



**Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under
regulation 63 of the
Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended)
(‘Habitats Regulations Assessment’)**

**Assessment of the King Charles III England Coast Path
proposals between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay**

On:

Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC

Studland to Portland SAC

Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

Date of publication July 2025



Assessment of Coastal Access proposals under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended) (‘Habitats Regulations Assessment’)

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Summary

I) Introduction

This is a record of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (‘HRA’) undertaken by Natural England (in its role of competent authority) in accordance with the assessment and review provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (‘the Habitats Regulations’).

NE has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. This assessment considers the potential impacts of our detailed proposals for coastal access from Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Bay on the following sites of international importance for wildlife:

- Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Studland to Portland SAC
- Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

This assessment should be read alongside Natural England’s related Coastal Access Reports which between them fully describe and explain its access proposals for the stretch as a whole. The Overview explains common principles and background and the reports explain how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths within the stretch.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-lulworth-cove-to-highcliffe#progress:-lulworth-cove-to-kimmeridge-bay>

II) Background

The main wildlife interests for this stretch of coast are summarised in Table 1 (see section B1 for a full list of qualifying features).

Table 1. Summary of the main wildlife interest

Interest	Description
Chalk grasslands and scrub. Early gentian	<p>Semi-natural dry grassland occurs at this site in both inland and coastal situations on both chalk and Jurassic limestone. The site contains extensive species-rich examples of CG4 (<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>) grassland in the southern part of its UK range. Smaller areas of CG2 <i>Festuca ovina</i> - <i>Avenula pratensis</i> grassland occur on shallow soils on steeper slopes. Transitions from calcareous grassland to both chalk heath and acid grassland are also present. The site has well-developed terricolous and saxicolous lichen and bryophyte communities associated with open turf, chalk rock and pebbles, and flinty soils.</p> <p>Early gentian (<i>Gentianella anglica</i>) is an annual plant, occurring in calcareous grassland, mainly on steep, south-facing slopes. It grows on bare ground or in thin turf that is kept open by a combination of</p>

	<p>rabbit or sheep-grazing and trampling by livestock on thin droughted soils. In dense turf it becomes shaded out and unable to compete with other more vigorous species. It is found on a variety of substrates and in different habitats but is particularly frequent in coastal grasslands. This site on the Dorset coast, together with St Albans Head - Durlston Head SAC, supports important long standing populations the species.</p>
Cliffs and strandline vegetation	<p>The cliffs are formed of hard limestones, with chalk at the eastern end, interspersed with slumped sections of soft cliff of sand and clays. The cliffs support species-rich calcareous grassland with species that are rare in the UK, such as wild cabbage (<i>Brassica oleracea</i> var. <i>oleracea</i>), early spider-orchid (<i>Ophrys sphegodes</i>) and Nottingham catchfly (<i>Silene nutans</i>). This section of the coast is dominated by sloping cliffs supporting scrub communities, where wood spurge (<i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>) grows in grassland.</p> <p>The strandline vegetation on deposits of shingle lying at or above mean high-water spring tides. The types of deposits involved are generally at the lower end of the size range of shingle (2-200 mm diameter), with varying amounts of sand interspersed in the shingle matrix. These shingle deposits occur as fringing beaches that are subject to periodic displacement or overtopping by high tides and storms. The distinctive vegetation, which may form only sparse cover, is therefore ephemeral and composed of annual or short-lived perennial species.</p>
Breeding terns	<p>The Solent and Dorset Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) covers 88,980.55 ha and stretches from Worbarrow Bay in Dorset to Littlehampton in West Sussex incorporating most of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight coastline and adjacent offshore areas. The SPA overlaps and shares boundaries with many other designated sites within the Solent, Southampton Water, Portsmouth Harbour, Christchurch Harbour, Poole Bay and West Sussex. These areas support important breeding colonies of terns at existing SPAs which include Poole Harbour SPA, Solent & Southampton Water SPA, Chichester & Langstone Harbours SPA and Pagham Harbour SPA.</p> <p>The Solent and Dorset Coast SPA protects the surrounding waters of these sites as they are used by the terns for foraging and maintenance activities, such as bathing and preening. The SPA supports over 12% of UK's tern breeding population, specifically, 4.92% of the common tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>), 4.01% of sandwich tern (<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>), and 3.31% of little tern (<i>Sternula albifrons</i>) populations.</p>
Reefs	<p>Reefs in the Studland to Portland SAC are located across the entire site from the eastern to the western boundaries. They extend out over 10km from the shore at St Alban's Ledge, and down deeper than 60m around Portland Bill. The reefs are divided into three sub-features: infralittoral rock, circalittoral rock and subtidal stony reef.</p> <p>Infralittoral reefs where communities are usually characterised by algae such as kelp forests, extend across the coastal fringes of the site in shallow waters. They are characterised by flat bedrock mixed with areas of boulders, cobbles and mixed sediment).</p>

	<p>Circalittoral rock dominates the site. This is rock in deeper water, where communities tend to be dominated by animals attached to the rock rather than algae. It is interspersed with a variety of different sediment types ranging from fine sand to large cobbles.</p> <p>Stony reefs are characterised by stable boulders and cobbles over lying sediment. Like circalittoral rock stony reef are located in deeper water and characterised by animal dominated communities.</p>
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III) Our approach

Natural England's approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in section 4.9 Coastal Access: Natural England's Approved Scheme 2013 [Ref 1].

Our final published proposal for a stretch of England Coast Path is preceded by detailed local consideration of options for route alignment, the extent of the coastal margin and any requirement for restrictions, exclusions or seasonal alternative routes. The proposal is thoroughly considered before being finalised and initial ideas may be modified or rejected during the iterative design process, drawing on the range of relevant expertise available within Natural England.

Evidence is also gathered as appropriate from a range of other sources which can include information and data held locally by external partners or from the experience of local land owners, environmental consultants and occupiers. The approach includes looking at any current visitor management practices, either informal or formal. It also involves discussing our emerging conclusions as appropriate with key local interests such as land owners or occupiers, conservation organisations or the local access authority. In these ways, any nature conservation concerns are discussed early and constructive solutions identified as necessary.

The conclusions of our assessment are certified by both the member of staff responsible for developing the access proposal and the person responsible for considering any environmental impacts. This ensures appropriate separation of duties within Natural England.

IV) Aim and objectives for the design of our proposals

The new national arrangements for coastal access will establish a continuous well-maintained walking route around the coast and clarify where people can access the foreshore and other parts of the coastal margin. These changes will influence how people use the coast for recreation and our aim in designing our detailed proposals has been to secure and enhance opportunities for people to enjoy their visit whilst ensuring appropriate protection for affected European sites.

V) Conclusion

We have considered whether our detailed proposals for coastal access between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay might have an impact on the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC, the Studland to Portland SAC and the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA. In Part C of this assessment we identify some possible risks to the relevant qualifying features and conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity of any of the sites or their features.

VI) Implementation

Once a route for the trail has been confirmed by the Secretary of State, we will work with Dorset Council to ensure any works on the ground are carried out with due regard to the conclusions of this appraisal and relevant statutory requirements.

PART A: Introduction and information about the England Coast Path

A1. Introduction

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 whole coast: we call this the England Coast Path; the other relating to a margin of coastal land associated with the route where in appropriate places people will be able to spread out and explore, rest or picnic.

To secure these objectives, we must submit reports to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recommending where the route should be and identifying the associated coastal margin. The reports must follow the approach set out in our methodology (the Coastal Access Scheme), which – as the legislation requires – has been approved by the Secretary of State for this purpose.

Where implementation of a Coastal Access Report would be likely to have a significant effect on a site designated for its international importance for wildlife, called a 'European site'¹, the report must be subject to special procedures designed to assess its likely significant effects.

The conclusions of this screening are certified by the person responsible for considering any environmental impacts recognised within Natural England's Non-Financial Schedule of Delegation.

Natural England's approach to ensuring the protection of sensitive nature conservation features under the Coastal Access Programme is set out in section 4.9 of the Coastal Access Scheme [Ref 1].

A2. Details of the plan or project

This assessment considers Natural England's proposals for coastal access along the stretch of coast between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay. Our proposals to the Secretary of State for this stretch of coast are presented in a series of reports that explain how we propose to implement coastal access along each of the constituent lengths within the stretch. Within this assessment we consider the relevant reports for the route alignment.

1. Coastal access proposals have several elements and in this part of the HRA we describe those relevant to the assessment.

England Coast Path

2. A continuous walking route around the coast – the King Charles III England Coast Path National Trail (KCIIIIECP) – is being established by joining up existing coastal paths and creating new sections of path where necessary. The route will be established and maintained to National Trail Quality Standards.
3. There is already an established National Trail route along the stretch of coast between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay – the South West Coast Path (SWCP). The SWCP is well-used by walkers and our proposed alignment for the England Coast Path is to follow the existing trail for much of the length. In one place our alignment departs from the promoted SWCP route. This is at Lulworth Cove, on the western end of Bindon Hill, where the

¹ Ramsar sites are treated in the same way by UK government policy

KCIIIECP will take a route running North-South on the western boundary of the Isle of Portland to Studham Cliffs SAC, for a distance of around 150m. This is an existing walked route, promoted on OS maps within a heavily utilised area of Open Access above the cove. Towards Kimmeridge bay, the KCIIIECP proposal will be aligned along a track just inland of the official SWCP, and outside of the European sites.

Coastal Margin

4. An area of land associated with the proposed trail will become coastal margin, including all land seawards of the trail down to mean low water.
5. Although coastal margin is by default subject to new Coastal Access Rights (CARs), on some parts of the coast a significant proportion of it is excepted, is subject to certain other public access rights², or is locally excluded from them. CARs are rights of access on foot for open air recreation. The nature and limitations of the new rights and the key types of land excepted from them are explained in more detail in Chapter 2 of our Coastal Access Scheme [1].
6. A key area of excepted land is that land where the use of which is regulated by bylaws under section 14 of the Military Lands Act 1892 or section 2 of the Military Lands Act 1900. This means the majority of the length of the coast path in this location between Lulworth and Kimmeridge Bay will not have coastal access rights, both as a Trail and therefore no coastal margin.
7. Only two short sections of this report on the Main Route alignment lies outside military lands, the far east and far western sections. The far western section (Lulworth) part is already Open Access land and the whole as a destination area is extremely well used. The eastern end at Kimmeridge Bay would be conferred a right of access on foot over the coastal margin.
8. Where the public has an existing right of access by statute or by express or implied permission (for example where there already are public-facing signs or messaging) CARs exist in parallel. Coastal access arrangements do not change the position for people using the land under other types of rights - for example to shoot or to exercise rights of common there.
9. Where public access on foot already takes place on land within the margin because people are 'helping themselves' to it without any right to be there (as happens for example on many beaches), the new CARs secure this existing use legally, subject to the normal national restrictions on CARs, and to any additional local restrictions or exclusions that may prove necessary.

Local restriction or exclusion of Coastal Access Rights

10. Local restrictions and exclusions, where needed, are normally put in place through directions given by NE. NEs direction making powers are explained in Chapter 6 of the Coastal Access Scheme [1].
11. There must be valid grounds to make a direction; and these are set out in CROW. No restrictions are proposed within the main route report – by virtue of the majority not having coastal access rights as is military land, and the remainder either already well used by the public or public access not anticipated to increase above the tolerated use. This HRA assesses if this is an appropriate approach, (i.e. it assesses the proposed project).

² As defined in CROW section 15

Access management

12. Through the coastal access programme, we can deliver practical access management measures that help to avoid or reduce possible impacts of recreation on sensitive sites. Interventions may be an inherent feature of the access proposals (e.g. providing a managed path that avoids more sensitive parts of a site) or additional measures added to the proposals for conservation reasons (e.g. installing new screening between a path and sensitive area). Theoretically possible impacts of coastal access are often avoided at the design stage by how the path is aligned and other inherent features of the proposals, such as exclusion of CARs for reasons of public safety. Our proposals for KCIIIIECP often make use of existing routes or create CARs over areas where there is established access (a common situation at the coast where public access to the foreshore is widely accepted). In this situation, the access proposals may not create any new issues, and the interventions delivered through the programme are more relevant to improving the management of existing pressures.
13. Our general approach to access management is described in our Coastal Access Scheme (see Chapter 6 for our general approach and Part C for discussion of particular coastal land types and land uses) [1]. Our practical experience, and that of practitioners, national organisations and professional bodies we work with³, is that access management measures work best when used in combination and deployed as part of an integrated, area wide approach. Uncertainty about how people will respond to a particular set of circumstances can be reduced by using range of approaches, rather than relying on a single technique. The specific proposals we make are tailored to local circumstances and new interventions are often combined with existing access management and natural features of the site.

Promotion of the England Coast Path

14. The trail along this length of coast will continue to be managed and promoted as part of the SWCP that itself being part of the King Charles III England Coast Path. On the ground the trail is easy to follow with distinctive signposting at key intersections and places people can join the route. Directional way markers incorporating the National Trail acorn symbol are used to guide people along the route.
15. The route of the South West Coast Path that links the two sections of King Charles III England Coast Path sits within the MoD live firing ranges at Lulworth, which directs for a restricted opening and a clearly guided route. (Fig 1 below from OS maps). This section of coastline will not be part of the England Coast Path and will not be subject to coastal margin. But it is a key element of the Trail in this location and is detailed here, to recognise it is an inherent part of the coastal path network.

³ Including: Outdoor Recreation Network, The Conservation Volunteers, The Institute of Public Rights of Way and the Access Management and Countryside Managers Association

Figure 1: Details from OS maps of the description of the Trail through the ranges.

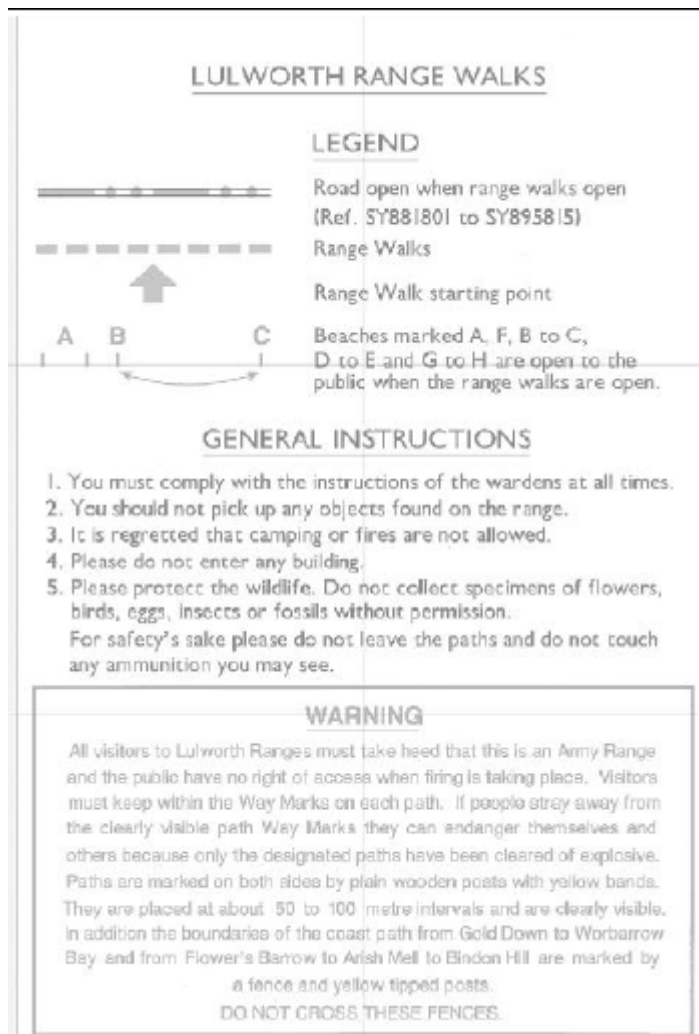


Figure 2: Example of some of the on site signage, showing the need to follow a defined path between markers.



Figure 3: Example of current on site information, to be supplemented with KCIIECP National Trail funding



16. Information about the Lulworth Range Walks as part of the SWCP is available on-line including things for users to be aware of, such as when the trail, beaches and associated inland path network is open. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lulworth-access-times/lulworth-range-walks-and-tyneham-village-access-times-2023>

Figure 4 Google StreetView images from 2022 showing defined path and waymarkers, looking west in top photo, east in lower <https://maps.app.goo.gl/YDr345TJb1MZwppX6>



Figure 5, aerial photo showing extent of desire lines over the Open access land at the western end of Bindon Hill, above Lulworth Cove. The KCIIIECP proposals follow the southern and western edge desire lines.



Establishment and maintenance of the trail

17. Establishment works to make the trail fit for use and prepare for opening, including any additional measures that have been identified as necessary to protect the environment, will be carried out before the new public rights come into force on this stretch. Details of the works to be carried out and the estimated cost are provided in the access proposals. Works on the ground to implement the proposals will be carried out by Dorset Council subject to any further necessary permissions being obtained including if deemed necessary by the authority assent to undertake operations on or near a SSSI. NE will be able to provide further advice to the access authority carrying out the work if necessary.
18. The access proposals provide for the permanent establishment of a path and associated infrastructure, including any additional measures referred to in this assessment and described in the access proposals. Ongoing maintenance of the route will continue to be overseen by the SWCP Trail Partnership led by the SWCP Association and along this section of the route carried out by Dorset Council. The Partnership oversee delivery of the SWCP and there is regular reporting and scrutiny of key performance indicators, including the condition of the trail.

PART B: Information about the European Sites which could be affected

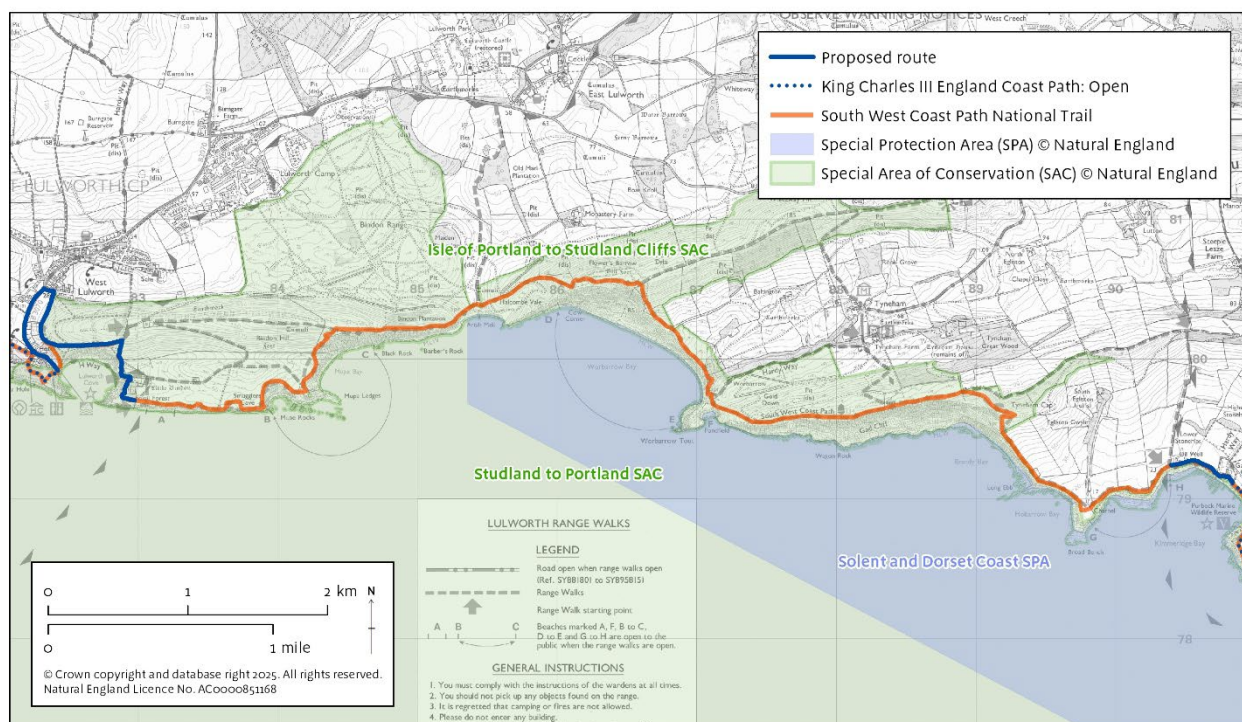
B1. Brief description of the European Sites and their Qualifying Features

19. Three European sites occur within or near to the project area and could potentially be affected by the proposals. These are:
- Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
 - Studland to Portland SAC
 - Solent and Dorset Coast SPA.
20. A brief description of each of these sites and list of their corresponding qualifying features is provided in this section of the assessment. A map showing the extent of these sites in relation to the project area is below.



King Charles III England Coast Path - Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Bay
Habitat Regulations Assessment

Map 1: European Sites subject to this report



21. Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC

The Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation stretches for some 40 km along the coast of South Dorset. The cliffs support species-rich calcareous grassland with particularly large populations of several species that are scarce in the UK such as wild cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* var. *oleracea*), early spider-orchid (*Ophrys sphegodes*) and Nottingham catchfly

(*Silene nutans*). The endemic sea lavender (*Limonium recurvum* ssp *recurvum*) is locally frequent. The Portland peninsula demonstrates clearly the contrast between an exposed western coast, with sheer rock faces and sparse maritime vegetation, and a more sheltered eastern side.

On this sheltered coast and on the mainland cliffs east of White Nothe there are extensive slumped undercliffs and landslides with a mix of massive fallen boulders, grassland and scrub. The scrub contains a high proportion of wayfaring-tree (*Viburnum latana*), while wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) occurs widely in the grassland. The open habitats that occur on sands and clays as a result of frequent landslips are an especially rich habitat for many localised invertebrate species. Calcareous boulders in this turf support important and restricted lichen and bryophyte assemblages. Semi-natural dry grassland occurs in both inland and coastal situations on both chalk and limestone. The site contains extensive species-rich examples of tor-grass (*Brachypodium pinnatum*) grassland and smaller areas of sheep's-fescue - meadow oat-grass (*Festuca ovina* - *Helictotrichon pratense*) grassland occur on shallow soils on steeper slopes. It also supports important long-standing populations of early gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) numbering several thousands of plants.

The site lies partly within the Dorset AONB, and wholly within the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. Geologically the underlying rocks are from the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous Periods. This geology, the geomorphological process that act upon it and the fossils it yields are recognised as being of outstanding universal value under the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

22. Studland to Portland SAC

The Studland to Portland SAC lies off the Dorset coast, and is comprised of two sections; the Studland Bay to Ringstead Bay reefs and the Portland reefs. The site contains a diverse range of reef habitats, which exhibit a large amount of geological variety and biological diversity.

The Studland Bay to Ringstead Bay section contains numerous geological features of interest including: exposed soft chalk bedrock around Ballard Cliffs in the east and Ringstead Bay in the west; limestone ledges protruding from shelly gravel at Worbarrow Bay, and shale reefs extending from Kimmeridge. Other areas of particular interest that support the site's diverse marine life include: Evan's Rock; St. Albans ledge; the limestone blocks of "seabed caves"; and Lulworth Banks. Within this section of the site seagrass beds, maerl beds, and *Ampelisca* mats have been recorded, with *Sabellaria* reefs having been recorded in the past.

The Portland Reefs section surrounds Portland Bill and is characterised by flat bedrock, limestone ledges, large boulders and cobbles. The boulders and ledges occur where the eroded coastal cliffs of Portland extend underwater. South of Portland Bill, a steep drop off has been formed which runs south west of the Bill and extends to depths of over 60m. This mosaic of reef habitats are exposed to extremely strong tides, currents and wave action, and support a diverse range of marine life. Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) beds are found to occur on bedrock off the eastern side of Portland Bill, and also in the infralittoral zones of the eastern reefs amongst kelp forests

23. Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

The Solent and Dorset Coast Special Protection Area covers 88,980.55 ha and stretches from Worbarrow Bay in Dorset to Littlehampton in West Sussex incorporating most of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight coastline and adjacent offshore areas. The SPA overlaps and shares boundaries

with many other designated sites within the Solent, Southampton Water, Portsmouth Harbour, Christchurch Harbour, Poole Bay and West Sussex. These areas support important breeding colonies of terns at existing SPAs which include Poole Harbour SPA, Solent & Southampton Water SPA, Chichester & Langstone Harbours SPA and Pagham Harbour SPA.

The Solent and Dorset Coast SPA protects the surrounding waters of these sites as they are used by the terns for foraging and maintenance activities, such as bathing and preening. The SPA supports over 12% of UK's tern breeding population, specifically, 4.92% of the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), 4.01% of sandwich tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*), and 3.31% of little tern (*Sternula albifrons*) populations

Table 2. Qualifying features

Qualifying feature	Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC	Studland to Portland SAC	Solent and Dorset Coast SPA
Vegetated sea cliffs	✓		
Early gentian	✓		
Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone (incl. important orchid sites)	✓		
Annual vegetation of drift lines	✓		
Reefs		✓	
Common tern (breeding)			✓
Sandwich tern (breeding)			✓
Little tern (breeding)			✓

B2. European Site Conservation Objectives (including supplementary advice)

Natural England provides advice about the Conservation Objectives for European Sites in England in its role as the statutory nature conservation body. These Objectives (including any Supplementary Advice which may be available) are the necessary context for all HRAs.

The overarching Conservation Objectives for every European Site in England are to ensure that the integrity of each site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that each site contributes to achieving the aims of the Habitats Regulations, by either maintaining or restoring (as appropriate):

- The extent and distribution of their qualifying natural habitats,
- The structure and function (including typical species) of their qualifying natural habitats,
- The supporting processes on which their qualifying natural habitats rely,
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of their qualifying features rely,
- The population of each of their qualifying features, and

- The distribution of their qualifying features within the site.

Where Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice is available, which provides further detail about the features' structure, function and supporting processes mentioned above, the implications of the plan or project on the specific attributes and targets listed in the advice will be taken into account in this assessment.

In light of the European Sites which could be affected by the plan or project, this assessment will be informed by the following site-specific Conservation Objectives, including any available supplementary advice;

24. Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC

Conservation Objectives:

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

[file:///C:/Users/m159667/Downloads/UK0019861%20IsleofPortlandtoStudlandCliffs%20SACV2018%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/m159667/Downloads/UK0019861%20IsleofPortlandtoStudlandCliffs%20SACV2018%20(1).pdf)

Supplementary Advice:

[file:///C:/Users/m159667/Downloads/UK001986IsleofPortlandtoStudlandCliffsSAC_Formal%20Published%2023%20Jan%2019%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/m159667/Downloads/UK001986IsleofPortlandtoStudlandCliffsSAC_Formal%20Published%2023%20Jan%2019%20(1).pdf)

25. Studland to Portland SAC

The site's conservation objectives apply to the site and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the "Qualifying features" listed above).

The objectives are to ensure that, subject to natural change, the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its qualifying features, by maintaining or restoring:

- the extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of the qualifying species
- the structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- the structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying species
- the supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- the populations of each of the qualifying species
- the distribution of qualifying species within the site

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/MarineSiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=UK0030382&SiteName=studland&SiteNameDisplay=Studland+to+Portland+SAC&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=&NumMarineSeasonality=&HasCA=1>

26. Solent and Dorset Coast SPA

Conservation objectives:

The site's conservation objectives apply to the site and the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the "Qualifying features" listed above).

The objectives are to ensure that, subject to natural change, the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:

- the extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- the structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- the supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- the populations of each of the qualifying features
- the distribution of qualifying features within the site

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/MarineSiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=UK9020330&SiteName=Solent%20and%20Dorset%20Coast%20&SiteNameDisplay=Solent%20and%20Dorset%20Coast%20SPA&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=&NumMarineSeasonality=3&HasCA=1>

Supplementary Advice:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/SupAdvice.aspx?SiteCode=UK9020330&SiteName=Solent+and+Dorset+Coast+&SiteNameDisplay=Solent+and+Dorset+Coast+SPA&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=&NumMarineSeasonality=3>

PART C: Screening of the plan or project for appropriate assessment

C1. Is the plan or project either directly connected with or necessary to the (conservation) management (of the European Site's qualifying features)?

The Coastal Access Plan is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European or Ramsar sites for nature conservation listed in B1 above.

Conclusion:

As the plan or project is not either directly connected or necessary to the management of all of the European site's qualifying features further Habitats Regulations assessment is required.

C2. Is there a likelihood [or risk] of significant [adverse] effects ('LSE')?

This section details whether those constituent elements of the plan or project which are (a) not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the European Site(s) features and (b) could conceivably adversely affect a European site, would have a **likely significant effect**, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, upon the European sites and which could undermine the achievement of the site's conservation objectives referred to in section B2.

In accordance with case law, this HRA has considered an effect to be 'likely' if it '*cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information*' and is 'significant' if it '*undermines the conservation objectives*'. In accordance with Defra guidance on the approach to be taken to this decision, in plain English, the test asks whether the plan or project '*may*' have a significant effect (i.e. there is a risk or a possibility of such an effect).

This assessment of risk therefore takes into account the precautionary principle (where there is scientific doubt) and **excludes**, at this stage, any measures proposed in the submitted details of the plan/project that are specifically intended to avoid or reduce harmful effects on the European sites.

Each of the project elements has been tested in view of the European Site Conservation Objectives and against each of the relevant European site qualifying features. An assessment of potential effects using best available evidence and information has been made.

C2.1 Risk of Significant Effects Alone

The first step is to consider whether any elements of the project are likely to have a significant effect upon a European site 'alone' (that is when considered in the context of the prevailing environmental conditions at the site but in isolation of the combined effects of any other 'plans and projects'). Such effects do not include those deemed to be so insignificant as to be trivial or inconsequential.

In this section, we assess risks to qualifying features, taking account of their sensitivity to coastal walking and other recreational activities associated with coastal access proposals, and in view of each site's Conservation Objectives.

C2.2 Design of the access proposal to address possible risks – for the Main Trail alignment.

C2.2.1 Baseline situation

The main trail alignment of the England Coast Path generally follows the existing line of the South West Coast Path National Trail between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge aside from very short sections at the western and eastern ends. These two sections are existing public rights of way.

These two distinct sections of King Charles III England Coast Path link to the South West Coast Path through the ranges. Public access to the ranges is carefully controlled and the route through is only open on 46 weekends throughout the year, with additional availability for around a further 63 week days spread throughout the year, with a concentration in August and late December to early January. In effect the Trail at this location is only available for public use for less than one third of a calendar year. As there is no through route, this will reflect in the amount of walkers availing themselves of the coastal access rights at each end as with no onward journey available this will self limit the number of visitors on site because of the KCIIIIECP. It will have limited impact on bringing in more visitors above the current baseline.

During these open times, the SWCP is a popular walking route. It follows public rights of way on vehicular tracks or as well worn desire lines. The change to status as part of the King Charles III England Coast Path is not expected to have any quantifiable impact on the overall levels of use.

The Footprint Ecology survey for Dorset Council [3] provides a review of visitor actions and attitudes to the coastal sites along the wider coastline. The headline figures give support to a high

level of current environmental baseline use with almost 50% of visitors being those returning to the same areas over a ten year period. An area with a highly promoted existing trail and significant visitor destination with supporting facilities will absorb into the background levels of access any new visitors that are just on site because of the King Charles III England Coast Path status. This HRA has to consider the project proposed, which is the creation of the KCIIIIECP and associated coastal access rights and if the users of this will have a likely significant effect when considered with the current baseline.

C2.2.2 Detailed design features of the access proposal

The detailed design features of the access proposal are self-limited as this is an existing National Trail, that will receive some localised enhancements to signage. The trail through the ranges is carefully controlled by the MoD with locked gates, and a clearly demarked route along the coastline. The alignment in West Lulworth follows existing promoted routes/public rights of way that are also within a popular area of Open Access land. Users avail themselves of their access rights because of the views and the open land (facilitated by local carparking, facilities and tourism promotion) and the National Trail status will not alter this baseline environment.

C2.2.3 Consideration of possible risks to qualifying features at this location in light of the access proposal

This main trail alignment has the potential to interact with the features of Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC, the Studland to Portland SAC and the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA.

The features of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC are vegetation habitat types. There could be interaction at the extreme west and east ends as spreading room is created through the coastal access rights. However, at the western end, Lulworth Cove and the land above have a high existing environmental baseline of public access which will not be impacted by the creation of coastal access rights as a linear Trail and seaward coastal margin spreading room. At the eastern end at Kimmeridge Bay the existing public use of the bay (both through wider public use and commercial enterprises) will not be altered to any degree by the creation of a right of access. The public have helped themselves to this area and will continue to be able to do so under lawful right.

A possible interaction is between users and the areas of dry grasslands and early gentian. As the King Charles III England Coast Path follows existing public rights of way above Lulworth Cove, the negligible increase of users because it is the KCIIIIECP means the risk above current environmental baseline is negligible.

At the eastern end the Trail is outside of the SAC, and follows rights of way or is a new right of access to walked routes along vehicular tracks. The coastal margin is noted as maritime cliff and slope, which may host interest features. The trail is set back from the SAC. The area of the SAC affected directly by coastal access spreading room is very small and in many areas scrubby growth will hinder any public access. The area above the foreshore, with its scrub and grassland mosaics is unlikely to be used any more than present, an occasional visitor perhaps approaching the cliff edge for a view.

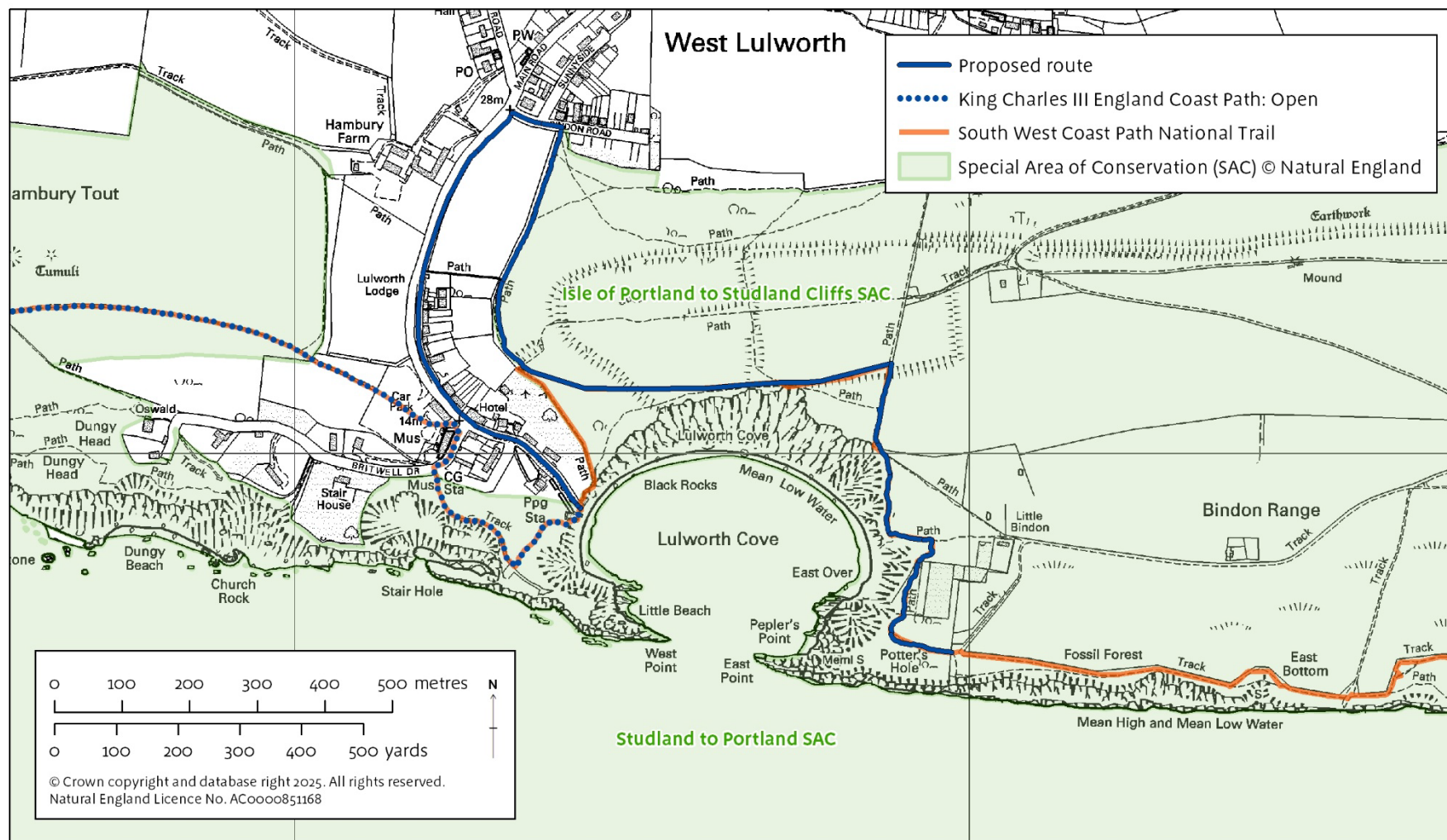
Early gentian is not recorded within the corridor of the Trail but it was noted by Edwards [2] that the trampled vegetation along the line of the trail offers habitat opportunity in lieu of sheep grazing creating the required short turf and thin soils.

The features of the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA are three breeding terns. They are not known to actively nest near this trail alignment due to the absence of appropriate habitat. All three terns feed in the open waters of the SAC, which is some distance from users of the trail alignment. In many areas users are set back from the cliff edge and screened from view. In general the distance between users and any feeding birds is considerable and well beyond the 200m considered as a standard approach to when disturbance interactions can start. The visitor numbers to these sections of route will be generally driven by the seasonally open route through the ranges. This

will further reduce the miniscule risk of interactions when the majority of feeding related to breeding is being undertaken.

The Studland and Portland SAC is a marine based area of importance for its reef communities. Disturbance from walkers is not a factor for this habitat type and as coastal access rights only extend to mean low water mark, there is no geographic overlap where these rights may exist (far western and eastern ends of this section).

Map 2: Proposed route (west)



Map 3: Proposed route (east)

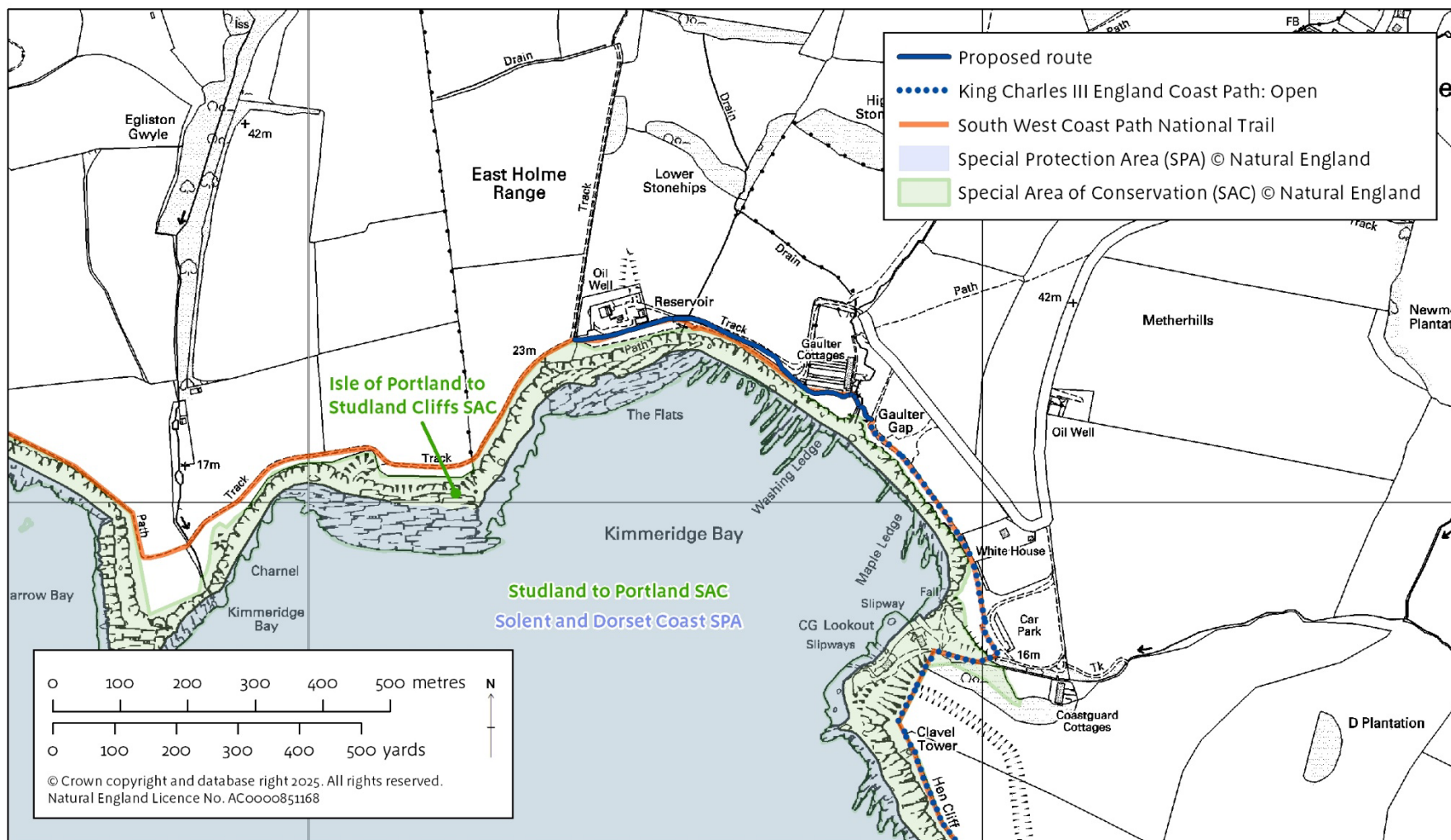


Table 3. Assessment of likely significant effects alone

Feature	Relevant pressure	Sensitivity to coastal access proposals	Assessment of risk to site conservation objectives	LSE alone?
Chalk grasslands and scrub. Early gentian	Trampling and disturbance	Would be vulnerable to disturbance by recreational activities.	No appreciable risk above the existing environmental baseline. Walkers directed to existing utilised, less floristically rich routes on the short section in the SAC	No
Cliffs and strandline vegetation.	Trampling and disturbance	Would be vulnerable to disturbance by recreational activities only where coastal access rights apply.	No appreciable risk above the existing environmental baseline, due to existing well utilised access in Lulworth and no change to use of coastal margin from enshrining access rights in Kimmeridge Bay area.	No
Breeding terns	Disturbance of feeding or resting birds	Birds feeding or resting in the vicinity of a coastal path may be disturbed by recreational activities including walking and walking with a dog.	The level of risk is higher where access proposals would be likely to bring people close to places on which large numbers of birds depend including undisturbed roost sites and possibly important feeding areas. The Trail and associated Coastal Access Rights are significantly geographically separated and unlikely to be above current baseline to allow to conclude no interaction.	No
Reefs	Damage to reef structure	Coastal Access Rights do not extend below mean low water mark.	No geographic interaction.	No

C2.3 Assessment of potentially adverse effects alone

Conclusion:

The plan or project alone is unlikely to have a significant effect on the qualifying features of:

- Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC

- Studland to Portland SAC
- Solent and Dorset Coast SPA.

C3.0 Risk of Significant Effects in-combination with the effects from other plans and projects

The need for further assessment of the risk of in-combination effects is considered here.

Natural England considers that it is the appreciable risks of effects (from a proposed plan or project) that are not themselves considered to be significant alone which must be further assessed to determine whether they could have a combined effect significant enough to require an appropriate assessment.

Further to the risks identified as being significant alone (in C2), it is considered that there are no other residual and appreciable risks likely to arise from this project which have the potential to act in-combination with similar risks from other proposed plans or projects to also become significant. It has therefore been excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project is likely to have a significant effect in-combination with other proposed plans or projects.

C4.0 Overall Screening Decision for the Plan/Project

On the basis of the details submitted, Natural England has considered the plan or project under Regulation 63(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations and made an assessment of whether it will have a likely significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

In light of sections C1 to C3 of this assessment above, Natural England has concluded:

As the plan or project is unlikely to have significant effects (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on any Qualifying Features of the European Site(s), no further appropriate assessment is required.

PART D: Permission decision with respect to European Sites

Natural England has a statutory duty under section 296 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. To fulfil this duty, Natural England is required to make proposals to the Secretary of State under section 51 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. In making proposals, Natural England, as the relevant competent authority, is required to carry out a HRA under Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations.

We, Natural England, are satisfied that our proposals to improve access to the English coast between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay are fully compatible with the relevant European site conservation objectives.

It is open to the Secretary of State to consider these proposals and make a decision about whether to approve them, with or without modifications. If the Secretary of State is minded to modify our proposals, further assessment under the Habitats Regulations may be needed before approval is given.

References to evidence

1. NATURAL ENGLAND. 2013. Coastal Access Natural England's Approved Scheme 2013. Published by Natural England Catalogue Code: NE446
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5327964912746496?category=50007>
2. Bryan Edwards, Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Survey of Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) in Dorset. May/June 1997
3. Dorset Council Local Plan evidence and background papers. Habitat regulations assessment December 2022 Visitor surveys and recreation impact assessments - Coastal sites
<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/307470/Visitor+survey+and+impact+assessment+work%2C+COASTAL+SITES+091122.pdf/e2b86ba2-db4f-5e0b-c5a0-4b8213defb58?t=1670917712055>