mapping our shores

50 years of land use change at the coast
Foreword

There is something very special about living on an island. Few can be unaware of our towering cliffs of chalk, sandstone, granite and basalt, even though it is largely the sparkling sandy beaches and the more sombre salt marshes that are visited by thousands of holiday-makers every year. However, the drive for economic growth and pressure for development is an ever-increasing challenge for these treasured but finite parts of our scenic heritage. Coastal towns and coastal industry may need to expand but this pressure simply highlights the need to protect our shoreline from needless or unplanned development.

In 1964, the National Trust formally set about establishing a project to protect and conserve large stretches of its heritage coastline at a meeting held at Queen Anne’s Gate, London under the Chairmanship of Lord Antrim. I am the only survivor of that historic committee which planned what was to become known as Enterprise Neptune.

It soon became clear that in order to establish a programme of acquisition it would be essential to identify which coastal sites should be targeted. I was asked to carry out a mapping survey of the entire coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to illustrate what existed in terms of every detail of land use. The brief was to provide the National Trust with a complete set of maps by the end of 1965 together with accompanying reports for each coastal county.

That summer the intrepid surveyors (I mapped most of North Wales) set forth to tramp thousands of miles of our coastline on an expenses only agreement. Just how far isn’t clear: we originally thought we were going to map 3,083 miles but more recent calculations show the coastline stretches closer to 8,000 miles. Whatever the distance it involved an incredible amount of legwork and weary feet! In due course the 350 field-survey maps, generously donated by the Department of Geography, were returned to me to be copied, hand-coloured and annotated onto a fresh set of maps. This archive was to be the blueprint upon which future National Trust purchase policies were to be planned.

Over the next few decades the National Trust continued to add to its existing coastal properties and actively sought to acquire land whenever and wherever the opportunity arose.

In 1999, I was asked to produce an interim report in an attempt to assess the degree to which our coastline was being lost to development, planned or otherwise. Although this task had to be carried out with a very broad brush from current OS maps, it became evident that certain stretches of coastland had disappeared under bricks and mortar.

I worked with officers of the National Trust (aided by a colleague, David Pinder) to establish a second detailed survey to identify the location and degree of such changes. By 2013 the National Trust generously agreed to fund a second coastal survey, following broadly the format but not the fieldwork of the 1965 undertaking – digital mapping technology and aerial photography were used instead. It was successfully completed in 2015 by a research team from the University of Leicester and the results are illustrated in this important report.

I am privileged and honoured to be invited to write the Foreword to a volume that encapsulates so much of what I have striven to accomplish and to have contributed to the Neptune Campaign of coastal conservation for more than half a century.

Dr John Whittow
Formerly Chairman of the School of Earth Sciences, University of Reading

Right: Cadgwith, The Lizard, Cornwall.
Introduction

As a nation of islanders that loves and cherishes the British coast, we are lucky enough to enjoy a predominantly undeveloped coastline that supports the need for homes and employment as well as the need for beautiful landscapes, space for nature, fresh air and special seaside places.

This report presents a unique and important analysis of 50 years of land use change at the coast. From the baseline of a visionary physical survey carried out by University of Reading students in 1965, a second survey was conducted by the University of Leicester from the relative comfort of the desktop in 2014. The maps, data and analyses produced by these two surveys are incredibly rich in the way they show how change has occurred along our coasts. They also show the difference that can be made by a small group of enthusiastic and tenacious volunteers. By making the maps and data publicly available, we hope they might inspire further research.

Of the 775 miles of coastline looked after by the National Trust, three quarters have been acquired since 1965 when we launched Enterprise Neptune. The fundraising campaign set out to save our coast from the threat of over-development that had emerged following the world wars. Since its launch (during which time it has been renamed the Neptune Coastline Campaign), it has become the National Trust’s most successful and enduring fundraising campaign, thanks to overwhelming public support which has so far raised £65 million. This report presents evidence of the success that National Trust ownership brings alongside statutory landscape protections in conserving the very things that often bring us to visit the coast.

Although we describe some large changes that have occurred in the balance of land use at the coast, the results broadly show the success of the planning system in protecting it from the kind of threats that were prevalent in 1965. It’s good to think that the Neptune Campaign helped to raise public awareness of the coast’s importance and the related shaping of planning policies over the years.

Our new strategy sets out how we will play our part in tackling future threats to nature and heritage over the next decade, and beyond. This timely and inspiring report reminds us just what can be achieved when we think long term and set ourselves ambitious goals.

Whilst this report celebrates successes, the analysis also presents a wake-up call for maintaining strong planning policies for our protected landscapes; built development is shown to be almost entirely irreversible, and once open countryside is gone – it’s gone.

Looking forward, these principles shape our vision for the coast. We want:

- The coastline to be clean and healthy, predominantly shaped by natural forces.
- The sheer beauty and diversity of our coastline to continue to inspire and refresh generations of people.
- Wildlife to be rich and abundant, not squeezed into a narrow margin.
- People to enjoy walking on every stretch of coastline, not just land managed by the National Trust.
- A coast rich in reminders of our heritage.
- Coastal resources put to good use, contributing to the economy, in a way that’s respectful and sustainable.

It’s been a pleasure and privilege to be part of this special project.

Huw Davies
Head of Conservation Information, National Trust
Key findings

Our analysis of 50 years of land use change at the coast has led us to these conclusions:

The nation's longest running conservation campaign is delivering
In 1965 the Trust launched an ambitious campaign to buy and protect the coastline identified as ‘pristine’ for the nation to enjoy. Fifty years later, our commitment to the coast is as strong as ever. Thanks to the ongoing generosity and passion of our supporters, we have been able to realise the bold ambition to save much of the pristine coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We’re lucky to have lots of undeveloped coastline
Looking at 50 years of land use change on the coast we can see that planning policy has worked – in England and Wales. Northern Ireland has suffered more development and demonstrates what happens when the planning system lacks rigour.

Our coast has changed
The threats – and opportunities – we have at the coast have changed over time. Whilst the threat of insensitive coastal development hasn’t gone away, better planning controls and increased National Trust ownership in coastal areas means that we have widened our focus to other coastal challenges. Climate change, increasing use of marine and offshore resources and sea level rise mean we need to think about how we look after the coast for the long term – and how we maximise benefits for the environment as we do so.

Love the coast
Three quarters, 74%, of the coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland remains undeveloped – a wonderful resource for people and nature, within reach of most of the population. We will continue to work hard with others to increase access to the coast, and the wildlife and heritage there, so people can enjoy the coast they love.

Left: Whiteford Burrows
Headline statistics

The two surveys offer unprecedented insights into the change that has taken place on the coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland over the past 50 years.

For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the coast remains largely undeveloped with 69% of the total coastal survey area categorised as ‘open countryside’ (which covers both farmed land and natural/semi-natural habitats, excluding woodland) in 2014.

However, open countryside has decreased by 4.2% since 1965, which is a loss of 14,800 ha – greater than the urban area of Bristol.

Urban/built-up areas increased by 42%, with a net change of 17,357 ha – this has added the equivalent of a city the size of Manchester to the coast.

Almost the entire coastline which was identified as ‘pristine’ in 1965 (3,342 miles) now benefits from some kind of protection through a combination of Trust ownership, other like-minded landowners and public protection through the planning system, particularly through the creation of AONBs and National Parks.

The amount of coastal land classified as used for defence has decreased by 24% by 4,209 ha of the total area. World War Two infrastructure and defensive blockhouses have almost disappeared from the maps.

Open countryside on the Northern Irish Coast has decreased by 7.9% as a proportion of the total land surveyed, which is a loss of 2,229 ha. Over the same period urban areas increased by 116% (from 1,478 ha to 3,197 ha), caravans by 191% (from 91 to 247 ha) and industry by 357% (from 91 ha to 416 ha).

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasteland</td>
<td>2,926</td>
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</table>

Change in land use type from 1965 to 2014 (in hectares)
The 1965 survey

In 1964, the National Trust, concerned by the potential impact of increasing development and industrialisation along the coastline, commissioned the University of Reading’s Geography Department to complete a survey of land use along the coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

During the summer of 1965, 34 graduate geography students and three members of staff from the University of Reading, led by a young lecturer Dr John Whittow, set out to survey the coast, taking with them all of their equipment, including the tents they stayed in overnight.

Between them, over three months, the researchers walked almost the entire length of the coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland – a staggering 8,030 miles. They had to be self-sufficient and worked only on minimal expenses.

The challenges they faced were not just scientific. They encountered mixed weather and difficulty in accessing the coastline, often with no footpaths. The South Wales surveyor met even greater misfortune as he returned to find his tent ransacked with his camera and completed maps stolen.

The students physically surveyed the whole coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland up to two miles inland, for fourteen different types of land use. Their work was hand-coloured onto around 350 Ordnance Survey map sheets. They drew over 18,000 land use areas and marked more than 4,000 comments.

One major focus of the survey was the explosion of leisure development along the coast as post-war prosperity enabled more people to holiday there. Another was the rapid increase in large-scale and heavy industry in the form of steel works, oil refineries and related infrastructure.

The use of coastal land was assessed using 14 categories, including open countryside, woodland, industrial buildings and shack development. Value judgements were also recorded about the condition of the coast by the surveyors using terms such as ‘excellent’, ‘deplorable’ or ‘semi-urbanised’.

Land use was then grouped into three categories to help the National Trust understand the nature of coastal development. This comprised areas where land use remained largely free from built development (seen as target areas for protection); areas that had been compromised through small-scale development (but had the potential to be restored); and those that were rather uncharitably described as ‘beyond redemption’ – built-over swathes of land that could never be won back, so compromised by unsympathetic development that they would be of no interest to the Trust.

Once completed, the maps were collated by Dr Whittow, who painstakingly produced copies of every sheet used in the field. It was a huge task.

Their annotations are often striking, stark even, and at other times provide great examples of value judgements of their time. The map for Orford Ness in Suffolk, which was home to some of the UK’s nuclear weapons research and testing, notes both a ‘National Nature Reserve’ and ‘Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (no access)’ as well as a reference to ‘unexploded missiles to south’. Orford Ness was an example of the enormous amount of military equipment still left around after World War Two.

Elsewhere, the annotations of Whiteford Burrows in the Gower peninsula included praise such as ‘unspoilt’ and ‘pleasant’.

The Great Orme in north Wales was described by the researcher as ‘one of the finest limestone headlands in Britain’ but adds that derelict gun emplacements are ‘both dangerous and an eyesore’.

The survey identified 3,342 miles of coastline as ‘pristine’ and in need of protection to prevent development. The 1965 survey highlighted the aesthetic threat caused by uncontrolled development of shacks and caravans, illustrated in the photograph opposite.

The findings provided hard evidence demonstrating the need for the National Trust’s Neptune Coastline Campaign, which officially launched on 11 May 1965 by Prince Philip which set out to raise £2 million.
Top left: Hand-scrawled annotations on what the surveyors found reflect their judgements on the impact of coastal development.

Above: Orford Ness had perhaps the most extreme contrast between natural beauty and military impact.

Right: Rapid and often chaotic caravan development was a key motivating factor behind the mapping project.
A tale of two surveys – and two students

For two of the students who undertook the 1965 survey, the experience was significant for more than their geographical findings. David Pinder and Pam Yeates were already a couple when they were dispatched to the south-west coast of Cornwall to map the land from St Austell to Land’s End.

‘It was a lovely stretch to do, though we were paid a ridiculously small amount,’ David recalls. ‘It was really just expenses.’

The work was rewarding, if at times problematic. ‘In many places the coast path was not developed, so there was overgrown bracken and farm dogs to contend with,’ he says. Even their single day off in three weeks was far from straightforward, as a planned day in Penzance was all but washed out. ‘The weather was awful. Our youth hostel was closed during the day, so we sat in a seafront shelter reading the newspapers and then covering ourselves with them to keep dry and warm.’

On another day, while walking along Loe Bar near the Lizard they realised they were pushing their luck with the weather and sea. ‘There was a storm blowing up, the tide was rising rapidly and we were weighing up whether we could get around the rocks in time at the end of the beach to reach Porthleven. Otherwise we faced a long inland detour,’ says David. ‘We went for the rocks and as we did so a helicopter from RAF Culdrose emerged overhead. It

Great Orme – 1965

A copy of the 1965 map showing land use on the Great Orme and the surrounding coast. The annotations were observations made by the surveyor at the time.
just happened to be checking for people in trouble and it hovered over us while we walked around the rocks. They were probably thinking ‘what on earth are those idiots trying to do!’

In the intervening years, Pam has regularly made the point that as they were able to put up with one another through the ordeals of the survey, they could do so for life. In 2016 they will celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. Pam went on to be a teacher and a research assistant, while David became the first professor of Geography at the University of Plymouth.

Looking back, David is struck by the importance of the survey. ‘Development on the coast was proceeding very rapidly; the oil industry and steel works were expanding on scales never seen before. They were seen to be of strategic national interest but also brought visual intrusion and development to ecologically rich areas. The pressures were spiralling upwards and alarm was growing. This survey work has not been done anywhere else, it is unique and it’s a story that has to be told.’

Great Orme – 2014

The above map shows only areas of land use change on the Great Orme and the surrounding coastline. The colours used reflect the new land use classes (see key opposite).
The 2014 survey

The impact of the 1965 study was enormous, but the original maps faced an uncertain future. As time moved on, the knowledge around the survey ebbed away and the maps became confined to dusty archive stores.

After joining the Trust in 2011, Huw Davies was made aware of the maps and commissioned digital copies. With the maps now in this format, the organisation had the chance to do something groundbreaking with the findings: by completing the same survey again – using the same areas as in the 1965 survey – they would be able to create a snapshot of coastal land use change over the last 50 years.

This time the survey was completed by the University of Leicester, using new technology to carry out the work on computers.

Led by Professor Lex Comber, Department of Geography, University of Leicester (now at the University of Leeds), the researchers developed an approach for recording robust measures of land use change. A methodology was designed that involved aerial photography, current OS topographic base maps and the original map sheets (now digitised), and, where necessary, other sources such as Google Streetview to analyse land use.

It took the careful supervision of Professor Comber, one research associate, two interns and several MSc students six months to complete the project. Once finished, both surveys were compared and statistically analysed to determine the location and nature of land use changes along the coast.

*Right: Original pencil-marked map of the Durham coastline from the 1965 survey.*
How our coast has changed

The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was passed in part as a response to the rapid sprawl at Peacehaven, East Sussex where, since the 1920s, piecemeal development of single plots of land for housing had spoiled many of the potential benefits of the area.

By 1965 the modern planning system was in its infancy and there were clear threats to stretches of beautiful coast, as development encroached along shores and countryside. Major industry was expanding on an unprecedented scale and caravan sites which gave holidaymakers more affordable places to stay, also sometimes spoil the very coastlines their occupants were travelling to admire.

Development control was significantly strengthened in the second half of the 20th century. In addition to the protection offered by National Trust ownership and other like-minded landowners, the most effective control has been the planning system. Protection has been further bolstered by protective designations such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

The threats – and opportunities – at the coast have changed over time. We are incredibly fortunate to have a coast that remains predominately undeveloped. 

The research from the two surveys shows that the post war planning system has played a key role in protecting our coast from inappropriate development. Yet, the twin surveys also show that once open countryside is lost, it is rarely recovered.

Above: Chris Lingard, National Trust warden, removing fence at Wembury Point.

Coast land use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Land use types and areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>1965 (ha)</th>
<th>LU 1965</th>
<th>2014 (ha)</th>
<th>LU 2014</th>
<th>change (ha)</th>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td>-698</td>
<td>-81.3</td>
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</table>

† Default land use class

Land use classes with areas > 100ha

1965

- Open countryside
- Woodland
- Managed recreation/sport
- Inland water
- Urban/built-up
- Shacks

2014

- Industry
- Wasteland
- Caravans, etc
- Defence
- Blockhouses
- Transport
Open countryside

Open countryside (which covers both farmed land and natural/semi-natural habitats, excluding woodland) has decreased by 4.2% since 1965, which is a loss of 14,800 hectares. On National Trust owned land, ‘open countryside’ has been protected from change, and in some places, land has in fact been returned to natural uses. For example the Durham coast to the south of the town of Seaham, which in 1965 was considered ‘beyond redemption’, where a heavily polluted coal mining landscape has been managed back to healthy and species-rich coastal habitats.

Below: The brutalised Durham coastline was employed by sci-fi film directors in search of alien landscapes. Today, a clean-up operation has helped nature to return more quickly than could ever have been hoped for.

Economic benefits of an undeveloped coast

There are enormous economic as well as social and environmental benefits of having a well-planned coast. An undeveloped coast does not mean it isn’t contributing in a major way to the local economy and growth as it benefits from people visiting the natural coastline.

- The South West Coast Path generates £436 million every year and supports 10,000 jobs.[1]
- The 870-mile Wales Coast Path has generated £32 million since it opened in 2012.[2]
- A counter installed at the top of Golden Cap in Dorset shows that more than 100,000 people visit the site every year.

Urban areas

Since the 1965 survey, there has been a 42% increase in ‘urban/built up areas’, with a net addition of 17,557 ha, an area greater than the city of Manchester. The popularity of the coast as a place to visit and live means it has always been under a high level of pressure from development. Whilst urban areas at the coast have increased, our planning system has become increasingly able to direct development to the most appropriate places, and these figures suggest it is doing a good job on the coast. As development pressure intensifies in the future, the role of the planning system in finding the right places for new development will only grow in importance.

Defence land

Coastal land covered by defence use has decreased by almost a quarter, from 3.5% to 2.7% of the total coastal area. For instance, on the urban fringes of Plymouth, Wembury Point was acquired by the National Trust in 2006 from the Ministry of Defence at a time when the area was under threat from commercial development.

Nevertheless, remnants of World War Two infrastructure remain across our coasts and attitudes to such structures have altered. These days we might be more inclined to preserve installations such as tank traps, pillboxes and blockhouses, as part of our cultural heritage.

Industrial use

Industrial coastal areas have increased by 39% to cover a total of 13,081 hectares. This change is characterised by the phenomenon of churn, where industry has reeded in some places over the 50 years but spread elsewhere. The location of industrial sites has been moving geographically as the type of industry has changed. In particular, there has been a large shift from quarrying and mining to transport services particularly ports, warehousing and storage.

Caravans

The survey showed a 44% net increase in caravan areas from 0.98% to 1.42% of the total coastal area surveyed, which is an extra 2,153 ha. Caravan sites are more commonly found outside statutorily protected areas, and there have been large increases in the North West and Northern Ireland.

For many, affordable coastal accommodation is important and can be a key way for people to enjoy the coast. However, we will still need to be vigilant that future development doesn’t compromise the natural beauty of the coast or its accessibility.

Shacks

Development control has been tightened considerably since the 1960s, and shacks are a good practical example of the effect of the planning system. Shacks were often erected in large numbers as temporary holiday bases, but they have now almost disappeared from our coastal landscape often being replaced with more permanent dwellings. Many might consider this a loss of cultural history.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has suffered more negative coastal development than England or Wales, and this demonstrates what can happen when the planning system lacks rigour. Undeveloped land along the Northern Ireland coast has decreased from 90% to 84%. For many years it was relatively easy to obtain planning permission for individual houses along the coast and a lot of Government money was invested in industry in coastal towns and areas. Unlike the mainland, camping and caravan parks were in their infancy in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, but have increased by a large percentage over the last 50 years.

However, there is a sense locally that these trends have now levelled off. Many of the statistics also start from a low base, which can make the picture appear more dramatic than the reality of the impact.

Impact of National Trust ownership on the coast:

- The National Trust now owns 775 miles of the coast. 74% of National Trust owned coastline has been acquired since 1965 thanks to the generosity of our supporters and donations made to the Neptune Coastline Campaign (formerly Enterprise Neptune).

- Coastline looked after by the National Trust accounts for 9.7% of the total coastline of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A change matrix is used to analyse changes between land use classes as losses and gains. (Note that some columns and rows have been removed for reasons of space and clarity. The totals will not therefore be accurate to the data shown.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>1965 Total</td>
<td>494,742</td>
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</table>

The loss of marginal farmland, for example, may simply be attributable to that land no longer being viable.

Recent changes in the planning system give hope for the future. Responsibility for local development plans and development control was devolved from central Government to local councils in Northern Ireland in April 2015. This should give planning professionals the opportunity to work with communities to create local development plans. These will take into account long-term trends, reflect a better knowledge of habitats and impacts, and use this survey data as a tool to influence future patterns of change.
Measuring a coastline

The National Trust uses a measure of coast length to tell the story of the coastline it looks after. Inevitably, there is always a level of interpretation in calculating this and it is not always an exact science. Essentially, this is because the length of coastline is fractal, the closer you look, the more detail you see, and the longer the coastline gets – the same process that applies when trying to measure a snowflake!

Since 2013, the National Trust has used Ordnance Survey (OS) and Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland (OSNI) 1:50,000 digital data products for measuring coastlines. Standards are used to reduce ambiguity concerning questions such as what constitutes a ‘coastline’ (we use mean high water) and how far into estuaries the coastline extends (we use normal tidal limits).
Protected coastline

The original land use survey identified 3,342 miles of ‘pristine land for permanent preservation’. Of this, the National Trust now looks after 649 miles out of a total of 775 miles in its care.

With the additional protection provided by Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Parks and Heritage Coast status, 2,422 miles are now protected from inappropriate development.

Adding in Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) the total stretch of coastline in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which is considered ‘protected’ is 3,139 miles, equal to 94% of the coastline identified as ‘pristine’ in 1965.

In 1965, the pristine areas for permanent preservation were drawn onto a single UK map reproduced in the London Illustrated News. The thick black stretches represent coast that was already owned by the National Trust; the thick red strips represent unspoilt coastline that was considered to be pristine and in need of protection.
The future

Celebrating the nation’s longest running conservation campaign

In 1965 the National Trust launched an ambitious campaign to buy 900 miles of ‘pristine coastline’ for the nation to enjoy. 50 years later, thanks to the generosity and support of hundreds of thousands of people, the National Trust has been able to deliver on its bold ambition to save much of the pristine coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and our commitment to the coast is as strong as ever.

The Neptune Campaign has achieved extraordinary success. Our work continues as we meet the challenges of looking after 775 miles of coastline in our care and stand ready to acquire new areas of coastline when the need arises.

We’re lucky to have lots of undeveloped coastline

The of the threats of 1965 have receded. That’s not to say that some threats have gone away, but society’s ability to manage them has improved. Onshore developments such as housing and leisure use remain – and indeed urban areas have grown substantially since 1965 – but development seems to have been contained and directed to the most suitable locations, enabling us to focus protection on what is most valuable. This has provided protection in places that need it, and allowed for essential development.

It’s important that protective policies and designations remain, to keep our coastline largely undeveloped so that everyone can continue to enjoy it.

The benefits of a strong town and country planning system and National Trust ownership, alongside other like-minded landowners, have ensured that more than three-quarters of the coast of England, Wales and Northern Ireland remain undeveloped. This provides a resource for people and nature, within reach of most of the population, contributing to the nation’s quality of life in the long-term.

We hope that evidence from the surveys can facilitate important conversations within and between local communities, landowners and policy makers, contributing towards a sustainable and beautiful coast for the next 50 years and beyond. As development pressure intensifies, the role of the planning system in finding the right places for new development can only grow in importance. The findings from the surveys show how important it is that we make space for nature and keep in place a strict planning process.

Our coast has changed

The planning system is already facing new challenges, with some arguing in favour of relaxing planning rules to make it easier for development to take place. The National Trust will seek to influence, contribute to, and complement planning policy and development management to ensure that the planning system remains effective. This applies offshore as well as on land.

We have protected most of our coast but the threats to the seaward side are now much greater. New technologies, such as offshore wind, marine and tidal technologies and oil and gas extraction can have dramatic effects on seascapes and people’s experience of the coast and seas.

Marine planning – a new approach to managing the seas – is being introduced around the English, Welsh and Northern Irish coastlines. We need to learn the lessons from the coast mapping projects: that effective planning is vital when managing competing priorities at the coast. Major infrastructure developments at the coast require a joined-up, strategic approach to planning to minimise harm to sensitive landscapes. We must manage the increasing pressures on seascapes, the seabed and marine environment through the marine planning process.

Coast you can walk and enjoy

As well as having a coastline that is well protected and with a high proportion of open countryside, we are fortunate to have one that is accessible. The newly created coast path around Wales has ensured everyone can enjoy its diversity and beauty. The National Trust will remain dedicated to providing access to the coast by working with others, while protecting its wildlife and heritage. Part of this will be supporting the Government’s commitment to creating a coastal footpath around the whole of England by 2020. We will play our role in supporting this through sharing our experience with other landowners and farmers, demonstrating how coastal access can bring benefits for everyone.

Love the coast

People’s generosity, in the form of legacies and donations, has been key to the long-term success of Neptune and will remain the cornerstone of caring for the coast as the Trust looks to meet the challenges of the next 50 years.

Whilst the scale of the loss of countryside at the coast is perhaps not as high as some may have expected, it is important to remember that the natural processes operating within open countryside at the coast provide an essential buffer against climate change including extreme weather. And once open countryside is lost, it is rarely recovered. Beaches, soaring cliffs, rolling headlands and wild open views are the very things that bring millions of people to live at and visit the coast. It is imperative that we continue to take special care over how we manage our coastline.

Peter Nixon
Director of Land, Landscapes and Nature, National Trust
The stunning setting of Great Orme has now been protected by National Trust acquisition in early 2015.
Case studies

Great Orme

Regarded as one of the top five botanical sites in Great Britain, the Orme came up for sale in 2015 amid rumours of plans to develop it into a golf course.

By acquiring the site, the National Trust sought to defend this landscape against any potential development and work with its neighbours to better manage the headland.

Fences around Parc Farm have already been removed, opening up a vast expanse of the landscape for the first time. The National Trust also has the grazing rights to over 290 hectares of the headland, allowing it to work with others to safeguard habitats for the majority of the landmark.

Golden Cap

In 1965 Golden Cap, part of the Jurassic Coast, was under threat as holiday parks in the area were being heavily developed.

Using Neptune funds the National Trust has gradually been stitching together more than 30 separate parcels of land on the Golden Cap Estate.

Today, eight miles of the exceptional coast between Charmouth and Bridport are protected by the Trust, spanning over 1000 hectares. Previously inaccessible, it’s now criss-crossed by 25 miles of public footpaths and bridleways.

Durham Coast

Once a popular holiday destination, the Durham coast became an industrial dumping ground in the 1960s for waste created by the deep coal mining taking place under the North Sea.

The National Trust acquired the land in 1990, employing local people and joining the Turning the Tide project, a partnership of interested parties and landowners led by the local authority. Work began to start clearing the sites and managing the rare limestone grasslands for nature.

Now, 25 years later, most of the waste has been cleared by the natural action of the sea. The area is part of the Durham Coast AONB and valued by both locals and visitors.

Whiteford Burrows

This large remote area of sand dunes on the north coast of Gower peninsula is widely regarded as one of the finest sand dune wildlife areas in the UK.

During World War Two it was used as a shelling and mining range. After the war finished it became a disposal area for explosives.

Whiteford Burrows faced an uncertain future as plans were made to use the area as a landfill site. However, on 12 March 1965, Whiteford Burrows became the first piece of land to be safeguarded by the Neptune Coastline Campaign. It has since been designated an SSSI and an NNR.
David Bassett
MBE, volunteer ranger at Wembury

‘I’m a local boy and have also travelled the world with the RAF. There used to be no reason to walk at Wembury, it was a real eyesore. There was horrible barbed wire and when they fired the guns, the whole of Devon seemed to shake. Now when I come back to Wembury I get a lump in my throat. The way the National Trust manages the land is phenomenal. If this had fallen into private hands it would look like the Costa del Sol. Now it’s stunning. You can walk through here and see a skylark nest; you wouldn’t have seen that a few years ago.’

White Cliffs of Dover

The White Cliffs of Dover stand proud at over 110 metres tall and have witnessed many dramatic moments in history. They are also home to a rich array of wildlife including the Adonis blue butterfly, skylark and the only colony of Kittiwakes in Kent. The National Trust already owned a five mile stretch of the cliffs as well as South Foreland Lighthouse, but the two were separated by a stretch of the coast which was privately owned.

In 2012 the land in between came up for sale and a fundraising campaign raised the £1.2 million needed to for the National Trust to secure the cliffs’ long-term future. The most iconic stretch of the White Cliffs is now looked after and managed for the benefit of the wildlife and the public.

Murlough Nature Reserve

Murlough Nature Reserve on the south-east coast of County Down covers an area of approximately 285 hectares. The landscape is internationally important for both its geomorphology and biology and designated an Area of Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation.

As well as undertaking habitat management and conservation grazing, National Trust ownership means that Murlough is open to the public with a network of more than 20 miles of paths and board walks.

Wembury Point

First used as a holiday camp in the 1920s, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) requisitioned it in 1940 for the defence of Plymouth. In 1956 the HMS Cambridge Gunnery School was established there. Although decommissioned in 2001 it remained hidden to the public behind barbed wire fences.

In 2005 the site was set to go up for sale for commercial development. English Nature, which later became Natural England, advised the MOD to sell it to the National Trust because of the site’s rich wildlife that had established itself there. The National Trust has since demolished the buildings, removed security fences, improved the route of the coast path and restored the traditional grassland of the cliffs for the benefit of wildflowers, birds and butterflies.

Whiteford Burrows

Golden Cap

Durham Coast

Murlough Nature Reserve

Great Orme
Cover image: Visitors exploring the beach at Birling Gap, part of the Seven Sisters chalk cliffs range, East Sussex.