

## Putting Nature on the Map

### Statement of Compliance for Heritage Coasts

Heritage Coasts (HCs) represent stretches of the most beautiful and undeveloped coastline which were proposed by the Countryside Commission in 1970. 45 were established in England and Wales by 1992, one (the Durham Coast) has been established since. In 2006 a review revealed that HCs had been successful in raising profile, visitor management and protecting the coastal environment but conservation of the marine environment was, at best, minimal and patchy.

HCs are 'defined' rather than designated, as there is no statutory designation process or national funding stream like that associated with National Parks and AONBs. Although Heritage Coast status would confer no new statutory powers or obligations, they were to be identified on County Structure and Local Development Plans and would be a material consideration in planning terms. Definition is formalised by agreement between the relevant maritime local authorities and (now) Natural England (NE) or Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Most (e.g. 89% in England) are within the boundaries of National Parks or AONBs, although a small number (Lundy, the Durham Coast, Spurn Head, Flamborough Head, St Bees Head, the Great Orme, and the Cerdeigion and Glamorgan coasts) stand alone.

The national purposes of Heritage Coasts are to:

- Conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coasts, their marine flora and fauna, and their heritage features.
- Facilitate and enhance their enjoyment, understanding and appreciation by the public.
- Maintain and improve the health of inshore waters affecting Heritage Coasts and their beaches through appropriate environmental management measures.
- Take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and of the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts (source NE web site).

Although Heritage Coasts are not subject to any statutory development control processes, Planning Policy Guidance Note 20: Coastal Planning (PPG 20), which was published in September 1992, clarified Local Planning Authorities responsibilities towards Heritage Coasts. It states "the planning policies to be pursued in Heritage Coasts and the uses and activities which are or are not to be permitted should be defined and local plans should contain clear policies on public access to the coast".

However, PPG 20 no longer exists, and the NPPF says this about HCs (in England):

"Local planning authorities should ...

- maintain the character of the undeveloped coast, protecting and enhancing its distinctive landscapes, particularly in areas defined as Heritage Coast, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the coast" (para 114) .

In summary, HCs:

- do not derive from legislation
- are not designated
- have no statutory standing
- are unrelated to ownership - though many such areas are in conservation ownership

However:

- they are influential in terms of planning (now reinforced though the NPPF), and
- they are important in terms of encouraging positive management.

Finally, from a practical perspective, HCs have been relatively neglected by local authorities and others since their inception, and certainly more recently – see Annex 1 below. While the Position Statement of NE (published in April 2010 – see Annex 2) was fairly upbeat about HCs, this was published just before the change of government. They suggested that the management, conservation and enhancement of HCs need to be reviewed and set in a new context reflecting increasing recognition of the importance of the marine and coastal zone. Since 2010, there have been repeated reductions in the staffing and budget of NE, which means that little has been done to give effect to the ambitions in this statement. At present there is no reference at all to Heritage Coasts that on the web site of the new Natural Resources Wales (but since there is nothing yet on NPs and AONBs either, they are in good company!).

HCs are more like Green Belts in status, though of course with a different purpose. Considered against the elements of the IUCN definition, the analysis goes as follows:

Main elements of IUCN definition	Discussion of element in relation to SWT wildlife reserves
Are the sites in clearly defined geographical areas?	Yes. Each HC is mapped and its boundaries plotted.
Are they recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? NB 'nature' includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values.	The aims include nature conservation and broadly speaking these aims align with those of AONBs and NPs - but see immediately below.
Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present but they do not cause conflict, i.e. nature conservation is the priority	The aims most certainly include conservation of nature. But though NE list it first, there is no explicit hierarchy (no Sandford-type test) between this and the other aims
Does the designation of the site prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?	This will depend on planning policies and sympathetic ownership and land management. Definition will encourage the protection of these areas, but it can only be assured through other means

Main elements of IUCN definition	Discussion of element in relation to SWT wildlife reserves
Does the designation of the site aim to maintain, or ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected?	Yes. Positive management for conservation has always been an important part of the aims of HCs. However, delivery in many cases will depend upon sympathetic ownership (the NT owns about 40% of the coastline of HCs).
Is the long-term nature conservation ensured through legal or other effective means? E.g. national or international statutory law/ agreement/convention, traditional rules or NGO policy.	Problematic. As planning definitions, the long-term status of HCs could be in question and their aims could be arbitrarily weakened without any formal legal process. Though most HCs have been around for many years, they - like GBs - are inherently vulnerable to governments' changing priorities. As HCs are not linked to ownership, the management of the HC is dependent on the agreement of owners.

The conclusion is that HCs do not fulfil the IUCN protected area test on several grounds:

- they have no legal foundation but exist on a rather informal basis
- though they have lasted many years, permanence is not assured
- they are heavily dependent on other policies delivered through other areas, e.g. land use planning which is vulnerable to change
- there is no hierarchy that gives conservation policies priority
- they convey no additional rights over owners.

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## **ANNEX 1: Extract from the REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF HERITAGE COASTS [IN ENGLAND] (2006)**

“Since 1995, the priority attached to Heritage Coasts by the Countryside Agency has declined, in favour of support for the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and work with rural communities (such as the Market Towns Initiative). As funding by the Countryside Agency to Local Authorities with Heritage Coasts has declined, Heritage Coast units have tended to dissolve, with most Local Authorities transferring their funding and interest to their AONBs (where they exist) or to initiatives in the wider countryside. Where staffing posts with a stronger coastal remit are in place, this is usually the result of new external funding acquired for specific projects”.

## **ANNEX 2: Extract form the NE Protected Landscape Position Statement of April 2010**

**“The management, conservation and enhancement of Heritage Coasts needs to be reviewed and set in a new context reflecting increased recognition of the importance of the marine and coastal zone.**

Heritage Coasts are nationally important stretches of our finest coastal scenery. They are highly valued by their local communities and large numbers of visitors, and contribute significantly to local economies. They can provide places for innovation, integrated planning and management, sustainable adaptation to coastal and climate change, and high quality access and recreation without compromising the natural beauty of their landscape or seascape. Fully realising this potential requires strong support from the spatial planning system and good join up between terrestrial and marine planning.

We will work collaboratively with interested partners to explore and seek consensus on the most effective ways to secure the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of Heritage Coasts. The scope for an improved role for protected landscapes in management of the coastal zone and their seascapes will need to be explored within the context of an emerging and more holistic marine and coastal policy agenda.

### **Rationale**

The advent of the new Marine and Coastal Access Act, increased implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, recently reviewed Shoreline Management Plans, proposed revisions to national planning policy and guidance and the European Landscape Convention (which applies to the 12 mile territorial waters) offer important levers for achieving a more holistic and integrated approach to management of our terrestrial, coastal and marine environments.

Shoreline Management Plans are a crucial planning tool for all coasts and the direction set by these plans will have implications for the purposes of protected landscapes and their special qualities, especially for coastlines vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Such change is inevitable and the sound management of such change should assist adaptation of our coastal protected landscapes.

AONB and National Park Management Plans currently guide activities for 89% of Heritage Coasts. The remaining 11% stand alone. There is no national Heritage Coast funding stream. In 2006, a review and evaluation of England's Heritage Coasts was undertaken by Land Use Consultants. It revealed that the Heritage Coast programme had been successful in developing a positive national profile and brand for the coastlines covered and that the definition was valued by Local Authorities. Heritage Coast teams were effective locally in protecting and improving the coastal environment, facilitating visitor management and engaging with local communities. Less positively, the review identified that Heritage Coast definition had led to minimal conservation work on the marine environment with intertidal zones benefiting most. The adoption of effective planning policies supporting Heritage Coast conservation had been patchy, and effort put into coastal zone planning had been of little positive effect.

There are varying levels of coverage and consideration of Heritage Coast in Regional Spatial Strategies".