



Kent Coastal Network

Towards integration on the Kent Coast

This topic paper is part of a KCC coordinated project to develop an Integrated Coastal Action Plan for Kent. The aim is to generate wider discussion and it is accompanied by a consultation response form.

Title: - Recreation

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Introduction

At just short of 360 miles, Kent's coastline is one of the longest of any English county. Most of it is readily accessible to a large population based in London and the South East. It offers a variety of conditions and scenery – from the urbanised river around Gravesend to the flatter open landscapes of the marshes, Sheppey and the coastal resorts towards Margate, and lastly the rugged scenery of East Kent ending in the White Cliffs at Dover and Folkestone. It provides internationally important habitats for birds, invertebrates and vegetation, including the North Kent marshes, Thanet's chalk reefs and caves, the shingle spit at Dungeness and the Romney Marsh. There are relics of our past, from the Roman forts at Reculver to Dover Castle and Chatham Dockyard.

The Kent coast is a great place for people wishing to spend leisure time in an active way whether on the sea or on shore. Nationally some 8% of the population took part in water sports in 2004 [source Watersports Omnibus Survey 2004]. In South East and East England the figure was 9% - nearly one and a half million people. A recent Tourism South East/SEEDA survey showed some 670,000 yachtsmen visiting marinas and harbours in the South East region.

Around 75% of the Kent coastline has public access by public rights of way, cycle routes and promenades [source Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan p35]. In England, walking has grown as the main activity for people on leisure trips from 12% in 2002/03 to 19% in 2005 [Kent CAIP p54].

This topic paper

- Summarises recreational activities, facilities and opportunities for the Kent coast
- Invites comment from representatives involved in this area of concern, the responses will be used to ensure a well informed and supported plan is developed.

Water based activities

Sailing and motor cruising

Boating requires shore-based facilities for boat storage and launching and is thus largely based in clubs or marinas, with a few commercial training centres. Kent has some 60 yacht clubs spread along or near the coastline; and marinas on the Medway, Ramsgate and Dover with plans for a new one at Folkestone.

Dinghy sailing is mainly confined to the rivers and estuaries of the Thames and Medway. These are more sheltered than the open waters of the eastern coast, albeit with strong tides and sometime difficult launching facilities. For yacht racing, there are centres around the Medway, Ramsgate and Dover which organise regular events and major regattas. The proximity of the Continental and East Coast ports makes Kent a favoured choice for yachts and motor cruisers. The constraints are a shortage of suitable moorings both for resident boats and for visitors, and other facilities such as boatyards.

Windsurfing, kitesurfing

These activities have tended to be non-club based. They require little shore-based infrastructure – the equipment can be carried easily by car, on roof or small trailer, and launched off a beach close to where the car is parked. They have also tended to be activities enjoyed by individuals or small groups. The result is that they have often caused annoyance to others, both on shore and on the water, with complaints of parking obstruction and lack of discipline on the water.

Windsurfing has now largely come of age, with training schemes and windsurfing clubs developed, particularly for juniors and youth, and increasing inter-club competition in the region and nationally. Kitesurfing is a relatively new and developing activity. The most popular sites for kitesurfing in Kent are Whitstable and Ramsgate depending on the direction of the wind where you can see as many as 60+ participants on the water.

Personal Watercraft (PWCs – Jet Skis)

Personal Watercraft (commonly known as jetskis) are a popular past time in Kent. Their use centres around urban areas with a number of dedicated launch sites in Herne Bay, Margate and the Isle of Sheppey. With this in mind KCC designed a guidance leaflet on the use of PWC's around the Kent coastline.

PWC activity is beginning to move in the same direction as windsurfing, encouraged by the development of clubs using the RYA training scheme, and the work of the PWC Working Group led by Kent County Council to develop an action plan to encourage clubs, training and safe and responsible skiing and produce guidance to PWC users. The industry advises that the trend within this activity is in the growth of family orientated sit down style craft. With the introduction of local Zoning for PWC's the number of nuisance instances has decreased, however, there are still concerns raised with regards to safety, noise and wildlife disturbance.

Canoeing

Canoeing is a popular activity with schools and activity centres. This encourages groups of youngsters to participate in water sports at an affordable level, which in turn usually leads to a life long participation in all kinds of water sports. With the rise in popularity of the kayak, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals / small groups taking to the water. There are a number of active clubs spread along the Medway.

Water ski-ing

There are several water ski-ing clubs in Kent, with 2 in the Canterbury district alone. Whitstable has a large water-ski club and is known as the “Home of British Water ski-ing” due to its association with ex World Champion Liz Hobbs. National, international and even world championships have been held in Whitstable in the past. Water ski-ing and Wakeboarding (a single wide, but short board – like a snowboard) are popular with individuals who practise this activity either using a power boat or a large PWC.

Rowing (Coastal / Inland)

Kent is one of the few remaining areas that has active coastal rowing clubs. Herne Bay Rowing Club is a very popular club holding a number of regattas annually. Inland rowing is popular on the river Medway with clubs at Borstal and Maidstone and the river Stour at Plucks Gutter.

Diving

Some of the most technical diving in the country is found around the Kent coastline. There are a number of clubs who regularly dive many of the thousands of wrecks, especially in the English Channel. This does however have an effect on the limited public launch points around the coast.

Bathing

Bathing is popular and Kent is well resourced with a good number of clean, safe bathing beaches. A list of suitable bathing beaches can be found in the MCS “good beach guide”. A number of beaches around Kent have been awarded either the European Blue Flag award or the ENCAMS Quality Coast Award.

Surfing

Although not as popular as the south west coast of the UK, Kent has some “little gems” when it comes to surfing. Good surf can be found at Joss Bay in Thanet (surf school on the beach), Broadstairs and even at Ramsgate.

Sea Angling

Sea angling is a popular activity all around the Kent coast, by boat or from shore. There are a number of active clubs that hold regular competitions and events (Herne Bay Angling Association hold several including the National Bass Competition - £10,000 prize if you beat the record bass). Pier fishing is popular at Deal, Ramsgate and Dover to name but a few locations.

Land based activities

Golf – Kent has several coastal golf clubs, see the Tourism topic paper for further details.

Walking

Coastal path walks are very popular and Kent has varied and spectacular coastal walks. The Saxon Shore Way traces the shoreline as it was in Saxon times from Gravesend to the Kent/Sussex border and offers a surprising range of scenery. Although it mostly follows the current shoreline, it moves inland round the edge of Thanet and the edge of Romney Marsh. As well as being a long-distance footpath, it provides the opportunity for day walks and shorter walks along most of the Kent coast.

The Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan covers walking in the county as a whole and contains proposals for improving, in conjunction with key partners, walking routes and information about them. The Government has recently published a survey to help deliver the Thames Estuary Path [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/thamesgateway/thamesestuariespath]. It provides information about the current state of the waterfront path, how much it would cost to develop into a continuous path for walkers and cyclists, suggestions for link paths, what blockages there might be to development and how these might be solved. The Marine Bill contains provisions on coastal access to allow the development of a Coastal Route along the English coast.

Cycling

The National Cycle Network includes some popular sections on the Kent coast. National Route 1 starts at Dover along quiet coastal lanes as far as Sandwich. It then heads inland via Canterbury, rejoining the coast at Whitstable, and then running along or close to the Thames Estuary into London. National Route 2 begins in Dover and heads westward along the south coast. There are some spectacular traffic free sections along cliff top paths and sea walls at Samphire Hoe Country Park, East Cliff and Warren Country Park, Folkestone's Lower Leas Country Park to Hythe, Dymchurch and St Mary's Bay. [[www.sustrans.org.uk/getcycling/south east/kent](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/getcycling/south%20east/kent)]
There is a new extension to the Saxon Way cycle route from Reculver to Swalecliff. The Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan identified scope for new cycle routes running along or near the coast – between Rochester and Canterbury, through the Darent Valley, and linking London and the Thames Path to the Kent Coast along the Saxon Shore Way.

Horse riding

Horse riding is popular in Kent. The Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan revealed a demand for improved equestrian access on the coast. Details of suitable horse riding beaches can be found in the British Horse Society publication "riding on beaches"

Hang-Gliding / Para-Gliding

Hang-gliding and para-gliding is available around Kent depending on weather conditions. There are a number of registered sites including Reculver cliffs on the north coast and the area around the downs at Folkestone on the south

coast. Disturbance to nesting birds at Reculver is of concern to many and maybe a zoning scheme needs to be implemented

Other activities

The Kent coastline provides scope for a wide range of activities organised by national and local bodies. These include nature trails and bird watching events, fossil and geology walks, historical and archaeological walks, as well as helping with coastal management and beach clearing. Kent County Council organises an annual Coastal Week to bring many of these activities together.

Regulators

Europe

- Environmental issues, including protected areas and water quality (e.g. Bathing Water and Water Framework Directives)
- Recreational Craft Directive
- Integrated Maritime Policy

National

- Planning guidance e.g. PPG 17 (Sport and Recreation)
- Environmental legislation eg Marine Bill
- National bodies with regulatory powers eg Environment Agency (navigation, dredging), Natural England (designating protected areas), proposed Marine Management Organisation (marine works, dredging, Marine Conservation Zones)
- Sport England (competitive sport)
- National Governing Bodies eg Royal Yachting Association, British Canoe Union

Ports and Harbours

- Harbour authorities (powers to make byelaws, general and specific directions, levy charges, provide moorings)

County

- County Councils
- County Sports Partnerships – support sport and recreational activities

District

- Local Development Frameworks
- Byelaw making powers
- Land ownership and control, car parking

Parish

- Car parking, launching facilities

Integration of recreation on the Kent Coast

Biodiversity, Environmental Quality and Geology and Geomorphology

In principle recreational activity should support biodiversity and environmental quality. All those using the water want good water quality; all those using the land want good air quality. Neither want pollution or litter, and many of those engaging in recreation are seeking to take advantage of natural beauty and

resources which it is important to protect. The work done in preparing the draft South East River Basin Management Plan [currently out for public consultation www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd] indicated that recreation was not one of the major factors putting pressure on water quality.

However some sport and recreation can put pressure on the environment e.g. by using motorised transport to get to their activity or to a lesser extent requiring facilities that increase environmental pressures. The joint British Marine Federation/Royal Yachting Association Green Blue project seeks to promote the sustainable use of coastal and inland waters and the sustainable operation and development of the recreational marine industry; and to educate and inform the boating community about minimising environmental impacts.

Historic Environment

The range of sites in the coastal and marine zone is vast. It includes:

- historic buildings
- submerged landscapes
- wreck sites (including aircraft crash sites)
- coastal defences (including castles, forts, pillboxes, sound mirrors)
- ports and harbours
- ship, barge and dockyards
- maritime berths (including harbours, jetties, wharfs and beach launches)
- industrial sites.

Some of these sites have direct links with sport and recreation e.g. harbours provide recreational moorings, submerged wrecks provide dive sites. Others provide attractions for walkers, cyclists and riders. However there can be dangers where fragile sites can be damaged e.g. diving wreck sites purely for recreation rather than underwater archaeology.

Industry

Industrial expansion can put pressures on recreation e.g. by limiting recreational sailing routes by zoning channels or placing wind farms across them. There can also be risks to essential shore-based activities – see on regeneration below.

Regeneration

Regeneration is essentially the improvement of environmental, economic and social conditions, usually through physical change, and often in urban areas. As such it can have mixed implications for recreation. It can provide new and greatly improved facilities for both land and water based activities. The new Greenwich Yacht Club clubhouse, built when the club was dispossessed by the construction of the Millenium Dome, is a major example.

On the other hand, redevelopment along water frontages can dispossess essential activities on which recreation depends, such as boatyards; or prevent access to the water for recreation (gated communities being a particular problem). Marine industries are an essential support for many water-based recreational activities e.g. yachting, motor boating and sea fishing. All too often land use and development plans do not recognise the

essential locational requirements of marine industries such as boatyards, and instead allow development which does not have to be located adjacent to the water to take place there. [Note: The implications of this for integrated coastal planning need to be addressed in the sections on industry and regeneration.]

Shoreline Management

Most water-based recreational activities rely on shore-based facilities. Changes in shoreline management policies can put these at risk. The building of sea defences on Sheppey in the 1960s drastically reduced the usefulness of the new Isle of Sheppey Sailing Club clubhouse and led to a fall in membership from 400 to 100. Plans for managed retreat at Seaford (now dropped) threatened to put Newhaven and Seaford Sailing Club under water. Managed retreat is also threatening yachting in some estuaries by reducing water depths in channels. However changes can also provide opportunities for moving facilities to better locations.

Tourism

There is a strong link with sport and recreational facilities and activities, simply because they can help to draw tourism to the Kent Coast. Golf courses, marinas, natural features and beaches are but some of the facilities that attract tourists. Yacht tourism is a significant revenue earner, with each member of crew spending money on local hotels and restaurants. Thus recreation can be a major draw for tourism, and tourism can be a source of funding for new and improved recreation facilities.

Policy directions for recreation on the Kent coast

1. How should growth in recreational activity be catered for?

- Given the planned growth in population in the South East over the coming decades, what scale of growth in sport and recreation facilities is required?
- Where should new facilities be located?
- What steps should be taken now in planning documents, particularly Local Development Frameworks, to safeguard these locations and associated facilities (such as car and boat parking, marine industries)?
- How should new facilities be paid for (e.g. section 106 agreements, lottery funding)?
- Is support needed for local voluntary and youth organisations to promote the development and expansion of sport and recreation on the Kent Coast? If so, how is this best channelled e.g. through County Sports Partnerships or National Governing Bodies?

2. Balancing people needs

- What conflicts are there between different types of recreational activity, or between recreation and other activities? If so, how are these best resolved?

3. Balancing people and environment

- What is the likely extent of future conflicts between needs for environmental protection and people seeking active sport and recreation?

- Is this a major issue compared with e.g. the issues posed by planned growth generally?
- Are there any activities where conflicts are a major issue?
- To what extent can conflicts be resolved by education? Is there need for regulation, and if so why?