

## **ACCESS IMPROVEMENT & ENVIRONMENT ENHANCEMENT A STRATEGY FOR THE SOLENT**

The Solent coast is enjoyed by young and old alike, from the passive activity of "sitting in a nice spot" to the pursuit of more strenuous, water-based activities. In recent years, an increase in leisure time has led to a notable growth in the number of people spending time at the coast and undertaking recreational pursuits. This has corresponded with a rise in the types of recreation that are now pursued on and along our shoreline. Such intensive use of the coast may lead to conflict and as such stricter forms of access and permitted recreation zones may need to be considered.

In 1997, after wide consultation, the Solent Forum produced the *Strategic Guidance for the Solent*. This document examined all Solent related topics from nature conservation to emergency planning and made recommendations. The *Strategic Guidance for the Solent* recognised that there was scope to improve the quality of the environment of the Solent and to co-ordinate the provision and promotion of public access for recreation. Five flagship projects were identified to implement the Strategic Guidance. Flagship Project 2, the Solent Access and Environment Initiative, aims to provide a strategic and balanced approach to the provision of improved public access, in conjunction with landscape and environment enhancements, with due regard to indicated environment constraints. The strategy is also intended to promote the cultural well being of the area through public awareness and understanding of the special qualities of this coast, which can lead to increased enjoyment and stewardship.

### **Aims and Objectives**

#### **The Aims of the Strategy are:**

To encourage and promote the sustainable, responsible and safe **use** of the Solent for recreation.

To enhance the recreational experience; in particular to further the **appreciation** of the landscape, wildlife and culture of the Solent region.

#### **The Objectives of the Strategy are:**

##### **Use**

maximise the use of the coast for recreation whilst minimising the environmental impact, conflict amongst users and the chance of incident  
promote positive and integrated access management

##### **Appreciation**

improve public access to the coast whether visual or physical  
raise awareness and understanding of the Solent's unique natural, historic and cultural value

Part I of the Access and Environment Strategy was an appraisal of current coastal access, together with an overview of the statutory land-use policies, character areas, local themes and their interpretation, as well as planned, proposed and past enhancement projects in the Solent. Part II, the Strategy itself, builds on this by promoting a strategic approach to enhancing the recreational experience, whilst acknowledging constraints imposed by nature conservation and other interests, and identifies potential opportunities for action. Implementation of the strategy will need to be done in partnership with statutory authorities, user groups and other stakeholder organisations. Implementation is an ongoing process with priorities made to maximise the use of limited resources. Land-use planning policies provide a statutory framework for this strategy but it also complements and can inform other programmes such as Local Agenda 21 and associated community strategies.

**The Strategy follows in four sections: Recreation which is sub-divided into land-based and water-based; Information and Interpretation; Transport and Environment. Each section introduces the topic and then highlights the issues and proposes opportunities for action.**

## RECREATION

### Land based recreation

The Solent coast offers a variety of land-based recreational opportunities from small areas of open-space to major visitor attractions as well as the comprehensive Rights of Way network. Open space for both informal and formal recreation is found in coastal urban and rural areas, whilst viewpoints and picnic sites are situated where appropriate. The rights of way network on both the island and the mainland are used all year round with walking proving to be the most popular pastime whether it is a stroll along a promenade, a short circular route or one of the long distance walks. Cycling is also a favoured pastime and both local authorities and other agencies continue to promote and improve the provision for cyclists. Provision for horse-riding is limited to public bridleways and a small number of other permissive routes.

Due to the Solent's importance for waders and waterfowl, nature reserves prove attractive for bird watchers and other day visitors who enjoy the peace and quiet of these areas. Reserves are managed and/or owned by local authorities, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Access to many of these reserves is controlled for matters of nature conservation. Country Parks are well-used by local day visitors and tourists providing relief from the more built up areas. The beach is also a popular place, especially in the summer months, with beach car parks used for "sitting in a nice spot" whatever the weather or time of year. The beach is also used by local people for strolling and dog walking all year round.

Man's history in the Solent has meant that the landscape is dotted with relics from the past both industrial and military, many of which are visited; the Defence of the Realm sites especially.

### Issues

- Climate change and associated sea-level rise mean that there is a need for footpaths and other land-based recreational activity zones to be able to roll back inland to avoid the loss of intertidal habitats due to coastal squeeze.
- Recreational carrying capacity is an under researched topic in the Solent area. Such research is invaluable in the management of recreational activity.
- Access to and along the Solent coast is constrained by the physical coastline itself, landownership, and nature conservation constraints.
- Access to recreational opportunities is sometimes limited for those who are mobility impaired. The improvement of access to the countryside for people with mobility impairment is a national objective and their needs are recognised in all statutory plans.
- In many places the Solent Way is forced to go inland due to landownership or other considerations.
- The Rights of Way Network, although extensive, is under-utilised and public access to and along this coastline is poor or non-existent in some parts.
- The Solent Millennium Trail was a proposed complete circuit of the Solent incorporating the existing ferry services between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight that has not yet seen fruition. although a European long distance route from Plymouth to Dover, E9, is expected to connect Hampshire with the Isle of Wight.

### Opportunities for Actions

- R1** Determine the effects of climate change on areas of land-based recreation and assess the feasibility of moving footpaths and other areas inland when opportunities arise.
- R2** Assess the impacts of land-based recreation on nature conservation.
- R3** Support and encourage studies on the recreational carrying capacity of the Solent area.
- R4** Determine methods of managing public access to sensitive areas of the coast.
- R5** Seek to improve access for all; in particular improve opportunities for the disabled and those who are mobility impaired.
- R6** Provide an attractive and safe environment, particularly for those with restricted mobility.
- R7** Promote, maintain and extend the Rights of Way Network.
- R8** Where possible reroute Solent Way to the coast by negotiation with land-owners.

**R9** Assess the feasibility of a Circular Solent Way, linking the Isle of Wight and mainland coastal path together with circular routes from the Solent Way.

## **Water-based recreation**

The Solent's sheltered waters are suitable for most forms of water-based recreation, but it is leisure boating that dominates. The Solent is one of the most densely populated sailing areas in the world and as such there is continuing pressure to create more moorings and marinas. There are currently more than fifty places where a boat may be moored, with marinas becoming increasingly popular due to the services and facilities they provide. The annual cost of berthing a 10m boat ranges from £250 to over £4,000 depending on facilities. Dedicated visitor moorings are found at twenty-seven sites but visitors are mainly provided for by vacated resident berths.

There are 60 public launch points on the Isle of Wight and 80 on the mainland. These slipways, hards and beaches provide an alternative to moorings for trailed craft and other water users such as wind-surfers and jet skis.

There are 20 identified bathing sites in the Solent where the water is tested regularly throughout the bathing period (May-September). During 2001, the Solent's waters were the cleanest yet with all beaches passing the European mandatory standard. Pump-out facilities are available at seven places on the mainland coast and at Yarmouth Harbour on the Isle of Wight. The placement of well-signed and maintained refuse and waste facilities is crucial to protecting the water quality of the Solent. Some harbour authorities and marina operators offer recycling facilities.

## **Issues**

- The quality of the Solent's water is central to water-based recreation and the local flora and fauna.
- Any increased access to the water environment must satisfy the objective of accommodating the demands of sport and recreation with regard to safety and the potential damage to the environment, whilst recognising the high economical and social importance of marine industry in the area.
- With the increase in the types of recreation that are now pursued along this coastline there is greater chance of conflict amongst users. Safety, therefore, is of paramount importance.
- Ancillary facilities for water-based recreation users are limited with the majority of provision for sailors.
- It has been nearly ten years since a comprehensive study of recreational use of the Solent has been undertaken. For a strategy of this kind to have meaning it is timely to carry out another.
- The 1994 recreation study assessed the mooring capacity of the Solent and reported that it was close to full capacity. A survey carried out in 2001 found there to be 23,159 moorings in the Solent. Such counts do not take into account the use made of the Solent by other forms of water recreation nor the number of craft kept ashore.
- The quality and practical use of public slipways varies and some are not recommended by relevant harbour authorities for use, either due to safety reasons or inadequate access, whilst others are in high demand.

## **Opportunities for Action**

**R10** Improve public awareness of water quality in the Solent.

**R11** Encourage boat users to adopt codes of practice with reference to the environment; to scrub boats in designated areas and to dispose of their waste in dedicated containers.

**R12** Assess the water-based recreational impacts on nature conservation (see E1)

**R13** Examine the trends, pressures, demands and facilities relating to water-based recreation, to develop an integrated approach to water based recreation on the coast.

**R14** Consider stricter control over access and recreation where conflict (between recreational users as well as between recreational and nature conservation) or safety issues are or become apparent.

**R15** Undertake a mooring count/use and demand survey as part of a Water Recreation Study with special focus on visitor moorings.

**R16** Examine the efficiency of mooring areas and improve where necessary.

**R17** Assess which public launch points are inadequate and either improve or close them, whilst encouraging the use and maintenance of good quality launch points.

## **INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION**

Information and interpretation are key factors in enjoying and appreciating the coastal environment. Awareness raising is crucial in bringing together all those who use the sea and the coast together to share the responsibility for its enhancement and protection.

Information can:

- raise awareness of the resource;
- educate users of the needs and values of others who use the coast and;
- influence visitor choice and routes taken.

Various sites provide information for the public, usually through the use of signs covering: safety; recreational zoning; byelaws and restrictions; local codes of practice; weather, tides and water quality; important wildlife features; as well as historic and landscape features. Information is also provided through leaflets, theme days, on-site staff, presentations, interpretative trails, information centres and museums. Informal environmental education activities are also undertaken by various agencies for example, guided walks, talks and events specifically geared for children and young people. Signs are also used to provide direction. Road signs and way markers give guidance on an appropriate route and may also be used as a form of visitor management by diverting people away from sensitive areas.

The Solent has many special features and its enjoyment can be enhanced by explaining and interpreting these. They may be grouped into themes: ports and shipping; the Navy and defence heritage; sailing; wildlife; aviation history and maritime archaeology. Minor themes include industry and royalty.

### **Issues**

- The Solent has many key features/themes but none are highlighted, other than the Defence of the Realm sites, a marketing consortium of over 40 defence heritage attractions within Hampshire and its surrounding area, some of which are on the coast. The linkage of other sites and features to sites of similar interest is missing.
- Not all significant features are interpreted.
- Many visitor attractions offer some form of information to the public but often solely about the site itself and not the wider coastal context.
- Information may be out of date.
- Lack of a uniform style for signs and notices makes the coast appear fragmented instead of a cohesive physical unit.
- Minimal Solent interpretation on public ferries.
- Misleading signage on some Rights of Way.

### **Opportunities for Action**

- In1** Carry out an interpretation audit to establish what is and isn't promoted and/or interpreted in the Solent area.
- In2** Examine and improve Solent interpretation on ferries.
- In3** Establish an integrated approach to interpretation and information provision along the coast through key sites, heritage trails and educational information explaining the attributes of the coastal resource.
- In4** Generate a public awareness campaign to promote the Solent and its enhancement.
- In5** Look to improving and rationalising signage where possible and when resources allow.
- In6** Establish key information points for signs and displays where particular information is important.
- In7** Determine a Solent "Standard" so that the public understand symbols/signs along the length of the coast
- In8** Support collaboration between teachers and organisations to improve the educational use of the Solent.
- In9** Produce information media that is aimed at the widest range of society so all can value and enjoy the coast.

## **TRANSPORT**

The transport network provides infrastructure and services for both residents and visitors who wish to visit the coast. Along the mainland the M27 and A27 are the arterial routes with "A" roads feeding to the coast. On the island some A roads go to the Solent coast.

Railway stations are found in most local towns on the mainland whilst buses provide an important form of transport for islanders and visitors on the Isle of Wight. It is important to encourage and support schemes that make all forms of public transport, attractive, safe, convenient and pleasant.

The ferries from Lymington, Southampton and Portsmouth/Southsea provide vital links in the communication network between the island and the mainland coast of the Solent whilst local ferries provide convenient, shorter crossings for both commuters and visitors.

### **Issues**

- Public transport is too awkward or inopportune, for example poor provision for bicycles on buses and trains.
- Public transport is poor in many areas of the Solent.
- Conflict on shared routes between motorised vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.
- Insufficient safe and convenient facilities for cyclists.
- Increasing car ownership and reliance on this convenient mode of transport has meant that at peak times some coastal roads are congested and parking facilities are full.
- Ever-increasing demand for more car parks on the coast but these can have a negative impact on the visual quality of the landscape and their creation conflicts with policies to preserve the landscape and protect the environment from intense visitor pressure.

### **Opportunities for Action**

- T1** Continue to campaign for better public transport services to the coast
- T2** Continue to pilot and support innovative schemes to encourage the use of public transport.
- T3** Reduce pedestrian/cycle/vehicle conflict to improve safety of all users
- T4** Provide fully for the needs of the cyclist with safe and convenient parking in appropriate coastal locations.
- T5** Devise controls/schemes to resolve existing parking problems, and continue to work towards integrated land use and transport policies as a method of car park management.
- T6** If car park charging is considered the best method of curbing use of the car, a co-ordinated approach to car park charging should occur across the whole Solent.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

The Solent's landscape varies from unspoilt countryside to urban waterfront, industrial areas to historic castles and sites of geological interest to busy marinas. It is this variety that make our coastline so appealing for recreation but also so sensitive to recreational impact.

On the Solent shores there are three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one on the Isle of Wight, one that follows the New Forest coast and one that encompasses Chichester Harbour. In 1999, the Countryside Agency began the process of designating the New Forest as a National Park. The Island also boasts two stretches of Heritage Coast which fall entirely within the designated AONB; these areas have particular landscape, flora and fauna features as well as archaeological and architectural interest. There is also historic heritage on parts of the Solent coast, namely, monuments and gardens as well as sites below low water, all of which are of environmental, educational and cultural value.

The Solent has significant habitats and natural features recognised not only nationally but internationally as well. More than 80% of the coastline is considered to be of high nature conservation value and has been designated accordingly.

The coastal recreational experience draws on all aspects of the coast: culture, beauty and wildlife but in many places, the glory of the coast is tarnished by the litter and objects users of the coast leave behind. The problem of rubbish is largely down to public education; the provision of better information on the impacts on the environment from litter might serve to alleviate some of the problem. People who carelessly discard litter in a public open place are committing a criminal offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 whilst it is an offence under the Merchant Shipping Act to dump garbage at sea. Various sites offer recycling facilities but there is no provision at Country Parks or larger visitor attractions.

### **Issues**

- The Solent's unique features make it important to manage visitor access and recreational use within the constraints of the natural, built and historic environment.
- In some areas the coast is intruded upon by development, eyesores and waste.
- Public respect, acceptance and support of protection and conservation management is not as good as it could be.

### **Opportunities for Action**

- E1** Assess recreational impacts on nature conservation.
- E2** Determine areas or zones where access for recreation needs to be controlled and develop the appropriate method of management.
- E3** Where appropriate create/restore habitat with native species.
- E4** Enforce regulations that make it an offence to drop litter or dispose of garbage overboard.
- E5** Promote schemes such as Marine Conservation Society's Adopt a Beach as an approach to tackling the coastal litter problem.
- E6** Promote clean codes of conduct, such as a Dog Owners Code of Practice for Solent Beaches.
- E7** Undertake environmental enhancements such as landscaping, improvement of floorscape/street furniture and provision of litter and recycling bins.
- E8** Seek to retain sea views and open up new ones should opportunities allow.
- E9** Seek to remove and/or replace structures that are detrimental to visual amenity.

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

This Strategy sets out aims, objectives and opportunities for action to shape the sustainable use of the Solent. Its success relies upon the support of the diverse organisations on both sides of the Solent, their acceptance of the guidance it provides and implementation of its actions.

From here it is necessary to:

1. determine mechanisms to drive the opportunities for action, such as a co-ordinated Action Plan and the identification of partnerships required for realisation;
- [1.2](#) encourage and promote greater interest and involvement of local communities and individuals;
- [1.3](#) identify resources required;
- [1.4](#) find external funding;
- [1.5](#) explore and conduct pilot projects to determine best practice for the Solent; and
- [1.6](#) monitor and review progress.