

Sefton Coast Partnership - Annual Report, 1999

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Introduction

This document is the first annual report of the Sefton Coast Management Plan, Second Review, 1997-2006. It covers the period from the endorsement of the Plan in November 1997 to September 1999. Although it covers more than one year future reports will cover a calendar year with the next report due in November 2000. The report highlights some of the key elements of the past year and looks ahead with some targets. The Sefton Coast Management Scheme is guided by a detailed work programme, setting out objectives, prescriptions and outputs. The information in this report is drawn from a more detailed progress report on the work programme presented to the Sefton Coast Management Scheme Steering Group on 9 November 1999. The publication of this report was endorsed. A draft annual report was presented to the Sefton Coastal Forum Meeting on 20th November 1999 and this report endorsed by the Sefton Coast Management Scheme Steering Group at their meeting on 8th February 2000.

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General overview of progress and future challenges

The Second Review of the Sefton Coast Management Plan sets the scene for coastal management in Sefton over the next decade. The Plan is a non-statutory document and does not impose any additional constraints on landowners; instead it encourages a partnership approach to sustainable coastal zone management.

The area of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme includes all the coastline within the Borough of Sefton, including the beaches and inland to the fringes of the marshland and dune belt.

The coastal management partnership in Sefton is well established and currently brings together twelve key organisations to work together for the overall benefit of the conservation of this unique coastline.

Working arrangements were established in 1978 and consist of a Working Party group reporting to a decision making partners' Steering Group. The Steering Group is chaired by Sefton Council. Each group currently meets four times a year.

The partnership approach to coastal management is voluntary. Partners have endorsed the following vision statement and subscribe to a series of management aims.

Our vision is for the Sefton Coast to be managed to ensure the conservation of one of the most important coastal areas in Europe for nature while being an asset to a healthy local economy and providing a much needed area for the quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Specifically, we accept the joint responsibility to ensure that the integrity and natural value of the dune system and estuaries is protected in perpetuity as one of the series of European nature areas.

The Plan urges partners to adopt the key principles of sustainable development, biodiversity and the precautionary principle. It is recognised that external issues have, and will continue to have, an impact on management responses. Such issues include for example the changing scenarios of global climate change, the regional and local economy and recreation trends.

The Sefton Coast Management Plan informs the statutory planning process and supports the definition of a Coastal Planning Zone. The planning process has several important functions in the coastal zone. These include issues affecting the Green Belt, oil and gas exploration, mineral resources, port related activities, the identification of non-statutory nature sites and the control of development.

Nature conservation is an over-riding consideration on much of the Sefton Coast due to its national and international value for wildlife. Most of the area of foreshore forms part

of the Ribble to Alt Special Protection Area (notified under the EU Birds Directive) and the majority of the dune area and foreshore is designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (notified under the EU Habitats Directive). Management plans and management practice must adapt to this new tier of legislation. However, the structure of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme has been able to coordinate a positive response to such requirements by, for example, the preparation of a nature conservation strategy for the Sefton Coast candidate SAC.

The launch of biodiversity initiatives in the UK has led to the publication of a Biodiversity Audit for North West England. From this document a number of local species and habitat action plans are being prepared. Many of these affect the coastal area and the agreed recommendations will be brought into site management plans.

In 1999 a landscape character assessment of the Borough of Sefton was carried out. The findings of such an analysis have important implications for the way in which the various landscape types in Sefton are conserved. The coastal landscape types include the marshes, beaches, rolling dunes and dune plains landward of the high dunes. The sandy dune backlands are the surviving remnants of a former landscape which extended the length of the coast.

Archaeological and earth science conservation interests have generally been undervalued in the coastal area. For the first time the review of the Unitary Development Plan will propose a series of sites of local geological/geomorphological interest, many of which are in the coastal zone. The interest in intertidal and coastal archaeology is also growing and the Sefton Coast Management Scheme will support research efforts to survey the areas of greatest interest.

Water resource conservation is a key issue for the dune system which holds a small rain-fed aquifer. European legislation requires that relevant agencies address the impact of water abstraction near sensitive areas. In 1999 the Environment Agency established a network of water-table monitoring points along the main dune system. The information from these wells will help build up a better picture of the characteristics of the dune aquifer and will be essential information for determining any future applications for water abstraction from the sensitive dune area.

The management of woodland and scrub on the coast and the balance of these habitats with open dune habitats has been reviewed. From early days the Scheme partners have sought to conserve the continuity and variety of the coastal woodlands through regular thinning and replanting operations.

A review of the Sefton Coast woodland and scrub management policies prepared by the Joint Countryside Advisory Service in 1999 identified three scenarios; do-nothing, fell and replant at the rate of 3 hectares a year and fell and replant at a rate of 5 hectares a year. In the first scenario the woodlands would age and not be replaced by young trees. This could be disastrous for the important Red Squirrel population on the coast which depends on younger cone-bearing trees for its food source. The third scenario of felling

and replanting, whilst being acceptable from a silvicultural point of view would leave very few old trees as landscape features. The proposed balance involving felling and replanting at a medium rate should benefit nature conservation, landscape and amenity.

The proposals arising from this local woodland strategy will be used as a basis for drawing up a Forestry Commission approved Forest Plan for the coastal woodlands in 2000/2001. The Forest Plan is designed to look ahead about 25 years and to show all the main operations in a map format. The importance of presenting information on maps has been stressed by the results of public consultation on coastal strategies.

Agricultural enterprises in the coastal zone are part of the overall character of the area. There is concern that some of the more traditional land-uses such as asparagus farming are in decline. Nature conservation management is increasingly recognising the value of grazing as a sustainable and cost-effective method of land management which conserves the open character and natural value of the dune grasslands and heaths.

Tourism in Sefton is focused on Southport. However there is now greater recognition in regional and local tourism strategies of the importance of the coastal zone, not just as an asset in its own right but as a potential for the growth in sustainable 'green' tourism initiatives. A bid for additional resources from the European Union's funding has been submitted along with partner authorities in Belgium and Holland through a programme for inter-regional cooperation.

The provision of car parking facilities, paths, cycle-routes and bridleways opens out the coast for recreation. Greater emphasis in the future must be directed to public transport links and the encouragement of walking and cycling as a principal means of access.

The zoning of sport and recreation helps to reduce conflict between different users and between recreation and nature conservation. The introduction of zoning on the Ainsdale to Southport beaches in 1993 has reduced recreational problems, allowed the natural development of the dune system and enabled a greater number of different activities to take place at one time in safety. In some areas care is needed to protect sensitive wildlife such as ground-nesting birds from disturbance.

The quality of the service that is offered to visitors, to schools and to the local community is important to all managers of access land. In coming years greater emphasis will be given to the development of an interpretive and educational programme for the coast.

A project is being developed under the banner of *Sands of Time* and the aim would be to see the establishment of a chain of visitor centres in the Liverpool Bay area with links between centres and greater coordination of educational materials.

Shoreline management is a recent term for coast defence strategies which address both sea defence (the prevention of flooding) and coast protection (the control of erosion). Sefton Council is supporting the development of two local Shoreline Management Plans relevant to the Sefton Coast. Both should be adopted in early 2000.

These plans will address concerns about coastline change (erosion and accretion) and will include an assessment of the implications of predicted sea level rise. Shoreline management is an activity in its own right but must now be closely linked to planning policy and to nature conservation.

The Environment Agency is giving bathing water quality a high priority in the region and has established a dialogue with local authorities and users so that the issues can be debated and progress followed. In Sefton the occasional poor bathing water quality lets down the improvements that have been made to beach management and creates uncertainty amongst users. The target needs to be consistently clean bathing water. Attention has turned to some of the small sources of pollution which at times can lead to a failure of water quality.

The Sefton Coast Management Scheme is part of regional, national and international activity to better manage coastal zones. Liaison is an important activity particularly in the Liverpool Bay area where there are a number of inter-linked initiatives. The Sefton Coast Management Scheme continues to respond to Government discussion papers and regional planning studies as they affect the coastal zone.

The monitoring capacity of the Coast Management Scheme has been further enhanced through the development of a Geographical Information System. The GIS can relate different sets of data, e.g. a coast protection scheme against nature conservation value, and can generally assist the dissemination of knowledge on the coast. A shared system is being developed and all coastal partners should be able to benefit from better information.

A detailed progress report submitted to the Steering Group on 9 November 1999 follows the Prescriptions and Work Programme of the Sefton Coast Management Plan, Second Review. This report summarises progress and adds a set of targets for discussion. The detailed progress report is available for loan or inspection at the Sefton Coast Information Centre at the Formby Council Offices.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: LAND-USE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Aim - To encourage and support appropriate land-use, sustainable economic development, investment and employment consistent with the natural character and conservation importance of the coast.

[Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997]

- Sefton Council published its Sefton 2000+ document, an outline of the Unitary Development Plan Review 2001-2016. A sustainability appraisal was also published.
- A draft Regional Economic Strategy has been published by the North West Development Agency.
- The North West Regional Assembly have published a number of consultation documents leading towards the development of Regional Planning Guidance for the North West.
- The draft Single Programming Document for Merseyside 2000-2006 has been prepared by Government Office North West.
- Sefton Council published (Draft for Consultation, August 1999) Sefton 2010: an Economic and Community Regeneration Strategy for Sefton.
- The Sefton Coast Management Scheme has responded to consultation documents on the Regional Economic Strategy, the Single Programming Document, Sefton's Economic and Community Regeneration Strategy and the European Commission's Demonstration Programme on Integrated Coastal Zone Management.
- Central Southport Partnership was formed in 1997 and has published annual delivery plans

Targets for the year 2000-2001

- To include revised draft Planning Policies for the Coast in the draft Unitary Development Plan, first review, 2000.
- To undertake a survey of employment in the coastal zone as a baseline for bids for Objective 1 funding.
- To submit a bid for the coast under the ERDF Objective 1 programme for the development of visitor centres under the banner 'Sands of Time'.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: NATURE CONSERVATION, LANDSCAPE AND LAND MANAGEMENT

Aim: To conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty and biodiversity of the coast, including its characteristic terrestrial, littoral and marine flora and fauna, geology, geomorphology, landscape and heritage features of architectural, historical, cultural and archaeological interest.

Nature conservation, landscape and land management lie at the heart of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme. The whole approach to management is identified with 'the place'; the unique combination of features and wildlife which make the Sefton Coast special.

Over the years there has been a progressive improvement in our knowledge of, and management for, habitats and species. The major success of recent years has been the additional funding for nature provided by the European Union's Life-Nature Fund. The Sefton Coast Management Scheme partnership approach was essential to secure the £400,000 of additional resources. The *Sefton Coast Life Project* was active from 1996-1999 and helped to establish a good baseline of knowledge on which to plan future management.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997;

- Sefton Council has approved extensions to the Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills Local Nature Reserve and the Ravenmeols Sandhills Local Nature Reserve.
- Royal Birkdale Golf Club received favourable press comment for their conservation management programme in the lead up to the 1998 Open Championship.
- Seven Golf Clubs have adopted five year management plans for their sites based on the advisory work of the Sefton Coast Life Project.
- A nature conservation strategy for the Sefton Coast candidate Special Area of Conservation has been prepared and endorsed.
- A Woodland and Scrub Management Strategy has been endorsed.
- A landscape character area assessment of the Borough of Sefton including the coastal area has been completed
- Grazing projects for nature conservation have been developed by the National Trust and Sefton Council.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

- English Nature to complete their review of Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- English Nature to undertake a review of their dune restoration project at Ainsdale.
- RSPB to erect a second hide at Marshside and work with Sefton Council to declare the area as a Local Nature Reserve.
- Woodland managers to submit a proposal to the Forestry Commission in October 2000 for a Plan Preparation Grant for a Forest Plan.

- To complete a first tranche of local Habitat and Species Action Plans for Merseyside, including the review of species strategies for the Natterjack Toad and Sand Lizard and to identify habitats and species for the second tranche.
- To complete a National Vegetation Classification survey of the main coastal habitats and to assess change from the 1989 survey.
- To put into operation the first review of the Beach Management Strategy in April 2000.
- To finalise a list of Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Sites for Sefton for inclusion in the revised UDP deposit document.
- To seek greater recognition of the archaeological interest of the Sefton Coast, to promote a seminar in 2000 on the subject and to seek funding for further studies.
- To contribute to the English Heritage sponsored *Historic Landscape Characterisation Project* coordinated by Lancashire County Council Archaeological Survey.
- RSPB to review the first five years of management at Marshside and begin the process of writing the second five year plan.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: TOURISM, LEISURE AND RECREATION

Aim: To facilitate and enhance the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the coast by improving and extending opportunities for quiet recreation, education, sporting and tourist activities that draw on, and are consistent with, the natural character and conservation value of the coast.

Recreation, leisure and tourism are a major land-use on the Sefton Coast. The balance between recreation and nature conservation is the main area of concern for the conservation land managers.

The Coast Management Scheme stresses the need to seek a balance between people and nature and between people's uses of the coast. The lack of effective management of the growing recreation pressures in the 1960s and 1970s led to many of the problems tackled by the Coast Management Scheme in the early years.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997.....

- Beach management has been improved to better balance recreation and conservation. The obligations under the Habitats Directive are being addressed.
- The RSPB have developed and promoted the reserve at Marshside.
- Green Tourism has been recognised as an important future market for Sefton.
- Merseytravel have maintained and updated their Walkabout and Rideabout series of booklets promoting countryside access.
- The National Trust have provided new access areas and new facilities for educational groups at Formby Point.
- Educational visits have continued to be supported, particularly by Leisure Services Department and the National Trust.
- A successful application has been made to Heritage Lottery and ERDF funding for the Pier restoration project.
- A feasibility study for the regeneration of the Crosby Coastal Park has been completed by Groundwork.
- The book *The Sands of Time* published.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

With more effective management it is now becoming possible to consider greater promotion of sustainable tourism on the open coast. An application to the European Union's *Interreg IIC* programme for a project to develop ideas for sustainable recreation and tourism has been accepted as eligible. Project partners include North Holland and Koksidge in Belgium. The project will run from December 1999 to March 2001 and will, amongst others, address visitor surveys, tourism strategies, transport (in partnership with Merseytravel)

- To fully develop the Ainsdale Discovery Centre as an educational facility on the Sefton Coast linked to the National Curriculum.
- To assist the inclusion of the tourism potential of the coast in Sefton's Tourism Strategy.
- To put into operation the first review of the Beach Management Strategy in April 2000 with new arrangements for the zoning of access and use.
- To start work on the strategy for the regeneration of the Crosby Coastal park area from Waterloo to Hightown.
- To resolve access issues at the Marshside RSPB reserve.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: SHORELINE MANAGEMENT

Aim : To support the need to protect life, property and habitats by appropriate coast defence strategies, and to maintain the sea defence function of the beaches, sand dunes and saltmarshes, consistent with the natural character and conservation importance of the coast.

The management of natural and artificial sea defences is part of the overall approach to coastal management. In recent years a more integrated approach to shoreline management has been adopted the manifestation of which is through Shoreline Management Plans.

Considerable expertise has developed on the Sefton Coast in the management of sand dunes. This has helped to draw up strategies for coast defence that respect the dynamic nature and conservation importance of dunes.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997.....

- Sefton Council has prepared a draft revision of its Coast Defence Strategy in the light of the findings of Shoreline Management Plans.
- A public meeting has been held at Hightown to explain the process that must be followed in preparing a coastal defence scheme for the area. Investigations have begun for the development of a strategic study.
- The first phase of the Southport Floodwall and Promenade has been completed and the Promenade opened with important implications for beach management and tourism.
- Approval has been given for Phase II of the Southport Coast Defence Scheme
- Planning applications are under consideration for the continuation of sand winning at Southport.
- A revised programme of monitoring vegetation change at Southport has been established.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

Monitoring of coastal change is essential. Sefton Council has an accurate record of erosion and accretion from 1959 and such data helps to inform the development of Shoreline Management Plans. There is now greater understanding of coastal dynamics and the need to monitor rather than rush into actions. Preserving mobility in the dune system is vital for biodiversity yet this must be at an appropriate scale for the landscape. The challenges for the future are associated with 'soft engineering options'.

- To adopt the two Shoreline Management Plans (Sub-Cells 11a and 11b) relevant to the Sefton Coast.
- MAFF, by March 2000, will publish targets for flood and coastal defence operating authorities which will ensure the effective delivery of sustainable flood defence and coast protection policies.
- To continue to monitor coastal change and continue the vegetation monitoring at Southport.
- To complete Phase II of the Southport Coastal Defences.
- To develop a strategy for the maintenance of the dune system as a natural sea defence.
- To start a strategic study for a Coast Protection scheme for the coast from Hall Road to Hightown.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Aim: To liaise with the competent agencies for the control of activities at sea to ensure that they are aware of the high amenity and conservation value of the Sefton Coast, and the impact their activities may have on terrestrial sites, and to work with others to promote the conservation and management of marine resources.

The issue of marine environmental management in the Plan reflects a national approach towards integrated coastal zone management. As the geographical area of the Scheme has widened so has its concern with the offshore perspective. Pollution incidents focus the attention on how easily one domain can impinge on another. Reorganisation of the North West and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee and a resultant change to the levy to Sefton Council has allowed the Sefton Coast Management Scheme to contribute directly to the regional initiatives of the Irish Sea Forum, Mersey Estuary Strategy and Ribble Estuary Strategy.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997;

- The European Commission have promoted the concept of integrated coastal zone management through a series of demonstration projects.
- The Irish Sea Forum has continued to take a regional and international perspective on coastal and sea issues and addresses many marine interests.
- H M Coastguard at Crosby was threatened with closure. The facility was saved and will develop a greater partnership and educational role in the future.
- The North West and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee have appointed a marine environmental officer.
- Sefton Council and the Sefton Coast Management Scheme have continued to participate in coastal fora.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

Keeping up-to-date on marine environmental issues is a difficult area for the predominantly land-based partners of the Sefton Coast Management Scheme. However by working with other initiatives, such as the estuary projects, and through fora such as the Irish Sea Forum and PISCES (the Partnership of Irish Sea Coastal and Estuary Strategies) Sefton Council and partners can become involved in wider issues. The Management Scheme will aim to improve the dissemination of information on marine issues to relevant partners.

- To continue to be represented on marine and coastal fora and to take part in debates as appropriate.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: PUBLIC HEALTH AND AMENITY

Aim: To protect and enhance the environment by reducing pollution and promoting public health.

A healthy environment supports biodiversity, the quality of life and economic development. The Sefton Coast's image is affected by poor bathing water quality. Although the Sefton Coast and the Merseyside region are now benefiting from the massive clean-ups through the Mersey Basin Campaign and North West Water's Sea Change programme there are still water quality failures, enough to fail the criteria for Seaside Awards.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997;

- The Southport Bathing Waters Improvement Scheme has been completed.
- Ainsdale, Southport and Formby beaches won Seaside Awards in 1999 (but water quality failures left only Formby at the end of the season).
- The beach cleansing operation has been reviewed to give better coverage along the coast and to introduce a new service in areas such as Lifeboat Road, Formby.
- Oil spill guidelines have been reviewed.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

- Introduce a revised oil spill response for the Sefton Coast.
- To continue to press the Environment Agency and north West Water to resolve water quality issues.
- To maintain Formby, Lifeboat Road as a Seaside Award Rural Beach.
- To treat the sources of foul water inputs to Sands Lake, Ainsdale.

PROGRESS AND TARGETS: IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Aim : To adopt a systematic and open approach to the delivery and monitoring of Plan outputs.

The Sefton Coast Management Scheme is a partnership of Sefton Council, landowners, statutory agencies and voluntary organisations with an interest in the conservation of the Sefton Coast. Support for the Coast Management Scheme mechanism comes from Government guidance to best practice. The structure of the Scheme and its working arrangements are not fixed and the whole process can adapt to changing circumstances such as the reorganisation of local government in Sefton.

Since the adoption of the Coast Management Plan in 1997;

- All Steering Group meetings have been opened to the public and more information about the Scheme published in Coastlines.
- A Beach Management Consultative Group has been set up by the Leisure Services Department.
- A Sefton Coast Forum meeting has been organised. An independent chair for the forum has been appointed.
- Information, including the full text of management documents, is published on developing Internet sites.
- A Sefton Coast Information Centre, currently based at the Formby Council Offices, has been established. It is used by over 200 people a year.

Targets for the year 2000-2001.

- Publish key documents and information on Internet sites.
- Co-host a research meeting with Liverpool Hope University College to update knowledge of the local coastline.
- Review the operation of the partnership
- Publish annual report