

Thames Estuary Path – Isle of Sheppey Overview

The Isle of Sheppey is separated from the mainland by a single crossing point of The Swale at Kingsferry – the old Kingsferry bridge (road and rail) and the new Sheppey Crossing road bridge. The western half of the island has 70% of the resident population of 38,000 and the vast majority of the industry, including an international port at Sheerness. The eastern half is mainly agricultural land and marsh, with numerous holiday parks and some sandy beaches.

There used to be ferries at Harty for Faversham and at Sheerness for Port Victoria on the Isle of Grain (see Section 60). Re-opening of the Harty Ferry for walkers and cyclists would make a huge difference to the eastern half of the island.

Supporting policies and strategies

The island is already a popular destination for visitors. The existing walking and cycling network (public rights of way and quiet roads) is fragmented and linked by busy roads. Previous studies by Rummey Design Associates⁵² and Groundwork⁵³ have highlighted walking and cycling as a key part of an eco-tourism strategy for the island, but their proposals still include busy roads in the network of routes. One of the key priorities of the Swale Transport Strategy⁵⁴ is to “increase use of **sustainable** modes of transport” and the local authorities are investing in walking and cycling for local utility journeys.

The Queenborough Lines, built as a defensive canal in the 19th Century as part of the Napoleonic defences. Together with Barton’s Point Coastal Park, the Lines provide the largest green space near the main population centres. The “Sheerness Triangle” offers an excellent circular route of around 5 miles, including Sheerness Promenade, The Fleet and the Queenborough Lines. An Audience Development Plan for this area was recently completed by Arkenford Ltd, stressing the importance of walking, cycling and other outdoor activities⁵⁵.

Barriers to walking and cycling

We believe that the major barriers to walking and cycling must be overcome before these sustainable modes can make a real contribution to the lives of residents and visitors. In the main towns, the sheer weight of traffic makes walking and cycling unattractive. Although alternative routes exist in many places, the B2008 Chequers Road at Minster is a particular concern as it is narrow as well as busy. A new route to link the promenade with the quiet lanes between Minster and Warden is a high priority.

The main road linking west and east of the island, the B2231, is too busy for all but the most experienced cyclists. The Greenway proposed in the Swale Green Grid¹⁷ and Sheppey Green Clusters study⁵⁶ to the south of this road would make a big difference. The coastal path is accessible at Sheerness, Minster, Warden and Leysdown, but there is a large gap at Sheppey Cliffs, where there is no public access to the cliff top. A new footpath would be a fantastic boost for walking on the island, with spectacular views across the Estuary. Any agreed alignment would have to take account of the rapid erosion of the cliffs, perhaps with an agreement that the footpath can be moved inland as and when the cliffs slip away. Over the past 100 years the cliff top has been receding at an average rate of 1 metre per year, increasing to nearly 2 metres per year at Warden Point⁵⁷.

The southern marshes are a very sensitive area and may not be able to support a large increase in visitors. However, we recommend that the coastal footpath is completed as a high priority, so that a walking circuit of the whole island can be promoted. There is currently a gap of nearly 4km in rights of way between Spitend and Harty.

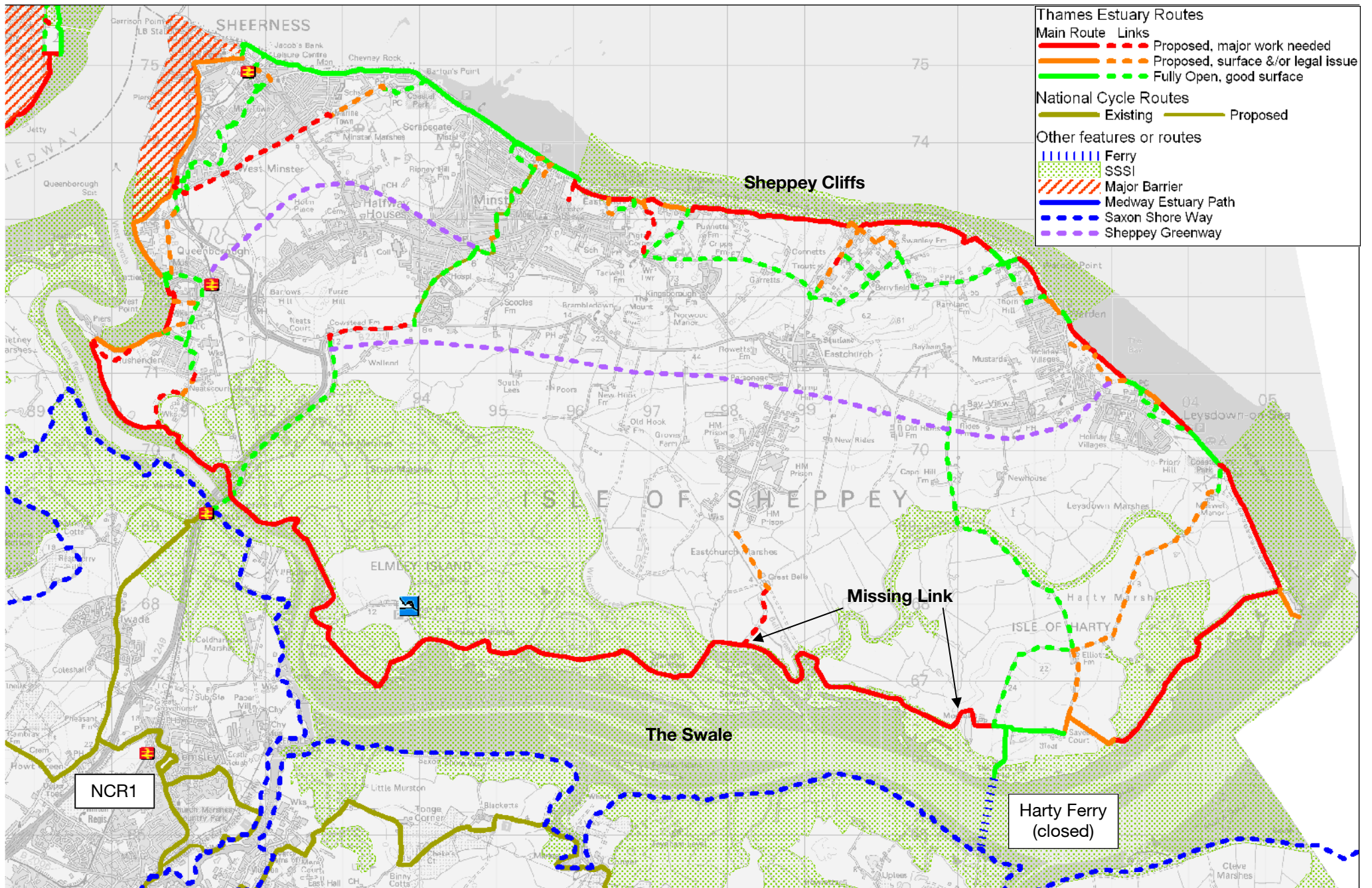
The line of the old Sheppey Light Railway between Queenborough and Leysdown is largely intact as far as Scrapgate Road in Minster and would make an excellent Greenway. Further to the east, the old line has disappeared for the most part.

Development sites

The largest site on the island is the Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration⁵⁸. The development plans give a high priority to walking and cycling, with new access to the waterfront. There are also major expansion plans for Sheerness Docks, including a major new marina. Access to the waterfront should be provided wherever possible.

National Cycle Network

When the NCN was first planned on Sheppey, passenger ferry services were still available to Vlissingen in the Netherlands. The ferry was popular with cyclists and the expectation was that large numbers of European visitors would start their cycling journey at Sheerness. The aim of the NCN is to create a continuous network of high quality routes, linking towns and cities with each other and the surrounding countryside. Proposals to date have centred on linking Sheerness and Minster with the mainland, but there is no reason why a strategic west-east cycle route should not be adopted as part of the NCN.



Thames Estuary Path – Section 61 Rushenden Marshes – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

Although this section does not have public footpath status, it is open and used by the public on foot and by bike. The grassed flood defence embankment is rough in places and needs a good surface to encourage more usage.

This section starts 100m past the north side of the Kingsferry Bridge. The grass/stone topped flood defence bund passes under the new Sheppey Crossing onto South Marshes.



Sheppey Crossing

Barriers to development

There are no physical barriers to access on this section. The main challenge is to formalise public access on the flood defences.

There are narrow sections by a small inland lagoon and at the sewage works outfall pipes.



Sewage Works outfall pipes

Links and Access

L1 Access to the mainland and Swale railway station via Kingsferry Bridge.

L2 Existing shared path beside the old main road Sheppey Way.

L3 Access to Bridge View Industrial Estate and Rushenden. A rough track skirts the western side of Joan Fleet and a private tarmac road runs from the sewage works.



Track beside Joan Fleet

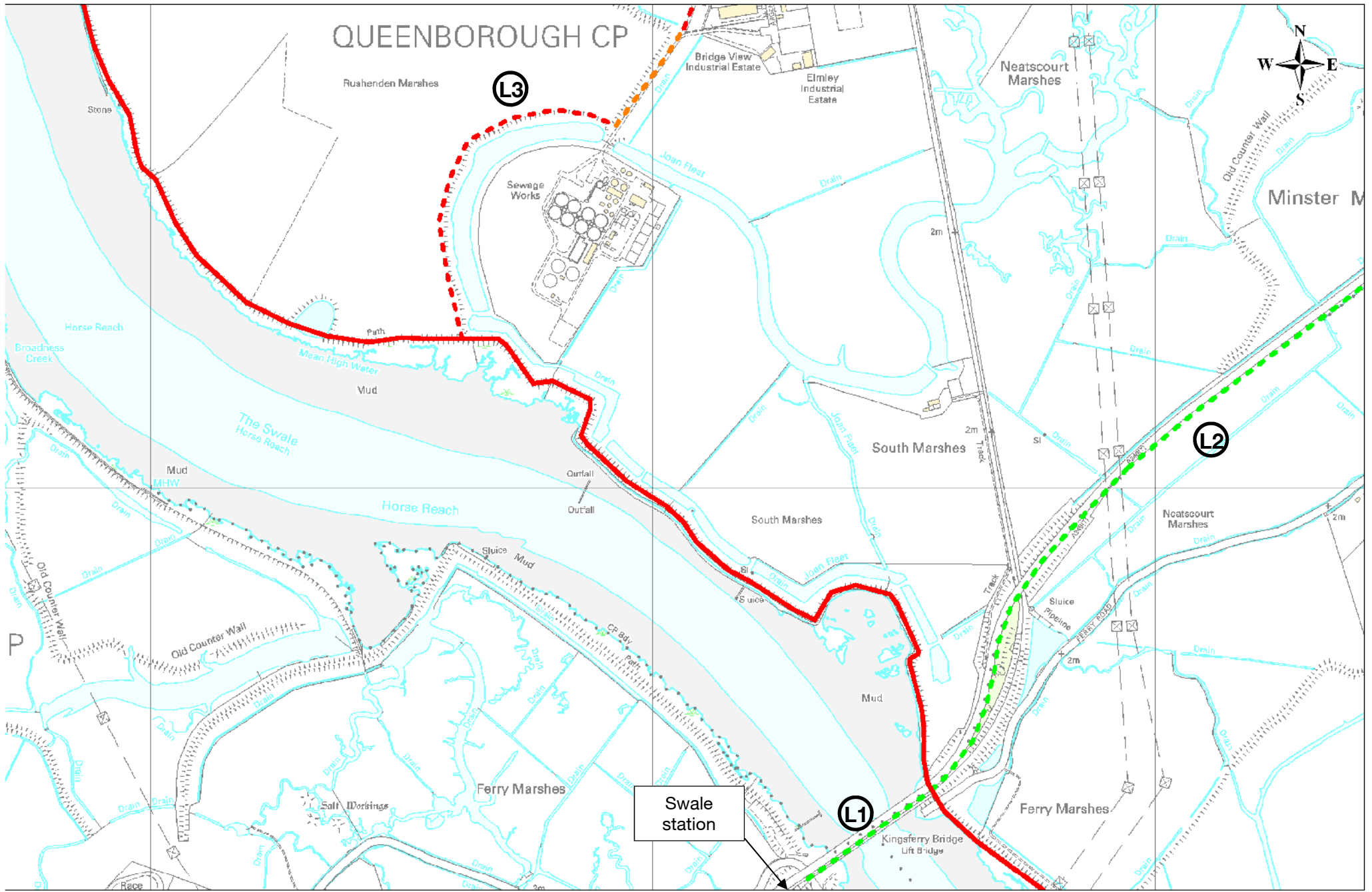
Key Recommendations

1. Seek Environment Agency and landowner permission to construct a path along the top of the flood defence embankment for 3200 metres.

2. Formalise walking and cycling on this section.



Flood defence embankment



Thames Estuary Path – Section 62 Queenborough – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

The flood defence embankment continues alongside the Swale towards Ladies Hole Point, with informal public access. The path is rough in places and clearly used by motorbikes.

Several rough paths run to and around the shipbreakers yard at Loading Hope Reach. There are steep earth bunds and embankments and other security measures in place to protect the site. Well worn motorbike tracks show the various informal access points.

A private road runs alongside the light railway line with public footpath status. The flood defence embankment continues from First Avenue to The Creek, but there is currently no crossing at the lock gates and no access to the waterfront from West Street.



Private road beside light railway

Barriers to development

Earth security mounds around the shipbreakers yard need a formal access point to the flood defence embankment.

The Creek is currently a natural barrier, but the land to the south is scheduled for development, led by SEEDA. The Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration will provide new houses and flats for a wide range of people, community facilities and services, a school, jobs, employment space, new open spaces, pedestrian parks and a new marina. It will be located between Queenborough and Rushenden, on the former Caradon Works site and on Sheppey Industries land⁵⁸.

A linear park is proposed for The Swale, with a new path along the waterfront. Two new crossings of The Creek are also proposed, which would enhance the Thames Estuary Path.



Looking north to Queenborough

Links and Access

L1 A rough path runs up Rushenden Hill to an open parkland area. This could provide an alternative to the road.

L2 Public footpath on private road alongside the working light railway line.

L3 First Avenue, Rushenden Road and High Street offer a satisfactory interim alternative to the waterfront path.

L4 Private track beside Klondyke Industrial Estate.

L5 Link to Sewage Works and more direct route to Kingsferry Bridge.



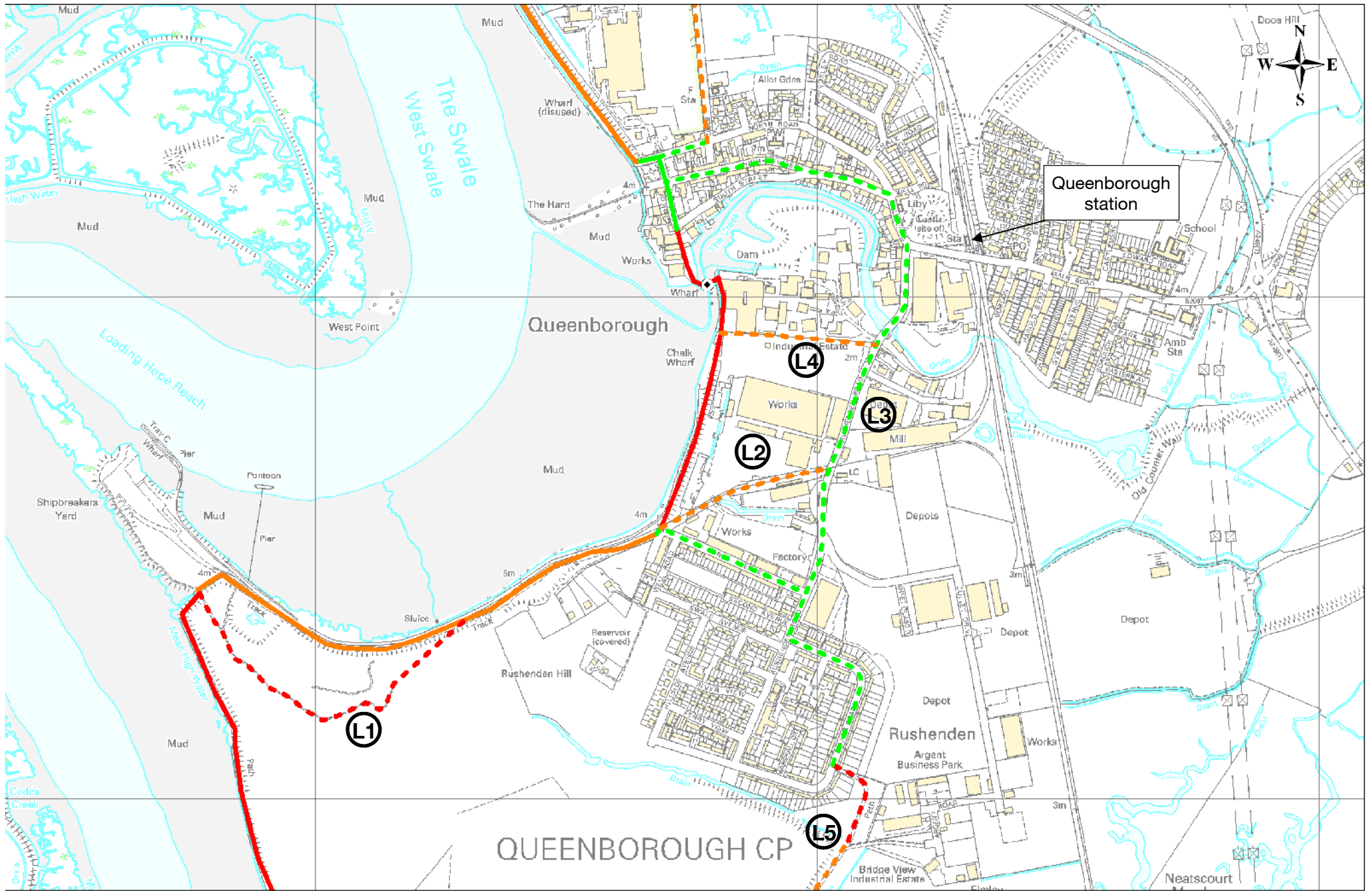
Rushenden Road traffic calming

Key Recommendations

1. Seek landowner permissions to use private roads.
2. Ensure that a high quality path is incorporated into the Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration at an early stage.
3. Formalise walking and cycling along the flood defence sections.



Shipbreakers yard, Ladies Hole Point



Thames Estuary Path – Section 63 Sheerness South – North Kent

Condition of the waterfront

A concrete seawall starts at North Road in Queenborough and continues through to Blue Town, with a narrow concrete apron alongside. The first 800 metres beside the West Swale comprise a level path 1.5 metres wide and slopes down to the river edge.

The path leaves the waterfront after 900 metres and winds its way inland through a huge car storage area. High security fences constrict the path, but it is well used by the local community.

The path continues beside the car storage area terminating at steps up then down to an elevated path by Brielle Way.



Sea defences north of North Road

Barriers to development

The extensive car storage area prevents access to the waterfront. There does appear to be space available between the waterfront and the boundary fence, which should be investigated further. If this area is developed, a high quality promenade should be provided.

The restricted width of the path along the sea defence wall is a barrier to developing this for popular shared use. In places, there is scope for a new path on the landward side of the sea wall. In other places, the boundary fence could be moved to accommodate a wider path.

An alternative to the sea wall is to construct a path in the verge of Brielle Way, although width is restricted in places. There are no attractive options in this area and it might be better to take the route inland towards the town centre and railway station (see L1).



Sea defences beside car storage area

Links and Access

L1 There is a sea defence gate and a slip road down to Brielle Way. A Toucan crossing links to a pedestrian bridge (suitable for wheeling bicycles) over the railway and quiet roads to the town centre. The shared path beside The Fleet forms part of the “Sheerness Triangle Healthy Walk”.

L2 The Toucan crossing does not link conveniently with the flood defences and the footway is very narrow, between commercial buildings and the busy road. A new link across open ground is recommended.

L3 The path beside the Queenborough Lines provides an excellent link to Barton’s Point and a circular route around Sheerness, although works are required. An Audience Development Plan for Swale Borough Council was published in July 2008, with proposals for new paths⁵⁵.

L4 Existing segregated footway beside Brielle Way, providing link to Whiteway Road.

Key Recommendations

1. Replace steps at both ends of the flood defence wall with ramps.
2. Investigate access behind sea wall at Queenborough end and negotiate to move boundary fence.
3. Investigate waterfront access by car storage area.
4. Formalise shared use walking and cycling status along traffic free route where required.
5. New link across open ground near Toucan crossing.



South end of car storage area

