

**Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills  
Executive Director for Environment and Economy**

Report to:	<b>Environmental Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>02 December 2016</b>
Subject:	<b>Coastal Path Update Report</b>

**Summary:**

Lincolnshire County Council continues to work with Natural England on the provision of the English Coast Path with the sections from Sutton Bridge to Skegness and from Skegness to Mablethorpe already progressing. The section from Mablethorpe to the Humber was started in October and the first site meeting is due at Donna Nook in early December following an initial scoping meeting between the authority and Natural England have taken place.

Although most landowners along the stretch have had a visit although Natural England are currently at a difficult stage to make much progress with finalising the route and there are two issues that need answering before we can continue with work on the less obvious parts of the route that will not follow an existing public right of way.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the report and highlight any recommendations or further actions for consideration.

## **1. Background**

### Sutton Bridge to Skegness

The issue of crossing the Steeping River has been the main point for consideration by Natural England where they have to balance the needs of the ECP scheme alongside habitats regulations, Environment Agency requirements and financial considerations for the proposed solutions.

At a meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November the following options were reviewed (see fig.1.)

- 1) Usage of the existing flood defence bank top to the existing Internal Drainage Board (IDB) bridge at point A**

This would appear to be the simplest solution as it provides an existing crossing point and is not a substantial deviation from the coastline. The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (LWT) however consider this route to be the least favourable option due to the likelihood of disturbance to birdlife in the adjacent lake. The species here are designated within the Special Protection Area which includes the whole of the Gibraltar Point. The bridge would cost c.£14,000 to bring it into a usable condition and this is provided by Natural England as part of their establishment costs for the ECP. Any ongoing maintenance would become the responsibility of the County Council as the Access Authority.

## **2) Usage of an alternative route around the lake from the IDB bridge**

Whilst more attractive than option 1 this route was also rejected by LWT due to significant disturbance to birdlife on the adjacent lake

## **3) The construction of a new bridge at point B.**

This structure would need to be a swing or lift bridge to enable the Skegness Yacht Club members to reach their moorings. This is the least favoured option from an Access Authority point of view as although Natural England will be responsible for funding construction the location is in an area likely to be subject to tidal water which will no doubt have an effect on any moving parts, the maintenance of which will fall to LCC. There are likely operational problems for when the bridge is in an "open channel" position as ECP users would need to operate the structure or will require assistance. If they are on the far bank this will not be possible outside of office hours for the visitor centre. Likewise for the bridge in a "closed channel" position when the Yacht Club members need to access their moorings from the seaward side of the bridge.

## **4) A fixed bank to bank bridge at approximately point C**

This bridge is unlikely to be constructed due to the necessary size of 60+metres which will also need to be in 3-4 spans on piers. The piers would have to be located on the saltmarsh flood plain to the river where ground conditions are likely to be unstable. Such a structure may not receive Environment Agency approval as a further hazard on the flood plain. The costs in any case are likely to be prohibitive.

## **5) A mown path within the flood plain from a point where the tree screening to Jacksons Lake ends to the IDB bridge**

This option is becoming the most favourable subject to Natural England habitat regulations and Environment Agency consent. The route would be the most direct available as per option 1. This could be combined with the construction of a new bird hide so that those curious to see the wildlife on Jacksons Lake can do so without causing disturbance. Those wishing to carry on along the ECP will be directed down onto the flood plain which will have a mown strip to aid navigation. It may require the construction of short sections of boardwalk though the wettest areas where borrow pits are located from the time of the construction of the flood bank. Natural England's habitats section has concerns about any boardwalk as it

will kill the underlying vegetation but it is hoped that the construction of such features is minimised then this will be acceptable.

Whilst option 5 seems to be the most favoured consents are still required.

For the route north from the visitor centre for the route to take a route partly along the dune ridge and partly at the base have been agreed with LWT. This takes into account Council advice that maintenance cutting would be more easily done in a strip at the base (providing a dry path and one that avoids trampling sensitive dune slack plants) and avoids significant and expensive scrub clearance on the dune ridge.

For sections around the Wash the outer sea bank is favoured but no formal decision has been taken. Improvements to path furniture on a bridleway through the Frampton RSPB reserve have also been agreed.

The schedule for the stretch is still to complete the report detailing the proposed route by June 2017. At this point the report is submitted to the Secretary of State and there is a brief opportunity for final objections and representations. The proposal should be given approval with or without alterations by December 2017. Establishment work can then begin so that the route will be ready to open at the end of 2018.

#### Skegness to Mablethorpe

This section is more advanced and an indicative line has been chosen. The key element here is the avoidance of conflict with the North Shore Golf Club and for that reason the emerging favoured line takes users onto the beach for a short stretch. This is likely to be contentious in the locality as residents have long pressed for establishing a route on the rock armour sea defence constructed in 1996 which has a natural desire line path already available but obstructed by the golf club.

LCC has received a list of the require furniture and signage from Natural England so that a cost for installation can be provided to Natural England. This analysis will take place in December.

The report for the route is due in Spring next year with establishment of the route towards the end of 2017 and opening in 2018.

All the dates above are subject to change depending on the levels and types of representation made to the formal consultation on the routes selected.

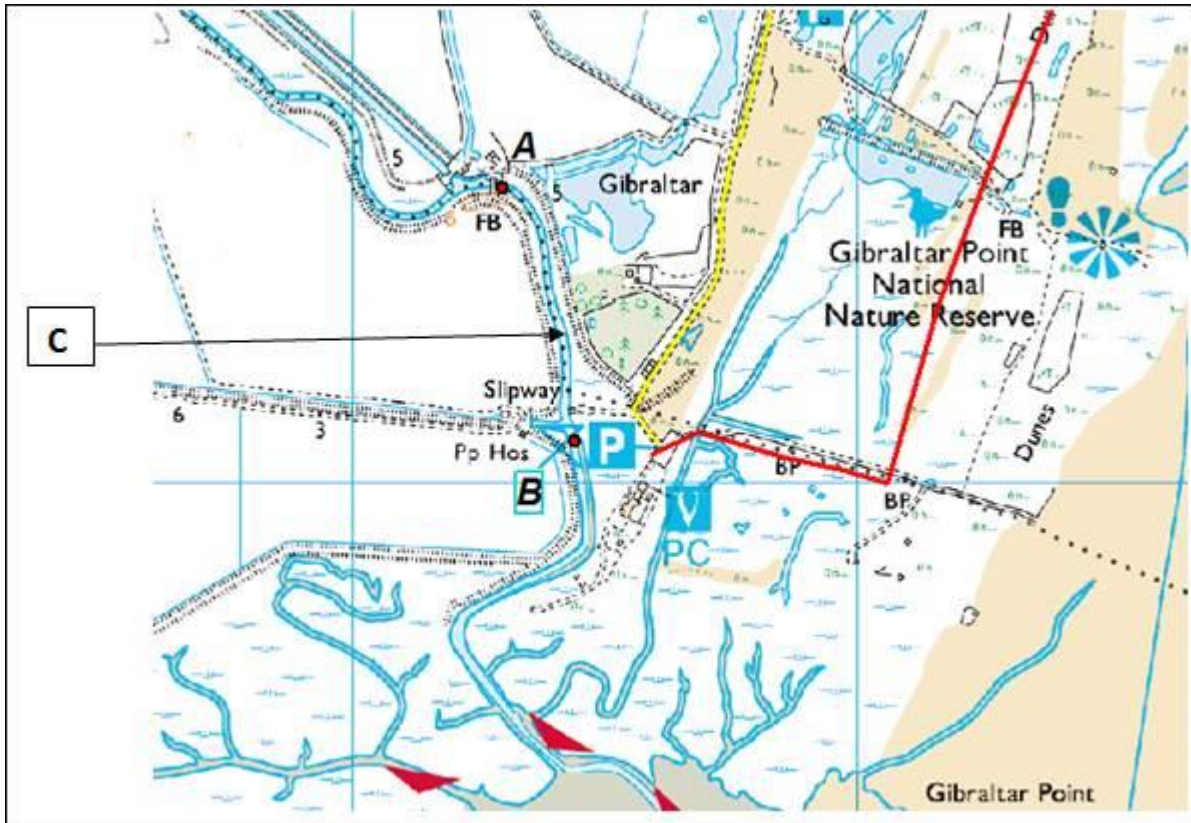


Fig1

## 2. Conclusion

Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the report and highlight any recommendations or further actions for consideration.

## 3. Consultation

### a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

## 4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	APPENDIX A - Option A & B Analysis

## 5. Background Papers

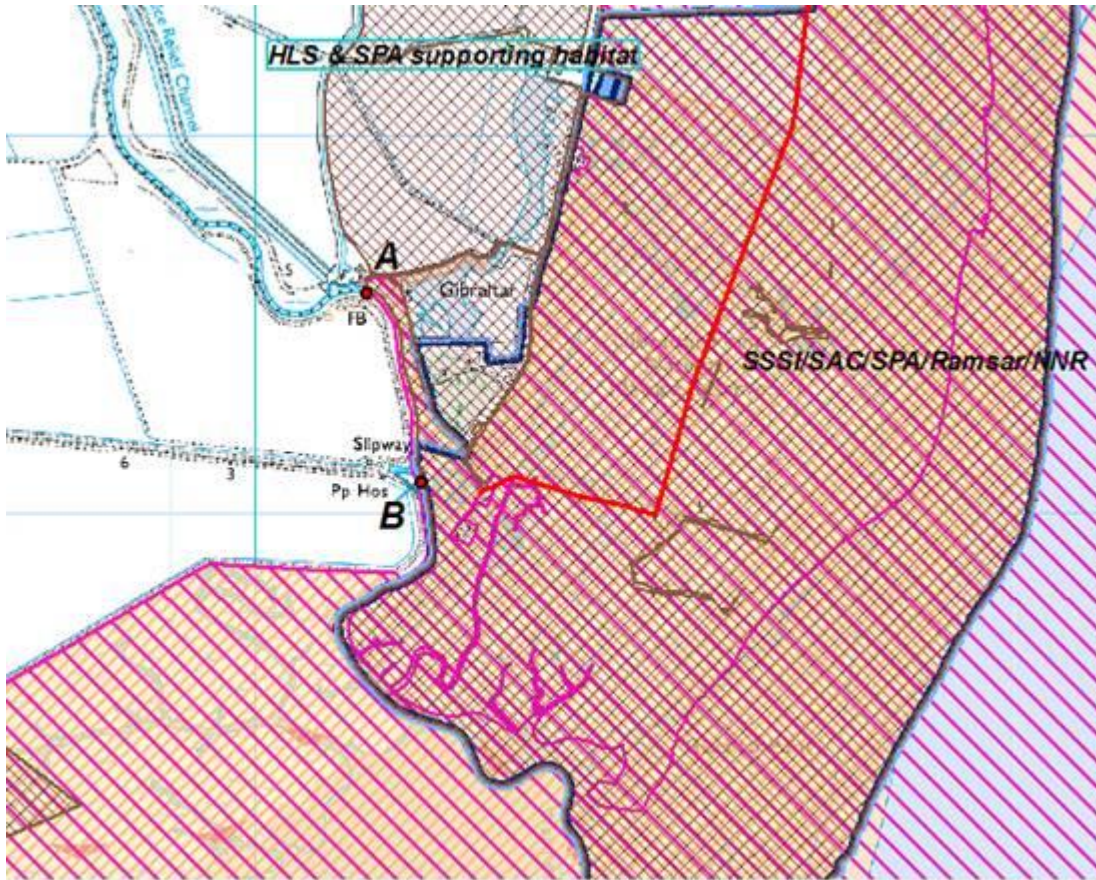
No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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Option A & B Analysis

Designations



The channel of the River Steeping between points A and B is approx 8-10 metres wide and has a high tidal range. To either side there is upper saltmarsh vegetation.



Existing slipway at point B, following high spring tide



Saltmarsh bounded by sea defence banks, looking upstream between points A and B

### **Existing IDB bridge at point A**

#### **FOR**

- No existing public access but IDB owners willing to consider use subject to agreement on future maintenance
- Highways engineer estimate of moderate costs c.£14k to upgrade to standard required
- Less likely to bring significant numbers to Wash sensitive section

#### **AGAINST**

- Approach from east bank may cause unacceptable disturbance to Jacksons Marsh, a key part of LWT reserve and considered “functionally linked” for SPA birds
- No acceptable screening option for approach via top of seabank or IDB access track
- Boardwalk at foot of seabank not favoured by EA unless engineered to high spec (high cost associated). Loss of habitat and disturbance involved could then be unacceptable for SPA/SAC.
- Route on saltmarsh could leave walkers on far side stranded at high tide with no alternative

### **Potential new footbridge crossing at point B**

A fixed footbridge cannot be installed at this point because the Environment Agency would require it to go at bank top level (50-100m span) to avoid obstructing floodwaters and as there are yacht moorings further upstream, so a small swing or lifting bridge has been suggested similar to those found on the canal network.

#### **FOR**

- Avoids disturbance to SPA birds
- Easily accessed from visitor centre car park
- A more direct crossing to continue trail on southern bank
- Favoured option by Wildlife Trust who manage site

#### **AGAINST**

- High construction costs – estimated £80 – 130k, and higher if landing stages required
- Small and specialised structure which all but one of consultants approached have declined to provide a design for (and that one does not include foundations). Design alone may be £20+k
- Local authority concerned at maintenance costs that may be associated with moving structure
- Consent needed from EA who must be satisfied that it will not obstruct floodwaters
- Site designated for wildlife (SSSI and European designations) – consent required from Natural England for works that may involve piling and heavy machinery access across saltmarsh
- Saltmarsh to either side - presence/depth of stable material for foundations unknown
- Right of navigation in use by small number of yachts upstream of this point. Landing stages may be required
- Safe operation - restriction on who can open the bridge. Needs to be dependably available to trail users
- No power supply present, so may need to be manually operated or use independent source
- Likely to bring higher number of users to sensitive section of Wash on south bank. Making it not possible to mitigate for effects on seabank and needing an alternative route inland.

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