

Proposed change to the King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIECP) at Sutton Hoo and Methersgate, Suffolk

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report FFB-VR23
May 2025

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 7th May 2024 the Secretary of State approved Natural England's proposals relating to *FFB4: Wilford Bridge to Ferry Cliff* and *FFB5: Ferry Cliff to Ramsholt* which formed part of our proposals for the [Felixstowe Ferry to Bawdsey](#) stretch. Whilst the proposals have been approved, Natural England and Suffolk 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 changes are necessary to the route of the KCIIECP. This report contains Natural England's proposals relating to changes at Sutton Hoo and Methersgate which are at the locations shown on the Variation Location Map below.

1.4 In order for these proposed changes to come into force they 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.



Part 2: Proposed variation at Sutton Hoo

Start Point:	Grid reference: TM 2859 4963
End Point:	Grid reference: TM 2855 4954
Relevant Original Proposal Map: FFB 4a	

2.1 Introduction

Reason for variation:

2.1.1 The approved alignment of the route is along the vegetated verge of a tarmac track on the National Trust's Sutton Hoo Estate. Since approval of the route Natural England had a site visit with Suffolk County Council and the National Trust and we have agreed to adjust the route slightly to follow the National Trust's permissive route for its visitors. This will take walkers away from a sharp turn on the track, with limited visibility for traffic, and instead go landward of the approved route through trees and grassland. The landowner supports this proposed variation.

Proposed variation:

2.1.2 The approved route FFB-4-S009 is aligned on a grass verge (see Maps VR23a and VR23b), alongside a tarmac track.

2.1.3 The route would be varied at the bend, on to a route that is up to nine metres inland from the approved route. It is an existing walked route that is signed by the National Trust as a permissive route. The surface is compacted soil.

2.1.4 As a consequence of these proposed changes, all land seaward of the trail would become part of the coastal margin. The change between the varied route and the approved route would create a minor increase in the size of the coastal margin.

2.2 Proposals Narrative

The Trail:

2.2.1 The proposed variation to the approved trail:

- takes visitors away from a bend in a road, and away from traffic.
- would follow an existing signed path through woodland and on grassland.
- follows a route similar to the existing approved route.
- is on compacted soil.

Protection of the environment:

2.2.2 The varied section of trail would pass through woodland and grassland. The proposed route is not covered by any national or international nature conservation or heritage designations though the Deben Estuary SPA and River Deben SSSI are nearby. No environmental concerns were identified with the approved route. The proposed varied route is not significantly different from the approved route and is further away from the protected sites.

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

Accessibility:

- the proposed path surface is compacted soil with a slight gradient and is unlikely to cause issues concerning mobility in the rural location.
- the new alignment would avoid any interaction with traffic on a corner with reduced visibility.
- the proposed trail consists of a path with a compacted soil surface. It may get a muddy surface along with exposed tree roots as it is in a rural location.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

2.2.4 **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.

2.2.5 **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.

We have chosen not to make any such proposal in this variation report. This is unchanged from the approved proposals as the varied route would be inland of the approved line. Accordingly, the route is to be at the centre of the line shown on map FFB VR23b as the proposed route of the trail.

Establishment of the trail:

2.2.6 The varied part of the trail would be physically established to make it ready for public use before any new rights come into force along it. Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is an increase of £200 from the cost in the published proposals report.

2.2.7 If the Secretary of State approves our report, Suffolk County Council will liaise with the affected landowner about relevant aspects of the establishment works and installation of new signs and a short revetment that is needed on the 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:

2.2.8 Ongoing maintenance of the varied section of trail would be necessary from time to time, which is likely to be grass cutting of part of the route, depending on use. This would make no significant change to the annual costs associated with maintaining the approved route as set out in our original report.

Part 2.3: Proposals Tables

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

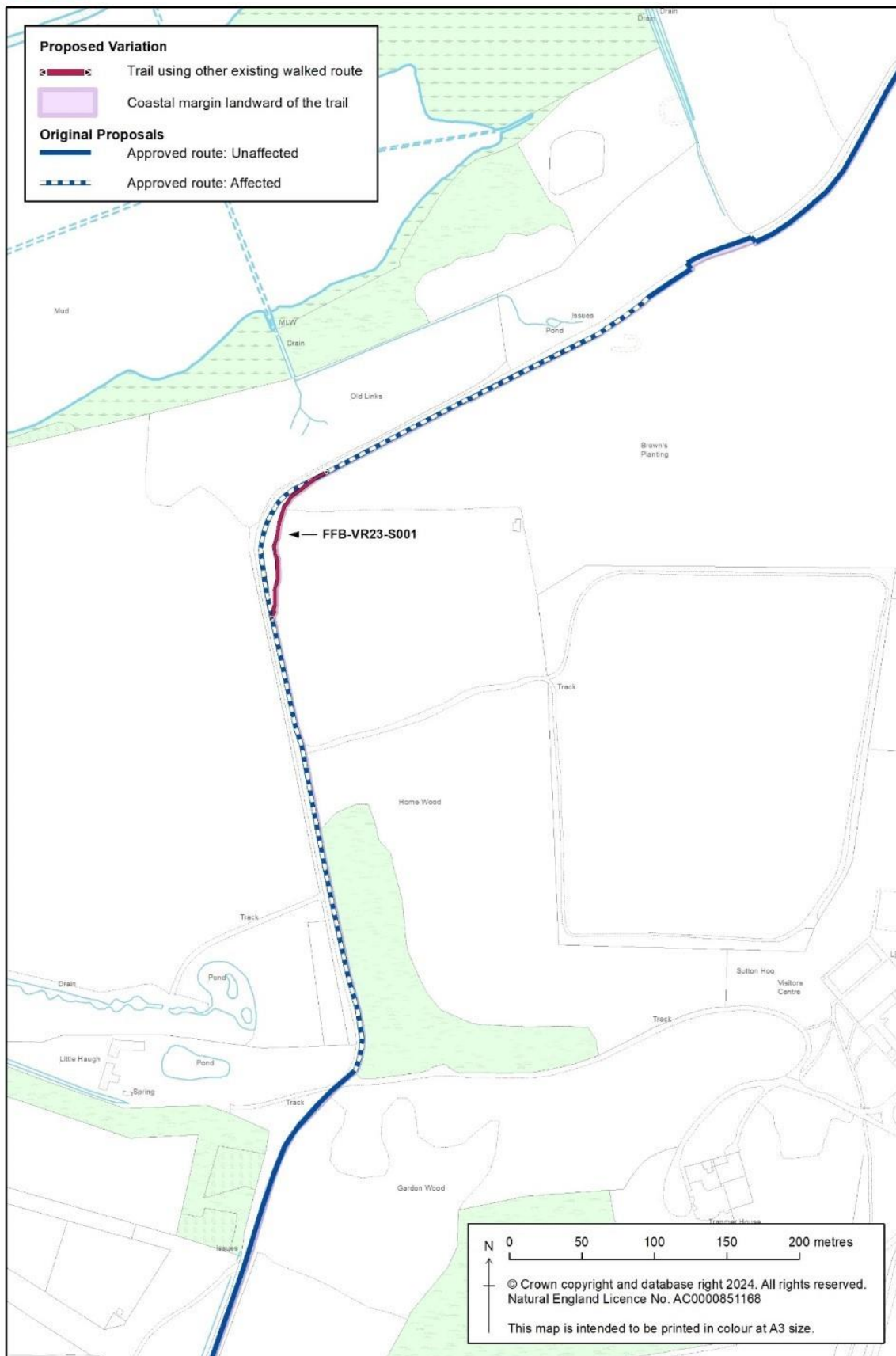
Table 2.3.1: Map FFB 4a - Wilford Bridge to Little Haugh

Key notes on table:

1. Column 4 – ‘No’ means no roll-back is proposed for this route section.
2. 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.
3. 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
FFB-VR23b	FFB-VR23-S001	Other existing walked route	No	No			





Part 3: Proposed variation at Methersgate

Start Point:	Grid reference: TM285464
End Point:	Grid reference: TM464463
Relevant Original Proposal Map:	FFB 5b

3.1 Introduction

Reason for variation:

3.1.1 The landowner has signposted and opened a permissive route after the KCIIIECP route proposals were made, as part of their own rationalisation of access routes. It is close to the approved alignment and is intended as a replacement for the approved route. It is more direct and simpler to maintain, with a greater length on a public footpath. The landowner supports this proposed variation.

Proposed variation:

3.1.2 The approved route, shown on Maps VR23c and VR23d below, is initially aligned on a grass field-edge public footpath (FFB-5-S014 FP) sloping downhill towards the estuary. At the northern edge of the wood, the approved route leaves the public footpath and uses a new bridge (part of establishment works) to cross a ditch. It turns towards the river on the edge of the adjacent field (FFB-5-S016). After 100m it cuts diagonally across the corner of the field towards the river. By doing so it creates a separation between the route and the nearby property.

3.1.3 The proposed variation, shown on Maps VR23c and VR23d below, does not turn at the edge of the wood but continues for a further 80m along the public footpath towards the river. It then turns through a gap into the same field as the approved route, but without the need for hedge clearance or a new bridge. For the next trail section, after the proposals were made, a new fence has been built diagonally across the corner of the field and creates a barrier between the route and the nearby house. The proposed variation follows the new fence. At a maximum point it is approximately 10m east (landward) of the approved route.

3.1.4 As a consequence of these proposed changes, all land seaward of the trail would become part of the coastal margin. The change between the varied route and the approved route would create a minor decrease in the size of the coastal margin.

3.1.5 The proposed variation puts the route on the landward side of a hedge for an additional 80m and so for that distance there are reduced views of the river. There are good distant views of the river from higher ground on FFB-5-S014 which is part of both the approved and proposed variation and both routes share the same riverside path at FFB-5-S017 and therefore the differences are not significant.

3.2 Proposals Narrative

The Trail:

3.2.1 The proposed variation to the approved trail:

- Follows existing walked routes, including a public right of way.
- Is mainly grass

- Maintains good views of the estuary for most of the length
- The northern part of the variation extends for a length of 80 metres and is parallel to, and an average of 10 metres westward of the approved route. The southern part of the proposed variation extends for a length of 95 metres at a maximum of 10 metres eastward of the approved route.

Protection of the environment:

3.2.2 The section of trail affected by this variation passes through an area of woodland and arable field. The proposed route is not covered by any national or international nature conservation or heritage designations though the Deben Estuary SPA and River Deben SSSI are nearby. No environmental concerns were identified with the approved route and the proposed route is not significantly different.

Accessibility:

3.2.3 The proposed trail consists of a mown grass surface. Accessibility is improved as the varied route does not have the new proposed sleeper bridge with limited width.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

3.2.4 **Landward boundary of the coastal margin:** We have used our discretion on some sections of the varied route 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 3.3.1 below.

3.2.5 The Proposals Tables show where we are proposing to alter the default landward boundary of the coastal margin. These proposals are set out in columns 5b and 5c of table 3.3.1.

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.

3.2.6 **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.

3.2.7 **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.

3.2.8 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 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.

3.2.9 Column 4 of tables 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 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 FFB VR23d as the proposed route of the trail.

Establishment of the trail:

3.2.9 Below we summarise how our proposed variation would be physically established to make it ready for public use.

3.2.10 Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is £100. This would have the effect of decreasing the overall establishment cost for the Ferry Cliff to Ramsholt report by £500. These estimates are informed by information already held by the access authority.

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

- fingerposts or waymark posts and roundels

3.2.12 If the Secretary of State approves our report, Suffolk County Council will liaise with the affected landowner 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:

3.2.13 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. The occasional costs of bridge maintenance/replacement would not be needed and so overall the cost to maintain the trail will decrease because of this proposed variation.

Part 3.3: Proposals Tables

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

Table 3.3.1: Map FFB 5b – Methersgate Hall to Nettle Hill

Key notes on table:

1. Column 4 – ‘No’ means no rollback is proposed for this route section. ‘Yes – normal’ means rollback 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 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.
3. 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 numbers	Current status of route sections	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
FFB 5b/ VR23d	FFB-VR23-S002	Public footpath	Yes - Normal	No	Landward edge of the hedge	Clarity and cohesion	
FFB 5b/ VR23d	FFB-VR23-S003	Other existing walked route	Yes - Normal	No			



