



Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place

Report to:	Environment & Economy Scrutiny Committee
Date:	16 April 2024
Subject:	World Heritage Site Proposal - East Atlantic Flyway

Summary:
To provide Scrutiny Committee with the requisite information concerning the proposal to include the East Coast Flyway on the UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites

Actions Required:
The Environment & Economy Scrutiny Committee is invited to:

- 1) Recommend to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Economy & Planning that the County Council supports the proposal to add the East Coast Flyway to the UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites
- 2) Recommend that assistance to the project leads, government and other agencies is given by officers of the County Council as and when appropriate.

1. Background

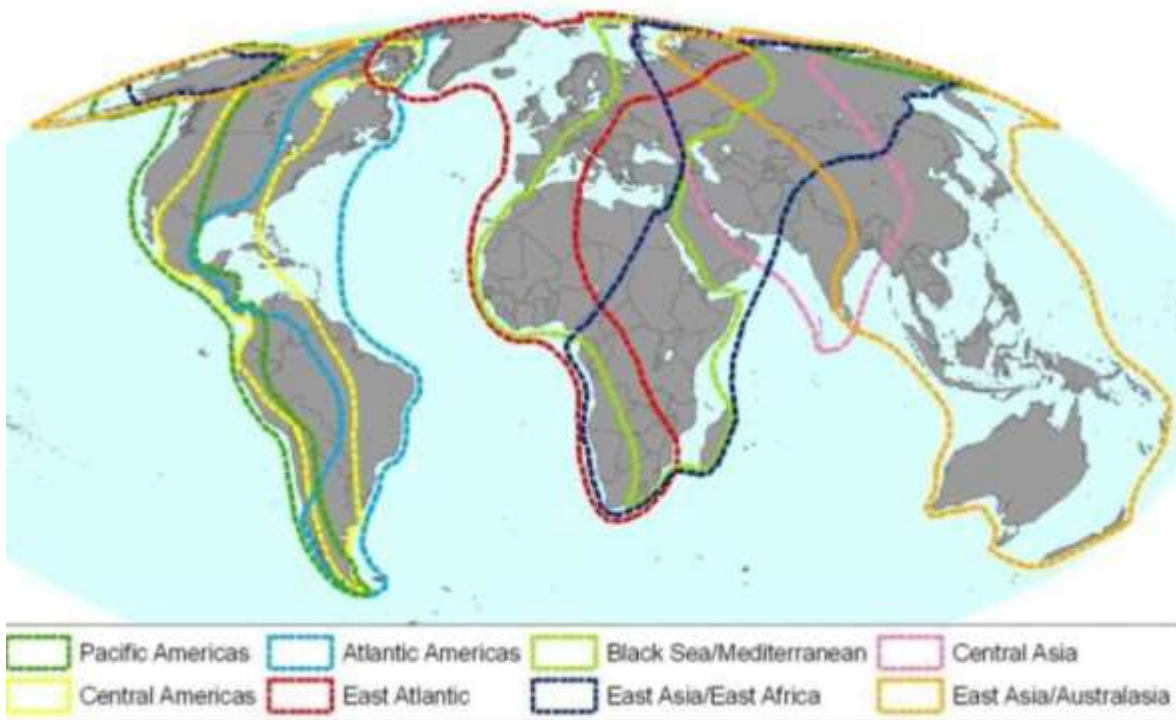
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) operates the selection of World Heritage Sites based on the principle of sites that contain "cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity".

To be selected, a World Heritage Site is nominated by their host country and determined by the international committee to be a unique landmark which is geographically and historically identifiable. A site can have a cultural or natural significance or a mixture of both. In the UK there are 33 World Heritage Sites of which 28 are cultural, 4 are natural and 1 is mixed. Of the 5 containing natural significance 2 are in overseas territories (Gough and Inaccessible Islands and the Henderson Islands). The mixed site is St Kilda, an island off northwest Scotland and the remaining sites are Giants Causeway in Northern Ireland and The Jurassic Coast of Devon and Dorset

1.2 Proposal

Led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), National Trust and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and with initial support from Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent County Councils, Coastal Partnership East, Babergh District Council and the Crown Estate, the proposal is for the England East Coast Wetlands (shortened name: East Coast Flyway) to be considered as a World Heritage Site.

The East Coast Flyway is part of the much longer East Atlantic Flyway, one of the 8 major migratory routes linking the north – south routes for billions of birds each year.



Assessment as to qualification for such a status by UNESCO is based on whether a site is of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and must meet at least one of the following ten criterion :

Cultural

- i. To represent a masterpiece of human creative genius
- ii. To exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design
- iii. To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living, or which has disappeared
- iv. To be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history

- v. To be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change
- vi. To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance

Natural

- vii. To contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance
- viii. To be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features
- ix. To be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals
- x. To contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation

In the case of the East Coast Flyway the proposal is that the area meets criterion (x) and that the site has OUV under criterion (x) because:

- 1) It is a world class complex of diverse coastal wetlands supporting globally important migratory waterbird populations on the wider East Atlantic Flyway making it a critical site within the world's eight major flyways
- 2) It plays a crucial role as a global exemplar of coastal adaptation and nature conservation management on a top flyway site in the face of a changing climate. Its mid-way location in the East Atlantic Flyway makes this a vital rung in the ladder for migratory birds that depend on it as a global staging area to moult and refuel, as well as its importance for breeding and wintering birds.

This coast is critical to the East Atlantic Flyway in terms of overall numbers of waterbirds (1 million in winter alone, many more on passage), 29 internationally important waterbird populations, including 6 globally (near) threatened species. The site hosts world-leading examples of coastal adaptation with 23 different sea defence 'managed realignment' projects and multiple restoration initiatives created during the last 30 years. These demonstrate how coastal adaptation can achieve multiple public benefits including for flood protection, habitat restoration, recreation, well-being, tourism, fisheries, water quality, and carbon storage.

The proposed boundary of the site is defined by existing nature conservation areas which collectively cover almost 170,000 hectares (ha) of the coast. This area includes large expanses of coastal grazing marsh, as well as around 85,000 ha of intertidal habitats that support over 155 different bird species. Across the upper shore, the intertidal areas include around 17,500 ha of saltmarsh habitat with some tidal reedbeds, while lower down the shore there are around 67,500 ha of mud and sandflat.

The area that will be considered as part of the site is the collection on existing designated Special Protection Areas (an EU designation for the protection of wild birds) and as shaded yellow below:

- Humber Estuary 37,630 ha
- Gibraltar Point 422ha
- The Wash 62,044 ha
- North Norfolk Coast 7,862 ha
- Breydon Water 1206 ha
- Halvergate Marshes 1433 ha
- Benacre to Eastern Bawents 471 ha
- Minsmere to Walberswick 1998 ha
- Alde-Ore Estuary 2404 ha
- Deben Estuary 981 ha
- Stour and Orwell Estuaries 3673 ha



- Hamford Water 3533 ha
- Colne Estuary 2720 ha
- Blackwater Estuary 4403 ha
- Dengie 3134 ha
- Crouch and Roach Estuaries 1848 ha
- Foulness 10942 ha
- Benfleet and Southend Marshes 2284 ha
- Thames Estuary and Marshes 4802 ha
- Medway Estuary and Marshes 4686 ha
- The Swale 6510 ha

1.3. Process

To be considered for World Heritage Site status the UK Government, through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), will invite applications for inclusion on the “UK Tentative List” once every ten years and consultation on the applications ran from March to July 2022. In determining the new Tentative List in April 2023 the Government has selected five new sites and retained two from the previous list:

- Birkenhead the People’s Park [Cultural]
- **East Atlantic Flyway – England East Coast Wetlands [Natural]**
- The Flow Country [Natural]
- Gracehill Moravian Church Settlements [Cultural, Transnational]
- Little Cayman Marine Parks and Protected Areas [Natural]
- York [Cultural]
- The Zenith of Iron Age Shetland [Cultural]

The East Atlantic Flyway, a migratory bird route over western parts of Europe including Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent, joins the UK’s list in recognition of its vital importance to bird populations and wildlife. The area sees huge transient bird populations pass through every year as the seasons change.

DCMS -April 2023

After one year of inclusion on the Tentative List the proposal must be fully worked up to complete a Nomination Dossier to contain all relevant information for UNESCO to consider. This is completed in three stages:

- Preliminary assessment by UNESCO
(Quality check/guidance on further work if needed)
- Technical Evaluation of the Dossier by DCMS
(Quality check)
- Submission to UNESCO
(UK can submit one nomination every two years)

In total this process can take up to 6 years in duration.

1.4 Benefits of World Heritage Site Status

At a UK scale designation will aid in the UK meeting its International Agreements on biodiversity and habitat protection and recognition and the status is considered by the public to be an important accolade enabling conservation through awareness and valuing habitats at a landscape scale. The status will enable greater access to funding and will link local communities in the role they play in:

- the management and protection of Outstanding Universal Value
- Issues of ecosystem sustainability and maintenance of biodiversity
- coastal adaptation

By bringing people regulators, stakeholders and communities together with a common purpose.

The status will act as a framework for collaborative working across 21 interconnected internationally important wetlands as part of a single globally important site and will place the Outstanding Universal Value at the heart of decision making and will be creating a lever for investment in people, eco-tourism and infrastructure.

What the status will NOT bring is any greater level of legal protection than is already afforded by existing habitat designations.

2. Conclusion

The East Coast Flyway is a globally important part of migratory superhighway for millions of birds and can be considered of significant importance on the global stage and protecting, restoring and enhancing this coastline could and should unlock new economic benefits for landowners and communities.

It is already understood that the east coast of England is going to be potential subject to significant change and working with nature will create the greatest benefits for people, nature and the climate through integrated adaptation strategies that will reflect the need for habitat and biodiversity protection alongside flood protection for coastal communities.

Environment Considerations

It is considered that there will be no adverse impacts to the environment through progression of the proposal to World Heritage Site status. Benefits are expected to be positive in terms of biodiversity protection and enhancement, habitat protection and opportunities for adaptive coastal change

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

n/a

4. 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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