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Proposed changes to the King Charles III England Coast Path at **Ferry Road, Isle of Sheppey**

Natural England's Variation Report to the Secretary of State

Coastal Access Variation Report IOS VR39
November 2026

Part 1: Purpose of this report

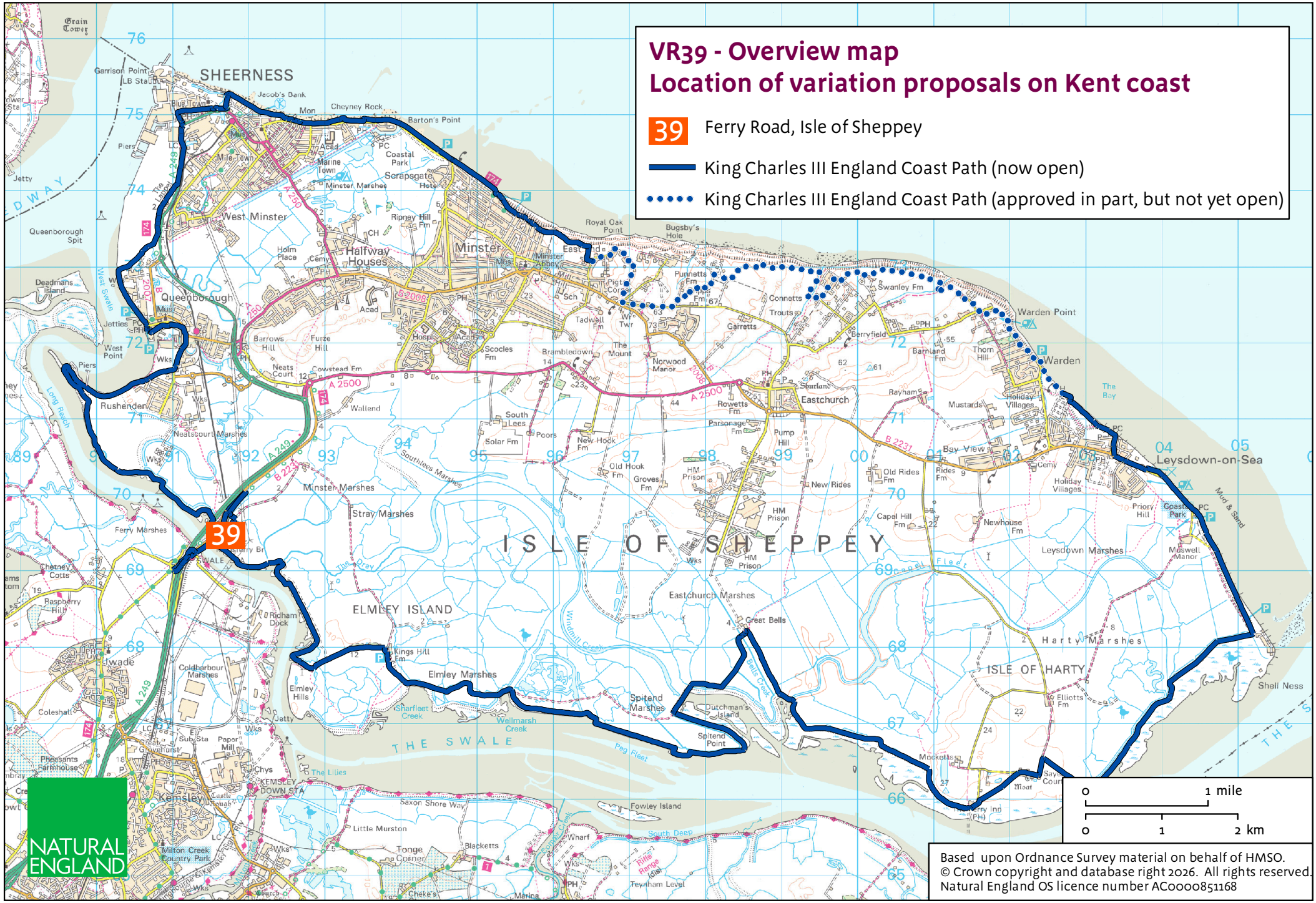
1.1 Natural England has a statutory duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to improve access to the English coast. The duty is in two parts: one relating to securing a long-distance walking route around the coast; the other to creating an associated "margin" of land for the public to enjoy, either in conjunction with their access along the route line, or otherwise.

1.2 On 12 November 2020 the Secretary of State approved Natural England's proposals relating to Isle of Sheppey (IOS) 10: Ferry Road to Swale Station via Kingsferry Bridge which formed part of our proposals for the Isle of Sheppey stretch.

1.3 Since the approval of the report, 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 Ferry Road, which is at the location shown on the Variation Location Map below.

1.4 In order for this proposed change to come into force it must be approved by the Secretary of State.

1.5 The original stretch Overview provides vital context to the proposal set out in this VR.


VR39 - Overview map
Location of variation proposals on Kent coast
39 Ferry Road, Isle of Sheppey
King Charles III England Coast Path (now open)
King Charles III England Coast Path (approved in part, but not yet open)
39
ISLE OF SHEPPEY
ELMLEY ISLAND
ISLE OF HARTY
SHEERNESS
Minster
Queenborough
Rushenden
Halfway Houses
West Minster
Eastchurch
Warden
Leysdown-on-Sea
THE SWALE
Minster Marshes
Stray Marshes
Elmley Marshes
Eastchurch Marshes
Leysdown Marshes
Harty Marshes
Spitend Marshes
Iwade
Kemsley
Minster Abbey
Warden Point
Shell Ness
Spitend Point
Dutchman's Island
Fowley Island
Teynham Level
NATURAL ENGLAND
0 1 mile
0 1 2 km
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Part 2: Proposed variation at Ferry Road

Start Point:	**Grid reference: 591721 169541**
End Point:	**Grid reference: 591747 169770**
Relevant Original Proposal Map:	**Map IOS 10a**

2.1 Introduction

Reason for variation:

2.1.1 Access along the approved route is unavailable due to changes in land management that occurred since the trail was approved which prevented the establishment of this part of the trail, including the raising of water levels within the site. A temporary diversion is currently in place; however, it is a lengthy inland route. The proposed variation provides an opportunity to establish a route that closely reflects the originally approved alignment while taking account of the changed site conditions. It would deliver a practicable long-term route that provides a similarly direct and attractive coastal walking experience for users, maintaining proximity to the Swale Estuary.

Proposed variation:

2.1.2 Our proposal (see map VR39a), is, to vary route sections IOS-10-S004 to IOS-10-S007 of the original report to align along sections IOS-VR39-S001 to IOS-VR39-S005. The proposed variation will, from south to north, continue along the Ferry Road track before following a bund that runs north-west between two wetland areas, from where it will connect to a new boardwalk to join the approved route.

2.1.3 As a consequence of these proposed changes, all land seaward of the trail would become part of the coastal margin. This would slightly increase the size of the coastal margin which would now include the pond south of the bund.

Considering the options:

2.1.4 No other obvious options were available in this area, and the alignment follows a route near the original, approved route. Feedback from walkers has also emphasised the need to resolve the lengthy diversion and get a more direct route for this part of the trail.

2.1.5 We have worked closely with the access authority and affected landowners to determine this change.

2.2 Proposals Narrative

The Trail:

2.2.1 The proposed variation follows an existing public highway along Ferry Road before continuing along a bund between two wetland areas. It will then follow a new boardwalk, to be constructed as part of the establishment works for sections IOS-VR39-S004 and IOS-VR39-S005. The route includes four sections of new access between IOS-VR39-S002 and IOS-VR39-S005.

Protection of the environment:

2.2.2 In this part of the report, we explain how we have taken account of environmental protection objectives in developing our proposals to vary the line of the trail.

2.2.3 The following designated sites affect this length of coast:

- The Swale Special Protection Area (SPA)
- The Swale Ramsar site
- The Swale Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Map VR39b Key Statutory Environmental Designations shows the extent of these designated sites in relation to the proposal.

2.2.4 The approved alignment was subject to scrutiny and assessment of the risk of adverse interactions between users and the noted wildlife interests of this area. These published Habitats Regulations Assessment and Nature Conservation Assessments considered in detail the impacts from public use of the proposed route. Much of these assessments still stands, from this minor variation that takes users around the other side of an artificial pond area to that originally planned.

2.2.5 A general approach for the risk of disturbance to bird life is to consider a 200m zone of influence. This zone of influence, due to the similarities and small difference in distance from one side of the pond to the other is basically the same for the varied route as it is for the original assessed route. It's noted that the small extra area that could be influenced to the eastern side is generated at the point where the varied trail joins the public road (Ferry Road). This is already publicly accessible and already generating a possible influence over this 200m zone. The small increase in visitor numbers, when considered against the local environmental background of the public road and local activities (railway line, main road and outdoor gun club) is assessed as adding no extra significant effect. The expanse of associated habitat and some natural screening along Ferry Road and the bund reduce any risk of effect further. Also, a consideration is that the designated area and the new zone at risk of influence within the nominal 200m zone is landward of the trail and therefore not subject to spreading room, meaning that there is no direct access right into this area to consider further.

2.2.6 Overall the small change in route alignment is judged to have no different impact on the birdlife of the area, compared to that considered and concluded in the assessment of the original proposals.

2.2.7 The line of the trail is within the designated sites, and habitat considerations for this alignment suggest no key notified habitats are at risk from access on foot. Establishment works undertaken by the local authority will be subject to further assessment at the time, including presence of protected species.

2.2.8 The altered route will create a small increased area of coastal margin, seaward of the trail – to the west. However the land caught within this category is generally overgrown or open water and therefore not conducive to public access. Any disturbance risk over the small pond and associated habitats is the same whichever side of the pond the trail passes around and as such the original HRA conclusion is still appropriate.

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

Accessibility:

2.2.10 The proposed trail comprises a surfaced track, a bund that will be surfaced with stone and topsoil as part of the establishment works, and a section of boardwalk. The proposed route will be flatter and without steps, as compared to the original, approved route, and will therefore have some improved accessibility. As with the originally approved route, the variation route is likely to present challenges for some people with reduced mobility due to the uneven nature of the terrain. There are also steps to the north of this site.

Where we have proposed exercising statutory discretions:

2.2.11 **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 or track edge to make the extent of the new access rights clearer. See columns 5b and 5c of table of 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.

2.2.12 **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. Access to the saltmarsh and mudflat within the coastal margin is already excluded year-round by direction under Section 25A of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) because it is unsuitable for public access. This direction will continue to apply.

2.2.13 **Coastal erosion:** Natural England is able to propose that the route of the trail would be able to change in the future, without further approval from the Secretary of State, in response to coastal change. This would happen in accordance with the criteria and procedures for 'roll-back' set out in part 7 of the Overview.

Natural England may only propose the use of this roll-back power:

- as a result of coastal erosion or other geomorphological processes or encroachment by the sea, or
- in order to link with other parts of the route that need to roll back in direct response to such changes.

2.2.14 Column 4 of table 2.3.1 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 VR39a as the proposed route of the trail.

2.2.15 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.

Establishment of the trail:

2.2.16 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.

2.2.17 Our estimate of the capital costs for these works is £79,000. These estimates are informed by information provided by the access authority.

2.2.18 There are three main elements to the overall capital costs:

- A new surface is required on the bund
- A new boardwalk is required over wet ground
- Replacement stock fencing is required

2.2.19 If the Secretary of State approves our report, Kent County Council will liaise with the affected land owners 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:

2.2.20 Ongoing maintenance of the varied sections of trail would be necessary from time to time. Maintenance of the replacement fencing at this site will continue with the landowner. This variation would make no significant change to the annual costs associated with maintaining the approved route as set out in our original report.

2.3 Proposals Tables

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

Table 2.3.1: Map VR39a – Ferry Road

Key notes on table:

1. Column 4 – 'No' means no roll-back is proposed for this route section. 'Yes – normal' means roll-back is proposed and is likely to follow the current feature (e.g. cliff edge/beach) for the foreseeable future as any coastal change occurs.

2. Column 4 – 'Yes – see table 2.3.2' means roll-back is proposed, but refer to that table below about our likely approach to implementing it for this route section. This is because a more complex situation exists in this case and consideration must be given to how roll-back may happen in relation to excepted land, a protected site etc.

3. Column 5a - Certain coastal land types are included automatically in the coastal margin where they fall landward of the trail if they touch it at some point. The relevant land type (foreshore, cliff, bank, barrier, dune, beach, flat or section 15 land – see Glossary in Annex B to the 2017 Overview) is shown in this column where appropriate. "No" means none present on this route section.

4. Columns 5b and 5c – Any entry in these columns means we are proposing to align the landward boundary of the coastal margin on this route section with the physical feature(s) shown in 5b, for the reason in 5c. No text here means that for this route section the landward edge of the margin would be that of the trail itself - or if any default coastal land type is shown in 5a, that would be its landward boundary instead.

1	2	3	4	5a	5b	5c	6
Map(s)	**New route section number(s)**	**Current status of route section(s)**	**Roll-back proposed?** (See part 7 of 2020 report Overview)	**Landward margin contains coastal land type?**	**Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin**	**Reason for landward boundary proposal**	**Explanatory notes**
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S001	Public highway	Yes – see table 2.3.2	No	Landward edge of track	Clarity and cohesion	
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S002	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 2.3.2	No	Fence	Clarity and cohesion	

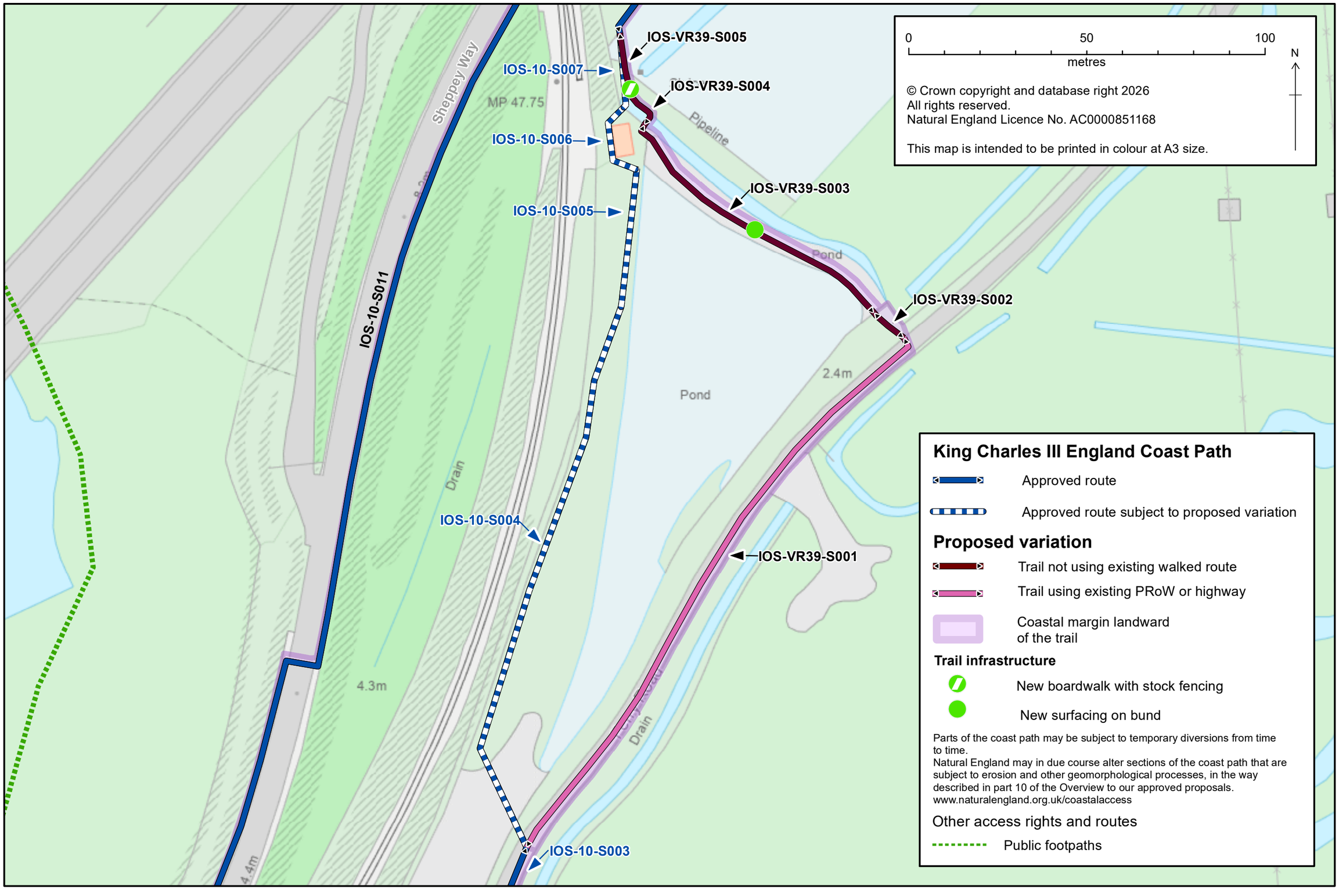
1	2	3	4	5a	5b	5c	6
Map(s)	**New route section number(s)**	**Current status of route section(s)**	**Roll-back proposed?** (See part 7 of 2020 report Overview)	**Landward margin contains coastal land type?**	**Proposal to specify landward boundary of margin**	**Reason for landward boundary proposal**	**Explanatory notes**
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S003	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 2.3.2	No	Landward edge of path	Clarity and cohesion	
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S004	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 2.3.2	No	Fence	Clarity and cohesion	
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S005	Not an existing walked route	Yes – see table 2.3.2	No	Fence	Clarity and cohesion	

2.3.2 Roll-back implementation – more complex situations: Map VR39a – Ferry Road

Map(s)	New route section number(s)	Feature(s) or site(s) potentially affected	Our likely approach to roll-back
Map VR39a	IOS-VR39-S001 to IOS-VR39-S005	Designated site: The Swale SPA, Ramsar, SSSI	If the existing route is no longer viable, we will choose a new route after detailed discussions with the relevant experts and with any potentially affected owners or occupiers. Possible impacts on designated sites may need to be considered as part of deciding on a new alignment for the trail.

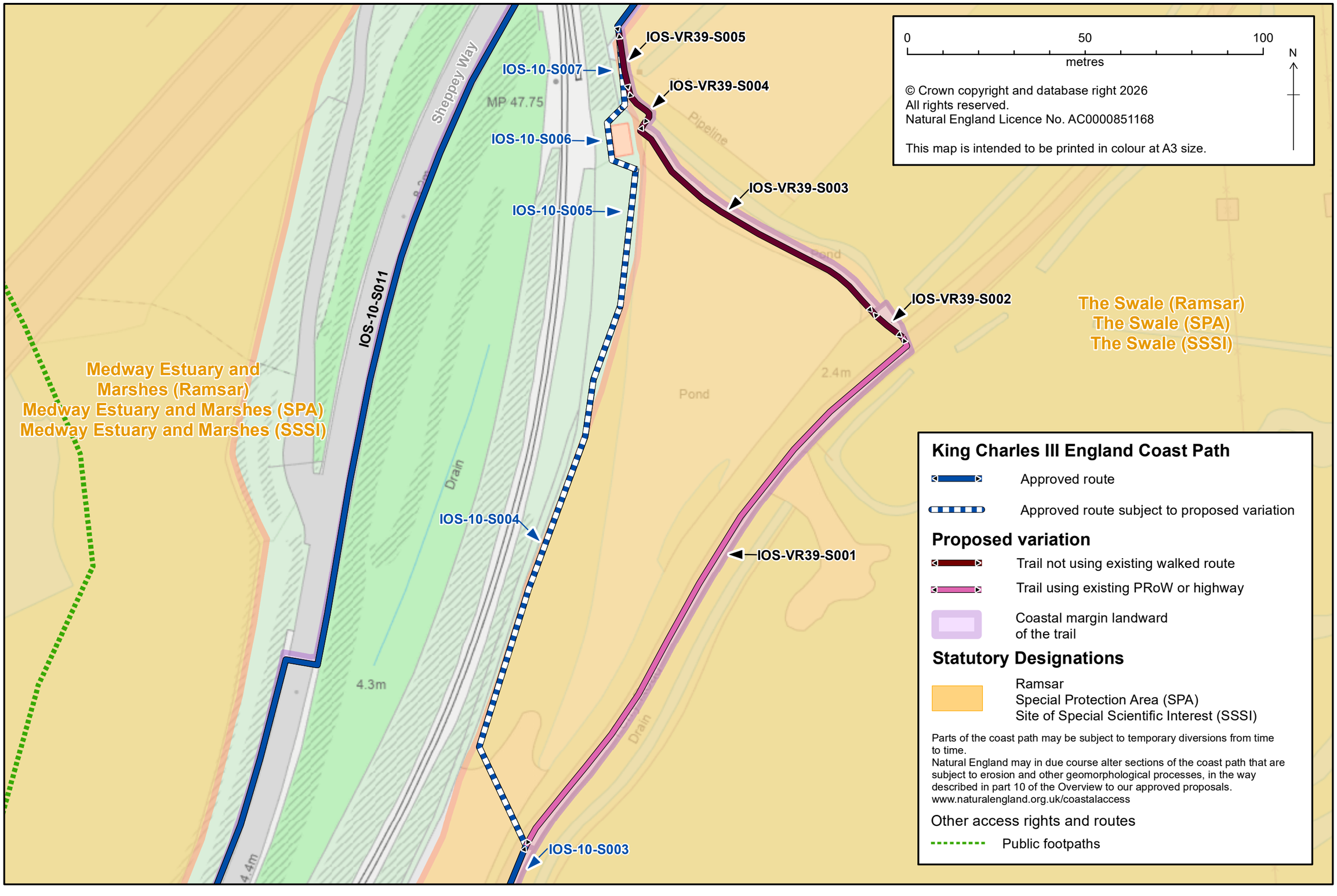
Coastal Access - Isle of Sheppey - Natural England's Proposed Variation to Approved Route

Map VR39a Ferry Road, Isle of Sheppey



Coastal Access - Isle of Sheppey - Natural England's Proposed Variation to Approved Route

Map VR39b Ferry Road, Isle of Sheppey- Key Statutory Environmental Designations



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This map is intended to be printed in colour at A3 size.

King Charles III England Coast Path

- Approved route
- Approved route subject to proposed variation

Proposed variation

- Trail not using existing walked route
- Trail using existing PRoW or highway
- Coastal margin landward of the trail

Statutory Designations

- Ramsar
- Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Parts of the coast path may be subject to temporary diversions from time to time.
Natural England may in due course alter sections of the coast path that are subject to erosion and other geomorphological processes, in the way described in part 10 of the Overview to our approved proposals.
www.naturalengland.org.uk/coastalaccess

Other access rights and routes

- Public footpaths