



# Making the most of the North West Coast

*Coastal  
Management  
challenges  
and successes*



This leaflet is produced by the North West Coastal Forum. It is designed to inform practitioners and policy makers about the broader context for coastal management in North West England and to demonstrate principles that can be used to help to manage this vital and challenging resource to ensure its long-term viability for future generations.

*In the North West, the region contains over 6 million people, most of whom live less than one hour's drive from the coast*



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**T**he North West coast is unique in its combination of high economic, social and environmental importance and potential. It stretches for more than 1000km from the Dee Estuary, on the border with Wales, to the Solway Firth, on the border with Scotland.

Our coast is made up of a vast array of natural assets and resources and is an extremely complex and dynamic environment with twice daily tides of up to 10m (the second highest tidal range in Britain), seasonal variation, for example bird movements, longer term natural change such as sediment movements, the impacts of climate change and a huge variety of human uses of the coast and its assets. Many of these are subject to change over time and the coast poses a huge challenge for sustainable long-term management but also provides a major array of opportunities for the social, economic and environmental benefit of North West England.

The European Union has a coastline of 68,000km, over three times longer than that of the US and almost twice that of Russia. The maritime regions within Europe account for 40% of Europe's Gross Domestic Product and are widely used by holiday makers. Public expenditure within Europe to protect against flooding and erosion will average 5.4 billion euros a year for the period 1990-2020.

The UK, as an island nation, has a much greater proportion of wealth generated within the coastal zone and a much higher proportion of our population living within a short distance of the coast.

In the North West, the region contains over 6 million people, most of whom live less than one hour's drive from the coast, and many, particularly in Merseyside, who live much closer to it.



Historically, the region's coastal areas - its ports and fisheries, major resort towns and clusters of industry like that around Widnes - have been instrumental in driving its economy and today the North West maintains a thriving maritime economy. Liverpool is a port of national significance and other major ports include Fleetwood, Heysham and the

## Major Ports...

Manchester Ship Canal, with Barrow, Silloth, Workington, Whitehaven, Garston and Glasson Dock at Lancaster all continuing to provide employment. All are important sites for servicing offshore operations such as oil and gas, fisheries and newer industries like offshore wind farms. Disused areas of dockland, for example in Liverpool, Sefton, Barrow, Whitehaven, and Maryport, are now providing significant opportunities for regeneration, bringing new employment to previously derelict and economically depressed areas.

*New sports such as kite surfing are joining more traditional coastal activities like golf and sea angling.*

Traditionally, the region's tourism industry is a major employer, with large, historic resorts like Blackpool and Southport, and smaller ones such as Morecambe, Lytham St Anne's and West Kirby.

## ...Great Resorts

National tourism patterns have changed, so many of the resorts are taking a fresh look at their tourism offer and are diversifying their economic activity to combat declining tourist revenue and associated social deprivation. Initiatives such as Resort Master Plans aim to capitalise on the strengths of the North West coast, as do Regional

Park initiatives such as Mersey Waterfront, the Ribble Coast and Wetlands Regional Park and the regional coastal trail. An increased interest in the value of wildlife and recreation-based holidays is giving rise to new opportunities for themed short breaks that can help to extend the tourist season into the spring and autumn, which are key times of the year for bird watching. New sports such as kite surfing are joining more traditional coastal activities



like golf and sea angling. The availability of high quality water for swimming, clean beaches and convenient facilities are increasingly important factors in maintaining tourist numbers and attracting new visitors to the coast.

Coastal processes, both natural and those resulting from climate change, e.g. increased storminess and rising sea levels, pose a constant threat to the economic, ecological and cultural assets situated on, or adjacent to, the coast. Protecting these assets against change can be extremely costly, so careful and long-term planning is needed to ensure that coastal defences are adequate and that any new developments are sited in the most appropriate location.

## *...Wild Places*

Over 80% of the North West's coast is protected at both national (SSSI) and international level (Natura 2000 and Ramsar) for its wildlife and habitat importance. Natura 2000 is an EU-wide network of wildlife sites designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives and all Natura 2000 sites are also protected nationally as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natura 2000 sites arising from the Birds Directive are also Ramsar sites. The North West coast is part of a globally significant bird migration route known as the East Atlantic Flyway and provides an internationally significant and vitally important feeding ground for many thousands of wildfowl and wading

birds over the winter and

## *...Open Spaces*

during the spring and autumn migrations, as well as providing a home to many other protected animal and plant species.

The North West coast is generally low-lying and formed from sands and silts, creating areas of wide sandy beaches, extensive salt marsh, sand dune habitats and vast intertidal mudflats.



These enable spectacular views across the numerous estuaries and bays which contribute so much to the uniqueness of the North West coast. There are considerable lengths of the coast that remain undeveloped or even remote, and which require careful planning and sensitive management to retain their character.

## The North West Coast - Key Facts

Length of the coastline (including estuaries and bays) over 1400km

Over 80% of the coastline protected for its international wildlife and habitat importance (Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites)

Forms an important feeding ground on a global bird migration route known as the East Atlantic Flyway

Nationally significant ports at Liverpool, Heysham and Fleetwood

Blackpool Pleasure Beach was the foremost visitor attraction in England in 2004-05 with over 6 million visits (source: Visit Britain - Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions)

Protected land and cityscapes include Arnside Silverdale and Solway Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Lake District National Park, the Heritage Coast at St Bees Head, the World Heritage Sites of Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City, and Hadrian's Wall

Morecambe Bay has the largest intertidal area in Britain (120 square miles)

The Sefton Coast includes the largest continuous sand dune system in England





## How do we make the most of the North West Coast?

In managing the North West's coast there are two main areas to consider. These are the need for integration and the need to adopt some good management principles. These are explained below:

### Integration

The integration of social, economic and environmental interests is the basis of good management of all natural assets, including our coast. In practice this means:

- ▶ **Sectoral integration** - there are many different sectors operating in the coastal zone such as oil, gas and offshore renewable energy development industries, shipping and port development, fisheries, coastal tourism, conservation, recreation, agriculture, aquaculture, etc. There needs to be communication and co-operation between all these sectors.
- ▶ **Spatial integration** - this includes integration between:
  - management plans, programmes and policies at various geographical scales;
  - plans, programmes and policies covering adjacent areas;
  - plans and programmes with overlapping, but different, geographical remits; and
  - the landward and seaward sides of the coast. Land-based activities can have a major influence on the sea, affecting coastal processes, water quality, and ecosystem productivity for example. Similarly, sea-based activities are dependent on coastal land for ports and transport infrastructure, safe refuge, cable and pipeline landfall, housing for workers, etc. Different systems of government administration and regulations apply to the terrestrial and seaward sides of the coastal zone.

*The Sefton Coast includes the largest continuous sand dune system in England*

- **Integration across government and other management and regulatory bodies** - integration between different levels of government (local, regional and national) as well as between different departments within an organisation.

Different levels of government and different government departments play different roles, address different public needs and have different perspectives. These differences can create challenges in harmonising policy development and implementation.

- **Science-management integration** - integration between the scientific community and those involved in managing the coastal zone.

*A long-term perspective is needed because of the long-term evolution of coastal processes*





## Guiding principles for good coastal management

- Take a long-term view
- Consider the bigger picture
- Ensure we are able to change our approach as our understanding improves
- Work with nature
- Get the right organisations to work together
- Use an appropriate mix of tools
- Wide involvement of people
- Reflect local character and need

These principles are often referred to as the principles for Integrated Coastal Zone Management or ICZM.

In practice, this means:

### Take a long-term view

Management must think further ahead. This includes using the precautionary principle and taking account of uncertainty.

A long-term perspective is needed because of the long-term evolution of coastal processes, the natural variability of habitats and species and the need to take account of the needs of future generations.

Strategies for tackling long-term issues may be different to those designed for solving current problems. Forward-looking management approaches are, however, more likely to be cost effective and sustainable in the long-term.



## Consider the bigger picture

Successful coastal planning and management must look at the overall picture and view coastal problems in the widest context. This means that decisions about coastal management should take into account the relationship between cultural, economic, social and environmental factors as well as temporal and spatial characteristics. This may mean that approaches and policies cut across conventional boundaries and challenge traditional sectoral approaches.

## Ensure we are able to change our approach as our understanding improves

Management decisions must be supported by appropriate information and be based on evidence wherever possible. This is known as *evidence-based decision making*. However, since we can never know everything, management has to get on with things and 'learn by doing', whilst fully applying the precautionary principle. Research, data collation, information and monitoring - enabling feedback on decisions taken and enhanced understanding - are essential and enable adjustments to be made to management over time.

## ...Working Together

### Work with nature

Modern coastal management should work with nature rather than battle against it, recognising that the natural dynamics of coastal systems result in a continually changing and evolving coastline.

This principle implies that coastal management should take account of the natural limits - or carrying capacity of coastal systems - ensuring that ecosystems maintain their functions and integrity.

### Wide involvement of people

In addition to government and agency involvement, local coastal management requires the participation of non-government organisations and others, particularly local businesses and local people.



The full participation of all stakeholders from the outset and through all stages of the coastal management process is essential. Stakeholder involvement aids the identification of real issues, harnesses local knowledge and builds and strengthens commitment and shared responsibility.

### Get the right organisations to work together

All relevant bodies (at national, regional and local levels) need to be fully involved in the development of any policies and plans for the coast to ensure that other relevant policies and plans and related legal instruments are well co-ordinated, mutually compatible and coherent.

### Use an appropriate mix of tools

## ...Working Better

Successful coastal management requires the combined use of a range of tools including laws, policies, plans and strategies, voluntary agreements, research, education and information provision. Given the need for a co-ordinated and integrated approach to management, coherence and consistency between these tools is vital.



*Strategies for tackling long-term issues may be different to those designed for solving current problems.*



## Conclusion

If we are to achieve our vision it is necessary for everyone involved in managing the coast or who has an impact on the coast to be aware of the variety of demands that we place on it and the conflicts that can arise because of these. We should integrate our efforts with others and keep the principles of good coastal management in mind when we are making decisions, developing policy and plans or undertaking work on the coast.

*Morecambe Bay is the largest continuous intertidal area in Britain*



***...Making the most of the North West's Coast.***



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Below and on the following pages are some examples of good practice from around the North West, illustrating many of the principles of ICZM in practice.

### **The Tern Project at Morecambe**

**Illustrates:** work with nature, get the right organisations to work together, wide involvement of people, reflect local character and need

In the early 1990s major coastal flooding in Morecambe and the recognition of a need for a new direction to halt the resort's decline gave rise to an innovative project for new coastal defences incorporating artwork based on the internationally important bird life of Morecambe Bay.



Morecambe Bay is the largest continuous intertidal area in Britain and has national and international protection because of its value to wildlife, in particular birds - it is the most important UK wintering site for Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Turnstone.

The Tern project was led by Lancaster City Council. In 1992 a design team was set up and included Lancaster City Council, Lancashire County Council, the RSPB, English Nature, and businesses including Wm Morrison's Supermarket. Gordon Young was appointed as lead artist and many artists worked on the project, together with local school children and community groups.

The artwork cost £2.2 million and was funded by Arts Council England, Lancaster City and Lancashire County Councils, Lancashire Tourism SRB and Wm Morrison's Supermarket. Work started in 1994 and was officially unveiled by Her Majesty, the Queen, in 1999.



Since the Tern project was created there has been a significant increase in the visitor economy in Morecambe. The project is directly responsible for an estimated 11,000 visitor nights and 27,000 day visits each year, worth over £800,000 annually. It has attracted new visitors, added quality and variety to the natural environment offer of the North West coast, highlighted out of season bird

tourism opportunities and has pointed Morecambe towards an alternative future as a destination in its own right rather than being another Blackpool. Benefits to the local community include an improved sense of place, local identity and community pride, evidenced by a significant decrease in vandalism in the area.

Artwork on coastal defences is now being used in other resorts such as Blackpool and Southport.

### **Regional Spatial Strategy in North West England**

**Illustrates: take a long-term view, consider the bigger picture, get the right organisations to work together, use an appropriate mix of tools, reflect local character and need, ensure we are able to change our approach as our understanding improves**

The Regional Spatial Strategy is the regional planning document. It provides a regionally-specific and statutory framework for Local Development Frameworks which are produced by Local Authorities. It is designed to last for 15 - 20 years and so needs to be future-proofed, although there is a process for regular review at shorter intervals. Spatial planning, which includes broader issues such as health, has replaced traditional land-use planning and has a major impact on many aspects of our lives here in the North West.

The North West Coastal Forum, a not-for-profit multi-sector partnership of organisations with an interest in the North West's coast (see page 21) acted as an expert group to help the North West Regional Assembly draft the coastal policies for the new Regional Spatial Strategy. This ensured that, before going out for wider public consultation, the policies were well-balanced and reasonably reflected the needs of a wide range of coastal stakeholders and foreseeable future needs. As a result, no changes to the coastal policies were needed following the public consultation and the formal Examination in Public. The



*Artwork on coastal defences is now being used in other resorts such as Blackpool and Southport.*







North West Coastal Forum is England's only regional coastal forum so the North West has a unique advantage over other regions in regional policy preparation.

Following a review of all the then existing regional spatial strategies Defra commented that the North West's coastal policy is the best with regard to integrated coastal management.

### **Morecambe Bay Partnership's BeachCare Initiative**

Illustrates: consider the bigger picture, wide involvement of people, get the right organisations to work together, reflect local character and need

Beach litter is a serious problem in the North West of England.

Because of the shape of the coast and the number of large rivers which wash litter down from inland areas the North West suffers more severe

problems with beach litter than

any other area of England or

Wales. This has a number of serious implications including the negative impact on the region's image which directly affects the visitor economy, and health and safety issues for beach users and wildlife, both while litter is on the beach and also when it is mobilised in the marine environment.



Across the region the local coastal partnerships and local authorities have recognised the seriousness of the problem and have been

actively taking steps to tackle it, with organised beach cleans, usually involving community and business volunteers, and beach cleansing, usually organised by the local authorities but on a restricted number of, for example, resort beaches.

In June 2003 Morecambe Bay Partnership established a new programme of regular beach cleans for community and business volunteers to participate in.

In the first four years of operation BeachCare it has held 126 events on a total of 27 beaches around the Bay. Over 15 tonnes of waste have been removed, and where possible, recycled. Over 2100 community volunteers have taken part, and several local groups established, trained and equipped with equipment to enable them to undertake beach clean-up operations themselves.

In addition to the monthly beach cleans a series of social events has been run to celebrate the success of the volunteers, and build a sense of achievement and community cohesion around the Bay.

### **Shoreline Management Planning in the North West**

Illustrates: take a long-term view, consider the bigger picture, get the right organisations to work together, use an appropriate mix of tools, reflect local character and need, ensure we are able to change our approach as our understanding improves, work with nature

The relevant organisations with powers to build coastal defences or an interest in the potential implications of coastal defence and coastal flooding have come together in the North West within three Coastal Groups: Liverpool Bay Coastal Group, North West Coastal Group and Tidal Dee Users Group. The boundaries of these groups are driven by the natural processes occurring at the coast rather than administrative boundaries and so include part of North Wales. The groups are responsible for developing long term strategic plans for coastal defence - Shoreline Management Plans - which are based on the best understanding that we have of coastal processes and look forward up to a hundred years in the future. The aim is to develop sustainable strategies for managing the risks arising from tidal flooding and coastal erosion. This means not only deciding what defences we should build and where, but also looking at where defences are no longer needed or will not be viable in the longer term, and identifying areas where we will need to consider, in the future, adapting to coastal change.

They are non-statutory so rely on a process of co-ordination and co-operation, wide consultation and good communication with all relevant bodies for effective delivery.

### **Partnership in Action - Solway Firth Partnership**

Illustrates: all the principles of ICZM

The North West coast has many local coastal partnerships which have been established at different times and for different reasons, usually because of a perceived local need for an organisation which can bring all relevant parties together and seek solutions to a particular problem or problems.

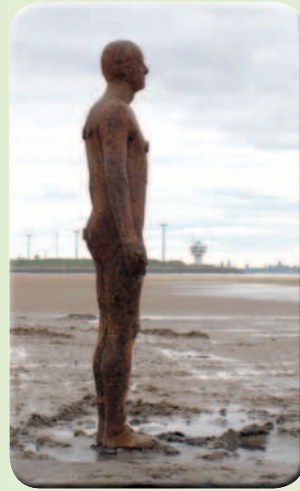
The Solway Firth Partnership was established in 1994 with the objective of working with local people to increase sustainable use and management of the Solway Firth. It is now a charity and is open to anyone with an interest in the area. It works by promoting better co-operation, agreement and understanding between all users, planners and managers on both sides of the Firth and has been successful in bringing together hundreds of organisations, agencies, companies and individuals to work in partnership for the benefit of the Firth. Operating across a national boundary has posed particular management challenges, but the people and businesses around the Firth, through active engagement with the Partnership, have worked together on important projects including:

*Shoreline Management Plans look forward upto a hundred years in the future.*



- **The Solway Firth Strategy** - an integrated management plan for the estuary. The Strategy has no statutory force but instead relies on authorities, organisations and individuals to voluntarily take steps to implement the actions suggested. The Strategy works through a combination of awareness, co-operation and commitment to implement the goals and actions recommended. The accompanying vision which has been developed is: **'To secure an environmentally sustainable future for the Solway Firth area which allows the economy to prosper while respecting the distinctive character, natural features, wildlife and habitats of the Firth.'**

*A key aspect of Solway Fish is the opportunity it provides for local people to effectively influence policy.*



- **The Solway Firth European Marine Site Management Scheme** - a management plan and related projects for this cross-border Natura 2000 site containing internationally protected habitats and species
- **Solway Fish** - an industry forum, promoting integrated working and better communication within the sector but, critically, this is also a sustainable development initiative that is jointly funded by Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Natural England, Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Natural Heritage.

A key aspect of Solway Fish is the opportunity it provides for local people to effectively influence policy. To help support the main forum and develop its recommendations and project ideas a number of sector specific working groups have been established. These have developed projects such as a Solway Aquaculture Strategy and Recreational Sea Angling promotional booklet.



### **Climate Change and the Visitor Economy: Sefton Coast**

Illustrates the need to take a long term view, work with nature and consider the bigger picture



Using the Sefton coast as one of its case studies a UK Climate Impacts Programme study - Climate Change and the Visitor Economy - was the first attempt in the UK to systematically assess, understand and find out how to adapt to the likely impacts of climate change on the tourism and leisure industry and the wider visitor economy.

Changes to our climate could have profound implications for this important and fast growing economic sector (currently worth £7bn to the North West region of England). The study addressed the question 'How can the North West visitor economy realise the opportunities presented by climate change, whilst ensuring that the resource base is sustained under growing visitor demand and climate-related reductions in environmental capacity'.

Conclusions of the Sefton case study were that changes to climate and visitor behaviour may bring new opportunities to Sefton and, more widely, to the regional economy. However, the ecological challenge to the dune system will be severe. An extension in time and space of current physical and biological monitoring is required to provide essential management information. This monitoring should also include systematic recording of visitor numbers.

Fortunately, a proven management mechanism - the Sefton Coast Partnership - is already in place to provide the required adaptive capacity. The Sefton Coast Management Scheme was originally developed because of concerns over the damage that recreational pressure was causing to the sand dunes both as a natural habitat and as a coastal defence. Through this scheme much effort has gone towards restoring and managing this habitat in a sustainable way adapting to changing pressures and understanding of the system as they occur.

The scheme, now the Sefton Coast Partnership, has developed an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan and seeks to work to the principles of good coastal management. It has acquired an international reputation for reconciling visitor pressure with conservation needs along a dune coastline and a new opportunity now exists for the Sefton Coast Partnership to provide an international demonstration project for anticipating and managing the response to a changing climate.



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*The North West Coastal Forum has a vision for a sustainable future for the North West coast.*





## Making the most of the North West's Coast

The North West Coastal Forum has a vision for a sustainable future for the North West coast. Summed up by the above phrase, our vision includes:

- ▶ Well-integrated planning and management of the coastal zone
- ▶ The economic potential of the NW coast achieved in ways which safeguard, enhance, restore and sustainably use our natural and cultural assets
- ▶ A high quality natural and built coastal environment able to adapt to climate and other change
- ▶ Improved recreational opportunities and visitor experience
- ▶ Improved well being of coastal communities
- ▶ Raised appreciation of the coast, its value and its needs

Our work helps to further the North West Regional Assembly's sustainable development objectives and contributes to the delivery of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Regional Economic Strategy. The North West Coastal Forum Secretariat is provided by the North West Regional Assembly.

### ***Our Aim:***

***To promote and deliver integrated coastal zone management in the North West to secure the long-term sustainability of the region's coast***

The North West Coastal Forum is made up of many different organisations that have agreed to co-operate to achieve the vision and goals set out above. The benefit of our multi-sector approach is that it brings together a wide variety of organisations with either responsibility for or interest in management of one or more aspects of the coast. This helps to create a shared understanding of each organisation's concerns and objectives and allows common principles and concerns to be identified and built into a prioritised programme of work, enabling these issues to be dealt with in a holistic and sustainable manner.

We are a not-for-profit organisation and our funding comes from many sources. Recently we have had funding support from:

- ▶ North West Regional Assembly,
- ▶ Natural England,
- ▶ Sefton Borough Council,
- ▶ Lancashire County Council,
- ▶ Cumbria County Council,
- ▶ North West Coastal Group,
- ▶ Liverpool Bay Coastal Group,
- ▶ Natural Economy North West.



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In addition to funding our work could not continue without the dedication and commitment of these and many other organisations.

Further details about our work, including the latest Business Plan, can be obtained from our website: [www.nwcoastalforum.co.uk](http://www.nwcoastalforum.co.uk) or by contacting the Secretariat on 01942 776941



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*We are a  
not-for-profit  
organisation  
and our funding  
comes from  
many sources.*

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