

15 November 2006

Improving access to the English coast- Summary of issues raised by stakeholders

The order of issues listed below does not imply any “ranking” of importance. Some of the

key points identified are contradictory, reflecting the differing perspectives of different stakeholders.

Issue - need for improved access on foot along length of English coast?

- What evidence is there of need for increased access? How much access is there now

and how much new access will be provided?

- Issues limiting access at coast are often due to topography, land use and public safety

- Extending open access rights to coast and provision of continuous access along the

coast will not deliver health and diversity objectives for increasing people’s use and enjoyment of the environment.

- People prefer well-managed and promoted linear and circular routes, plus facilities such as car parks and toilets

- Improved coastal access could deliver significant health benefits

- There is a strong public desire to walk along the English coast

Issue – impact on/opportunities for other forms of access?

- Providing for multi non-motorised use represents best value for money for the tax payer

- Focus should be on improving “recreational access” at coast, not just access on foot

via a limited linear route

- What is needed is legally secure access to coastal zone including foreshore, cliff top

and a distance back from cliff face, . for coastal climbing

- Activities like cycling deliver health benefits and appeal to a wide range of people, including families

- Need to provide facilities that appeal to young people . more water sports centres

Issue – local solutions more appropriate than national approach?

- Local solutions already deliver considerable coastal access provision

- Effective approach would be local solutions based on need/demand, where infrastructure can cope and negative effects on local business minimised.

- Local authorities best placed to work in partnership with landowners/mangers to deliver

solutions and fill gaps in provision.

Issue – need for legally secure access?

- Well defined, well promoted and well managed routes on the ground are far more important to the public than a statutory right

- Current coastal access arrangements lack clarity and consistency.

- Access to beach, cliff and foreshore often permissive or de facto, which can be revoked. Some areas remain inaccessible where public rights of way have been eroded.

- Improving coastal access should be a clear one-off process with a strong legal basis,

allowing for strategic long term management

Issue – need to accommodate impact of coastal dynamics?

- Rate of coastal change will increase in future so need to find ways of enabling access

provision to migrate in response

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Issue – need for balance with landowners'/managers' interests?

- Increased access could have detrimental effect on agriculture and individual rural businesses which rely on privacy and exclusivity. Any loss of income or depreciation in

capital value as a result of increased statutory access should be compensated

- Need for balance between access provision at coast and other functions of coastal land

Issue - benefit to local economy?

- South West Coast Path generates an estimated £307 million annually to the rural economy, enough to support more than 7,500 jobs
- Cycle tourism elsewhere in UK has had dramatic benefits for local rural economies.
- Economic losses resulting from impact of Foot and Mouth illustrates that improved coastal access likely to generate increased local revenues

Issue – liability and public safety?

- Need to be able to manage access for safety reasons . if weather severe or very high tides

- A major concern of landowners is their liability if member of the public is injured on their

land whilst exercising a right of public access or permissive access – note position in Europe where public access is at users' own risk

Issue - need to safeguard nature conservation interests?

- Coastal areas very high in nature conservation value with wide range of coastal habitats.

- Human activity at coast, including access, has damaged and degraded coastal landscapes and habitats. Some coastal bird species are esp. susceptible to disturbance

- Need to consider opportunity to improve existing access to benefit nature conservation

- Best of Both Worlds initiative should be used as a model for achieving harmony between recreation and nature conservation interests

- Wildlife is integral part of recreation experience; improved access should not damage

very thing people come to enjoy

Issue - need for funding for establishment and management of access?

- Coastal management, alongside new access rights, is important, plus a management

grant scheme along lines of existing Access Management Grant Scheme to improve and manage access locally.

Comments directly linked to mechanisms

Mapped approach

For

- Would clarify the situation legally by offering access in perpetuity.
- It also creates access to areas not just linear routes, which would add to the coastal

experience.

- It does provide the opportunity for access to the coast for a range of activities and deliver the full coastal experience to the user.
- A CRoW based approach would enable management and/or restrictions to safeguard nature conservation interests.
- CRoW reduces concerns regarding occupier's liability.
- Can be delivered within a time specific limit.

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Against

- There is strong reaction against Section 3 due to the experience of Section 1. This is due to costs and the benefits are not proven- are people using it? Does it fit it into the health and diversity agenda?
- It would be extremely difficult to define coastal land types.
- As the current system is linked there is no benefits to higher rights.

Descriptive approach

For

- Works well in other countries such as Portugal, France and in Scotland where there has been few problems under the land reform act.
- It would need a code of practice
- The success could only be achieved by a clear description, which will allow the public to make informed choices about where to go.
- It would be faster to implement and as a result less costly and bureaucratic.
- Could see benefits to higher rights but only if is not based on Section 3 approach

Against

- Strong belief that there would be less certainty and open to misunderstanding by the public.

Rights of Way

For

- Deliver access through agreement with landowners through the highway authority.
- Creation of circular walks.
- Upgrading coastal footpaths to bridleways through primary legislation and using existing rights of way legislation to close gaps in the coastal network with new bridleways or restricted byways in conjunction with section 25 path agreements.
- Improving coastal access on foot using linear routes would be preferable because well

understood by public and can be delivered and managed to avoid sensitive areas for nature conservation

Against

- If relied on the Local Highway authority past experience shows this could be a lengthy process and not guarantee continued onward journeys.
- This approach would not allow for nature conservation restrictions.
- Too restrictive to enable a full coastal experience.
- There is a need for rolling path agreements to allow for coastal change but this is lengthy and complicated and also relies on the will of the Local Authority.

- No benefits to higher rights.
- Susceptible to erosion.

Other Voluntary

- Would not create a permanent public access nor clarify the legal situation.
- Would also create patchy results- which is the current situation.
- Used in partnership with Rights of Way to create access through negotiation with the landowner.
- No benefits for higher rights through past experience.
- Voluntary agreements have been available for decades and not delivered improvements to coastal access