Proceedings
2004 Annual Coastal Forum
Sefton Coast Partnership

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Introduction

The 2004 Annual Coastal Forum of the Sefton Coast Partnership was held at The Gild Hall, Church Road, Formby, on Saturday 7 February. It was chaired by Mr Ted Jackson, of the Sefton Coast Partnership and introduced by the Mayor of Sefton, Cllr Councillor David Pearson.

Background to the Forum

The Forum is intended to provide an opportunity for anyone who is interested in the future of the Sefton Coast to contribute to the work of the Partnership. The aim of the Forum is to improve communication among local communities, businesses and organisations with an interest in coastal zone. The Sefton Coast Partnership includes representatives of local communities as well as organisations directly involved in the management of the Sefton Coast.

Contents

Following feedback from the previous year's event, the 2004 forum was planned as an all day event. Four presentations took place in the morning session which included;

Presentations

1. The Partnership's Annual Report and an update on the Mersey Waterfront Park (Mr Ceri Jones)

2. Nature Conservation – Flora and Fauna and its protection, over different timescales(Dr Phil Smith)

3. Access and the need for visitor facilities – includes the concept behind the North West Coastal trail, improvements to the local network and facility development (Dave McAleavy, Andrew Brockbank and Caroline Salthouse)

4. Coastal Heritage – includes details on the heritage coast bid and the coastal heritage conference (Dr Reg Yorke)

(Brief handouts of speaker notes attached)

Following the buffet lunch the afternoon session consisted of 4 workshops, followed by coffee and report back from workshops.

Workshops

1. The Future of Red Squirrel Conservation

2. Access and the Need for Visitor Facilities

3. History and Archaeology

4. Interpretation, the stories behind Sefton Coast, what's important and how should they be told.

(Brief write ups of the four workshops attached)

Forum Close

The Chair of Sefton Coast Partnership, Mr Ted Jackson, thanked everyone for attending the annual forum and the speakers. He also thanked all those involved in the logistics of planning the Forum. This included Mrs Lorna Lander who administers the Partnership, the Technical team of the Planning and Economic Regeneration Department and the Coast and Countryside Service of the Leisure Services Department.

Feedback on Questionnaire Responses

In addition to bespoke letters from Dr Phil Smith and Ceri Jones thanking those involved in the organisation of the event a number of questionnaire feedback forms were returned. 70% of those replying, responded positively to the event.

Positive:-

- Good attendance
- Good organisation of the event
- Excellent venue x 5
- Good refreshments and food
- Support for Heritage Coast Bid,

Less positive comments were as follows:-

- Went on too long, suggest shortening the event in places
- Disturbance caused during sessions, through setting up refreshments and food etc
- More time for questions and answers.
- Improvements to sound system e.g chest microphone, (loop for hard of hearing)

The Feedback will be taken on board for the 2005 Forum.

Speaker Summaries for Coastal Forum 14th Feb 2004

Presentations

- Patterns of floral and faunal change over different time-scales on the Sefton Coast
- Access on the changing coast (Parts 1, 2 & 3)
- Man on the Sefton Coast

Patterns of floral and faunal change over different time-scales on the Sefton Coast

Philip H. Smith February 2004

Sefton has what is known as a "soft" coast, dominated by sands and silts and therefore susceptible to rapid change by natural forces. These changes can occur over long, medium or short time-scales.

Long-term changes are exemplified by what happened after the end of the Ice Age, about 10,200 years ago. Natterjack Toads and Sand Lizards, which require open habitats, must have got here about 9500 years ago before trees grew up cutting off their migration routes from the south. The mammal fauna was dominated by large ungulates, such as the Wild Ox or Aurochs, now globally extinct.

In a later age, we gained such species as the Rabbit, introduced by the Normans in about 1100AD and the Red Squirrel, which is dependent on pine woodland planted on the sand-dunes from about 1887. The latter is now threatened by an invasion of Grey Squirrels, first introduced into Cheshire in 1876.

Several species of breeding birds have been lost from the dune coast in the last 60 years or so but this is offset, in part, by recent additions, so that the current total is about 67 species, compared with 72 in 1966.

The dunes probably now support more kinds of higher plant than in the past -941 at the latest count. Only about 12 species are known to have become extinct and 59 new native plants have been added to the list since 1963. About 28% of the flora has been introduced by man and, unsurprisingly, this figure is increasing.

Short-term changes are demonstrated by two recent studies at Birkdale. Counts of higher plants in frontal dune slacks in 1983 and 2003 show a 43% increase, while species of conservation importance have increased by a remarkable 80%. This seems to be due to the development of plant communities over time and the diversification of habitats by active management.

The Birkdale Green Beach has only existed since 1986 but now covers 44ha (106 acres). Its floral richness has increased rapidly to 227 higher plants in 2003, 31 of these being "notable". This site is important because it provides habitats for "pioneer" plants and animals in a dune system, which has become over-mature during the past half-century.

Change will continue in the future, in part due to global warming. Already, southern species of insect, such as the Ruddy Darter and Migrant Hawker dragonflies, have

invaded the coast and are well-established. Northern species may decline, although there is not much evidence for that so far.

Most recent change has been beneficial to the dune flora and fauna, thanks in part to the efforts of land managers. As a result, the new century finds the dunes and most of their special plants and animals in good heart, with the prospect of more improvements to come.

Access on a Changing Coast

Andrew Brockbank, Dave McAleavy & Caroline Salthouse Feb 2004

Part 1 Formby Case Study

Andrew Brockbank The National Trust

The Sefton Coast Management Scheme was founded in 1978 to address issues of recreational damage of the dunes particularly at Lifeboat Road and Victoria Road, Formby. Work teams carried out dune stabilisation and repair work supported by the Manpower Services Commission, the Countryside Commission, Merseyside County Council, and the National Trust.

Gateways: The coastal car parks at Formby continue to attract over 600,000 visitors each year with the highest number of first time visitors to any part of the Merseyside Coast. The Formby sites are seen as 'Gateways', key access for visitors to the Merseyside Coast.

The National Trust site at **Victoria Road** is within walking distance of Freshfield station with regular services to Liverpool and Southport.

Improvements to road-side access is a priority and linked improvements to the pedestrian link with the station and the Coastal Footpath will add value. Solutions are being sought to issues of traffic congestion at Victoria Road and one option will be to promote **Lifeboat** Road, which has a well located car park with spare capacity. Improvements to access and visitor facilities are one of Sefton Council's priorities. Lifeboat Road holds a Rural Beach Award and the excellent water quality (Guideline standard) would qualify it for Blue Flag status.

Meeting Expectations?: Sefton Leisure Services and the National Trust are working to co-ordinate plans for improved site facilities with complementary offer. Achieving improvements to access will include an extended network of paths to Countryside for All Standards centred around an improved coastal path.

Other recreational interests are important and where possible new trails and links will be considered for horse riding and cycling. Formby is a popular area for running and orienteering.

Expectations of what is possible vary immensely. The coastal staff, are committed to promoting safety and a feeling of security amongst visitors. Difficulties with anti-social behaviour have been eased by the introduction of Merseyside Police's quad bike patrols, due to start again in early April 2004.

Changing Coastline: Coastal landowners aim to work with natural processes and change. Dune roll back and growth of Marram grass are vital to landscape quality and sea defence. Access provision needs to be resilient and flexible.

Managing access presents particular challenges at Formby. Annual erosion at Victoria Road is around 4 metres with dramatic consequences for access after spring storm tides. Winter storm tides cause steep dune cliffs. The landowners regularly maintain dune access routes. Board walks must be regularly cleared of blown sand.

The National Trust removes rubble each year to restore safe access to the beach. Emergency access to the beach is difficult at times due to the steep sand slopes which form.

Managed Retreat: The coastline at Formby has been retreating for over 100 years. The Pine Trees Cafe was lost to the sea in 1961 and Pinetrees Caravan Park was relocated in the early 1980's.

Managed retreat is the only practical option at Formby. The car park at Victoria Road needs to be set back and the coastal path will be realigned to pass through the coastal pinewoods rather than the frontal dunes.

New Opportunities: Whilst visitor demand for access remains high, damage to the sensitive dune landscape can be avoided by careful layout and design. A co-ordinated strategy is being prepared for Formby and the wider coast. This will include reducing dependence on cars as the main means of access to the coast, providing new visitor facilities and generating alternative sources of income, including catering.

Changing Coastline: Coastal landowners aim to work with natural processes and change. Dune roll back and growth of Marram grass are vital to landscape quality and sea defence. Access provision needs to be resilient

Opportunities for education and learning will remain an important part of the provision at Formby, which receives over 30,000 educational visitors each year. The opportunity to be inspired by the magnificent coastal dunes, with their rich natural heritage and unique features like the Formby footprints, will be enhanced by providing new interpretation and information.

Part 2 - Beach Management in Sefton

Dave McAleavy
Head of Coast and Countryside, Leisure Services Department, Sefton MBC

A report 'Beach Management in Sefton'; resulting from a 1990 issues report was issued for consultation in January 1992. As a result of the consultation the need was identified to produce a more detailed working plan to develop in particular the principles of zoning. A Beach Management Plan, developed from this original report, was implemented in April 1993. This plan, agreed with English Nature fom1ed the basis for the Councils' General Consent.

Beach management issues are part of the wider concept of coastal zone management (CZM) and a revised Beach Management Plan will form an important component of the Coast Management Plan second review 1997 -2006.

The five year period of the revised Beach Management Plan will be linked to agreed management objectives and consented activities and operations within the Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The strategy will take into account the Regulation 33 Guidelines issued by English Nature.

Beach Zoning

Sefton's beaches are in effect already zoned as defined by land ownership. It was identified as a priority that the problems associated with those beaches in the north of the Borough. managed by Sefton and in particular the areas of foreshore where vehicular access is allowed be physically zoned through the use of beach barriers.

Previous to Apri11993, vehicular access was allowed over the whole of the foreshore between Ainsdale and Southport. This area was 9 kilometres in length, by up to 3 kilometres out to the waters edge; the size of this area made it impossible to control the behaviour of visitors and more importantly enforce the Seashore Byelaws and collect incidental litter .

The problems associated with the foreshore are usually caused by a minority of users. In recent years more people have had access to a car and this, along with the development of high performance off road recreational vehicles, such as quad and trike motorcycles. had led to the considerable un-authorised and damaging use of the foreshore and dune areas. Because of the beach management plan zoning policies these problems are now effectively managed.

Foreshore cleansing was also a problem as strandline debris was scraped up using machines and deposited at the top of the beach and in the dunes. This debris included all sewage related litter (plastics etc) and flotsam and jetsam.

Beach Barriers

In May 1993 the installation of the beach barriers was complete with areas of beach defined as vehicle free, inaccessible to normal beach traffic except for that of fishermen.

The southern barrier at Ainsdale (1 kilometre from Shore Road), was erected forming the boundary of the summer car parking area with vehicle free amenity beach immediately to the south for quiet enjoyment for those members of the public who prefer an area of beach with no cars. This area is identified for kite buggying during the summer .

The second barrier at Ainsdale,1 kilometre north of Shore Road, created the northern boundary of the summer car parking area and effectively removed the ability of vehicles to move between Ainsdale and Southport. Defining a parking area helped staff enormously in managing the use of the beach by vehicles.

The area immediately north of this barrier is also defined as amenity beach and is popular as a quiet area of beach for walking and jogging, it is also used at times by a model aircraft club and for horse riding. The northern area further north towards Southport is defined as a sanctuary, particularly during the winter; but during the summer has developed into a well used section of vehicle free amenity beach for

visitors. This area has seen rapid accretion and development of new habitats and is an important zone for wading birds.

The third physical barrier was erected just south of Weld Road and completed the physical zoning of the northern beaches. From this barrier to Southport Pier is the main resort beach car parking area.

Partnership and Policies on the Sefton Coast
Since July 2003, the Sefton Coast has benefited from the presence of the Merseyside Police Quad Section. Based at the National Trust Offices in Formby, two dedicated Police Officers have worked closely with land managers along the entire coast and at Rimrose Valley Country Park to target offenders and to assist staff in enforcing byelaws.

The Officers are equipped with quad bikes and are fully conversant with both terrestrial sites and the foreshore. They are in daily contact with coastal staff and have become an integral part of our operations.

The table below shows the figures (for the coast) to date from the Section:

Number	Offence	Comments
10	Arrests	Theft from motor vehicle. disqualified driving, drugs. warrants, obstructing police
40	Summons/fixed penalties	Road traffic and byelaw offences
100	Stop forms	Issued for poaching, going equipped to poach, sunbathing naked, lighting fires. riding/driving vehicles on the beach.
80	VDRS	Vehicle defect rectification tickets
30	MSM Q1	Issued for riding/driving vehicles where prohibited
Non recordable incidents		First Aid, lost children, kite flying, fishermen, wildlife. property washed up on beach

Their support was invaluable over the August Bank Holiday weekend, helping to control the 'Cruise' on Southport Beach. They are currently working with the National Trust, English Nature and Coast and Countryside on a number of operations. including targeting poachers, alleged indecency offences on Ainsdale Beach and a spate of thefts from vehicles in car parks. This successful partnership will be continuing for the foreseeable furore.

Part 3 - The North West Coast Trail – *From Concept to reality*
Speaker: Caroline Salthouse, Regional Coastal Project Officer, NWRA

The Concept
A continuous coastal trail running from Chester to Carlisle which will encourage both residents and visitors to explore, appreciate and enjoy one of the North West's greatest assets -our coastal landscapes, heritage and settlements.

The Birth of an idea
2001
PISCES, the Partnership of Irish Sea Coast and Estuary Strategies which includes the Sefton Coast Partnership, came up with the idea of the trail, initially calling it the 'Golden Thread' to reflect the sandy nature of the North West coast. It was also referred to as a 'String of Pearls' –the pearls being visitor centres and attractions scattered along the trail.

2002
The Coastal Forum, at that time hosted by Government Office for the North West, was involved and the North West Coastal Trail Group was formed. This group comprises local authorities and key non-governmental organisations such as Friends of the Lake District and the RSPB, along with the North West Development Agency. In July a 'Missing Links' report was compiled by the Morecambe Bay Partnership on behalf of the Coastal Trail group -this report outlined the key gaps in the route and indicative costs for overcoming them.

2003
Research funded by the NWDA culminating in the Concept Feasibility Study Report was published in April and gave a green light to the concept, indicating many benefits to the region. The findings were presented to an audience of key decision makers in October, resulting in a clear mandate to take the work forward. The Feasibility Study Report and a synopsis of the launch event are downloadable from the Coastal Forum website at: *www.nwcoastalforum.co.uk*

Following the launch further research, jointly funded by the NWRA and the Coastal Forum has been commissioned to produce an Implementation Framework, which will look in more detail at the studies, costings and partnership structures needed to turn the Trail concept into reality.

2004
The Implementation Framework Report will be complete by the end of April and will then be used to support funding bids and to help to get the necessary structures and agreements in place.

Key Economic Benefits

- Promoting a positive image of and showcase for the North West's coastal assets
- A regionally significant recreation resource, linking to regional and national routes, attracting new visitors and longer stays, hence greater local spend
- Linking regeneration initiatives e.g. coastal regional parks
- Encouraging exploration of local areas by links with other local routes
- Creating income, employment and diversification opportunities in surrounding communities e.g. *Pembrokeshire Coastal Path* '96/'97: *£12m,* 560 *jobs*

Key Social and Environmental Benefits

- Generally flat terrain and all-ability sections appealing to a wide range of users -young, old, infirm, disabled
- Including, not replacing, existing routes and ensuring consistent standards and well maintained, well marked routes.

- Accessible by public transport -new links / facilities? -inclusion of cycle carriage facility?
- Opportunities for social inclusion, community health, etc., -links to health and community campaigns
- Opportunities for 'greening' of the trail corridor in appropriate areas, e.g. urban fringe

Factors to Consider
Route:

- Determining the route - who should decide? Community and land owner/manager involvement.
- Resolving the gaps - new bridges? Quiet road sections where road use unavoidable?
- Setting and maintaining the standards -different standards for different terrain applied consistently across the Trail length
- Consistent and non-confusing way marking -avoiding proliferation of signs
- Short term capital funding - for gap projects, bringing existing routes up to new standards
- Infrastructure - visitor centres, toilets, interpretation, public transport provision, car parks

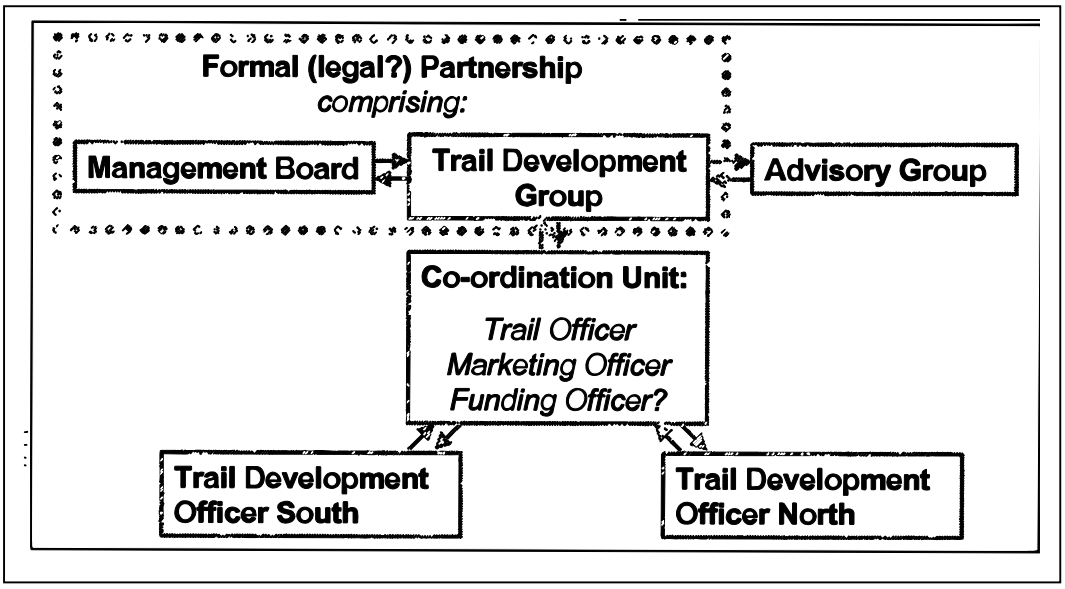
Usage:

- Public expectation levels with regard to timing of a launch and marketing - danger of disappointing the public if the route is not substantially complete or of a standard.
- User information provision, including public transport information, to enable visitors to plan
- Conflicts -users, wildlife, archaeology, land owners - how will these be resolved?
- Monitoring, keeping relevant statistics, including economic benefits -important information for long term funding commitments and engagement of key partners
- External facility provision - B & Bs, etc. -these need to be in place for the long term success of the trail but the demand needs to be there for new businesses to start up

Management:

- Co-ordination -Trail Unit? How is the core unit financed? How many staff and what skills?
- Partnership -who should be involved, how will the partnership be maintained - legal status?
- Promotion / marketing -regional/national / international to attract from outside the region?
- Long term maintenance funding -legal agreements in place to ensure continued funding?

Trail Management
Possible Structure:



So How Can YOU Get Involved?

- Complete a survey form (available on the website at *ww.nwcoastalforum.co.uk)*
- Tell your friends, MPs and Councillors
- Get involved with local community forums and initiatives through organisations such as the Sefton Coast Partnership and Mersey Waterfront

And, once the Trail is up and running:
Join a 'Friends of the North West Coastal Trail' group or local wardening schemes

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Man on the Sefton Coast

Dr R. A. Yorke

Man has been on the Sefton Coast for over 5,000 years. The results of this today are expressed in a number of different ways including impact on landscape, wildlife and the creation of our cultural heritage.

Even the earliest visitors left physical traces of their activities. In the lower Alt Valley around Ince Blundell many flints tools found during Field-walking tell of his presence during the Neolithic period and at Formby Point, the actual footprints of our Neolithic ancestors have survived preserved in the silty muds on the edge of ancient coastal lagoons. At Hightown a marshland trackway, carefully constructed of tree branches, recently exposed under the retreating coastline and dated to the Neolithic, dramatically tells of man's first attempts to live on the coastal marshland round the mouth of the Alt. The discovery of the 'hoard' of Viking coins at Little Crosby, in the 17th supports the increasing importance of this area after the Norse landings in the early l0th century.

We know from the geological record that the sea has regularly 'transgressed' far inland during the last 10,000 years. The first evidence for man's efforts to prevent this are seen in the series of sea-banks in the Southport area. A series of banks gradually extending further West, represents the clearest possible attempts of man to control the position of the Sefton coastline from the 14th Century. Further south at Ravenmeols in AD 1289, much land had been lost to the sea but this did not prevent the Cistercian Monastery of Stanlow from the constructing a Water-mill on the north bank of the Alt which remained for 200 years, accompanied by the construction of Sea Banks and Flood-gates. These were the first of the series of embankments and tidal flood gates, preceding the work of the Alt Commissioners in the 18th century who reclaimed what is now Altcar Rifle range and in so doing converted the mouth of the Alt to the narrow water-course we know today.

By the early 16th Cent. much coastal land had been lost at Argarmeols, (west of today's Birkdale) and also at Ainsdale. Over and above natural processes we can not be sure that this was not in part due to human disturbance of the coast. John Houston postulated this as the real reason for the inundation by the dunes of the settlement and the subsequent decay of the original13th Cent Chapel at Formby Point. It is clear that the need for fixation of the dunes by the planting of Marram grass was recognised and legally enforced on Tenants by the Manorial Courts in the 17th Century.

It seems that early farming on this coast was largely pastoral; on the estuarine salt-marshes and on the grasslands between the dunes and the moss. Land division was, depending on the height of the water-table, (known locally as the Ream), by means of ditches, (dykes); draining towards the mossland or in the drier areas turfbanks, known locally as 'cops'. Hedges were not locally a feature but scattered wind breaks consisting of rows of trees where present adjacent to the manorial estates by the mid nineteenth century. At this stage the only woodlands where around the manorial dwellings at Formby Hall, Ince Blundell Hall and Crosby Hall. The 1845 Tithe maps show farm land to be a traditional mix of pasture, meadowland and arable. Particularly in the Formby area a 'Town Field' system based on open strips was an important feature right up to the mid-19th Cent.. The extensive Dune areas were actively and carefully managed as Warrens up to the late 19th Cent. These were important to the local landowners and economy and their management was in the hands of trusted tenants who paid 'Rabbit-rent' for their lease. Poaching was rife as was illegal catching of birds on the dunes by means of a long line known as a 'Pintle'. It was largely to counter this activity that a special keeper was appointed at Ainsdale in the 1920' s. -the first serious attempt to protect wildlife (as distinct from private property), on the Sefton Coast.

The extension of cultivation was in the mid-nineteenth century facilitated by the sudden availability of abundant supplies of first class natural fertiliser in the form of human dung., brought out of Liverpool by train, in the attempt to improve the sanitary conditions of the inner city prior to the creation of an adequate sewer system. This particularly benefited Formby, where a special manure-siding was constructed at what was to become known as 'Freshfield' by one Thomas Fresh. Asparagus cultivation on land among the rear dunes involved much hard work, levelling the dunes and using a back-breaking cultivation technique akin to the system previously traditional on the sandy western coasts of Scotland. It seems that it was partly in

order to protect the valuable new crop that the two local land owning families first began planting pines along the approximately 40ft dune ridge running parallel and inland to the shore. The first experimental plantation was planted by the Revd.. Richard Formby of Formby Hall on two acres of his land at Ravenmeols. This was in existence by 1795 and is today the area known as 'Firwood'.

The success of this bold experiment clearly surprised other land-owners in a county not known for its woodlands and in such an exposed situation. It was followed by further planting at Shorrocks Hill. In the 1880's/90's this example was followed by Charles Weld-Blundell who planted an area near what is now known as Victoria Road,. Planting then continued northwards as far as Ainsdale and the resulting woodlands can possibly be considered to be man's one most significant impact on the natural Sefton coast.

Sand-winning was during the last century a major industrial activity on the coast. This lead to the wholesale removal of a major part of the frontal dunes in Ravenmeols, particularly at Cabin Hill, resulting in a serious weakness of the dune-barrier. This had to be rectified by the creation of a replacement barrier during the 197Os. The removal of a large sand-hill adjacent to the Wicks Lane Path subsequently became the site of the 'Man-made Lake', one of the first undertakings of the new created Sefton Coastal Management Team , lead by John Houston in the early 198O's. The 6Os -7Os had also seen the extensive use of the dunes between Victoria Road and Lifeboat Road for tipping of Nicotine waste. This waste is now appearing on the eroding dune face and there has been a major impact on dune flora in that area due to its high nitrogenous content.

Recreational use of the coastal strip has been an increasingly important activity since the late 19th Cent.. Golf started at Hall Road, Blundellsands, in 1873. Formby followed in 1884 the perfect terrain lead ultimately to the establishment of many courses and Sefton now claims to be the Mecca of golf in England. It is interesting to note that the land which was Freshfield Golf Club, prior to its requisition by the RAF in WW2 is now one of the most important areas of dune heath-land in the country and it pleasing to note the happy co-existence of golfing and wildlife conservation along this coast.

During this presentation I will be giving some examples of man's activities and impact on the coast and finally asking whether the cultural history of this coast supports its possible designation as a 'Heritage Coast'.

Workshop 1 - The Future of Red Squirrel Conservation

Summary of a workshop held as part of the Sefton Coast Forum on 7th February 2004 at Gild Hall, Formby

Chair : Dave McAleavy (Sefton Coast and Countryside Serive)
Facilitator/Rapporteur : (Fiona Robertson (Lancashire Wildlife Trust)

Fiona Robertson, The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside presented the work that is being carried out through the Red Alert Partnership to safeguard the red squirrel in Sefton. She went on to present the National Strategy for Red squirrel refuges and buffer zones and highlighted the fact that Sefton had been chosen to be designated . The group went on to discuss the grey squirrel control effort needed to ensure the survival of the red squirrel on Sefton and that a holistic effort is needed by all land owners, managers, conservation organisations, public bodies, members of the public etc. At present resources are minimal and work is being carried out on a fire fighting basis and that we will lose our red squirrel populations if action is not taken immediately.

A debate was then chaired by Dave McAleavy, Sefton Coast and Countryside and reported on by Janette Easton, English Nature, looking at the future of the red squirrel with current resources and the need to conserve the red squirrel. The group agreed the following statements:

- The red squirrel is important enough to adopt a policy to protect them.
- Full support was given from the group for the designation of the refuge and buffer zone.
- It was accepted that disease is an immediate problem and grey squirrel competion is a long term problem.
- The red squirrel population is strong at present in the proposed refuge area.
- Red and grey squirrels will not live side by side.
- There is a need to resource and communicate the refuge and buffer zone policy, ideas from the group included: * the need for a famous champion e.g. David Bellamy, Bill Odie. *The involvement of land owners through supplementary grants. *Tourist revenue. *Lobbying for widespread grey squirrel control. * Make a recommendation to the partnership that there are not enough resources at present.
- The use of tactics to inform the public e.g. parapox pictures in the press.
- Use of the message that red squirrels will replace grey squirrels in areas where greys already have a foothold.
- Public bodies are signed up to the ‘North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan’ but actions need to be throughout departments e.g. highways, leisure, planning etc.
- Action is needed now, with everyone onboard with long term finance.

The main point brought out by the workshop is that there is an immediate need for action throughout Sefton. Red Alert has strong support for its policy in this area with press releases creating more calls than can be coped with. At present we do not have sufficient resources to carry out the necessary grey squirrel control to protect the future survival of the red squirrel.

Workshop 2 – Access and the Need for Visitor Facilities

Summary of a workshop held as part of the Sefton Coast Forum on 7th February 2004 at Gild Hall, Formby

Chair: Andrew Brockbank *(National Trust and Chair of the Sefton Coast Partnership Access and Interpretation Task Group)*
Rapporteur: Caroline Salthouse *(NWRA and North West Coastal Forum Secretariat)*

Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone and introduced the workshop session. The SCP is developing an Access, Information and Interpretation Strategy. A workshop took place at the at last Sefton Coast Forum and input from that workshop was taken forward during the year and used as a basis for this workshop which has the focus of physical access issues and scope for improvement. A separate workshop would be taking place contemporaneously to explore interpretation issues.

The first part of the workshop was a presentation to pass information to participants, followed by a discussion on future priorities for the four proposed 'investment zones'.

A funding bid to enable preparation of the Access, Information and Interpretation Strategy is being prepared by Sefton MBC for submission to Mersey Waterfront Park. All participants should have had been sent a copy of the consultants' brief prior to the workshop, however some participants had not received it. The aim of circulating the brief was to receive feedback on the quality and expectations which need to be met by the brief in order to ensure the resulting Strategy is effective.

PRESENTATION

Workshop Aims

1. To understand the mechanisms by which access improvements may be delivered and to identify relevant consultative fora.
2. To inform the workshop participants of the projects currently being considered for funding
3. To consider the issues identified by the Access and Interpretation Task Group which determine the quality of physical access to the Sefton coast
4. To seek views on future priorities for access and basic visitor facilities in each of the four investment zones identified by the Sefton Land Managers Group, i.e.
    a. Crosby to Hightown
    b. Altmouth to Fisherman's Path
    c. Fisherman's Path to Weld Road
    d. Weld Road to Marshside

Understanding the Mechanisms by which Access Improvements can be Delivered:

1. Rights of Way improvements (responsibility of the highways authorities)
2. New permissive routes (for example, part of the Sefton Coast footpath route is permissive)
3. Permit systems such as that used to control access by horses on the bridle path and beaches
4. Long distance routes like the Trans Pennine Trail which have joint management arrangements, mechanisms for ensuring that investment is worth doing, mechanisms to reduce landowners' problems re dedication of access routes
5. Removal of physical barriers – this is a legal duty under the Disability Discrimination Act but natural barriers not always possible to overcome

6. Remove barriers by information improvements to inform people's choices regarding route distance, surface width, slope, etc. (the Chair noted that Sefton's Rights of Way Officer was present, and a representative from Merseytravel)
7. Marketing and promotion of the routes – there needs to be appropriate investment and a certain standard of access worthy of marketing before the route is promoted to avoid user disappointment. Also visitor welcome and customer care issues need addressing
8. Links to transport networks – Sefton has good rail access along the coast but there is a need to ensure the link is as good as it can be
9. Recognised standards at local area level - natural areas need sympathetic treatments, there is a place for natural sandy or grassy tracks as they provide part of pleasure of countryside access, but there is a need to consider alternative surfaces where there are many users with different needs.

Identification of Consultative Fora

EXAMPLES OF CONSULTATIVE FORA		
Strategic Level	**Forum**	**Plans / Strategies**
Regional	North West Coastal Forum	North West Coastal Trail
Sub-regional	Merseyside Local Access Forum	• Mersey Strategy • Mersey Waterfront Way
Unitary Authority	• Rights of Way User Groups • Cycle Forum	Rights of Way Improvement Plans
Landscape Unit	• SCP Access & Interpretation Task Group • Beach Consultation Group	SCP Access, Information and Interpretation Strategy

Regional level
The North West Coastal Trail provides an opportunity to link 2 roman towns (Chester and Carlisle) and to act as a trigger for tourism and economy, heritage and health

Sub regional level
- Merseyside Local Access Forum was set up following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW 2000). It is a consultative / advisory group with representation from different fields - land managers, experts, health, etc. They comment on the Rights of Way Improvement Plans and access to 'open country' as defined by CROW (very few areas in Merseyside fit the CROW classification)
- Mersey Waterfront Way / Mersey Strategy – Mersey Strategy is an example of a plan, in this case an estuary development and management plan which includes access issues; Mersey Waterfront Way is a proposal emerging from Mersey Waterfront Park which would help to renew sections of the Wirral Way and the Sefton Coast Footpath.

Unitary Authority level (Sefton MBC)
- Rights of Way User Group and Cycle Forum help to provide local solutions to local issues, for example are the existing Rights of Way in the right place, etc. An Access Improvement Plan (Rights of Way *and* cycle access) have to be produced in each area by 2007 under current legislation. Guidance on how to prepare these is not yet available but there are demonstrations taking place nationally.

Landscape unit level
- SCP Access & Interpretation Task Group – a key output is the development of the SCP Access, Information and Interpretation Strategy. Another example of action at this level is Sefton's Beach Management Consultation Group.

Information about Current Project Bids

Crosby to Hightown

1. Crosby Coastal Park
2. Crosby Baths to Marine Lake
3. Coastal path and promenades
4. Potters Barn - an old farmhouse which could have a better use as a historic gateway

Alt to Fisherman's Path

1. Coastal Path Project: an early win would be the Kirklake to Fisherman's Path section, for which match funding is available. This will link to the Cornerstone Walk to the north and double as an extraction route for forestry (Mersey Forest may provide some cash match funding). It will continue on through the dunes, so no longer on the beach itself.
2. Freshfield Dune Heath: Lancashire Wildlife Trust are consulting with local residents
3. Victoria Road access improvements – National Trust: access alongside Victoria Road to be suitable for all users to improve access to the beach car park and dunes
4. Victoria Road pedestrian access – Sefton: improvements to kerbs, etc. for pedestrian access to Freshfield Station to help alleviate congestion and improve traffic management, so synergy with the National Trust plans.

Fisherman's Path to Weld Road

1. Lido Environmental Training Scheme
2. Ainsdale Discovery Centre / Lido Plans: major plans for the Discovery Centre and Lido as a Heritage Centre, with a private investor
3. Ainsdale Station to Southport via beach: transport project to link the two, this initiative is looking for private funding

Weld Road to Marshside

1. Southport to Ainsdale coastal path: upgrading of coastal path – the best chance is through the North West Coastal Trail
2. Southport Marine Lake
3. RSPB Reserve restoration work

Access, Information & Interpretation Strategy – Cultural & Natural Heritage

- Physical access element
- Rights of Way Improvement Plans are not directly included
- Interpretation & Visitor Information

All these projects are being co-ordinated within Sefton and are being submitted to Mersey Waterfront Park as they are being seen to add value, with landowners likely to provide some cash match funding. Mersey Waterfront has a limited pot of funding available, but if the projects are successful it is possible that more money might be made available from the North West Development Agency – there is around 10 years of development / activity which could be carried out if enough funding was forthcoming.

DISCUSSION

Seeking Views on Future Priorities

The Chair opened up the floor for discussion by asking if there were any strong feelings about any of the projects outlined.

There was a wide ranging discussion, with most workshop participants taking part. The views expressed are summarised below:

Southport

- Park and ride – people shortcut onto the Coast Road so a fence is needed for safety
- Visitor Attractions – the new Eco Centre in Southport is already partly constructed

Ainsdale

- Public Transport to Ainsdale Discovery Centre / the Lido – the issue of elderly or infirm visitors not being able to walk from the station to the Ainsdale Discovery Centre was raised. It was felt an additional public transport link is needed.

- General Access to Ainsdale National Nature Reserve - access from the coastal road was not felt to be visitor friendly or safe. There is a sharp turning into the National Nature Reserve and there is no public transport and no disabled parking. The gate makes the situation worse. It was felt that visitors are not encouraged by the existing arrangements and there is a need to involve English Nature in the Ainsdale Discovery Centre / Lido proposals, although it was also felt that people won't walk there from a car park at the Lido so English Nature needs a small car park for 20 – 25 cars, near the railway and there would still be dangers getting out from the car park onto the main road. The Chair noted that English Nature is already involved in the Access and Interpretation Task Group and has a commitment to look at disabled vehicular access. Part of the problem is the extent of the existing car park, which is acknowledged to be necessary for access to the site. The Chair accepted the dangers posed by the fast coast road and the sharp entrance turn. Sustainable transport solutions need to be found and English Nature are keen to embrace this approach.

- Differential Approach to Visitor Management – the different merits of Formby, where people are actively encouraged to visit, and Ainsdale National Nature Reserve, where they are not, were discussed. The Chair noted that the landowners along the coast work with a zoning system which allows tranquil areas and so helps conservation. There are pressures at 'honey pots', for example at the National Trust site there are no ground nesting birds because of visitor pressure and dogs, compared to the Ainsdale National Nature Reserve where there are many ground nesting birds. It was fully accepted that visitors do want and need to see wildlife to benefit from it but a balanced approach is needed. There was a suggestion to concentrate visitors and traffic at the Lido end and keep the National Nature Reserve quiet and the Chair noted that this is a likely solution.

- Barriers to Car Access – a fear of encouraging travellers by developing car parks was raised as one of the reasons why there isn't a car park on the Coast Road. The adjacent area is rich in wildflowers and animals and could be threatened by inappropriate usage. One suggestion was siting a car park off the road in the dunes but this would result in lost dune habitat.

- In conclusion: there is a strong desire for access to the Ainsdale Dunes Natural Area

Freshfield

- Level Crossing – this was felt to be dangerous, especially as the new trains are quieter so pedestrians have less warning of their approach. The time given to cross from sighting a train is only 10s, which might not be enough for disabled, etc. It was felt that some kind of warning system could be in place, for example flashing lights to warn pedestrians a train is approaching, or that train drivers be instructed to sound their horn at a particular point on the approach. It is a very busy crossing and features in a listed walk. Merseytravel is looking to vertically integrate track and trains so it all comes under one control, but it is unlikely that action would be taken by Network Rail or the rail network operator alone. Possible solutions raised included reducing dependency on the level crossing, e.g. by negotiating a permissive route along the edge of the golf course, although this would have inherent dangers in itself (golf balls), or bridging over / tunnelling under the line – this would have to be accessible by the disabled and would be very costly. In the short term there is a need to look at measuring current use and demand in order to provide justification for future funding bids to solve the problem. The Access, Information and Interpretation Strategy is likely to include user demand surveys.

Formby

- Car Access - the size of the car park at Victoria Road was raised, together with a query about the use of fees to control usage. The Chair stated the car park is full by noon on Sundays and the problem is limited space but high demand. There is a need to promote

the alternative car parking facilities at Lifeboat Road, e.g. by a system of signage to say the car park on the National Trust site is full and divert traffic to Lifeboat Road.

- Visitor Facilities – the issue of siting a café at the National Trust site was raised. It would raise revenue and be a good facility for visitors, however the Chair noted that it might compound the car parking problems already being experienced.

Ministry of Defence land

- Opening up Cycle Access – the question of whether or not the MOD land would ever be made available for public access was raised. Currently this section of the Coast Path is a relatively boring trudge alongside the railway line. It was felt unlikely that access would be granted, however the existing path will be upgraded to a cycle route - Regional Route 81 – it is too narrow at the moment but Sustrans is in negotiation with the MOD to allow widening of the existing path.

Little Altcar

- Acorn Farm at Little Altcar – there is a small nature reserve here, looked after by disabled workers. A building at one end of the site is in a state of disrepair but would make a good visitor centre if it could be purchased and developed. Formby Council is working on the idea.

Alt Estuary

- Pedestrian Access - there is an Alt 2000 access group working on an Alt path; the group hasn't met for some time but the path is still in Sefton's Unitary Development Plan.

Hightown

- Car Access – the lack of car parking facilities and hence reduced access to the dunes was raised.

Crosby Marina – Hall Road Promenade

- Cycle Access - the issue of the path being very busy with both pedestrians and cyclists was raised, together with the possible clashes of cycle use with wheelchairs and pushchair use. The possibility of taking part of the dunes to make a cycle track was raised. There was an order in place preventing cycling but because this is a section of the Trans-Pennine Trail New Opportunities Fund funding has been received and the order has now been revoked. The path will now be segregated by a white line as far north as Crosby Pool. Concerns were raised that this line might get scraped off when sand clearance takes place. It was also noted that many more cyclists use the section north of the Pool.

Seaforth Docks

- Pedestrian Access - Mersey Waterfront are negotiating a walk to the west of the docks, outside the dock wall. There is a public right of way along the docks, currently blocked, and action is being taken to remedy this, although due to the need for security at the docks, particularly re the Freeport and Customs and Excise requirements, there is unlikely to be an easy solution. Within the dock complex a bridge is missing at Langton Dock, again this issue is being remedied.

- Access along the Canal System – a suggestion was made that the Leeds and Liverpool Canal forms the obvious link from Crosby Marina, via the Rimrose Valley, to Stanley Dock.

General issues raised

- Access from the sea - there are no facilities for moorings off the coast and the Sefton Coast is the only part of the Irish Sea with no facilities for visiting boats. The need for moorings and floating jetties, protected from the waves, was raised and the example of Rhyl was quoted. This would bring in tourism. There is, however, a lack of shelter and the whole coast has wildlife designations.

- Healthier living and inland water links – there is a lot of opportunity for healthy exercise along canal networks through Liverpool (see also Alt and Seaforth Docks sections for associated comments).

- Maps – the issue of frequency of Ordinance Survey surveys and republication of maps was raised, as updated Rights of Way on large scale maps would help to increase information and hence access.
- Links to other regional paths – access along the coast would link the Trans Pennine Trail to the Coast to Coast route.
- Multi-use Access – the issues of conflicts between different types of users where two types of user have to use the same section of path was raised and the question of whether it is better to mix cyclists and horses or pedestrians and cyclists?
- Basic Visitor Facilities for Education Uses – the need for visitor centres able to accommodate classes for educational visits was raised. Ainsdale and the National Trust site at Formby both do lots of education work and both have toilets, although the toilets at Ainsdale were criticised (the Chair noted that this situation is likely to improve as Sefton Coast and Countryside will be taking over management of the Ainsdale toilets). Toilets are a basic but essential facility for school use. In contrast, Lifeboat Road cannot accommodate school visits as there are no toilets. Simple /good facilities can be the key and are often overlooked by funders / developers in favour of bigger, more exciting projects. Basic facilities include people and facilitate access. The lack of facilities at railway stations was also raised as an issue detracting from the visitor experience.

Workshop 3 – The Stories Behind Sefton Coast
What's Important and how should they be told.

Summary of a workshop held as part of the Sefton Coast Forum on 7th February 2004 at Gild Hall, Formby

Chair: Andrew Hall (Sefton Coast Planning and Ecomonic Regeneration Department)
Rapporteur : Graham Lymbery (Sefton Council – Technical Services Directorate)

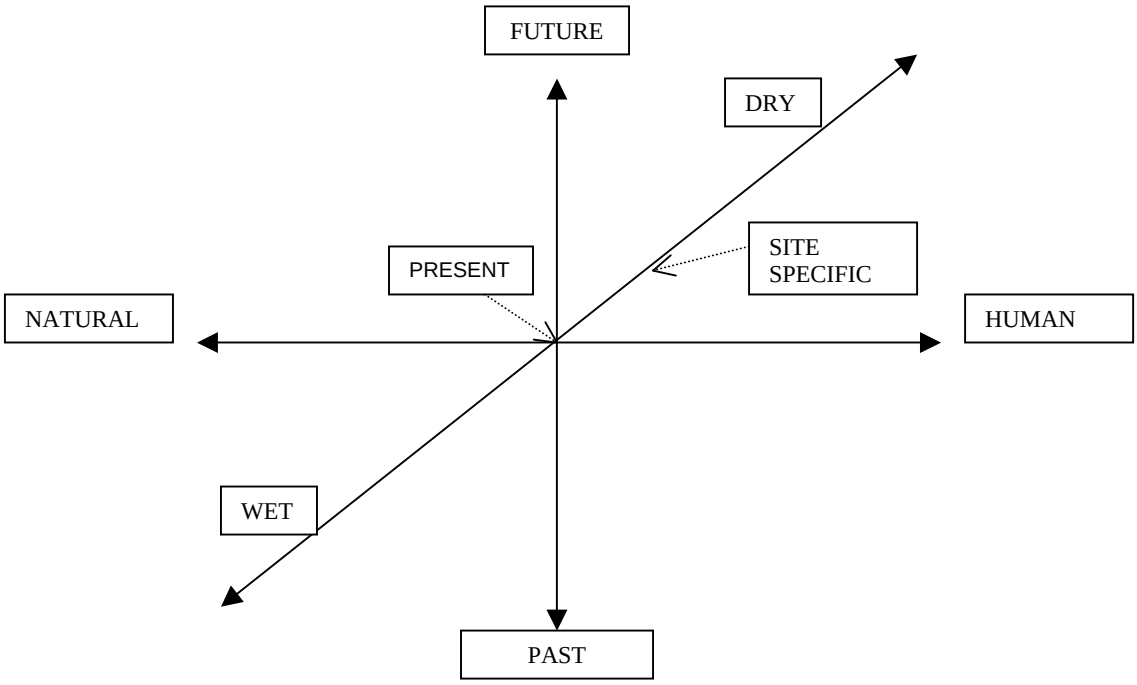
The Objectives

- To compile a list of stories or topics about the coast that are important to you
- To understand why they are important
- To understand the objectives, contents of the story/topic to be told
- To consider use of different mediums

The Output

To forward this information as a piece of consultation research in a format that can inform an Access, Interpretation and Information Study for the Sefton Coast Partnership.

Andrew Hall, Planning and Economic Regeneration Department and Graham Lymbery from the Technical Services Department, coastal defence, introduced the workshop. The group went on to discuss not just stories to be interpreted at a visitor site, but also how they could be categorised. For example interpreting stories against the back drop of how they have been affected by natural and human Influences, also that stories are not just about the past, but the present and the future. It is possible that interpretation could be categorised into 'wet/dry side' themes if several stories were be dealt with at a high level, or at a strategic gateway. The group also thought that whatever is interpreted on the coast, the public should be 'signed posted' to a place where they can find more information on the subject. For example, an appropriate web site or publication.



Workshop 4 – Coastal Heritage – Heritage Coast?

Summary of a workshop held as part of the Sefton Coast Forum on 7th February 2004 at Gild Hall, Formby

Chair: Dr Reg Yorke (Chair of History & Archaeology Task Group and The Formby Civic Society)
Rapporteur : Rachel Northover

In this workshop we considered a possible 'HERITAGE COAST' submission for, at least part, of the Sefton Coast. It was noted that about one third of the national coastline is designated but only a small stretch of the North West coastline (St Bee's Head). It was recognized by members of the Workshop that although the Sefton Coast is well known for its wild life and conservation importance, more needs to be done to raise its cultural and heritage profile. This would be helped by the building up and presentation of a coherent submission based on its historic, archaeological and cultural strengths.

We then looked at the benefits likely to accrue, objectives and requirements together with the possible geographical definition. Finally we looked at some existing 'Case-studies; - examples of coasts where this designation has been achieved.

After a very positive and full discussion the final conclusion of the group was that in line with Liverpool's successful bid for 'Capital of Culture' and the 'Waterfront Regional Park' plan, we should take this opportunity forward, preceded by a Conference to highlight 'Sefton's Coastal Heritage' in September 2004.