

Ecological Assessment for proposed Northney Coastal Path, Hayling Island.

The site is bounded on the north by Chichester Harbour, which is subject to several designations. The location also means that the site access will be affected by tides and the seasons, so timing has to be planned to minimize the impact, and the work procedure, in the main, from the road side only will protect the adjoining mudflats and ecology. The road may have to be partially closed with traffic lights as work proceeds to enable work to be carried out safely. The finish of gravel, has been selected as one that has been used successfully elsewhere in the harbour, and is therefore the most environmentally friendly option.

The proposed footpath follows the northern boundary of Hayling Island, and the southern edge of Chichester Harbour as it stretches west wards and joins with Langstone Harbour. Chichester and Langstone Harbours have the following designations: SSSI, SPA, RAMSAR, SAC .

The SSSI designation: There are large volumes of saline water due to the long coastline in the harbour, with extensive intertidal mudflats, of international importance. The winter waders benefit from this and the species who return in the autumn, ie the curlew and green shank. So avoidance of any construction work at these times is important.

SPA special protected area. The whole of the harbour supports many thousands of wintering wild fowl and waders. It is sheltered to a certain extent, for overwintering birds and has high grade farmland in the hinterland around Chichester Harbour. Although in places there are some recreational pressures, in this stretch of coast line, there is only water at the higher tides, and the launching and sailing of boats is only possible further round the coast. Sea Level rise is an important issue, we are hoping by the raising of the existing bank to improve the situation , this will have the minimum impact on the ecology.

RAMSAR and SAC Solent Maritime special area of conservation: It is of European importance. The perimeter of Chichester Harbour is largely low lying area, only a metre or two above sea level throughout. The upper levels of the intertidal mudflats, in this area are covered only by the spring tides.

It supports plant and animal communities including plover, black tailed godwit, red shank, brent geese , shell duck and dunlin. The Little egret once a comparative stranger has grown in numbers over recent years. Consequently there are many bird watchers in the parking area. Tourism generally has increased with walkers to and from the Northney Tea rooms, and hotel, who used to use the path along the bank, hence it has worn down over the years. This sadly allows the sea to over top more frequently, not just because of the higher tides. Now it is more dangerous for pedestrians as they use the edge of the narrow road. In order to improve access, and protect the mudflats etc, we feel that it is important to upgrade this bank to a proper

pedestrian access for all abilities. It could also form part of the perimeter coastal path, which Natural England are endeavouring to link up around Hayling Island.

The construction time of this project will be dictated by the overwintering birds, and tides on a daily basis. The spring tides are at their highest between the autumn and spring equinox, also a time to be avoided from the overwintering birds. Allowing for late departures, it would seem that the optimum time would be late May/ early June 2017. this would allow the bank to be constructed and settle down before any autumn gales, and enable summer visitors to enjoy the new safe access next year.