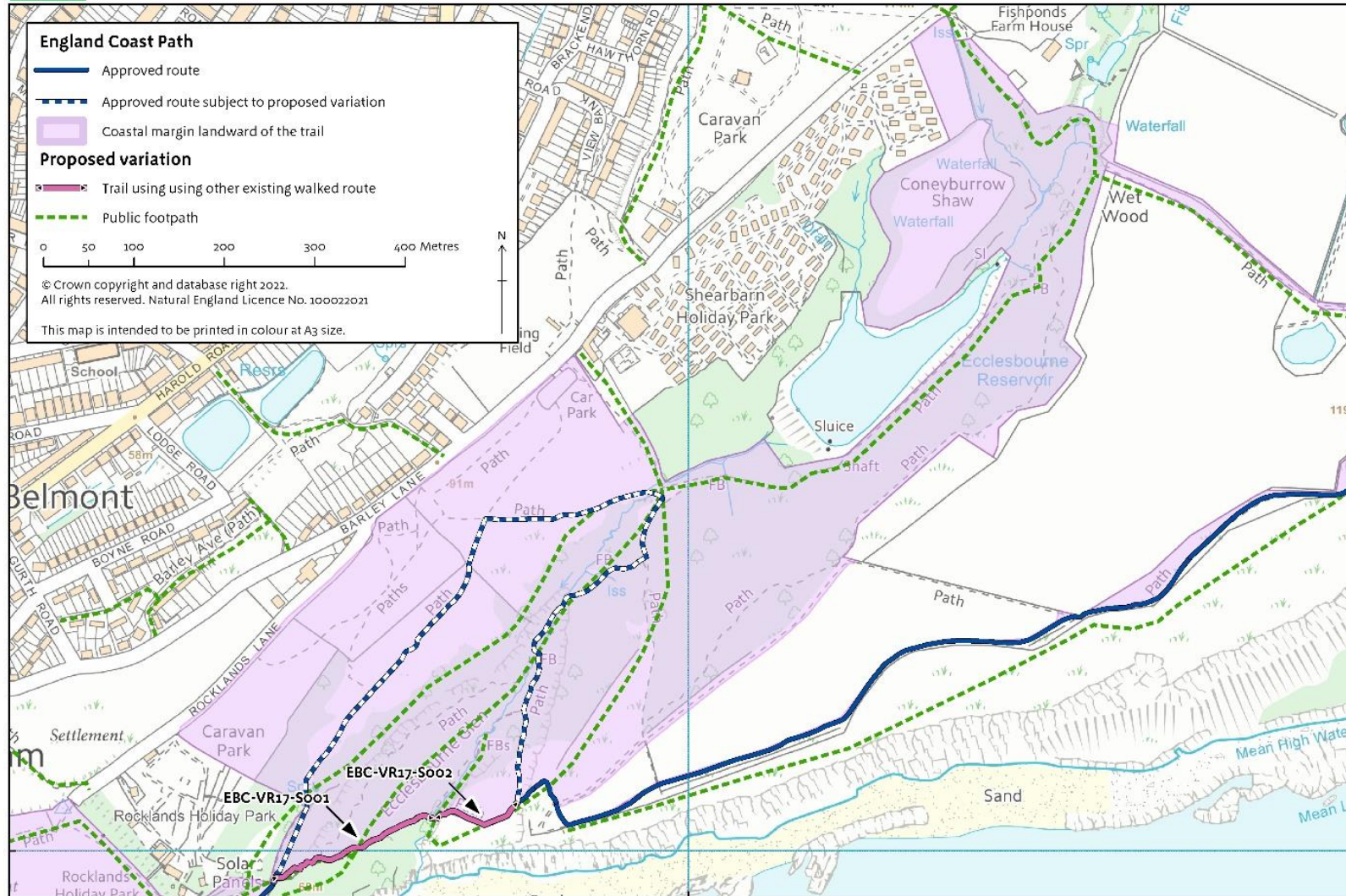
2.2.17 If the Secretary of State approves our report, East Sussex County Council will liaise with the affected landowners and occupiers about relevant aspects of the establishment works and installation of new signs that are needed on their land. Prior to works being carried out on the ground, all necessary permissions, authorisations and consents will be obtained. All such works would conform to the published standards for National Trails and the other criteria described in our Coastal Access Scheme.

## **Maintenance of the trail:**

2.2.18 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 as set out in our original report.



Map VR17c - Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park: extent of landward margin



Map VR17c - Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park: extent of landward margin



## Part 2.3: Proposals Tables

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

**Table 2.3.1: Map VR17d – Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park**

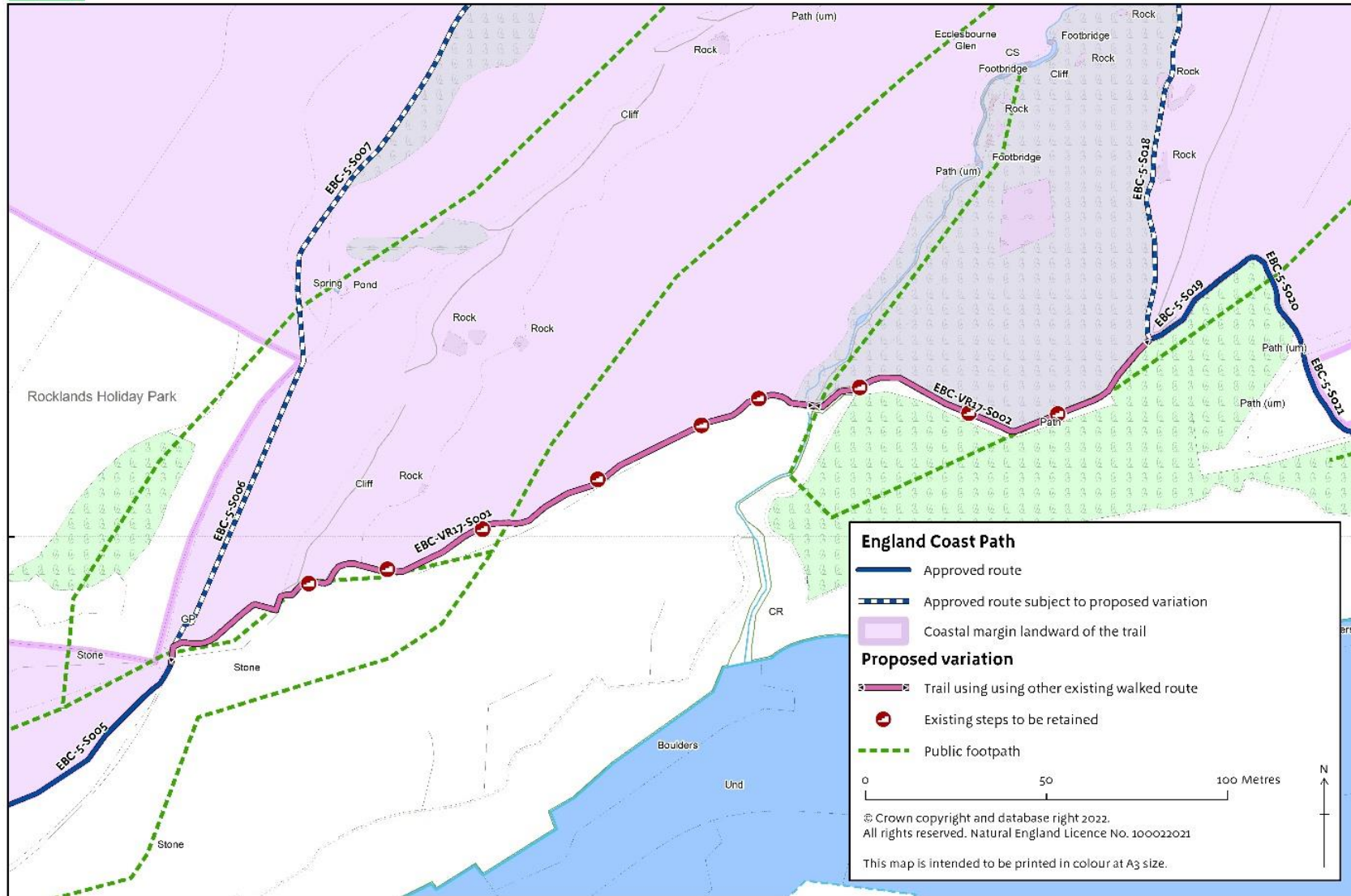
Key notes on table:

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(s)    | 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  |
| Map VR17d | EBC-VR17-S001 to EBC-VR17-S002 | Public footpath                    | Yes – see table 2.3.2                                    | No  | Various   | Additional margin                     | See paragraph 2.2.10<br><br>Various means fence line, hedgeline and road |

### 2.3.2 Roll-back implementation – more complex situations: Map VR17d – Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park

| Map(s)    | New route section number(s)    | Feature(s) or site(s) potentially affected               | Our likely approach to roll-back   |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Map VR17d | EBC-VR17-S001 to EBC-VR17-S002 | Hastings Cliffs SSSI, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) | If the existing route is no longer viable through or seaward of a designated site (SSSI, SAC, SPA, SAM) whose designated features are potentially sensitive to public access, we will choose a new route after detailed discussions with the relevant experts and with any potentially affected owners or occupiers, which will either (a) continue to pass through the site, if appropriate or (b) if necessary, be routed landward of it. Possible impacts on designated sites (Hastings Cliffs SSSI, SAC) may need to be considered as part of deciding on a new alignment for the trail. Where necessary, a Habitats Regulations Assessment will be carried out. |
|           |                                | Rocklands Holiday Park                                   | If it is no longer possible to find a viable route seaward of the holiday park, we will choose a new route after detailed discussions with all relevant interests, either (a) to pass through the site, or (b) if this is not practicable, to pass somewhere on the landward side of it. In reaching this judgement we will have full regard to the need to seek a fair balance between the interests of potentially affected owners and occupiers and those of the public   |



Map VR17d - Ecclesbourne Glen, Hastings Country Park