

C7 Zone 7: North West Solent Shore

In this secluded part of the Solent shore, mudflats, saltmarshes and tidal creeks fringe a well-wooded, agricultural landscape. The zone is of outstanding scenic quality, and of considerable value for nature conservation. The majority of the area is in the ownership of a few large country estates. Other than at Lepe Country Park, public access is limited, and indeed much of its character and attractiveness is due to the resulting sense of isolation.

Features and interest

Description

- C7.1 This zone extends from the ferry terminal in the Lymington River to the Bourne Gap at the south-western end of Calshot Spit, and includes the Beaulieu River and its estuary and Stanswood Bay. It covers the attractive coastal hinterland, all of which is within the New Forest National Park. It is a gently undulating, well-wooded, predominantly agricultural landscape, fringed by extensive marshes and mudflats, with narrow gravel beaches, and low, sandy cliffs to the east at Lepe and Stanswood Bay. There is sporadic development, with individual dwellings and small clusters of houses scattered at intervals along the shoreline. Much of the zone is in the ownership of large estates - the Pylewell, Sowley, Beaulieu, Exbury and Cadland estates.



The Watch House at Lepe

Access

- C7.2 Because of the land ownerships, access to much of the zone is very limited; the Solent Way is diverted well inland for all this stretch of the coast. There is limited vehicular access at Tanners Lane, a public footpath runs down the western bank of the Beaulieu River between Beaulieu and Buckler's Hard, and there is public access along the foreshore in front of Inchmery House and along the coast at Lepe Country Park. The narrow lanes east of Walhampton and between Lepe and Exbury also run alongside the shore for short distances, and offer glimpses of the coastal marshes.

Nature conservation

- C7.3 This zone is of considerable nature conservation value. It includes the eastern end of the Hurst Castle to Lymington River Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which extends as far as Colgrims east of Lymington, most of the North Solent SSSI (which extends for 13 km from Colgrims to Calshot Spit), the North Solent National Nature Reserve (centred around the Beaulieu River and Needs Ore Point), the Gull Island Bird Sanctuary and the Boldre Foreshore Local Nature Reserve; also a number of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The zone possesses a remarkable diversity of habitats, including mudflats, saltmarsh; shingle spit, fresh and brackish water pools, and a variety of maritime grassland. It supports large autumn and winter populations of waders and wildfowl, and important breeding populations of gulls, terns and waders - Gull Island boasts the largest breeding colony of black-headed gulls in Britain. The SSSIs are in the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site; most of them are also in the Solent Maritime candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC).
- C7.4 Stone Point is an important geological site for stratigraphical studies. The inter-glacial deposits provide a rare datum-point to determine the age of the widespread gravel terraces in the southern New Forest and along the shores of Southampton Water. Another important geological exposure occurs at Stanswood Bay, which again offers sedimentological research opportunities unique in Britain.
- C7.5 Sowley Marsh, now an important coastal habitat designated as an SSSI, in the Solent and Southampton Water SPA, Ramsar site and the Solent Maritime candidate SAC, was formed as the result of a breach in the seawall during a storm in 1955/56. The wall was not repaired and the marsh, which is still extending, developed in the low-lying land behind. Sowley Marsh may offer some useful guidelines about the possibilities of establishing areas of managed retreat along the north-west Solent shore.

Erosion and flooding

- C7.6 Parts of this low-lying shoreline are vulnerable to flooding, particularly the eastern side of the Lymington River estuary. Erosion of low cliffs and the marshes is evident, and landowners along the shore have undertaken a number of small coast protection schemes some with the advice and assistance of the District Council. A shingle bank has been constructed across Bull Run, an artificially created channel, to join Gull Island to Warren Farm Spit, in order to stem the rapid erosion of the bird sanctuary. More substantial works have been necessary at Lepe, where erosion threatens properties and the road near the shore; a major concrete structure protects the road. In front of Lepe House, timber coast protection works were built in 1991 by the landowner with a grant from the County Council, in return for a public right of way being established along the top of the new timber revetment. To the east, beyond Stone Point, the timber revetments are frequently undermined during storms, resulting in erosion of the soft, sandy cliffs. Similarly, the shingle beach north of Stansore Point is relatively unstable despite the timber groynes and revetments that have been constructed. The beach was breached extensively in 1991, resulting in damage to the cross Solent Isle of Wight gas mains. Parts of the heavily wooded foreshore, which forms part of Cadland Estate, have been lost over the last 50 years.

History and archaeology

- C7.7 From an historical and archaeological perspective this zone contains a number of important features. There are important Iron Age and Roman remains between Lepe and Stone Point. Buckler's Hard is central to the maritime history of the Solent, as the place where many of the ships of Nelson's fleet were built. To the north, Beaulieu is of much historic and archaeological interest, including the ancient Abbey and its walls, the Palace, the village itself, and a former tide mill. Both Beaulieu and Buckler's Hard are important Conservation Areas. Eaglehurst is also of historic interest. From more recent times, there are remains of Mulberry Harbour construction works at Pylewell and in the Beaulieu River.

- C7.8 Parts of the coastal estates include historic designed landscapes. The grounds of Pylewell House, for example, extend to the foreshore, and a gap in the coastal woodland has been created which affords views into and out of the grounds. The famous gardens of Exbury House extend down to the marshes alongside the Beaulieu River estuary, and at Cadland House and Eaglehurst on the Cadland Estate, there are also grounds of historic landscape value.

Recreation

- C7.9 While access to this part of the coast is limited, it offers some of the most important recreation and tourist facilities on the District's coast. Lepe Country Park, managed by Hampshire County Council, is the largest, single, land-based recreational resource on our coastline, attracting some 700,000 visitors a year. It offers excellent views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight, and is popular with picnickers and for informal recreation. The beach and foreshore are also well used as a launch site for board sailors. In the past Lepe beach has received a Solent Water Quality Award, but it is not really suitable for bathing. The park can accommodate approximately 650 cars, and has a cafe and public conveniences.
- C7.10 Sailing is again an important recreational activity in this zone, with a large marina at Buckler's Hard and moorings in much of the Beaulieu River between Beaulieu and the estuary. Indeed, the visually attractive nature of this part of the coastline contributes much to the popularity of the Solent as a sailing venue.
- C7.11 Beaulieu and Buckler's Hard are amongst the most popular tourist destinations in the District. As well as the attractions within the Abbey and Palace House complex, Buckler's Hard offers a maritime museum and a number of other opportunities to learn about the history of the area.



Beaulieu river entrance

Commerce

- C7.12 Coastal commercial activity is limited in this zone; however, the western Solent supports the largest natural oyster fishery in Europe. There used to be a shellfish cleansing plant on the coast next to Colgrims; this is now redundant, as operators take their catches to Southampton or Poole for cleansing, or off-load them to other ships at sea. At Buckler's Hard, there is a boat-building and repair yard.

Lymington - Keyhaven Policies for Future Management

- C7.13 The western part of this zone between Lymington and Boldre foreshore lies within the area covered by the Lymington Coastal Area Advisory Panel and Management Committee. These were established from representatives of the statutory authorities with responsibilities for the area, and local elected members. This Committee operates under a policy framework that is managed by the Countryside Service of the County Council.



Lepe trees and seawall

Local Plan

- C7.14 This zone is entirely within the New Forest Heritage Area and South Hampshire Coast AONB, where development is severely restricted. The local plan also identifies areas predicted to be at risk from flooding.

Issues

Environment

- C7.15 A plethora of environmental designations apply to this zone, reflecting its ecological and landscape value. While much of it is not visible from public viewpoints on the land, it can all be seen from the water, and forms part of the special character of the Solent. Maintaining its environmental quality is therefore a management priority.
- C7.16 In places, positive intervention is required to preserve characteristic features of the zone. For example it is distinguished by isolated stands of oak and pine woodland (e.g. at Lepe foreshore), which have been ravaged by recent storms and are in need of restoration and management.
- C7.17 There are a few other areas where improvements are needed. At Lepe, the coast protection works alongside the road are unsightly and out of character with the coastal landscape. More works are proposed which may exacerbate this problem. Future works need to be carefully integrated and managed so as to cause minimal environmental impact. There are also problems of visual clutter associated with the car parks and the beach facilities. Monitoring of coastal processes in this area will provide information associated with sediment transport, and the possible affects on sensitive habitats.
- C7.18 At Sowley, the former shellfish cleansing plant is visually intrusive, and the site needs to be restored and landscaped. The adjoining woodland is also in need of restoration and management.

Recreation

- C7.19 A management plan has been prepared for the Boldre Foreshore Local Nature Reserve, which is wardened by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and the South Hampshire Wildfowlers Association. There is a byelaw to help control the speed and handling of vessels.
- C7.20 The impact of sailing activity on the Beaulieu River needs to be monitored carefully. Any further increases in moorings could lead to more environmental damage, and increase pressures on on-shore facilities such as parking for cars and boats.

- C7.21 The foreshore between Lepe Country Park and the Darkwater outfall is a popular area for bait digging - a recent study recorded that, on average, there are nine bait diggers working this area at any one time. This activity needs to be monitored to ensure that it does not reach commercial proportions.

Access

- C7.22 Access to this remote stretch of the coastline is very restricted, and given its ecological value and sensitivity, it would be inappropriate to increase the level of access for active recreation. However, the potential public benefit from, for example, a coastal access link between Lepe and Calshot is very great, and the feasibility of its achievement without detriment to wildlife interests should be explored. There may also be some limited opportunities to re-route the Solent Way between Beaulieu and Lymington, bringing it closer to the shore. The County Council has undertaken negotiations with the Beaulieu, Sowley and Pylewell estates to improve public access to the foreshore, by means of a new dedicated public footpath, and the use of permissive routes for part of the year. However there remains a "missing link" across the Sowley estate.

Erosion and flooding

- C7.23 The north-west Solent shore is as threatened by erosion of the saltmarshes and coastal flooding as areas to the west. Loss of the coastal marshes is leading to an increase in coastal erosion and flooding. The variable state of the coast protection and flood defence works is a matter of some concern. The SMP's preferred options for this stretch of coastline are mainly low key. There are proposals for 'managed retreat' between Elmer's Court Country Club and Warren Beach Cottage, and from south of Bourne Gap to Hillhead. At Warren Farm Spit, Beaulieu River, and from east of Stone Point to Bourne Gap it proposes a 'do nothing' policy option. However, between Inchmery and Lepe and from Lepe to east of Stone Point, it proposes to 'hold the line' to protect properties, valuable recreation facilities and the National Nature Reserve. These strategic coastal defence policy options and their possible interactions and environmental implications will be reviewed as part of the Western Solent Coastal Defence Strategy Study.
- C7.24 The construction of coast protection and flood defence works inevitably has an impact on the coastal landscape; however, an up-to-date understanding of coastal processes enables the use of "softer", less intrusive solutions than the massive structures traditionally employed. This is a particular issue at Lepe.
- C7.25 The shingle bank at Gull Island has proved successful in preventing further erosion of the island, but continuing accretion of shingle at the eastern end of the island is now causing a problem for boats entering the Beaulieu River, and will affect the shoreline processes east of the Beaulieu River estuary. Monitoring of coastal geomorphology will provide useful information on coastal processes operating in this dynamic area.



Sunrise at Lepe

- C7.26 While this area is of considerable landscape, ecological and archaeological value, it is not one where major public spending on coast protection and flood defence can be justified. In parts of it, allowing "managed retreat" of the coastline may be a more appropriate alternative, as proposed in the SMP. These coastal defence policy options will be reviewed to provide a strategic framework of coastal management polices within the Western Solent Coastal Defence Strategy Study.
- C7.27 For the north-west Solent shoreline frontage the South East Regional Monitoring Programme includes a combination of remote sensing techniques, e.g. airborne topographic methods, and aerial photography of the coastline including saltmarshes and inter-tidal mudflats, physical measurements on the shoreline (e.g. topographic and hydrographic surveys) and assessments of wind and wave climate. Data are used to analyse the morphological changes of the beaches and offshore, and the soft cliffs, and to determine the rates and possible causes of saltmarsh erosion. The outputs from the monitoring are incorporated into the Western Solent Coastal Defence Strategy Study.

Actions

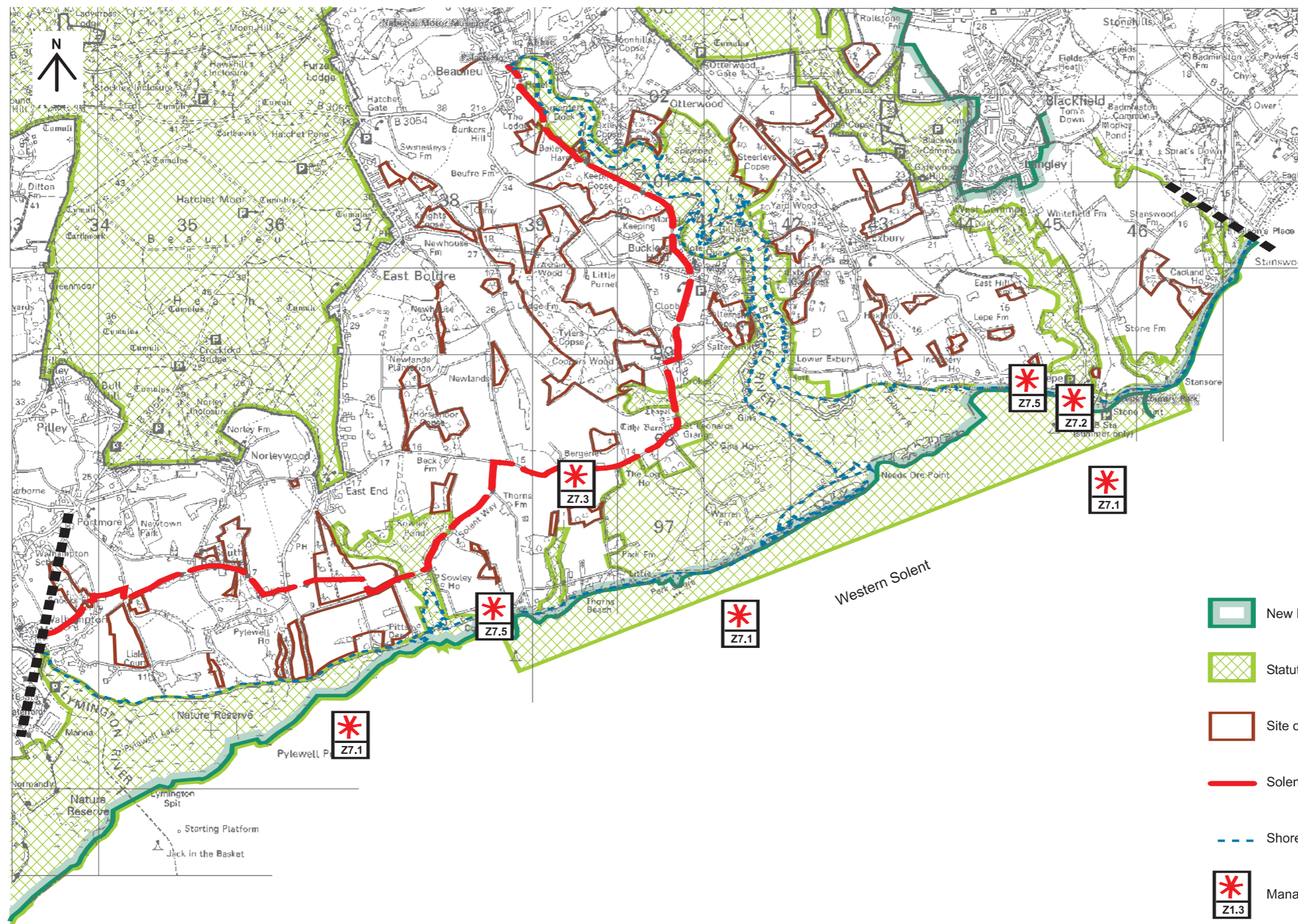
In Zone 7, the District Council will:

- Z7.1 monitor coastal processes, and hydrodynamic parameters throughout the north-west Solent shore as part of the south east UK regional strategic approach to coastal monitoring. Data will be collected and analysed to provide the best available information for coastal and flood defence design and coastal management.**
- Z7.2 encourage a high standard of design of coast protection works at Lepe and elsewhere through the Western Solent Coastal Defence Strategy. The quality and effectiveness of coast protection works beyond Stone Point and Stansore Point are being kept under review.**
- Z7.3 discuss with Hampshire County Council:**
- i alternative routes for the Solent Way closer to the shore; and**
 - ii other initiatives to provide coastal access (e.g. between Lepe and Calshot), where this will not conflict with nature conservation interests.**
- Z7.4 continue to assist landowners with advice regarding the design and implementation of coast protection works.**

In the longer term, the District Council will seek to:

- Z7.5 encourage environmental improvements by means of:**
- i planting (or re-planting) and management of coastal trees and woodland for shelter and amenity and to create a healthier age distribution within the tree population;**
 - ii removal of intrusive elements such as the shellfish cleansing plant.**

Zone 7: North West Solent Shore



-  New Forest National Park boundary
-  Statutory Nature Conservation Designations
-  Site of Importance for Nature Conservation
-  Solent Way (existing)
-  Shoreline, Mean High Water
-  Management actions
Z1.3
-  Zone limits

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