

**Assessment of Coastal Access Proposals between  
Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay  
on sites and their features of nature conservation interest**

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## Nature Conservation Assessment for Coastal Access Proposals between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay

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### About this document

This document should be read in conjunction with the published Reports for the Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay Stretch and the associated Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the routes.

The Coastal Access Reports contain a full description of the access proposals, including any additional mitigation measures that have been included. These Reports can be viewed here <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-lulworth-cove-to-highcliffe#progress:-lulworth-cove-to-kimmeridge-bay>

A HRA is required for European sites (SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites). The HRAs are published alongside the Coastal Access Reports.

This document, the Nature Conservation Assessment (NCA), typically covers as appropriate other aspects (including SSSIs, MCZs and undesignated but locally important sites) in so far as any HRA does not already address the issue for the sites and features in question.

# Contents

<b>ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ASSESSMENT OF COASTAL ACCESS MAIN ROUTE PROPOSALS ON:.....</b>	<b>8</b>
South Dorset Coast SSSI.....	8
Current situation.....	10
Risks from Coastal Access proposal .....	11
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>14</b>

## Introduction

The King Charles III England Coast Path between Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge Bay is in two distinct parts either side of an access controlled route through the Lulworth MoD ranges.

The eastern and western sections of the King Charles III England Coast Path generally hug the coastal edge, diverging inland on a public right of way near West Lulworth. Along both sections the Trail follows existing public rights of way, and user levels will generally be influenced by the opening times of the route of the South West Coast Path through the ranges.

The King Charles III England Coast Path creates coastal margin, the area of publicly accessible spreading room where coastal access rights apply to land between the trail and mean low water.

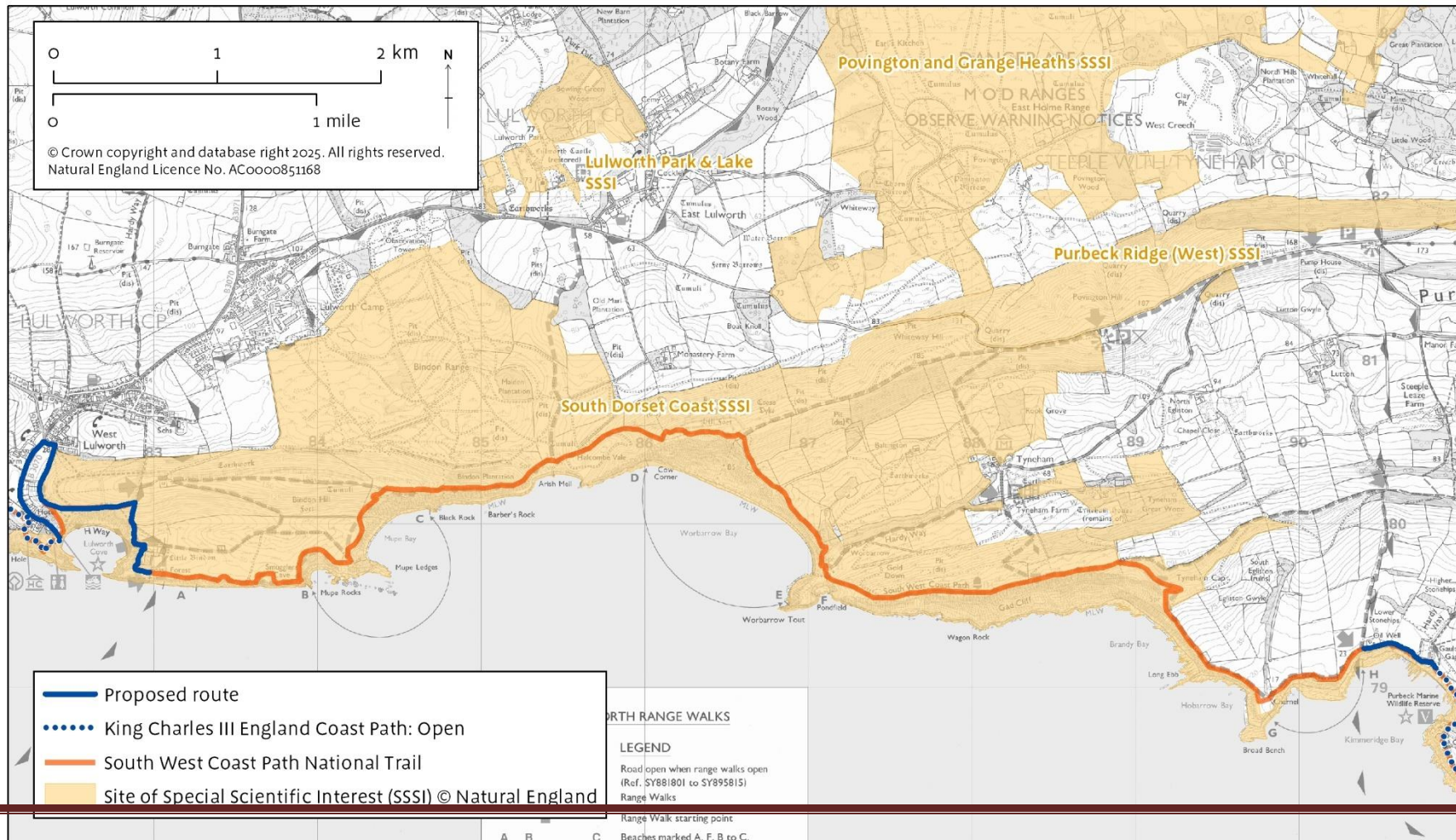
This document will review the access proposals from the King Charles III England Coast Path between Lulworth and Kimmeridge Bay. It will look at the sections of trail with its associated spreading room on lands outside of the MoD bylaw area.

Map 1, shows the location of the two sections of route as joined by the South West Coast Path through the ranges and in relation to the SSSIs in the local landscape. Maps 2 and 3 show the east and west sections in more detail.

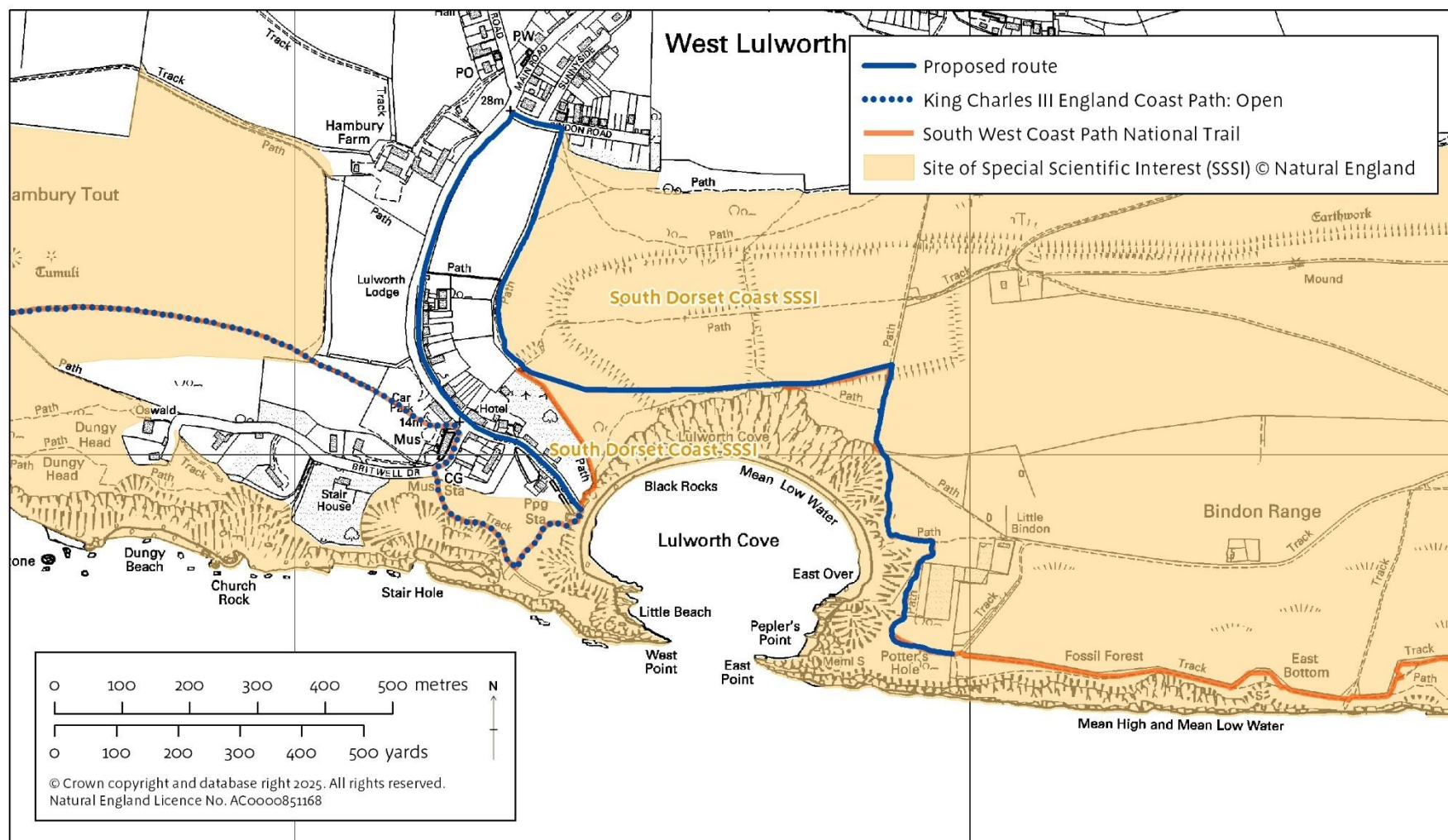


## King Charles III England Coast Path - Lulworth Cove to Kimmeridge Bay Nature Conservation Assessment

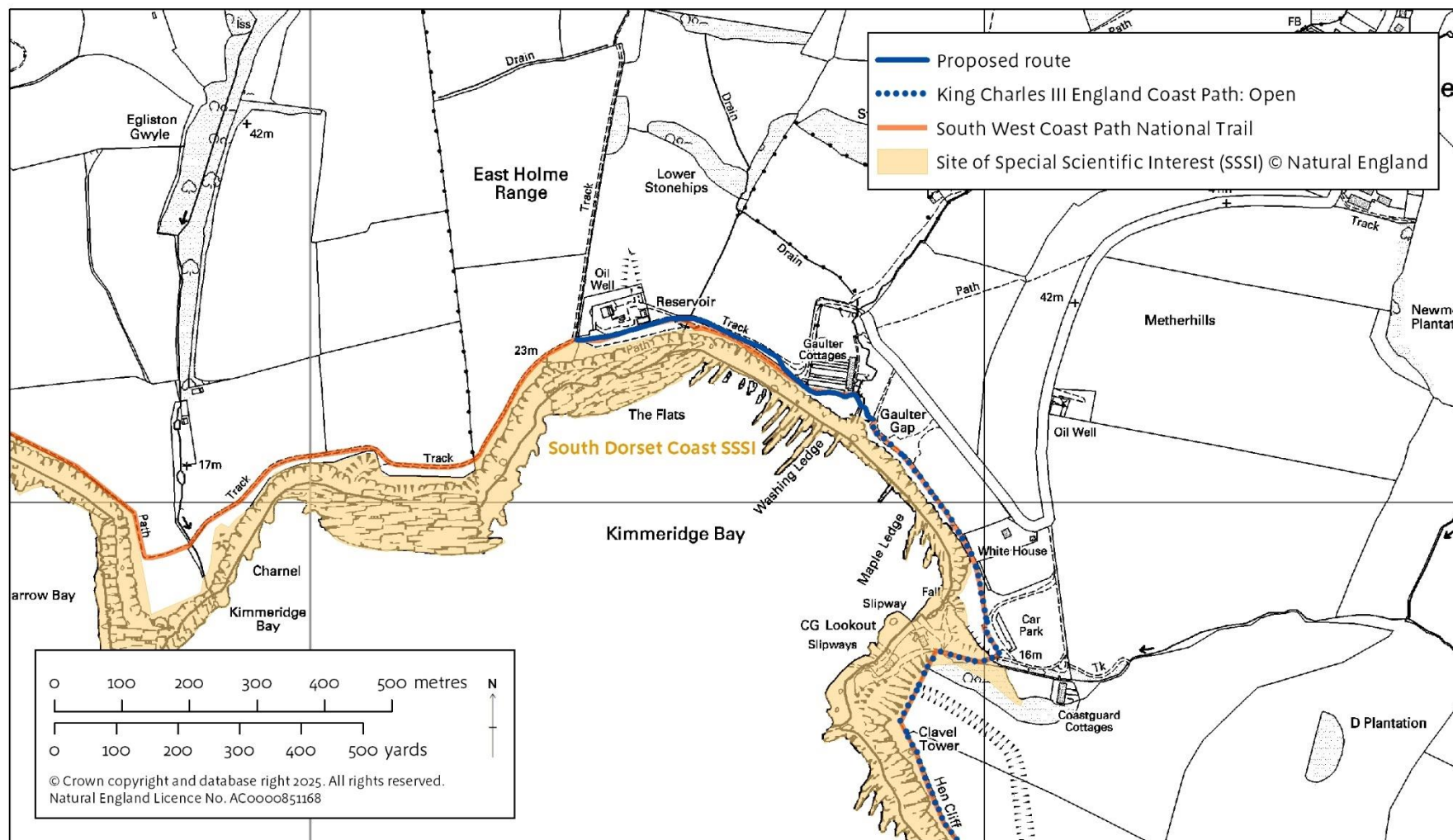
### Map 1: Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the landscape subject to this report



### Map 2: Proposed route (west)



**Map 3: Proposed route (east)**



## **Assessment of coastal access Main Route proposals on:**

### **South Dorset Coast SSSI**

This stretch of coastline combines internationally important geological interest with a rich range of wildlife habitats supporting populations of several rare plants and animals.

The coastal cliffs are of international geological importance and expose a complete section through the Upper Jurassic and Cretaceous rock succession. The site includes the type localities for the Kimmeridge Clay, the Kimmeridgian Stage, the base of the Portlandian Stage and the Purbeck Beds as well as the standard reference section for the Oxfordian of southern England. Numerous features of great importance for studies of Palaeontology, sedimentology, stratigraphy and environments of rock formation are present and have been studied by geologists for well over 150 years. The site is also of national importance for its physiographic interest.

Most of the rock units are very fossiliferous and a number are of international significance for the assemblages of fossil vertebrates which they contain. In particular the Purbeck Beds of Durlston Bay are of special note since they have yielded one of the most important collections of Mesozoic mammals from anywhere in the world. Durlston is also the most important Late Jurassic–Early Cretaceous fossil insect site in Europe. Internationally important sites for fossil reptiles also occur in the Kimmeridge Clay at Gault Gap to Broad Bench and between Swyre Head and Chapmans Pool and in the Oxford Clay at Furzy Cliff.

The great range of rock types has given rise to a varied coastline of vertical cliffs, undercliffs and landslips which support an outstanding array of local and maritime species. Among the rare plants which occur here are the Carrot Broomrape (*Orobanche maritima*) and the strongest national populations of Wild Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*).

The majority of unimproved limestone grassland in Dorset falls within this site which also includes one of the main areas of unimproved chalk grassland in the county. The character of these calcareous grasslands is strongly influenced by their maritime location and also very locally there is 'chalk heath' on clay with flints over the chalk. Among the many scarce and localised plants and animals of the chalk and limestone are the largest national populations of two rare species -- Early Spider Orchid (*Ophrys sphegodes*) and Lulworth Skipper butterfly (*Thymelicus acteon*).

Unimproved grassland, scrub and woodland typical of more neutral soils are found on the clays and sands of the Wealden, the Kimmeridge, Oxford and Gault Clays and the Reading Beds. Of the woodlands, those of the Tyneham Valley are especially notable for their lichen communities which include several rare species.

Details relating to this SSSI can be found here:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002501&SiteName=dorset&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

This SSSI is also part of the following European sites: Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC and St. Albans Head to Durlston Head SAC.

Notified features of the SSSI that are also qualifying features of the European site are omitted from this assessment.

These are:

Notified features for South Dorset Coast SSSI that are also qualifying features of European sites	European site name
Annual vegetation of drift lines	Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia), (note that this includes the priority feature 'important orchid rich sites')	Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
Early gentian ( <i>Gentianella anglica</i> )	Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	St. Albans Head to Durlston Head SAC
Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia), (note that this includes the priority feature 'important orchid rich sites')	St. Albans Head to Durlston Head SAC
Greater horseshoe bat ( <i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i> )	St. Albans Head to Durlston Head SAC
Early gentian ( <i>Gentianella anglica</i> )	St. Albans Head to Durlston Head SAC

These are omitted as the assessment of possible impacts on qualifying features of the European site are made in the accompanying Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). Only the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs Special Area of Conservation is relevant to these proposals and as such is the only site considered in the HRA.

The notified features of the SSSI that are not considered by the HRA process and therefore require further consideration in relation to any risk of impact from the coastal access rights are:

- Geological interests: Aptian – Albian, Cenomanian-Maastrichtian, Jurassic - Cretaceous Reptilia, Kimmeridgian, Mesozoic - Tertiary Fish/Amphibia, Mesozoic Mammalia, Oxfordian, Palaeoentomology, Portlandian – Berriasian, Post-Variscan Structures, Wealden
- Coastal Geomorphology
- Hard maritime cliff and slope
- Invertebrate assemblage bare sand & chalk
- Invertebrate assemblage open short sward
- Invertebrate assemblage riparian sand
- Lowland calcareous grassland (CG1)
- Lowland calcareous grassland (CG2)
- Lowland calcareous grassland (CG3-5)
- Lowland dry heath
- Lowland mire grassland and rush pasture
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Lowland neutral grassland
- Population of nationally scarce butterfly species - Lulworth Skipper (*Thymelicus acteon*)
- Population of Schedule 8 plant - Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*)
- Population of Schedule 8 plant - Early Spider-orchid (*Ophrys sphegodes*)
- Soft maritime cliff and slope
- Vascular plant assemblage

Many of these site features are not found within the area that this report considers. The South Dorset Coast SSSI is about 1760 hectares, covering various habitats and coastal zones, and extends from Overcombe just to the east of Weymouth to Swanage, over some 30 miles of coastline.

## Current situation

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 differs from the promoted SWCP route. This is at Lulworth Cove, on the western end of Bindon Hill, where the KCIIIECP will take a route running North-South on the western boundary of the SSSI, 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. In Kimmeridge Bay the KCIIIECP is set a little inland from the SWCP on an access track.

The majority of the linking route between these two sections is within the Lulworth Ranges MoD exclusion zone. Public access to this area is carefully controlled and the Trail is currently only open on 46 weekends throughout the year, with additional availability for around a further 63 days spread throughout the year, with a concentration in August and late December to early January. In effect the majority of the Trail at this location is only available for public use for less than one third of a calendar year.

During these open times the SWCP is a popular walking route. In many places it follows public rights of way on vehicular tracks through the area or as well worn desire lines from walking. The change to status as part of the King Charles III England Coast Path will not have any significant impact on the overall levels of use of the public rights of way and the SWCP.

The far western section (Lulworth) also crosses an area of Open Access land and 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 but would not alter the way the public currently access the area, which has been tolerated over many years.

## **Risks from Coastal Access proposal**

For the majority of the route alignment though the SSSI on public rights of way there is no greater risk to the SSSI features than currently arising from the existing access. The existing South West Coast Path will essentially be integrated within the longer King Charles III England Coast Path. This may bring a relatively small increase in users undertaking the England Coast Path walk but the numbers will be minor in comparison to existing use so as to be trivial and insignificant in consideration of impacts.

At Lulworth, the route passes through a field of highly used Open Access above the cove. The alignment generally following the public rights of way which are defined more by desire lines than a defined line from a map diligently followed on the ground. Lulworth with its large car parks and marketed as a visitor destination is often at capacity. The spreading room rights in this location will be minimal compared to the existing way the public utilise the areas of downland above the cove and the cove itself, where access has been conferred and commercialised.



There are two SSSI units influenced by the proposals at Lulworth. The large field of Open Access is unit 19 and this is noted by Natural England as overall being unfavourable with no change, although some of the key interest features in this unit are themselves in a favourable condition. From the long list of SSSI only features only 9 are found in this area. The larger unit 20 to the east, includes an area of the trail on its western flank, an area of existing open access and an unbounded area of land between the two open access blocks in both units close to the cliff edge that the public have wider access to. Unit 20 is in a unfavourable recovering condition.

The of the 9 features in unit 19, 4 are geological, the remaining vegetation (dry grassland, sea cliffs and calcareous grassland) and the invertebrate assemblage of chalk and sand, will not be impacted by the proposals for the King Charles III England Coast Path as for many features there is a geographic separation, notwithstanding this proposal will not alter the way the public access this area, with their existing rights and the commercial encouragement to visit the area. The unfavourable features of the unit are specifically the semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates and the lowland calcareous grassland. These have a high degree of overlap on the ground, with some areas able to fall into both classifications. Under grazing and inappropriate scrub clearance are noted as the unfavourable reasons. The public access is not noted as a specific adverse impact, but it can be a management factor when considering grazing. The KCIIECP and coastal margin should not impact the ability to graze a site as this allows mechanisms to be put in place to manage the public and their interaction with grazing animals. But as noted the trail in this area follows public rights of way and coastal margin covers areas where

there is already a right of access or the public have been tolerated long before any rights came or come into affect (such as access to the foreshore).

The larger and more diverse unit 20, is noted for 12 interest features. There is commonality with the 9 features of unit 19, and the remaining 3 features are those likely to be found on habitats and areas outside of the part of the unit influenced by the KCIIIIECP and coastal margin. As for unit 19, there is no noted change in the way the public will access this area, with perhaps fewer public venturing into the edge of this unit as it nears the point of closure for when the route through the ranges is unavailable. It is further from the facilities in Lulworth and the wider public have no draw to pull them further away from such areas.

At Kimmeridge Bay the route follows the South West Coast Path alignment and creates an area of access rights to the land and foreshore. This area is generally quieter but also has commercial enterprises encouraging a paid for experience of the area as well as the general public approach to access coves and 'beaches'. The beaches being large rocks and boulders in loose formation as collapsed from the sheer cliff faces, or solid rock on a horizontal tidal plateaux. It has fewer services than Lulworth Cove and is more remote to access but also has a large car park. The coastal access rights will not significantly increase the number of users in this area above the current environmental baseline.



Unit 26 of the South Dorset Coast SSSI covers the Kimmeridge Bay area, although this only influences a very small part of this much larger favourable unit. It is noted for 6 features of interest, 3 of these geological in nature and unlikely to be impacted by the Trail outside of the SSSI and the coastal margin spreading room rights this creates over the SSSI. The habitats of vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts and hard maritime cliff and slope have a considerable degree of overlap and are essentially the same habitat type. These habitats are generally of little interest

in this area for the public to access any differently than they do at present and are sufficiently robust and shielded from access for the risk of an adverse damaging effect to be low to negligible.

Overall, the promotion of the King Charles III England Coast Path will not have any significant impact on the current environmental baseline. Walker numbers on the onward journey of the KCIII ECP will be constrained by range opening times as they are now. Lulworth Cove will remain a visitor destination, that coast path walkers will generally pass through to continue their walk to other services and Kimmeridge Bay will remain more quiet and isolated with no significant increase in users altering this quietness. The users base from the access proposals will have no impact on the features of the SSSI.

## **Conclusion**

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 our duty to further the conservation and enhancement of the notified features of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest that both route alignments pass through and any resultant spreading room rights, consistent with the proper exercise of our functions.