

Proposed changes to the King Charles III England Coast Path at Douglas Boatyard

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report CPH-VR31
27 November 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 10th May 2023 Coastal Access rights came into force along this section of the Cleveleys to Pier Head stretch (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-cleveleys-to-pier-head-liverpool>), by order of the Secretary of State.

1.3 Since the opening of this section, it has become clear that a change is necessary to the route of the King Charles III England Coast Path. This report contains Natural England's proposals relating to that change at Douglas Boatyard, east of Becconsall, which is at the location shown on the Variation Location Map below.

1.4 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/media/5e7e2d25d3bf7f133ed1b6b9/cleveleys-pier-head-liverpool-overview.pdf>



Part 2: Proposed variation at Douglas Boatyard

Start Point:	Grid reference: SD 45247 23172
End Point:	Grid reference: SD 45049 22835
Relevant Original Proposal Map:	CPH 4b

2.1 Introduction

Reason for variation:

2.1.1 Since the trail has opened it has become apparent to the owners of the Douglas Boatyard that regular footfall on the current line of the King Charles III England Coast Path creates a significant negative impact on the operational capabilities of the boatyard. Given the limited space for manoeuvre, members of the public are exposed to risk of injury and inconvenience during times when boats are being moved. For these reasons, discussions have also already been underway between the landowner and the Access Authority, with the intention to realign an existing public footpath to the line proposed in this Variation Report. As such, it will be appropriate for both footpaths (the public footpath and the KCIIIIECP) to follow the same line, which Natural England believes will create a more pleasant and less frequently interrupted walking experience. The proposed realignment offers a clear and safe route with good links to local community and facilities

Proposed variation:

2.1.2 The current alignment of the route takes walkers along the main track through the centre of the boatyard on sections CPH-4-S014 to CPH-4-S016 (see report CPH4 Tarleton Lock to Southport beach car park, map CPH 4b). This is situated adjacent to and at times between boats moored in the yard.

2.1.3 The varied route would follow the landward extent of the boatyard, keeping the trail outside of the operational area.

2.1.4 This variation will enable the walker and the boatyard to proceed with their respective recreational and commercial activities uninterrupted and in safety.

Considering the options

2.1.5 We have worked closely with the access authority and landowner in developing this proposal. Natural England believes that this is the only viable route for the KCIIIIECP in the circumstances, and no other options have been put forward by either the landowner or the Access Authority.

2.2 Proposals Narrative

The Trail:

2.2.1 The proposed variation to the approved trail:

- Would follow a newly created line along the back of the boatyard.
- Includes three sections of new path, in one location at Douglas Boatyard
- Remains close to and maintains views of the river.
- Is a minor inland diversion which is necessary to take the trail away from the operational area of the boatyard.
- Extends for a length of 400 metres at a maximum of 20 metres westward of the approved route.

Protection of the environment:

2.2.2 The section of trail affected by this variation, passes alongside a section of the river Douglas which is mainly used for accommodating or launching boats. A Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) extends up the river Douglas past the boatyard. As confirmed in our original Nature Conservation Assessment, the MCZ is not affected by the current route and as such we draw the same conclusion with regards the new, more landward route. There are no national or international nature conservation or heritage designations present in this area; therefore, Natural England is satisfied that the proposals for coastal access in this variation report are made in accordance with relevant environmental protection legislation.

Accessibility:

2.2.3 The proposed route will consist of a path with a gravel surface. Like the current route, which is mainly tarmac and gravel, the varied route is still likely to be suitable for people with reduced mobility. To that end, the landowner, Natural England and the Access Authority will endeavour to establish a 2m width on all sections of the path.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

2.2.4 **Landward boundary of the coastal margin:** We have used our discretion on all sections of the varied route to map the landward extent of the coastal margin to the landward edge of the trail to make the extent of the new access rights clearer. See Table 2.3.1 below.

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

2.2.5 **Restrictions and/or exclusions:** Access rights to the seaward margin can 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.

2.2.6 **Coastal erosion:** Natural England can 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.

2.2.7 We have chosen not to make any such proposal in this variation report. Accordingly, the route is to be at the centre of the line shown on map VR31 as the proposed route of the trail.

Establishment of the trail:

2.2.8 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.

2.2.9 Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is £36,500.00

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

- we will lay a gravel track along the full extent of the newly proposed sections of trail, except for the section which crosses the access track into the boatyard, which already comprises of a gravel/tarmac construction.

2.2.11 If the Secretary of State approves our report, Lancashire 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:

2.2.12 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 currently established route as set out in our original report.

Part 2.3: Proposals Tables

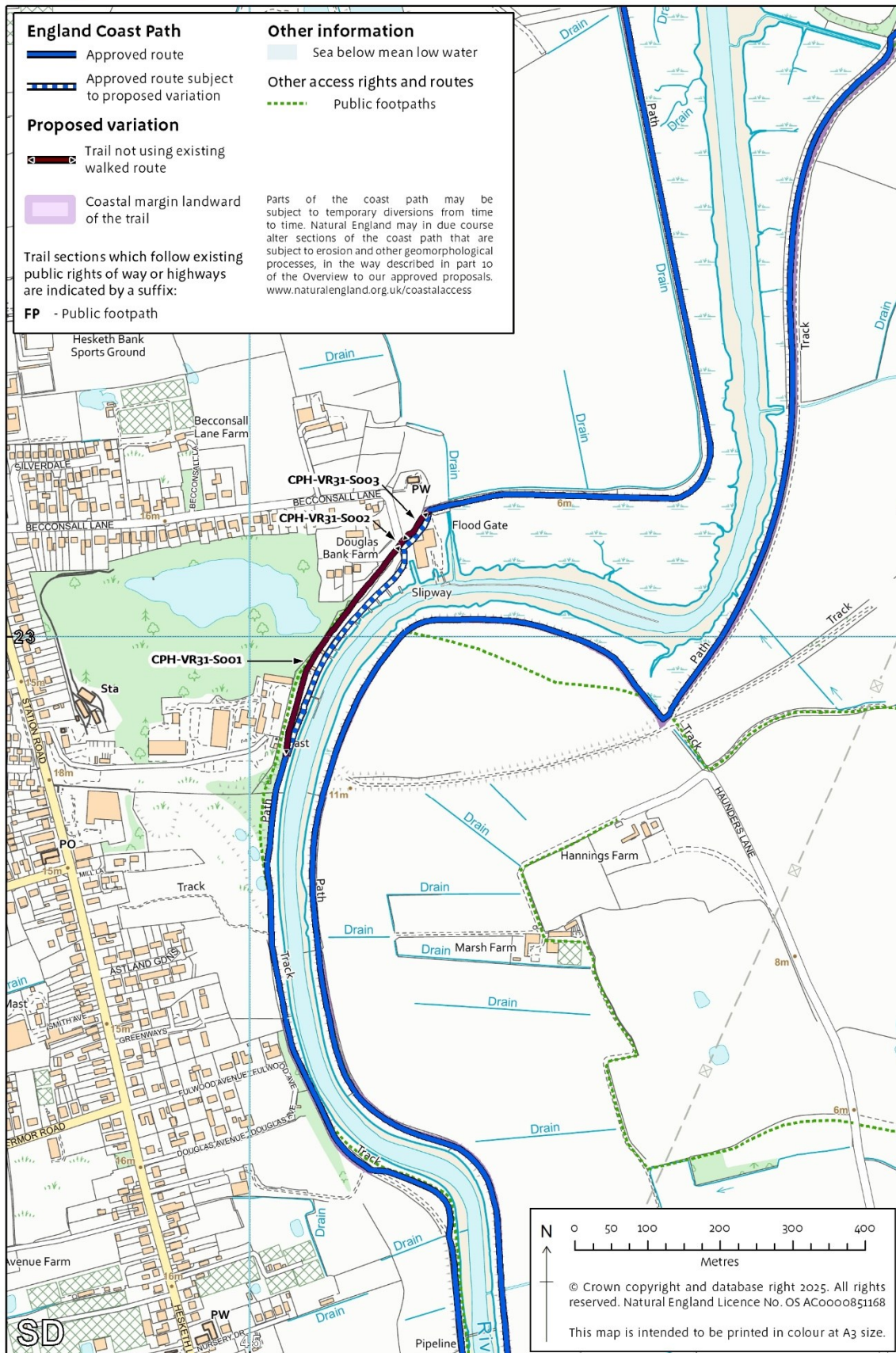
See Part 3 of Overview for guidance on reading and understanding the tables below

Table 2.3.1: Map VR31: - Douglas Boatyard, Hesketh Bank

Key notes on table:

1. Column 4 – ‘No’ means no rollback 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 (X)’ 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
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
CPH VR31	CPH-VR31-S001	Not an existing walked route	No	No	Landward edge of trail	Clarity and cohesion
CPH VR31	CPH-VR31-S002	Not an existing walked route	No	No	No (default 2m)	
CPH VR31	CPH-VR31-S003	Not an existing walked route	No	No	Landward edge of trail	Clarity and cohesion



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