

Thames Estuary Path – Southend-on-Sea Overview

The seven miles of award winning seafront within Southend are a tremendous asset for the area and help to boost Southend's reputation as one of the most popular visitor destinations in the country. With over 6 million day visitors reported in 2004³² tourism is said to be "worth £275 million to the local economy and supporting 17% of all the town's jobs." This will be given an added boost as a result of the recent decision to locate the 2012 Olympic mountain biking event at nearby Hadleigh Farm³¹. All this is likely to mean that the Thames Estuary Path within Southend will be one of the highest profile sections of the whole path.

It is little wonder therefore that Renaissance Southend has given priority to establishing a coastal park along the seafront. "The project is as much about re-branding, recognising and celebrating the unique natural asset that Southend has in its seven miles of seafront....Key actions will include investigations in how to reduce the severance between the settlements, softening the impact of the highways and seafront parking and the delivery of a coherent programme of hard and soft landscaping to unify the seven miles of seafront". This fits very well with plans for the Thames Estuary Path.

Development and growth in Southend is being led by both Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (Unitary Authority) and Renaissance Southend whose objectives are to "assist, promote, encourage, develop and secure the regeneration in the social, physical and economic environment of Southend-on-Sea".

Supporting policies and strategies

The seafront features prominently within local strategies and policies, as well as wider strategies such as the Thames Gateway South Essex Greengrid Strategy. Relevant local strategies include:

- Local Transport Plan 2006-11³³
- Renaissance Southend Regeneration Framework³⁴
- Central Area Masterplan and in particular the public realm proposals³⁵
- The emerging City Beach Masterplan (Renaissance Southend)

Southend has recently won recognition as a Cycling Town, which brings with it additional funding to help increase cycling and added responsibility to be achieving results and demonstrating good practice³⁶.

Barriers to walking and cycling

The Council is seeking to address many of the barriers to cycling through its Cycling Town work, but the levels of funding will not achieve the major infrastructure changes that are needed along the seafront.

Whilst there are significant lengths of seafront open for walking and cycling within Southend much is officially only available for walking. In these areas cycling on the promenade is generally banned, but many cyclists ignore this, choosing to use an attractive and obvious route, despite the restrictions. Finding a satisfactory way to successfully accommodate walking and cycling within an attractive public realm and within an affordable budget is the major barrier at present. The most obvious example of the challenges is the section between Chalkwell and Leigh, but it is important that other sections of the seafront are not forgotten.

Development sites

Within this area there are numerous developments opportunities which need to be used to enhance the public realm and the Thames Estuary Path. Given that most of the seafront is already open for public access these improvements are likely to be part of the Masterplans being developed by the Council and Renaissance Southend. The one obvious exception is Gunners Park and the Garrison development at Shoeburyness, where seafront access is currently restricted and needs to be delivered as part of development and Parklands plans.

National Cycle Network

Completion of National Cycle Route 16 through Southend is integral with the Thames Estuary Path. Current on-road sections are only viewed as interim alternatives to a final route completely off-road from Leigh to Shoeburyness.

Within Southend the Prittle Brook Greenway and plans for new routes along the A1159 corridor provide good opportunities for circular routes when combined with plans for a comprehensive town cycle network.

Thames Estuary Routes

Main Route Links

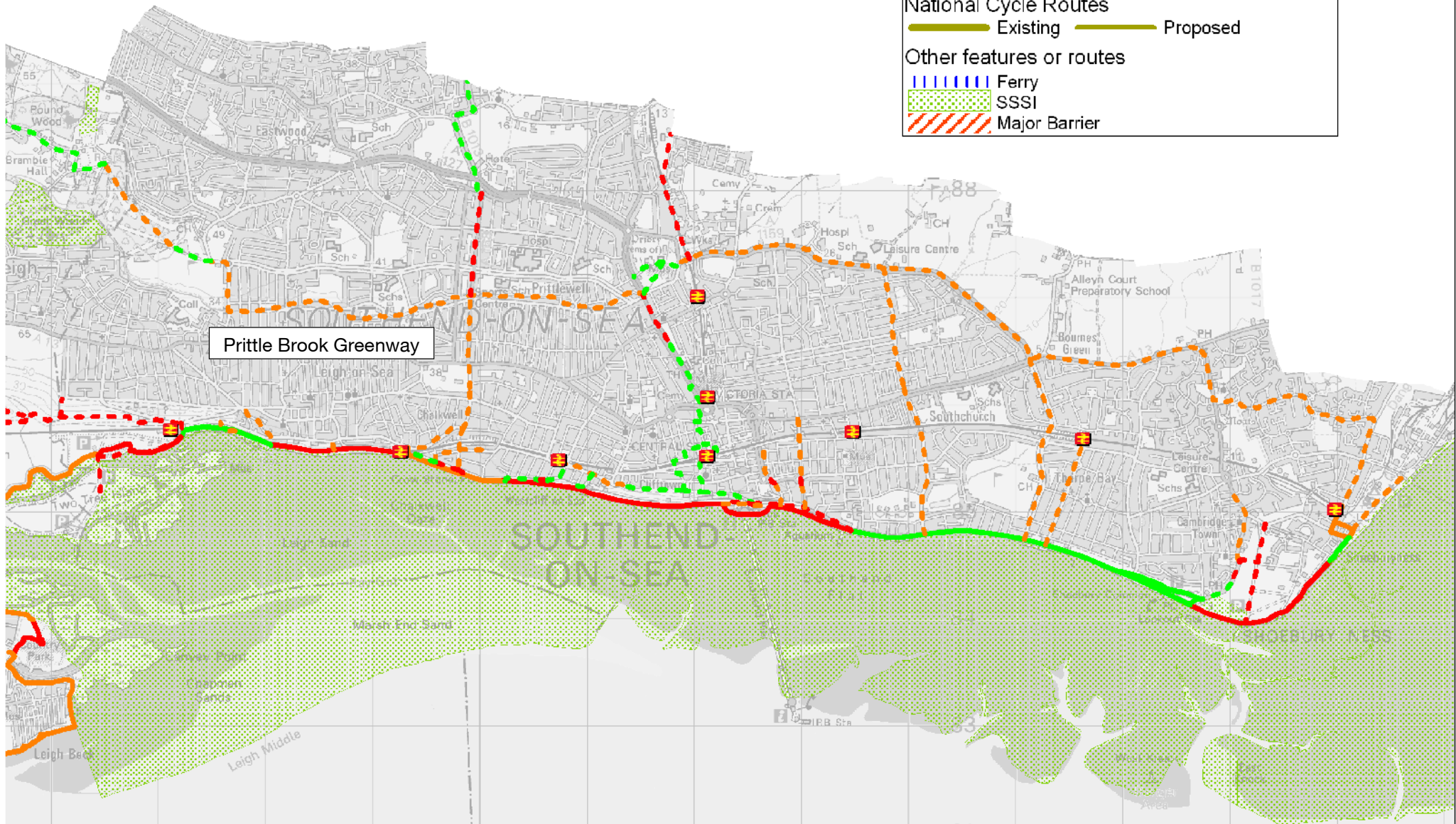
- - - - Proposed, major work needed
- - - - Proposed, surface &/or legal issue
- - - - Fully Open, good surface

National Cycle Routes

- Existing
- - - Proposed

Other features or routes

- ||||| Ferry
- SSSI
- / / / / / Major Barrier



Thames Estuary Path – Section 37 Two Tree Island – South Essex

Condition of the waterfront

In this area the route follows Benfleet Creek past Two Tree Island to rejoin the bank of the Thames at Leigh-on-Sea. The route passes Two Tree Island on a wide grassed flood bank with plenty of space around, but gradually becomes more confined as it enters the built up area at Leigh-on-Sea.

The route adjoins Benfleet and Southend Marshes SSSI and careful assessment of route options is needed before works can start.

This section of route has tremendous potential as a direct flat link between Benfleet and Leigh and provides a wonderful approach to Southend.

Barriers to development

There are few obvious barriers to development of this section and there have been plans prepared and funding allocated over the years. The major barrier appears to be the inability of the landowners and Essex County Council to agree on the legal status of the path from Benfleet to Leigh, but there are also important habitat issues to address. The nearby 2012 Olympic Games site³¹ should give added incentive to removing all barriers to development.

There is limited scope for links in the western section but opportunities improve near Leigh-on-Sea Station.

Construction should be relatively easy given the very wide banktop.



Flood defences A to B

Route description

A-B. Construct new sealed surface path for shared use on banktop on Salvation Army land. The exact position and impact of the SSSI in relation to the path needs to be confirmed and the impact of the works assessed.

B. Boundary between Essex and Southend.

B-C. Existing concrete roadway. This could be landscaped to give a more appropriate feel with some minor repairs.



Existing concrete roadway

C-D. A public footpath runs on top of the flood defence embankment, but it is narrow for shared use. The recommended option is to upgrade the banktop for pedestrian use and construct a new shared use path along the existing worn path on the landward side of the reservoirs, then switch to a new path constructed along the existing path on the river side of the flood defences.



Riverside path at Leigh

D. Junction treatment is recommended to narrow the carriageway and improve links between the road and off-road paths.

D-E. Leigh-on-Sea High Street will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of the Thames Estuary Path - well worth a stop. Traffic speeds are naturally slow and walking and cycling on the road are the only options in places.

Links and Access

L1 Quiet road link with Two Tree Island.

L2 Indicative route on public footpath to link with 2012 Olympic Games site needs surface improvements (not surveyed). This is part of plans for the 2012 Olympics.

L3 Link path with Marine Parade. Indicative route to link with 2012 Olympic site needs surface improvements (not surveyed).

L4 Public footpath to Hadleigh Castle and the Country Park.

L5 Indicative route for link with Benfleet via Country Park.

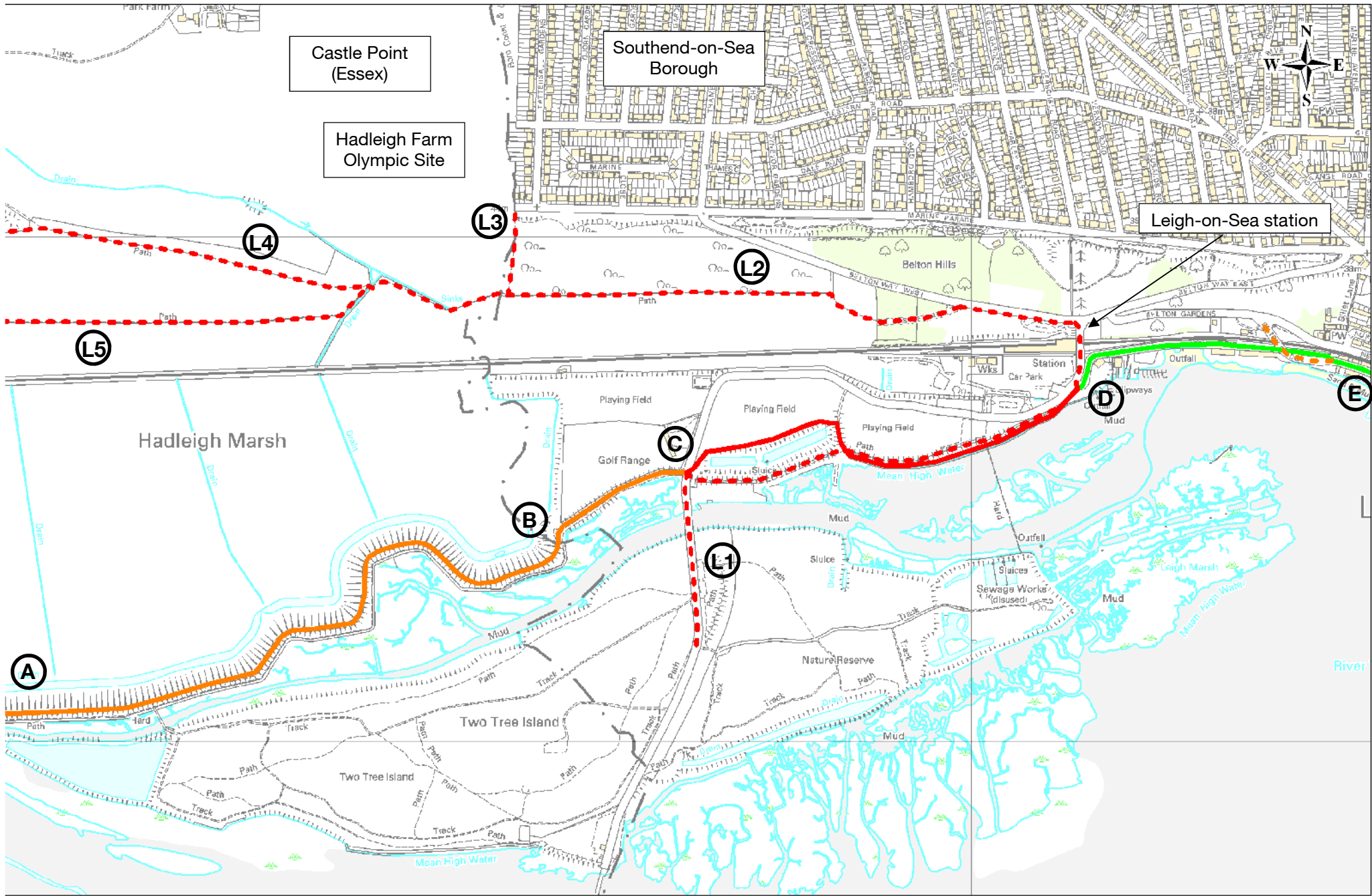
Key Recommendations

1. Construct shared use sealed path at the earliest opportunity on bank top to complete Benfleet to Leigh path.

2. Upgrade routes north of railway as access to Hadleigh Country Park and for Olympics site.



Cockle merchants on High Street



Thames Estuary Path – Section 38 Southend Seafront West – South Essex

Condition of the waterfront

In this area the waterfront has a seaside promenade feel passing beaches, which become mudflats at low tide. These form part of the Benfleet and Southend Marshes SSSI and SPA and any works will need to take account of this. The route is entirely within the urban area and is a major transport corridor with busy roads and the railway very evident.

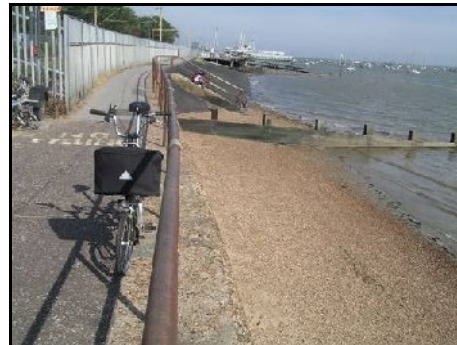
This section of route links Leigh-on-Sea High Street with the rest of Southend. The High Street is an intriguing place which is an established visitor attraction and the route along the waterfront offers numerous attractive and varying views, yet the quality of the existing waterfront path is disappointing. The route offers by far the flattest and most direct link between Leigh and Chalkwell.

Barriers to development

Improvements to the section of route between Leigh-on-Sea and Chalkwell have been a priority for many years, because the existing path is of poor quality. Renaissance Southend has recognised this and has made this one of their priority projects.

The major barrier to improving this section has been funding, but there are also numerous parties who will need to be satisfied including Network Rail, Natural England, yacht

clubs, Leigh Town Council, Environment Agency, Rights of Way groups and of course Southend-on-Sea Council. A lot of work has been done on this over recent years and a good solution does appear achievable. Whether this can be achieved by 2012 in time for the Olympics at nearby Hadleigh Farm is a major challenge at present.



Start of the cinder path at Leigh

Further towards Central Southend there are also major issues to resolve with regards to the existing promenade and formalising its use by cycles, including possibly widening it. This has again been a contentious issue that has been a barrier to overall progress.

Route description

A-B. Leigh-on-Sea High Street – a lightly trafficked road with footway that needs no works.

B-C. Works needed to upgrade and enhance the existing cinder path

between the railway and the sea. Sustrans has obtained agreement from Network Rail to move back the railway fence in various locations along the path to widen the route, but a comprehensive rebuild and widening is favoured as a better long term solution. See following sheets.

C-D. Over this length the promenade is parallel with a lightly trafficked 20 mph road, but whilst this road is functional it has no view over the sea and the promenade is a much more attractive option. There are also various paths set back from the promenade. Although used by cyclists formal steps would need to be taken to designate a cycle route.

D-E. This central stretch of promenade is narrower and road space re-allocation is recommended, to allow for a wider path.

Links and Access

Southend seafront is a popular local asset and an important transport corridor, but links to it are not as simple as might be expected. Between Leigh-on-Sea and Chalkwell the railway restricts links and further east the cliffs restrict access.

L1 Existing ramped bridge (cyclists are currently expected to dismount) links with local streets.

L2 Existing stepped bridge provides the only link in this area. Consider installing wheeling ramps for cycles.

L3 A ramped bridge at Chalkwell station gives access to local streets. A direct link from the station to the path is being considered.

L4 Potential links with local streets.

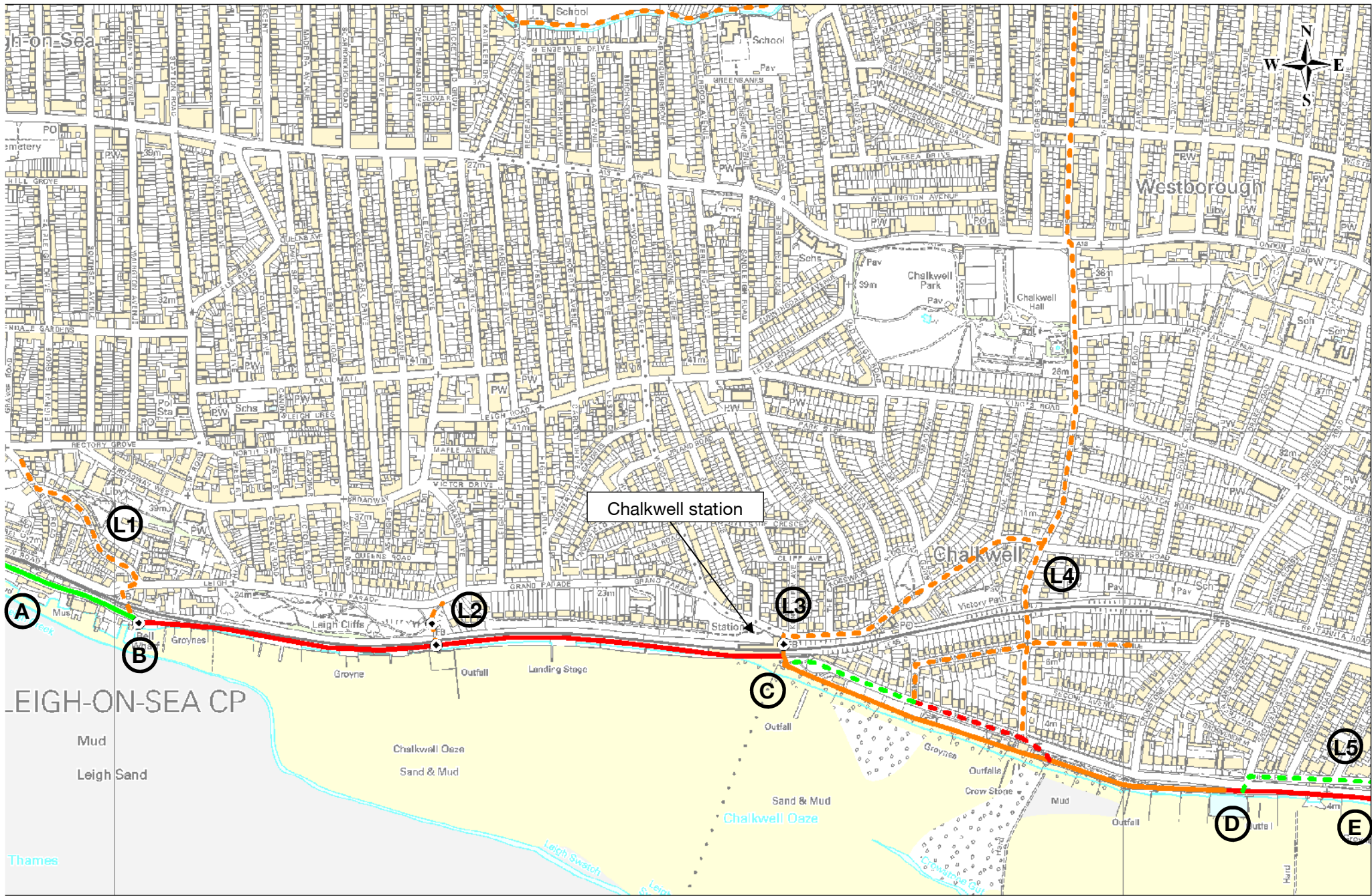
L5 The Leas is a relatively quiet road linking up to Westcliff station.



Promenade, linking paths and cycle lane (left to right)

Key Recommendations

1. Carry out major upgrade of Leigh to Chalkwell path.
2. The above works need to be integrated with an agreed seafront walking and cycle route, which also needs to be integrated with additional on-road cycle provision.



Thames Estuary Path – Leigh and Chalkwell Seafront – South Essex

The issues

The existing seafront path is narrow and suffers from poor maintenance. The path adjoins railway land and is separated from that by an unattractive fence. The sea defences on the seaward side of the path show signs of slippage and have been repaired with an ugly coating of black tar.

The path is fairly well used and a significant number of users are cyclists despite the “No Cycling” notices. This is perceived to be a problem. For cyclists and walkers this is the only flat route between Leigh and the rest of Southend, it is the most direct and the views are superb.

Although there is a strong will locally to widen the path and improve the local environment this is a very slow moving project for a number of reasons:

1. Land Ownership. The path and the sea defences belong to Network Rail, whose clear priority is to protect their own rail asset—the path is of lesser priority for them. This is believed to be the only stretch of Southend seafront that does not belong to the Borough Council. Borough Council ownership of the path and sea defences would appear the best way to develop the area, but there is a natural reluctance for the Local Authority to take on too many liabilities.

2. Sea Defences. The sea defences appear to be in need of attention and any works should allow for this. Adoption of the sea defences by the Borough Council could have serious cost implications unless they were already brought up to a very high standard.

3. Ecology. The mudflats are a protected habitat and any works need to allow for this.

4. Rights of Way. The existing path is a public footpath and any works may need to involve moving this.

5. Leigh Beach and Yacht Club. At the Leigh end space is restricted near Leigh Beach, because the local yacht club use this area for winter boat storage and summer car parking. Any compromise on promenade width in this area would however be to the detriment of the key entrance/gateway at that end.

6. Yacht storage areas. Yachts are stored on decking adjoining the path and these are likely to need to be moved to widen the path.

7. The Wilton is moored permanently beside the path and is used as a clubhouse by Essex Yacht Club. The club are keen for improved service provision (such as drainage) to be included in any scheme.

8. Rail Issues. Network Rail need to protect their rail operation and have

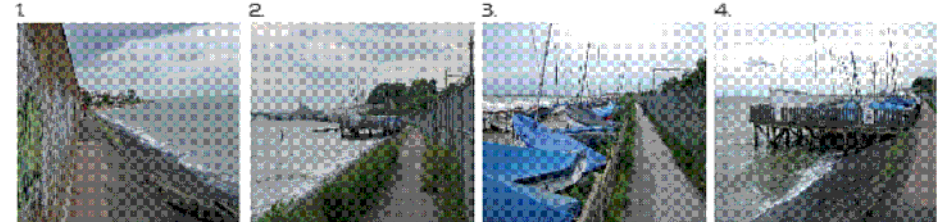
security and safety concerns that have to be addressed. They have however expressed a willingness to allow some of their land to be used for path widening, but they can give no guarantees about how long this would be for. At Chalkwell Station the station is separated from the path by a brick wall and the rail operator may consider ways to make this more attractive for path and station users.

Recommendations

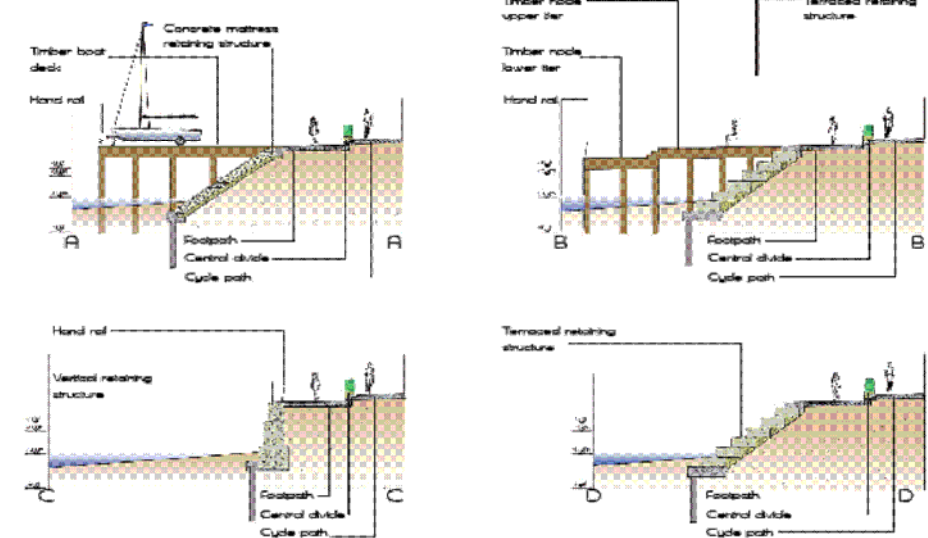
None of these issues is insurmountable, but a good solution is likely to cost £5-10 million. It would however be a major boost for Southend and is worth pursuing seriously.

Drawings below prepared by Atkins for Renaissance Southend and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

PHOTOGRAPHS – EXISTING FOOTPATH CONFIGURATION

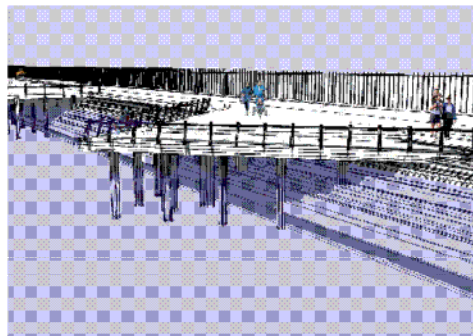
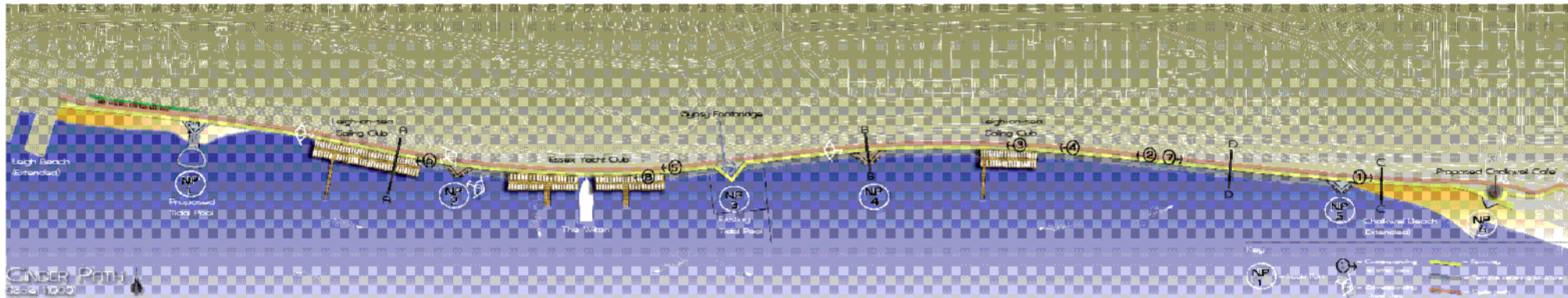


TYPICAL CROSS SECTIONS

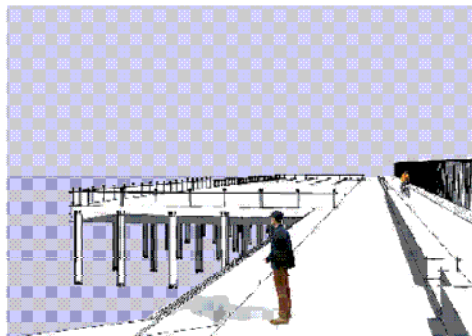


Thames Estuary Path – Leigh and Chalkwell Seafront – South Essex

CONCEPTUAL PROPOSALS



View A.
Typical view looking from the water towards nodal point.



View B.
Typical view from the footway looking towards the boat deck.



View C.
Typical view looking along the footway towards the nodal point.



View D.
Typical view of steps along central division.



Images showing options for a new promenade between Chalkwell and Leigh

Prepared by Atkins for Renaissance Southend and Southend-on-Sea Borough Council