

Coastal Path Development – Draft Guidelines

1. Introduction

Overall, a coastal path should;

- offer a variety of landscape with quality scenery and good viewing points providing regular marine views (maximum horizontal distance recommended is 400 metres to sea shore);
- provide a range of physical challenges with good underfoot terrain;
- incorporate a range of sites of interest (e.g. architecture, archaeology, biology, heritage);
- be easily accessible and have supporting facilities and services;
- be safe for the walker;
- be sustainable.

A coastal path should be developed to cater to the needs of the *occasional walker*, broadly defined as a person that;

- walks for more than 2hrs on average less than twice a month;
- has limited though variable fitness levels;
- has limited navigation or emergency procedures skills;
- has limited knowledge of access issues
- is unlikely to have done any research on the loop prior to arrival.

2. Trailheads

A coastal path should take the walker from trailhead to trailhead which provide;

- ample, safe car parking;
- access to services (shops, pubs, restaurants, toilet/changing facilities, phone, etc);
- close proximity to public transport links and accommodation outlets.

The trailheads should be located at reasonable distances along the path. As the fitness levels and walking speeds of walkers vary considerably, a distance range is estimated at 10km to 20km - but this will depend on the level of ascent and difficulty of terrain.

Each trailhead should contain a mapboard clearly outlining details of the trek to the trailheads on either side to include;

- distance
- estimated duration
- points of interest
- overview of terrain
- level of ascent
- degree of difficulty (easy, moderate or hard).

The mapboard should be weatherproof, vandal resistant and comply with planning regulations.

3. Path Development

A coastal path should be as *natural* as possible. In this regard;

- physical development should only be undertaken where the walker's *safety* would be compromised by not doing so (e.g. erecting handrails along a clifftop section, constructing a footbridge at a stream crossing); or the *sustainability* of the loop would be compromised by not doing so (e.g. boardwalking or surfacing to prevent erosion).
- the path should avoid trafficked roads and never along primary or busy secondary roads unless there is a wide footpath. Overall, tarred roads should not exceed 20% of the overall path length.

The path must provide *assured access* to the walker. In this regard

- the path should be clearly waymarked in both directions using a consistent scheme throughout that is in keeping with the landscape.
- walkers should not encounter any physical obstructions. This will require the erection of high-quality furniture including gates or stiles (to give access through field boundaries, fences, walls, etc.), sturdy, slip-resistant footbridges (to give access across waterways).

- *permissive access* should be secured for all sections of the path, in particular, sections over private property.

4. Walker Safety

The path should be developed in a way that minimizes, manages or avoids all potential dangers or hazards to the walker including;

- crags or cliffs,
- steep slopes,
- heights over 300m
- tidal areas.

5. Conservation and Protection

A coastal path should respect and protect all habitat and wildlife designations and comply with the legal requirements in relation to Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas and adjoining areas, the resting and breeding places of protected species of animals and birds and the habitat or environment of any protected species of flora.

The path should avoid, in particular;

- special areas such as wildlife or nature reserves, rare habitats or heritage sites.
- environmentally sensitive sites or easily eroded surfaces which are too fragile to handle large numbers (e.g. dunes).
- using heavy machinery.

6. Sustainable Trail Management

Overall development must include a plan for

- regular monitoring and maintenance;
- meeting ongoing public liability insurance obligations;
- the marketing of the path.

This may be taken on by one organisation (e.g. Local Authority), or may involve a partnership between community organisations, landowners, public bodies and/or private agencies