

Case Study

Sussex Heritage Coast – establishing the special qualities and a Partner led Interpretation Plan for the area

Background

The Sussex Heritage Coast stretches from Eastbourne, along the iconic chalk cliffs of Beachy Head and the Seven Sisters, past Cuckmere Haven and on to Splash Point at Seaford. This was the first Heritage Coast in the UK, established as part of a plan to protect and conserve the best stretches of undeveloped coast in England.

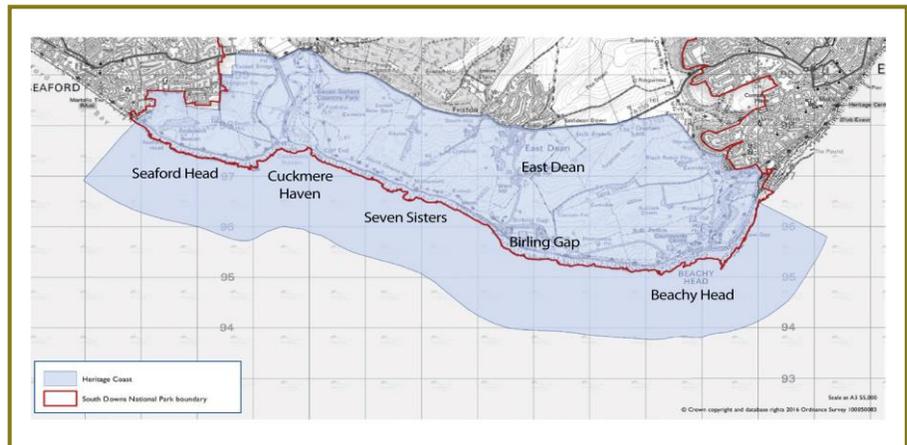
The Heritage Coast is the most visited part of the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and has excellent opportunities for targeting information to increase visitor enjoyment and understanding of the area.

The information available to the public regarding the Heritage Coast was disjointed and often contradictory. The SDNPA, as part of the Heritage Coast Partnership, identified the special qualities of the area and to draw a core narrative in order to promote consistent information to the public.

Consequently, a Management Plan has been developed by a group of key partners, led by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), who recognise that working together is essential for the delivery of actions which will benefit the Heritage Coast.

Consultation and collaboration with the Heritage Coast Partnership has been integral to the success of the project.

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/discover/landscape-geology/sussex-heritage-coast/>



The project

The development and delivery of a special qualities consultation; an interpretation/information audit and a partnership-led Interpretation Plan cost £19,000, which was funded by the Rampion Mitigation Fund. The Rampion Offshore Wind Farm comprises of 116 wind turbines constructed 13km off the Sussex Coast. The Mitigation Fund is a package of mitigation measures to reduce the impact on both land and people in the South Downs National Park.

The special qualities identified as part of the consultation will act as a baseline for measuring how the Heritage Coast changes over time. The Interpretation Plan was developed to better coordinate the visitor experience across the Heritage Coast to make the most of the opportunities available, looking at complementary approaches and increased partnership working.

SDNPA fulfilled the project requirements with the following key activities:

1. Site visits to the Heritage Coast area, including sections of the coastal cliff, the Cuckmere Valley, Seaford Head and South Hill Barn, Crowlink, Beachy Head and the gateways to the eastern end at Eastbourne.
2. Meetings with key stakeholders as part of the Special Qualities study and also to seek information about interpretive aims for the Heritage Coast.
3. The Special Qualities study included three activities to identify what the public see as the Special Qualities of the Heritage Coast:
 - Distributing a paper questionnaire to six visitor centres and museums for visitors to complete over a 5-week period
 - Organising and running drop-in sessions at four locations
 - An online survey, available on the South Downs and National Trust websites and promoted in advertisements carried by Facebook over a 4-week period.
4. Telephone interviews with representatives of partner organisations and key landowners/farmers within the Heritage Coast.
5. An audit of a range of existing interpretation within the Heritage Coast, including interpretation panels, leaflets, websites, activities and publications.
6. Delivery of the final Interpretation Plan document.

Unspoilt Stunning Views Heritage Coast Seven Sisters
 Cliff Edge Friendly Visitors Good Work Preserve
 Countryside Live Road Protected Experience
 Beautiful Tourists Place Stop Love Allow
 Wild Life Spectacular Access Given Walk Warning Signs
 Future Generations Fracking

Responses to the public consultation: *“Do you have any other comments or thoughts about the special qualities of the Sussex Heritage Coast?”*

Project outcomes

1. Establishment of the five special qualities for the Heritage Coast:

- Inspiring, iconic landscapes, with breath-taking open views of sea and land
- Rich and varied terrestrial and marine wildlife
- Undeveloped, with an exceptional sense of space, peace and tranquility
- An ancient landscape created by centuries of settlement
- Outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation and learning on land and sea

2. Audit of current interpretive/information provision

An interpretation/information audit covering print, digital and outdoor interpretation such as panels, guided walks and interpretive arts installations and built facilities (indoor interpretation) such as visitor centres, TICs and historic buildings is required to highlight current gaps in provision. The audit was presented as evidence in the partner led interpretation plan.

3. Partner led Interpretation Plan

The Interpretation Plan sets out a framework and programme for interpretation of the Sussex Heritage Coast, and is underpinned by the Special Qualities and an interpretation audit. This Interpretation Plan presents findings, approach, and a series of objectives and themes. It takes a strategic view of the overall messages for interpretation and recommends specific media and activities that are site-based or site-related.

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality. This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 5: Outstanding visitor experiences are underpinned by a high-quality access and sustainable transport network supporting improved health and wellbeing

Outcome 6: There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits they provide
southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf

The future

The Heritage Coast Partnership (HCP) are referencing the Special Qualities and messaging from the Interpretation Plan in current and future work.

HCP have established a ‘common language’ for all partners to use across communications and interpretive outputs.

An action plan for interpretation/visitor experience work is regularly updated to show progress and evidence of application.

For more information, please contact:

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