

Coastal access and the England Coast Path - Cremyll to Kingswear

Update on progress – September 2018

Introduction

Natural England is investigating how to improve coastal access along a 107km stretch of the Devon coast between Cremyll and Kingswear. This new access is expected to be ready in 2020. Officers from Devon County Council and Plymouth City Council are providing Natural England with expert local advice and helping to make sure there is full consultation with local interests during the development of the route.

We have completed stage 1 for the stretch. This has included:

- holding discussions with national and local organisations as well as interested individuals to get their ideas and concerns about current access along this stretch;
- assessing the problems, opportunities and constraints for improving access along this stretch of coast; and
- seeking to identify owners and occupiers of land that might be affected.

We are currently in stage 2 which is the main stage for dialogue with local landowners and other legal interests in potentially affected land. We share with them any initial thinking and ask for their views on coastal access. The route of the existing South West Coast Path National Trail (SWCP) is likely to be followed by much of the proposed England Coast Path (ECP) in this area and we will inform landowners where this is the case. Where improvements could be made to the existing SWCP route we will meet with landowners to discuss the best approach and ensure sensitive features are protected.

There will be a formal opportunity to comment on the proposals to improve coastal access at the end of stage 3, when a report for the stretch will be written up and submitted to the Secretary of State. This will be in 2019.

Estuaries

As there are a number of estuaries on the Cremyll to Kingswear stretch, it is worth summarising Natural England's position on these. Under the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act, there is no requirement for the trail to extend up any estuary further than the seaward limit of the estuarial waters. But Natural England has a discretion to propose that the trail could extend from the seaward limit as far as the first bridge over which there is a public right of way or a public right of access to cross the river on foot. In exercising this discretion, Natural England must have regard to the considerations in the Coastal Access Scheme (the statutory methodology that underpins delivery of the England Coast Path).

One of the key considerations of the delivery of coastal access is to ensure that as far as is reasonably practicable, interruptions to the route are kept to a minimum. So if the presence of an estuary would interrupt this continuity of access along the coast then we need to look at whether the trail should serve the estuary too. We look at various criteria to make our decisions, including the nature of the land that would be affected, the topography of the shoreline, the recreational benefit, the extent of adjoining land that would be 'excepted land' and the existence of a ferry service – the existence of a ferry service is an important factor in our decision, if it crosses the estuary at a convenient place downstream from the first bridge and is available to foot passengers.

Update on progress

The Cremyll to Kingswear stretch has been split into 10 working chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1: Cremyll to Mount Batton Point
- Chapter 2: Mount Batton Point to the River Yealm
- Chapter 3: Yealm Estuary
- Chapter 4: River Yealm to the River Erme
- Chapter 5: Erme Estuary
- Chapter 6: River Erme to the River Avon
- Chapter 7: Avon Estuary
- Chapter 8: River Avon to the Kingsbridge Estuary
- Chapter 9: Kingsbridge Estuary to Torcross Point
- Chapter 10: Torcross Point to Kingswear

Progress to date on each of the chapters is summarised below.

Chapter 1: Cremyll to Mount Batton Point

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests in Plymouth are ongoing.
- A study of the estuary based on the above criteria has been undertaken. A regular year round service such as that provided by the Mount Batton Ferry meets our requirement for a convenient crossing point and we are minded to propose that the ECP will cross at the ferry point between Plymouth and Mount Batton Point. However, it is the preference of Plymouth City Council and stakeholders for the South West Coast Path, for the SWCP to remain on its current alignment along the Waterfront Walkway to the crossing point on the A379 at Laira Bridge and so we will be proposing that the England Coast Path and the SWCP will diverge. The SWCP would retain its current approved route and the England Coast Path would utilise the ferry crossing.
- There are a number of waterfront sites currently being redeveloped in Plymouth or planned for redevelopment in the future. When proposals for development, including redevelopment, are being considered, we fully support Plymouth City Council's approach to include provision for the trail to be on the seaward side of any development wherever practicable.

Chapter 2: Mount Batton Point to the River Yealm

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. The route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by much of the proposed ECP in this area and we are informing landowners where this is the case.

Chapter 3: Yealm Estuary

- A study of the estuary based on the above criteria has been undertaken. The conclusion is that we are minded to propose that the 'ordinary' route of the ECP will use the ferry crossing and an alternative route will be in place for when the ferry is not running. The alternative route around the estuary will follow public rights of way (PRoWs), a National Trust permissive route and part of the Erme-Plym trail.

Chapter 4: River Yealm to the River Erme

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. We are informing landowners where the route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by the proposed ECP in this area.

Chapter 5: Erme Estuary

- The Erme Estuary can only be crossed on foot by fording at low tide, the best route being roughly between the two slipways at Mothecombe and Wonwell. If crossed within an hour of low tide the water is generally no more than knee deep, although this can differ depending on weather and floodwater conditions. Information boards are situated at each side of the estuary.

In coming to a decision whether to exercise our estuary discretion, we have held discussions with the major landowner and considered the various criteria relating to the estuary, including the nature of land that would be affected, the topography of the shoreline, the recreational benefit and the extent of adjoining land that would be excepted (e.g. historic parkland).

We are minded to propose that the ECP will cross the Erme Estuary at the low tide crossing point on foot as it does at present. We will work with the landowners and key stakeholders to look at improving existing information provision for users.

Chapter 6: River Erme to the River Avon

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. The route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by much of the proposed ECP in this area and we are informing landowners where this is the case.

Chapter 7: Avon Estuary

- Discussions with the major landowner are ongoing, looking at the opportunity to bolster the current ferry crossing and to include an alternative route based on the Avon Estuary Trail.

Chapter 8: River Avon to the Kingsbridge Estuary

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. The route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by much of the proposed ECP in this area and we are informing landowners where this is the case.

Chapter 9: Kingsbridge Estuary to Torcross Point

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. We are informing landowners where the route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by the proposed ECP in this area.
- There are a number of areas where we are holding discussions with landowners and looking at improvements to the route of the SWCP following the effects of Storm Emma earlier this year, notably at Hallsands, Beesands and Torcross.

Chapter 10: Torcross Point to Kingswear

- Discussions with landowners and legal interests along this part of the stretch are ongoing. We are informing landowners where the route of the SWCP is likely to be followed by the proposed ECP in this area.
- Following discussions with landowners and stakeholders we are minded to propose that the route of the ECP at Strete will follow the existing route of the SWCP through the village.
- We have held discussions with landowners and are working with Devon County Council regarding the realignment of the SWCP at Slapton Ley.
- There are some areas where we are looking at making improvements to the route of the SWCP/ECP and holding discussions with landowners about possible options, including at Stoke Fleming.

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