

Thames Estuary Path – Hoo Peninsula and Medway Estuary Overview

The Medway Estuary is outside the scope of this study, which concentrates on the Thames waterfront up to Grain Power Station and the north coast of the Isle of Sheppey. However, the absence of a crossing of the River Medway at Grain is a big obstacle to the ambition of a continuous Estuary Path. We recommend that a further detailed study is undertaken of the Medway Estuary from Grain to Rochester Bridge and out to the Sheppey Crossing.

Some existing local projects that can help to deliver an Estuary Path include:

- Lower Upnor enhancements / boardwalk
- Strood Waterfront
- Rochester Riverside⁴²
- Chatham Historic Dockyard and St Mary's Island, where over 3km of safe, new cycleways and footpaths have been created⁴³

The Saxon Shore Way (SSW) is plotted on the map opposite, which shows that a continuous walking route is already available along much of the Medway Estuary. Most of this is public footpath, so access for cycling is limited. In the Riverside Country Park, the SSW and NCR1 share the same alignment for around 3 miles. The SSW largely follows the coastline of approx. 1500 years ago and is named after the Roman Forts that were built along the east coast. There are also public footpaths on the flood defences towards the Isle of Grain, shown on the map opposite as the “Medway Estuary Path”.

Supporting policies and strategies

The Hoo Peninsula Green Cluster Study¹⁸ highlights the need for walking and cycling routes connecting the villages along the wooded ridge running through the centre of the area. Interestingly, the existing waterfront path is not seen as a strategic priority, although this is now regarded as something of an omission (Martin Hall, pers. comm. 13/08/08). A new route linking the centres of population with the Chattenden Barracks development site and Cliffe Pools is considered a priority.

Medway Council's Local Transport Plan⁴⁴ has eight strategic transport objectives, one of which is “to improve access for Medway residents to key services by all modes of travel and to develop transport corridors that encourage personal movement which promotes better health”.

Barriers to walking and cycling

The long distances from major population centres will limit the popularity of walking and cycling on the Hoo Peninsula. There are good bus services to

Cliffe, Allhallows and Grain and we recommend that the possibility of carrying bikes on these services is investigated. The waterfront is such a fantastic resource that it is a pity that it is visited by so few people.

Yantlet Demolition Range, Grain Power Station, London Thamesport and Kingsnorth Power Station are the major barriers to access to the waterfront. Alternative routes are fairly easy to develop and would enable local residents and visitors to safely enjoy the whole Peninsula. The A228 Grain Road is also a major barrier as it is busy with HGVs from the container terminal at London Thamesport. The following have been identified as priorities for the eastern part of the Peninsula:

- Develop a new route between Allhallows and Grain
- Construct a Greenway on the Allhallows Branch Line
- Provide a shared footway beside the A228 at Grain Bridge for 540 metres

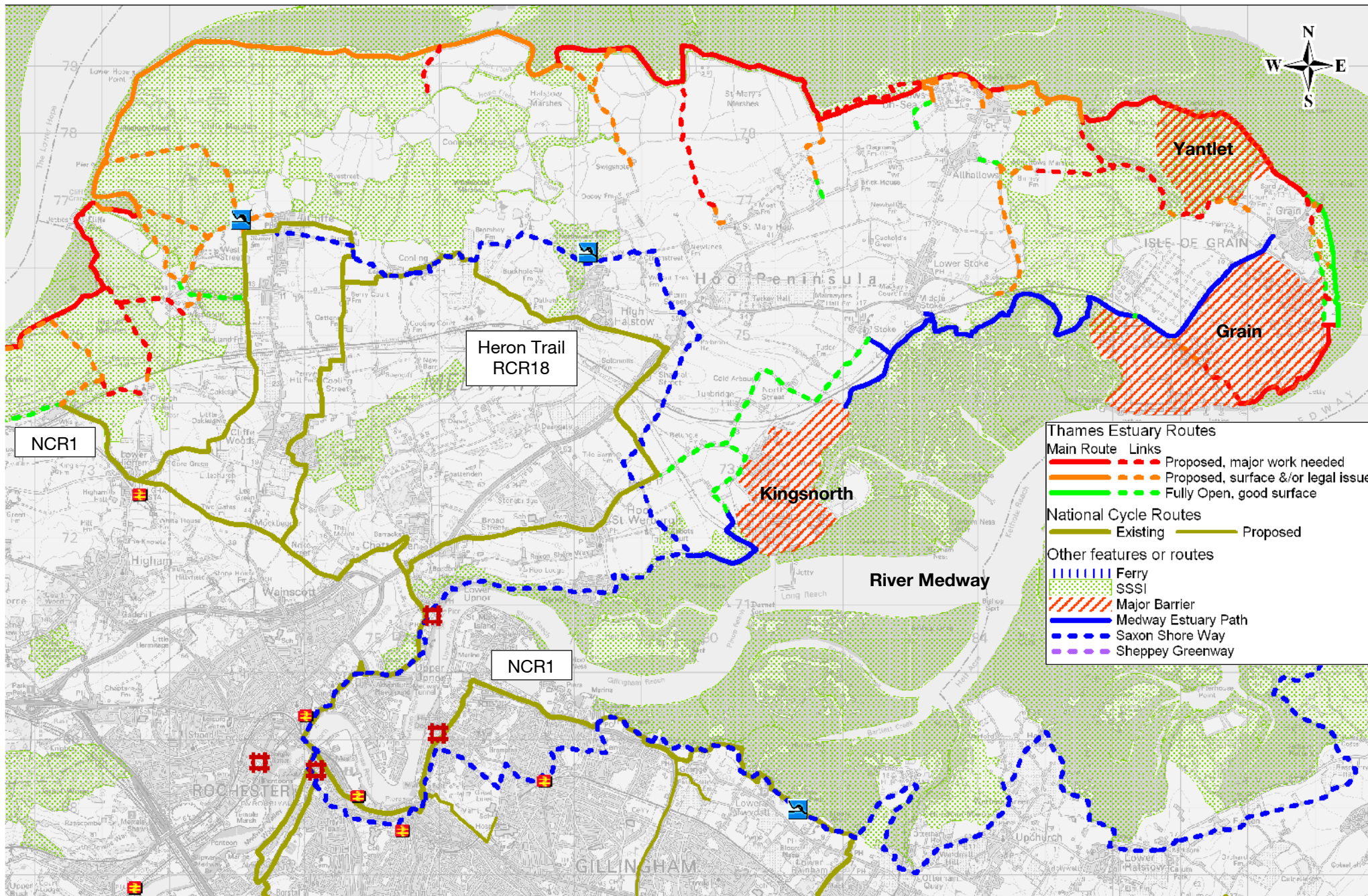
Development sites

New power stations are under consideration at Grain and Kingsnorth. The latter reached national prominence when a successful campaign persuaded the Government to delay plans for a new coal-fired station. If these sites are developed, every effort should be made to secure waterfront access. Particularly at Grain, there may be an opportunity to increase access in the short term, where there is no clear operational reason against.

The Chattenden Barracks site will bring opportunities for new public access and while these may improve the wider walking and cycling network, they are unlikely to have a direct impact on the waterfront. In Rochester, the riverside development has already provided an impressive wide promenade over 1km long, which is open to the public even before the first foundations have been excavated.

National Cycle Network

NCR1 is a well established route between Rochester Bridge, Higham station and Gravesend. The Heron Trail (Regional Cycle Route 18) links NCR1 with Hoo St Werburgh, High Halstow and Cliffe. Although there are no current plans for a cycle route around the Hoo Peninsula, Sustrans would be delighted to include a high quality riverside path along the Thames and the Medway as part of the NCN. Further to the east, NCR1 links the Riverside Country Park with Rainham, Newington and Sittingbourne, using quiet lanes and bridleways.



Thames Estuary Path – Section 50 Higham Marshes – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

The first part comprises a high grassed embankment. On the landward side the wide gravel track continues, but it is in poor condition.

The second part to Cliffe Fort comprises a narrow grassed embankment in poor condition and probably too narrow for development as a shared use path.

The waterfront is fully open for public access as a public footpath and is promoted as the Saxon Shore Way.

The main flood defences continue south and east to the Gravel Works at West Court Farm.



Looking south from Cliffe Fort

Barriers to development

There are two restrictive barriers on this section, at either end of the narrower section of embankment. These will need to be modified if this section is developed for shared use.

B1 This barrier comprises a homemade metal gate, with no provision for pedestrians.

B2 A restrictive gap as shown in the picture below.



Metal barrier at B1



Access control at B2

Links and Access

L1 Public footpath across open ground to Church Street, as described in the previous section.

L2 The public footpath through the Gravel Works is more suitable for shared use, although the flood defence embankment is quite narrow. A new link through the industrial site would be very useful if security issues can be resolved.

L3 Two links are available at Salt Lane, at access points to the Cliffe Pools RSPB reserve. Substantial barriers have been installed here to prevent motorbike access. Salt Lane also links with Buckland Road, which forms part of the Heron Trail cycle route from Lower Higham to Cliffe⁴⁵.

L4 A good quality cinder track leads back to Cliffe Creek and the waterfront, providing one of a number of circular routes in this area.

L5 A tarmac road and rough gravel track lead to Cliffe village with local amenities, including a bus service.

Key Recommendations

1. Surfacing of 950 metres of riverside path along flood defence embankments for shared use.

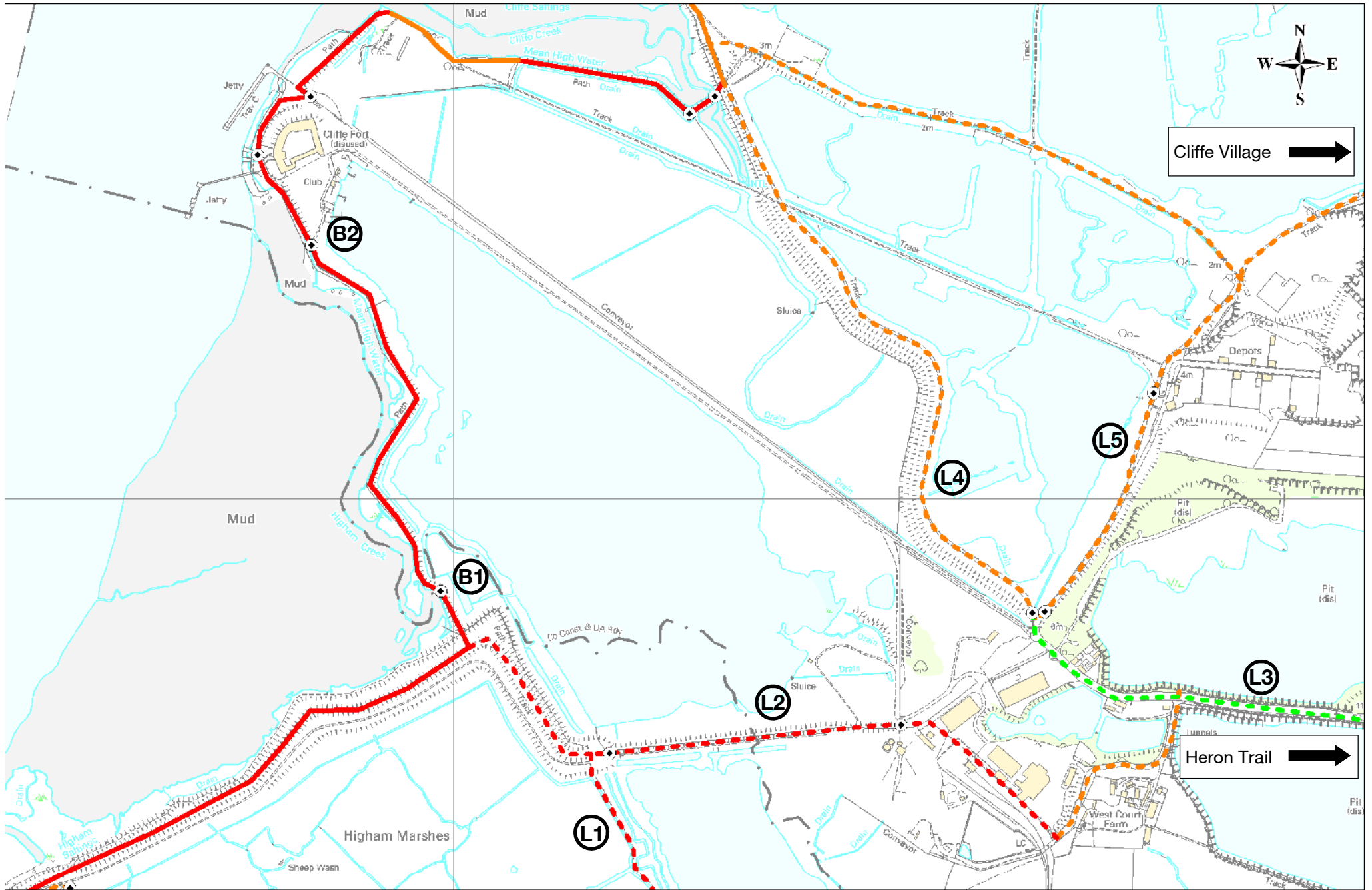
2. Feasibility work on surfacing of 1000 metres of flood defence embankments south of Cliffe Fort, including assessment of inland alternatives.



Footpath west of Gravel Works



Cinder track at Cliffe Pools



Cliffe Village →

Heron Trail →

Thames Estuary Path – Section 51 Cliffe Pools – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

There is some coastal erosion around Cliffe Fort, but there is currently sufficient space for a shared path. The historic torpedo launch tube is negotiated with two sets of concrete steps.

At the jetty, the footpath runs a short distance inland to pass underneath the gravel conveyor. It is bounded by fences and is currently too narrow for shared use.

Alongside Cliffe Creek, there is an old cinder path but it is overgrown with scrub. It then opens out onto a grassed flood defence embankment before entering the Cliffe Pools reserve.

A cinder track runs below the flood defences on the north side of Cliffe Creek, which continues to the junction with Mead Wall. From this point the cinder track is in evidence, but is largely overgrown with grass.



Looking north from Cliffe Creek

Barriers to development

B1 The torpedo launch tube is a significant obstacle, but this could be overcome with a modest footbridge.

B2 Waterfront access is not possible at the Cliffe Fort jetty, but there is an adequate diversion for a short distance. This would need to be widened for shared use.

B3 There is a restrictive barrier at the end of Cliffe Creek, which is very difficult to negotiate by bicycle.

B4 A substantial gate blocks the footpath at the junction with Mead Wall, with no means of crossing the boundary even for pedestrians.



Jetty at Cliffe Fort

Links and Access

There is an extensive network of tracks around the Cliffe Pools reserve and the RSPB has plans to improve them to encourage more public access⁴⁶. Substantial barriers have been installed at entry points to prevent motorbike access.

L1 An excellent circuit of around 4 miles takes in extensive views across the reserve and a section of the waterfront, starting just half a mile from Cliffe village and the bus stop.

L2 A broad cinder track links with Salt Lane and the Heron Trail, as described on the previous page.

L3 Link to Cliffe village.



Path beside Cliffe Pools

Key Recommendations

1. Feasibility work on surfacing 550 metres of flood defence embankments around Cliffe Fort, accommodating the gravel conveyor.
2. Clearance and surfacing of 300 metres of riverside path alongside concrete sea wall for shared use.
3. Surfacing of 440 metres of riverside path along flood defence embankments for shared use.
4. Replacement of the barrier at Mead Wall.



Torpedo launch tube at Cliffe Fort

Thames Estuary Path – Section 52 Cliffe Marshes – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

The waterfront from Cliffe Creek to Egypt Bay is one of the most isolated stretches in Kent, with no public access points for around 5 miles. On a sunny day in August 2008, the surveyor did not see another person on the path.

There is a tremendous sense of openness, with extensive marshes, the wide river and fantastic skies.

The flood defences around Cliffe Marshes are generally in good condition, starting with 2650 metres of concrete sea wall. The grassed embankment on the landward side falls away quite sharply.

Below the embankment is a broad flat grassy area with an old cinder track underneath, which is ideal for cycling and horse riding. Sadly, there is no view of the river from this track.

At the end of the sea wall, the flood defences become a reinforced grassed embankment, with a public footpath running along the top. The old cinder track continues alongside, covered with grass to a greater or lesser extent.



Old cinder track

Barriers to development

B1 The only minor barrier is a single fence line, which creates an obstacle for cyclists and disabled access. If the fences are still required for stock control, easy-access self-closing gates can be installed at this point.

Otherwise, this is a wonderfully open stretch with a reasonable surface for cycling and horse riding.



The only barrier

Links and Access

There is no public access between Mead Wall and Egypt Bay, although a number of Rights of Way start in Cliffe village but do not extend to the waterfront. At least one new access should be created in this area – see next section.

Key Recommendations

1. Minor works to 3800 metres of old cinder track, scraping off vegetation and surface improvements.
2. Installation of easy-access gate to the existing fence line at B1.



Lower Hope Point, looking south