

9. The Heritage Coasts

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Summary of changes

Note of changes following final comments from the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee/ Jan/ Feb 2021

No changes were requested

Our vision for the Heritage Coasts of the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. Collaborative effort continues to transform the management of the coasts which meets the needs of the landscape, natural and historic environment and communities, while supporting the Covid recovery and sustainable regeneration of the coastal economy including of the coastal towns.

9.1 Overview

The magnificent chalk cliffs between Folkestone and Kingsdown form one of Britain's most evocative and best-known landmarks. For many they are the first sight of Britain while views to France hold a special appeal, where chalk and clay cliffs, also held in great national regard, mirror the landscape drama. The Dover Strait is one of the world's most important, recognised and busiest seascapes.

The Kent Downs has a special place in some of our most renowned literature, the White Cliffs, forever in the hearts and minds of our nation, appear in many well-known songs, stories and poems sometimes as a metaphor for the whole country; they are never so well

described as in King Lear as Gloucester entreats Edgar (Tom) to take him to the Dover Cliffs – he describes that;

*'There is a cliff, whose high and bending head,
Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.
Bring me but to the very brim of it,
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear
With something rich about me. From that place
I shall no leading need.'*

Edgar describes the cliff;

*'Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles: half way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.'*

Globally coastal Chalk is scarce, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource.

The impacts of global climate change, including sea level rise and the greater frequency and intensity of storms, is projected to have a significant effect on the Heritage Coast, making adaptation strategies an important priority for the future management of the coast.

This extraordinary natural and cultural resource can strongly assist the regeneration and recovery of Dover and Folkestone and has been identified as the basis to secure World Heritage Site status for the Dover Strait. Recreation pressure has increased significantly in the plan period with the National Trust reporting over 10% year on year increases in visitor numbers and visitor car parks are regularly closed on account of capacity constraints. Visitor pressure is unevenly spread with Langdon Cliffs recording over 500,000 visitors each year and areas of Lydden Spout (also in National Trust ownership) only 4000 visitor movements.

Defence and invasion is one of the themes of the Heritage Coast and forms an important reference in the landscape. Features in the Kent Downs include the magnificent Dover Castle described as 'the key to England', Napoleonic Martello towers, the 'listening ears' built between the wars and superseded by radar installations some of which are now listed. World War II frontline fortifications, defences, gun emplacements and anti-tank devices are peppered along the coast.

Communication and cultural exchange are important themes. In 1899 the first international wireless transmission was sent from Wimereux to the South Foreland lighthouse. Cross channel trade and cultural exchange continues apace – the Strait of Dover being one of the

world's busiest shipping lanes. The close proximity of Dover Harbour and views of the Strait's central shipping channel means ferries and large cargo vessels are frequent features.

Arising both from conflict and seagoing exchange and transport there is an extraordinary and outstanding collection of wrecks comprising both air and water-craft, including the Dover Boat, the oldest sea-going boat in the world. Another example is the protected wreck of the Langdon Bay, located on the edge of Dover Harbour. It is thought to be the remains of a Middle Bronze Age vessel carrying a scrap metal cargo from France to Britain, indicating early cross-channel trade.

Navigation marks are often conspicuous in the landscape for example the National Trust-managed South Foreland lighthouse, which stands 21 metres high on the headland, and a white windmill (near to the lighthouse).

The Heritage Coasts

England's 32 Heritage Coasts have been established in the best areas of undeveloped coast to:

- conserve, protect and enhance:
- the natural beauty of the coastline
- their terrestrial, coastal and marine flora and fauna
- their heritage features
- encourage and help the public to enjoy, understand and appreciate these areas
- maintain and improve the health of inshore waters affecting heritage coasts and their beaches through appropriate environmental management measures
- take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing and the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts

Natural England's Designation Strategy promotes AONB Management Plans incorporating policies for the management of Heritage Coasts at a strategic level. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of the special character of Heritage Coasts and advises that development should be consistent with that character.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) has a Heritage Coast management function as part of its purpose. In the previous management plan period, the Kent Downs AONB Unit worked in partnership to secure and then chaired the 'Up on the Downs' Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the (then) Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scheme made significant and lasting investments in improving the condition of and partnership arrangements affecting the Heritage Coast and a wider inland area.

In the plan period of the last AONB Management Plan the National Trust has made important land purchases in the two Heritage Coasts and invested further in their conservation and enhancement, this new ownership arrangement, along with local partnership working has greatly increased the delivery of the Heritage Coast purposes. As a testament to the value placed by people on this area of coast, a National Trust appeal to purchase land reached its target of £1.2 m in just 19 days.

Seascape assessment of the Strait of Dover

The description of seascape character, like landscape character describes what is distinctive, special and characteristic in an area of sea (and land in coastal areas). Seascape character assessment is a tool and spatial framework to help integrate management decisions. Completed in July 2015 a full seascape character assessment of the Strait of Dover represents an important management resource. The study provides an evidence base to support marine planning and management as well as that of the coastal zone. The seascape character assessment has been used in support of the preparation of this Plan.

The assessment helped confirm the special characteristics and qualities of the Heritage Coasts and the priorities for management. The Strait is described as a cohesive seascape unified by geology, socio-economic functions, biodiversity, history, culture and intervisibility. The Strait is an area of multiple interests and values and the Assessment confirms the need for sensitive and integrated management which is clear in the vision, aims and principles of the plan.

The seascape character assessment has fed into the joint UK/ France Dover Strait Action Plan which while focusing on energy and climate change issues promotes several actions and activities which are coherent with the objectives of this Plan.

Marine Management Plans and Marine Conservation Zones.

Marine plans guide those who use and regulate the marine area to encourage sustainable development while considering the environment, economy and society. As a result marine plan policy topics across environmental sectors, economic sectors and social sectors are relevant to Kent Downs. Such policy topics can include Seascape, Biodiversity and Land-based infrastructure. AONBs are referenced in many numerous policies.

Heritage Coasts are included in Policy S-HER-1 (Heritage Assets) and Policy S-SCP-1 (Seascape) in the South Marine Plan. It is expected to be in similar policies in the South East Marine Plan.

The Heritage Coast east of Samphire Hoe will be covered by policies within the South East Inshore Marine Plan prepared by the Marine Management Organisation. The south east marine plan area includes tidal waters and extends to the mean high water springs mark. The Kent coast west of Samphire Hoe is covered by policies within the 2018 statutory South Marine Plan.

Described as 'blue belt' around the English Coast Marine Conservation Zones are areas designated by the Government to protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. There are three designated MCZs close to or within the Kent Downs Heritage Coasts: Dover to Folkestone; Dover to Deal and the Folkestone Pomerania.

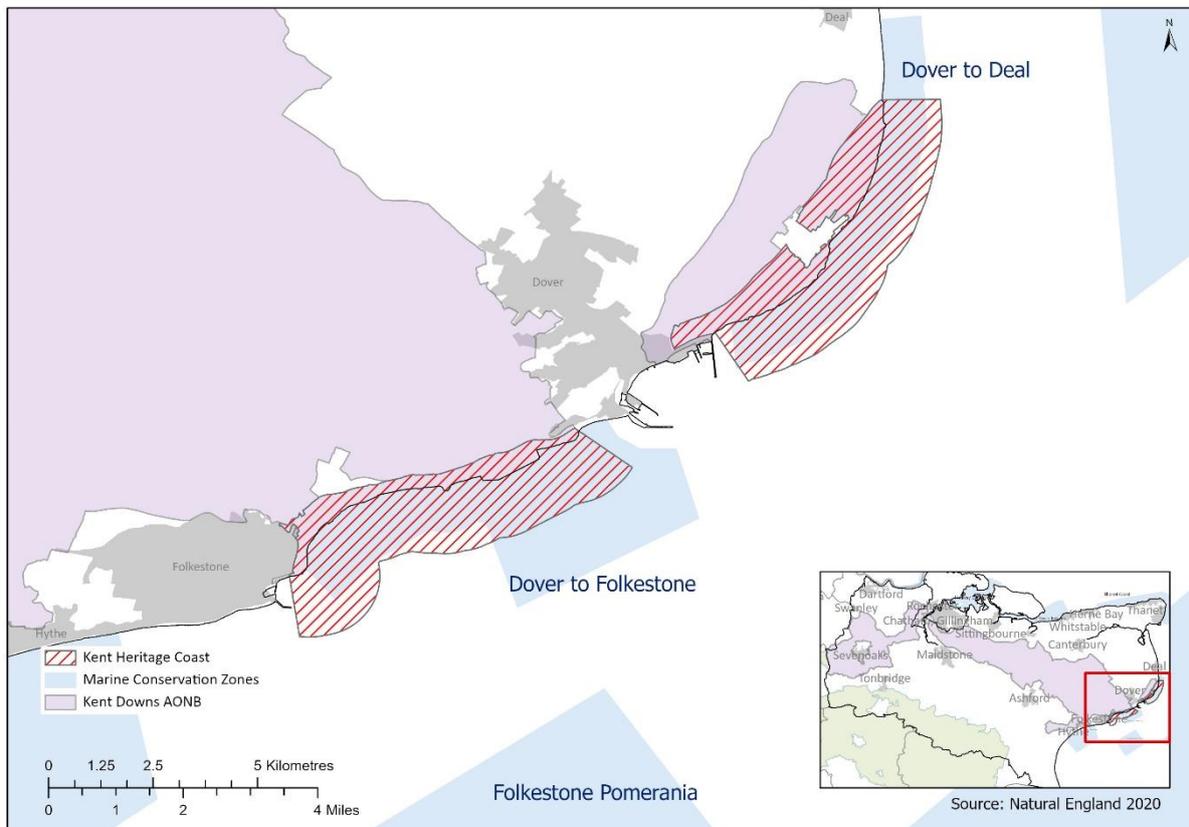


Figure 9.1 Kent Heritage Coast

9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover have been defined as some of the best undeveloped coast in England, they include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of the UK's national identity; forming a soaring landscape with a seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

Behind the rearing cliffs is a landscape of windswept coastal chalk downs, with further undeveloped areas of salt-wind sculpted scrub, open downland, and farmland punctuated by the remnants of thousands of years of exchange and conflict. The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a true feeling of 'wildness'. The ever-changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea, climate, geology and exposure.

The wildlife of the Heritage Coasts is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including increasing numbers Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and Peregrines. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

The cliffs and grassland contain rare plants such as Hoary and Sea Stock, Rock Sea-Lavender, Sea Heath and Wild Cabbage. Most of the area is protected as SSSI, not just for

the rich communities of birds, wildflowers but also seaweeds and particularly for the invertebrates. The Heritage Coasts are a vital landing point for migrating birds and insects and are home to many rare species. The proximity to mainland Europe places the Heritage Coasts in a key position as species migrate in response to climate change.

Marine habitats are a key part of the character and qualities of the two Heritage Coasts as is demonstrated by the two Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) which cover broadly the same areas of the seaward extent.

Dover to Folkestone MCZ is an inshore site which includes the wave-cut intertidal chalk platforms that form an almost continuous reef between Kingsdown, Deal in the north east and Folkestone Warren in the south west.

This MCZ is a highly diverse area with a number of habitats and features of interest. The chalk communities on the seashore are one of the best examples in the region, supporting a range of seaweeds and the animals that associate with them. Rocky outcrops, ledges and boulders support intertidal under boulder communities, an important habitat, of which this example is considered to be one of the best examples in the region. Boulders create shaded areas that provide a refuge to sea squirts, sea mats, and sponges. The undersides of the boulder provide a habitat for animals like sea slugs, long-clawed porcelain crabs and brittlestars, which shelter and feed in the damp shaded conditions. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. On the seabed, mixed sediment is rich in mobile animals including brittlestars, squat lobsters, crabs, fish and molluscs, and wild native oysters are found scattered across the site.

Dover to Deal MCZ protects a number of habitats and species. The site helps to protect intertidal under boulder communities, where large boulders provide shaded, cave-like conditions for unusual algae to thrive, and mobile animals such as long-clawed porcelain crabs, sea slugs and brittlestars shelter amongst sponges. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. This site includes excellent examples of littoral chalk communities which are unique communities of seaweeds and the animals that associate with them. Areas of littoral chalk are small in range and such areas are limited within Britain. The area also includes the best example in the region of wave-cut platforms, flat areas at the base of a cliff formed by wave erosion. Below these platforms lie gullies and rock pools, which support several types of seaweed. The chalk foreshore at St Margaret's Bay has one of the richest communities of algae in the south east. As well as Ross worm reefs subtidal off Kingsdown, there is a well-developed Ross worm reef between Dover and South Foreland, in the lower shore where sand fringes the edge of a chalk reef. The presence of Ross worm reefs on chalk reefs is extremely rare, and this reef is also thought to seed more vulnerable reefs offshore.

The geological exposures of the cliffs form an internationally important stratigraphic reference site for extensive and near-continuous exposures of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk, historically important for their contribution to the sciences of geology and coastal geomorphology and are all designated as SSSI. The Chalk cliffs and to the west Gault Clay are rich in fossils. On the seashore at Copt Point the exposed Greensand forms a series of rock pools with important seaweed colonies. The Greensand was also the home of an active quern stone (corn grinding) industry dating to the first century BC.

Like the natural heritage, the historic and cultural heritage of the Heritage Coasts is of national and international significance, there are frequent cultural references in music, drama, literature, poetry and painting and the built heritage ranges from the magnificent

Dover Castle to the underground scratches of graffiti in the chalk by a bored, or scared soldier from the Second World War.

The Heritage Coasts are a popular area for quiet countryside recreation; the cliff tops are crossed by the Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Path and the North Downs Way National Trail. The England Coast Path has been created along these sections of coast and there are several areas of open access land. Several areas offer extraordinary, panoramic views across to France. While access to the base of the cliffs can be difficult, it provides a feeling of remote wildness and relative tranquillity with exposure to the elements being a key feature.

9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Cultivation and coastal erosion have reduced the botanically-rich chalk grassland and associated historic heritage on the cliff tops to a narrow strip, making management difficult and placing the habitat at risk, this has been addressed in several areas and there remains the opportunity to continue this important effort.
- b. High and rapidly increasing visitor pressure, particularly at the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and parts of the Folkestone Warren is degrading important habitats and placing the historic heritage at risk and reducing the valued sense of tranquillity as well as the visitor experience – key sites such as the National Trust Visitor Centre exceed their capacity for visitor parking on regular occasions.
- c. Arable agriculture can sit uncomfortably with the natural beauty and wild scenery of the cliff tops and can damage the historic heritage, a significant opportunity remains further to expand the valued coastal grassland, it is also thought to be causing diffuse pollution affecting the quality of the marine environment.
- d. Discordant development, for instance caravan parks, visitor resources, and unsympathetic screening attempts occur in the Heritage Coasts.
- e. The enthusiasm for the area brings an opportunity build on the collaborative management activity and improve coordination and impact.
- f. Development pressure and traffic growth continues in and in the setting of the Heritage Coast.
- g. The need to increase understanding of the dynamic nature of the coast, accelerating coastal processes and the impacts of climate change.
- h. Despite improvements achieved through partnership management but there are remaining areas of inappropriate, antisocial and illegal activities, such as off-roading vehicles, disrespectful wild camping, fly-tipping and vandalism in parts of the Heritage Coasts.
- i. The safety, interpretation, conservation and potential sensitive re-purposing of remaining military and historic structures, many of which are un-designated is a new heritage priority.
- j. The very high quality, iconic natural and historic environment can be an important

component of a programme to regenerate the coastal towns of Dover and Folkestone, but the Heritage Coasts are in themselves extremely sensitive to development and visitor pressure.

- k. Marine litter and air pollution are significant detractors from the character and qualities of the Heritage Coast.
- l. The opportunity identified and supported by Kent County Council and the Pas-de-Calais Department to secure World Heritage Site status for the Strait of Dover has yet to be realised. The UNESCO Sites Across the Channel (USAC) project offers an opportunity to help realise the ambition.
- m. Marine Conservation Zones identify nationally important areas of the marine environment and afford the opportunity to generate agreed management plans for each Zone.
- n. The Heritage Coasts are much loved, genuinely iconic national landscapes with partnerships in place to support their management.
- o. A new partnership has developed to promote the reintroduction of the chough to the Heritage Coasts; this distinctive and charismatic bird could be a trigger for further collaboration amongst land managers and wider improvements in the habitat of the Heritage Coasts. At the same time the once substantial Kittiwake Colony has disappeared, there is a general lack of trend data of the important wildlife features of the Heritage Coast.

9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims

A landscape in which:

- 1. A wide, collaborative approach achieves careful, appropriate management of as well as respect and international recognition for the Heritage Coasts which reflects the extremely high national esteem in which they are held.
- 2. The extreme importance and sensitivity of the Heritage Coasts are recognised publicly, through appropriate international status and in policy, projects and programmes.
- 3. The importance and value placed on these iconic landscapes delivers resources and partnerships to ensure their future management and which supports the regeneration of the nearby coastal towns.
- 4. Lost or damaged marine and coastal habitats and species are recovered and the wildness of our Heritage Coasts is protected and restored.

9.5 The Heritage Coasts - principles

- HC1 Coastal defence policies and approaches will respect the special character and qualities of the Heritage Coasts, allowing, where practicable, a naturally functioning

coastline.

- HC2 The opportunity to support economic regeneration and recovery through the sustainable and integrated management of the Heritage Coasts in accordance with their defined purposes and those of the AONB will be pursued.
- HC3 Threats to the qualities and character of the Heritage Coasts will be resisted and managed.
- HC4 A collaborative approach, such as that employed by the WCCP and the Up on the Downs Landscape Partnership, will continue to be pursued to secure the objectives for Heritage Coast strategy and management and address the specific threats and opportunities identified.
- HC5 Achieving World Heritage Site status or other appropriate international recognition for the Strait of Dover will be supported.
- HC6 The conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the Heritage Coasts and Strait of Dover will be pursued through the Marine Plan making process, the development of new Heritage Coast Management Plans and the preparation of Marine Conservation Zone Management Plans.
- HC7 The England Coast Path National Trail will be managed in a manner that is sensitive to the landscape character and qualities and in partnership to meet and retain National Trail standards. The conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the corridor of the National Coastal Trail in the Heritage Coasts will be pursued.
- HC8 A collaborative strategic approach to manage visitor pressure to benefit the visitor experience, reduce impact, conserve the character and qualities of the area and support sustainable regeneration will be supported.
- HC9 New opportunities to secure 'protective ownership' of areas of the Heritage Coasts and partnerships to enhance management with existing private and public owners will be supported.
- HC10 The extension of the definition of Heritage Coast/ AONB into the marine environment and inclusion of areas currently defined as Heritage Coast within the AONB will be supported.