

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY

RESPONSE TO FOCUS FOR SCRUTINY

APPENDIX A: KING CHARLES III ENGLAND COAST PATH

Introduction:

The King Charles III England Coast Path (ECP) scheme provides for a public walking route around the coast of England. It is governed by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and policy on where the path can be aligned is set out in a document known as the “Approved Scheme”: [Natural England’s Approved Scheme, 2013](#)

Natural England (NE) on behalf of DEFRA is charged with implementing the ECP scheme.

The Isle of Wight was not included in the original ECP proposal. However, after lobbying (mainly by The Ramblers Association) the Council was consulted on its inclusion in 2012. The Council provided a corporate response supporting the inclusion of the Island in the scheme. The Island was formally included, and Natural England (NE) commenced work in 2014.

Due to the delay in the Island being included in the scheme (and for other reasons associated with coastal erosion, problematic/complicated landownership issues and resource/staff matters) the scheme remains in its infancy and no parts of the route are yet formally open.

Coastal Margin and Roll Back:

As well as the route itself, the scheme provides for what is known as “spreading room” and “coastal margin”. In general, this provides the public with a right to roam on land between the ECP route and the sea. However, there are many exceptions to this (as outlined in the Approved Scheme). For example, spreading room would not apply to a private garden or a “paid for” attraction. There are also areas where spreading room will be subject to a restriction on public access e.g., to protect sensitive land and wildlife.

No works are provided in the coastal margin as part of the ECP scheme. Access is on the basis that the public use their own judgment on ground conditions and safety. As per the legislation, the level of occupier liability is reduced when new coastal access rights are created along the ECP or within the coastal margin. A landowner is not responsible for any damage or injury caused by any physical feature on the land, whether it’s a natural feature of the landscape or a man-made one.

Any definitive map beach access points are not covered by the scheme in terms of improvement or maintenance (unless they are on the ECP alignment, which is uncommon).

The scheme also provides for what is known as “roll back”. Where the route is lost to coastal erosion the scheme provides that the path will move inland. Again, private residences etc would be avoided (with the path having to go further inland to avoid such areas). Where roll back is significant, a formal modification process is undertaken which goes out to public consultation.

The Process:

Natural England on behalf of DEFRA is charged with implementing the ECP scheme i.e., to plan, negotiate and decide (publish) the route. The process they follow is:

- Stage 1: Prepare
- Stage 2: Develop
- Stage 3: Propose
- Stage 4: Determine
- Stage 5: Open

Detailed information on each stage is set out in the Approved Scheme.

Progress: Isle of Wight:

NE have divided ECP on the Island into 10 separate stretches. The table at the foot of this paper sets out the progress on each stretch with links to further details of the proposals.

Funding:

Formation of the ECP route is funded by DEFRA by way of an establishment grant. All necessary works to form ECP are 100% funded (with no match funding required). However, a Local Authority is expected to deliver establishment and a 10% project management fee can be claimed.

In addition, Council time in supporting NE with the scheme (prior to opening) is funded by way of a Planning Grant.

The Council employed an England Coast Path Officer from February 2021 until he left the Council in June 2023. His replacement is due to start on 2nd January. In addition, a Rights of Way Maintenance Officer assists the England Coast Path Officer for 2.5 days per week. Salaries for the England Coast Path Officer and 2.5 Maintenance Officer time are covered by the DEFRA Planning and Establishment grants. The ability to claim for funding under both grants ends when a stretch has been opened.

Maintenance and Management:

Once a section of ECP is formally open, its management and maintenance becomes the responsibility of a Local Authority. ECP is a National Trail and it is expected that it will be maintained to National Trail standard (see below). Limited funding is available from DEFRA for the maintenance of National Trails and this must also be match funded by the Local Authority. In order to effectively manage and maintain ECP (and to deal with future route re-alignments) resource will be required, ideally in the form of the continuing employment of an England Coast Path Officer, who will also be responsible for forming and running a trail partnership.

National Trail Partnerships:

National Trails are managed by local trail partnerships, with guidance and support from Natural England. They are responsible for:

- receiving funding from Natural England on behalf of the local partnership
- reporting to Natural England on progress towards achieving the national quality standards

National Trail Funding:

A National Trail receives a funding contribution from Natural England to make sure they are maintained to a high standard. A local match contribution is required equivalent to at least £1 for every £3 provided by Natural England. The funding received by each trail varies depending on length and other factors affecting the cost of maintenance – it is likely to be limited and a requirement to bid for available funding will be necessary. It is not possible to obtain National Trail funding for sections ECP recorded on the definitive map.

There are 4 quality standards set by Natural England for National Trails. They cover a range of factors from path condition to the social and economic benefits of the trail:

- *Experience:* The trails should be managed in a way which allows as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape.

- *Enhancement:* Constant improvements should be made to the trail and its associated routes. It should contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic features within the trail corridor.
- *Engagement:* Build and sustain a community of interest in caring for the trail and the landscape through which it passes.
- *Economy:* The trails should create opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of the trails.

Progress on the King Charles III England Coast Path on the Isle of Wight

Stretch	Location	Stage	Link to report	Estimated cost to establish as per report	Cost to date	Comments
1	East Cowes to Wootton	2 – Develop	NA	TBC	NA	NE propose to publish route in early 2024
2	Wootton to Culver Down	4 – Determine	ECP IOW 2	£118,636	NA	Awaiting determination by DEFRA/PINS
3	Culver Down to Binnel Bay	4 – Determine	ECP IOW 3	£74,331	NA	Awaiting determination by DEFRA/PINS *
4	Binnel Bay to Chilton Chine	5 – Approved	ECP IOW 4	£118,639	£214,031	Works 80% complete
5	Chilton Chine to Colwell Chine	5 – Approved	ECP IOW 5	£28,462	inc. in above	Works 80% complete
6	Colwell Chine to Hamstead	4 – Determine	ECP IOW 6	£141,822	NA	Awaiting determination by DEFRA/PINS
7	Hamstead to Thorness Bay	4 – Determine	ECP IOW 7	£465,238	NA	Awaiting determination by DEFRA/PINS
8	Thorness Bay to Gurnard	5 – Approved	ECP IOW 8	£86,353	0	Works to commence in 2024
9	Gurnard to West Cowes	6 – Approved	ECP IOW 9	£28,277	0	Works to commence in 2024
10	The Medina Estuary	4 - Determine	ECP IOW 10	£56,574	NA	Awaiting determination by DEFRA/PINS

* Note: stretch 3 is subject to Modification Reports:

Luccombe: [Proposed changes to the submitted ECP proposals for IOW3: Luccombe](#)

Shanklin Chine: [Proposed changes to the submitted ECP proposals for IOW3: Shanklin Chine](#)

Subsequent modification on stretch 3 is likely to be necessary following significant landslide at Bonchurch landslip on 10 December 2023. The scale of damage is yet to be fully assessed but photographs and video footage indicate that all existing paths in the area have been destroyed, with little likelihood of reopening opportunities.