

THE CASE FOR ESTABLISHING A 'WIGHT COAST TRAIL' THROUGH THE PROVISIONS OF THE 2009 MARINE & COASTAL ACCESS ACT.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 provides for a coastal trail to be established around the whole English coast. In the words of the Act, it will be made up of a path with spreading room, a margin of land accessible to the public for the purpose of its enjoyment. There will also be provision for the path to 'roll back' inland to cater for coastal erosion.

Natural England (part of DEFRA) has responsibility for implementing the Act. Some types of coastal land will need to be bypassed by the coastal trail, both nature and heritage conservation requirements will be taken into account, consultation and objection procedures have been established.

Here on the Isle of Wight we are a long way short of having a comprehensive Coastal Path. Around half of the existing path runs either inland or along public roads. More than 10 miles of our northern coastline between Yarmouth and Ryde have no public access or footpath.

A study commissioned by the Countryside Agency identified that the South West Coastal Path is worth over £300 million each year to that regions economy. If we pro rata that to the Isle of Wight coast line, a comprehensive 'Wight Coast Trail' with national trail status could be worth £34 million pa for our Island economy. It will also provide additional healthy outdoor recreational facilities for Island residents.

In Wales their complete coastal trail has already been set up and will be officially opened in May. Here in England a total of £50m was originally budgeted for implementation of the new Act over ten years (2010-2019). So far work has started by Natural England on six stretches of coast in Dorset, Cumbria, East Riding, Kent, Norfolk, and Somerset.

Unfortunately as an Island the Isle of Wight is not automatically included under the provisions of this Act. A special Order will need to be prepared and signed at the discretion of the Environment Minister for us to be covered. So far in spite of several representations by the Ramblers to Officials and Ministers within DEFRA, we have received no commitment as to **if** or **when** such an order will be signed.

The IOW Ramblers plan to liaise with the Island Tourist Board, Chamber of Commerce, community groups and the IOW Council, to raise awareness of our 'Wight Coast Trail' opportunities and to seek their support for the implementation of this project as part of future Island development plans.

We also seek to persuade Natural England that the significant recreational and economic benefits for both residents and visitors of a 'Wight Coast Trail' on our picturesque Island should give it priority for early inclusion in their Coastal Access plans.

The Minister of the Environment should then sign an order to include the Isle of Wight under the provisions of the 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act.