

Cyclists and the Coast

Coastal access, paths, sea fronts and promenades (England and Wales)

THIS BRIEFING COVERS

The Marine and Coastal Act 2009; the coast's potential for cycling; coastal access - 10-point action plan for getting the best for cycling; sea fronts and promenades; benefit of allowing cycling; addressing hostility and fear; infrastructure; speed limits; sea fronts and promenades - 10-point plan for overturning bans.

HEADLINE MESSAGES

- Although primarily for walkers, England's new coastal path could open up more cycling routes too. This needs support from landowners and, if necessary, pressure from local people.
- Many councils have opened up promenades and sea fronts to cycling to the benefit of cycle safety and local tourism. Concerns about conflict with walkers have generally proved to be unfounded, but good design can make a difference.

KEY FACTS

- The *Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009* (Part 9) placed a duty on the Government to create a path for walkers all round the English coast.
- Only around 5% of the legally secure and satisfactory path available on the English coast is designated as multi-user cycle path or public bridleway. Most of it (70%) is public footpath.
- While the Wales Coast Path, opened in May 2012, was primarily developed for walkers, the Assembly Government encouraged the inclusion of cyclists on a number of sections. Around one third of it is available for cycling.

Cycling UK VIEW

- A good proportion of the English and Welsh coast could be safely and beneficially opened up for cycle use.
- The provisions of the *Marine Act* are extremely weak in terms of delivering cycle access along the English coast. Ultimately, it still depends on gaining the landowner's agreement and, as such, on sustained local activity and campaigning.
- Councils should revoke bans/bye-laws and allow cyclists to use sea fronts and promenades as scenic, motor traffic-free routes and links for recreational and utility purposes.
- Segregating cyclists and imposing speed limits on them along sea fronts and promenades is unnecessary: research shows that most cyclists modify their behaviour in the presence of pedestrians (e.g. by slowing down, taking avoiding action or dismounting as necessary).



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Coastal access: The Marine and Coastal Act 2009

One of the aims of the *Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009*¹ is to give people the right for the first time to *walk* all the way round England's open coast, with access to most of the surrounding coastal land such as beaches, cliffs, rocks and dunes so that visitors have 'spreading room' to rest, admire the view etc.²

The process: Natural England is responsible for implementing the legislation in England, and is producing proposals for each stretch of coast. The new rights will be brought in stage by stage, opening up the coast in sections, largely between towns. Planning started in 2010 and the aim is to complete the project by 2020.

Public consultation: Natural England submits a report to the Government on their proposals for each stretch of coast, and anyone can make a representation on them within eight weeks of publication on their website.

For updates on the proposals, consultations, general progress etc., see:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast

a. Cycling and coastal access

- **The potential**

Cycling UK view: A good proportion of the English and Welsh coast could be safely and beneficially opened up for cycle use.

- A 2008-09 audit of the 2,748 miles of English coast estimated that of the 66% (1,827 miles) with an existing legally secure and satisfactory path along it:³
 - Only 5% was on a multi-user cycle path or public bridleway (on which cyclists have a right to ride);
 - 70% was on public footpaths (on which there is no automatic right to cycle), 16% on public roads, and 8% along promenades with established access rights;
 - The average available path was 3.0 km (1.9 miles) long.

The suitability of the coast for cycling varies, of course, but Cycling UK believes that the Government should make more effort to open up as much of it as possible to cyclists (see 'Optimising opportunities' below).

- The 870-mile Wales Coast Path, opened in May 2012, was primarily developed for walkers. However, in contrast to the situation in England, the Welsh Assembly Government encouraged the inclusion of cyclists. As a result, several sections are open to cycling.⁴

- **The problems**

Cycling UK view: The provisions of the *Marine Act* are extremely weak in terms of delivering cycle access along the coast. Ultimately, it still depends on gaining the landowner's agreement and, as such, on sustained local activity and campaigning.

- In places where there is no legal right to cycle already, coastal access for cyclists depends on landowners giving informal permission ('permissive use') or, more formally, by dedicating a path or area under section 16 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000*.
- Landowners, however, often need considerable persuasion to permit cycling on their property, despite the potential for some grant aid. Little, if any, cycle access at all has yet been dedicated through s16 of CRoW and it is hard to see why the coast should prove any different.
- The Country Land and Business Association (CLA), which represents landowners, continues to be strongly opposed to the legislation.⁵

- **Optimising opportunities**

Given that the legislation prioritises walking and that many landowners resist attempts to open up their land, cyclists and those with professional or voluntary interests in cycling need to be proactive if they want to maximise coastal access by cycle. Identifying sections that are both desirable and appropriate for cycle use is the best way forward:

Terrain suitable for mountain bikes:

- Stoned tracks
- Well-drained earth paths of good width
- Wide, sheep-cropped downland, including sections on clifftops
- Wide coastal corridors between the waterline and field boundaries
- Cycle paths along low-lying coastal strips
- Beaches with firm sand at low tide

Less suitable terrain:

- Narrow paths, particularly where the width is restricted by hedges, fences, walls or scrub
- Sections with steep slopes or gullies
- Paths which cross substantial rocky outcrops
- Paths which are only accessible on the cliff edge
- Paths which are poorly drained, cross bogs, are normally muddy, or where soil displacement by tyres is likely to be severe
- Paths or routes in loose sand, particularly in areas of dunes





There are a number of bodies who could lend their assistance and support, so cyclists are advised to liaise with:

- The Coastal Access Authority (CAA) - normally within the local authority.
- Natural England, through its public consultation process.
- The Local Access Forum (LAF) - LAFs are particularly important.⁶ They bring together a wide range of users, including cyclists and representatives of landowners, and act as a conduit for boosting public awareness. Their work also builds into the local Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP).⁷ (See separate Cycling UK briefings on LAFs and ROWIPs, www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings, filter by 'off-road access').
- Local cycle clubs and representatives of national cycling organisations - for their local knowledge and experience of riding in the area.

COASTAL ACCESS: 10-POINT ACTION PLAN FOR GETTING THE BEST FOR CYCLING	
1	Team up with local cycle clubs and cycle shops to identify sections of coastline with potential for cycling (see previous page for advice on the type of terrain to look for). Look at the possibilities for incorporating the sections into local, circular routes, starting from a focal point like a town or railway station, etc.
2	Win the support of your council's Local Access Forum (LAF).
3	Discuss the best options with your local authority's Coastal Access Coordinator.
4	Make absolutely sure that the Coastal Access Authority knows that the potential for cycling needs to be discussed when the coast is walked with the landowner.
5	Ask the Coastal Access Coordinator to report back on whether the landowner is sympathetic to considering this additional access.
6	Discuss the line / format of any promising cycle opportunities with the Coastal Access Authority to agree detailed plans and implementation.
7	After such agreement, make sure that all parties know about progress or refusals, before any work starts.
8	Liaising with the Local Access Authority, start the legal process for 'voluntary dedication' by the landowner, ⁸ using Section 16 dedication (see P3). For other options, see: www.cyclinguk.org/article/campaigns-guide/developing-new-paths-for-cycling-in-countryside
9	Monitor progress
10	Launch and promote



2. Sea fronts and promenades

Cycling UK view

- Councils should revoke bans and allow cyclists to use sea fronts and promenades as scenic, motor traffic-free routes and links for recreational and utility purposes.
- Segregating cyclists and imposing speed limits on them along sea fronts and promenades is unnecessary: research shows that most cyclists modify their behaviour in the presence of pedestrians (e.g. by slowing down, taking avoiding action or dismounting as necessary).

a. Background

- There are many promenades, or sections of promenades, that have been opened up for cyclists in England and Wales, e.g. Blackpool, Morecambe, Bexhill, Worthing and many others. Some provide segregated routes, while others permit shared use.

Unfortunately, fears about conflict and risks to other users - often fanned by the media - make some councils highly reluctant to allow cycling along the sea front. People whose sight is impaired also often voice serious reservations. As a result, bye-laws prohibit cycling along many promenades and efforts to get them revoked can meet with public and official resistance. For an account of the campaign to open up Llandudno's prom for cycling, see:

www.cyclinguk.org/case-study/winning-right-to-cycle-on-llandudno-promenade

b. Benefits

- Sea fronts can form useful, wide, continuous, scenic and enjoyable traffic-free routes for cyclists who aren't in a particular hurry. They are especially popular with families.
- They are good places for children and other newcomers to practise cycling.
- They may be attractive alternatives to busy roads.
- Their popularity with families helps attract visitors, strengthening the economies of resorts.
- Where they are part of longer-distance routes, they can also bring in trade from people making cycling holidays.
- They help make cycling fun.

c. Addressing hostility and fear

- People often think that cyclists and pedestrians do not mix safely or happily together. Research shows, however, that this is a misperception. In 'pedestrianised' areas, cyclists tend to respond to pedestrian density, modifying their speed and taking avoiding action where necessary. They also dismount in crowded conditions, not least because it is very difficult to stay upright at very slow speeds.⁹
- Whether on the road, in areas where pedestrians have priority, or on shared use footways, cyclists very rarely cause serious harm to anyone and are less of a threat than motor vehicles. On average each year from 2011-15, in all urban areas (excluding motorways), cycles accounted for about 2.3% of vehicular traffic, but were involved in only just over 1% of pedestrian fatalities and 1.8% of serious pedestrian casualties.¹⁰
- Pedestrians will always have priority along promenades and cyclists are expected to respect it (most of them will do so, in fact).
- Conducting trials before a final decision is taken to revoke a ban permanently is often a good way of acclimatising people to the idea, allaying fears and proving that cyclists and pedestrians can co-exist happily.

d. Design

- **Shared-use / cycle lanes:** as mentioned above, cyclists modify their behaviour when riding amongst pedestrians and rarely cause harm.¹¹ It therefore makes sense to leave it up to cyclists and pedestrians to interact as conditions dictate, rather than providing a marked lane that cyclists are obliged to use:
 - Lanes encourage cyclists to go faster, and pedestrians, who are far less responsive to the presence of cyclists than cyclists are to them, tend to wander into them.
 - Overly narrow lanes make it very difficult for cyclists to pass each other legally without dismounting and walking.
- **Access:** it is important to make sure that both cyclists and pedestrians can enter and exit the promenade safely and conveniently, without presenting nuisance or risk to each other.
- **Signs:** clear signs or markings should alert pedestrians to the fact that cyclists may share the route.

CASE STUDY: WORTHING

Worthing Promenade had long been closed to cyclists, apart from an ill-advised experiment with a narrow, 2m wide painted cycle lane in the 1990s. This lane, which encouraged cyclists to make full use of tail winds and ride at 20 mph+, was implicated when a cyclist seriously injured a pedestrian (albeit well beyond the end of the lane). This crash resulted in the lane being closed, and much bad press.

After over a decade of campaigning, Worthing Prom was finally opened to shared use (cyclists and pedestrians) in 2010. The bye-law preventing cycling was removed in the previous year, but the opening was delayed due to Worthing Borough Council's insurers requiring tactile paving at every location that pedestrians could join the promenade.

Cyclists had been riding illegally along the Prom for decades, so the change was small in practice.

The Prom is now very popular with novices and family groups, as well as utility cyclists who aren't in a major hurry, and they seem to be co-existing quite happily with pedestrians. Because the Prom is wide, it's easy to give pedestrians lots of room (which wasn't the case when the dedicated narrow cycle lane was tried), and it's clear that pedestrians have priority. In busy areas, cyclists ride much more slowly than they did along the earlier dedicated cycle lane, and this creates a much more relaxed atmosphere.





e. Speed limits

- Bye-laws may make it a criminal offence for a cyclist to exceed a certain speed limit along the sea front (e.g. typically 10 mph). Cyclists can also be fined for ‘anti-social behaviour’. Again, because most cyclists respond to crowded conditions by slowing down, imposing a speed limit on them is an unnecessary restriction.
- Also, cycles do not have to have speedometers, which makes it impossible for most riders to tell how fast they are going. It is worth noting too that speeding offences under the *Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984* apply to *motor* vehicles, not to cycles.¹²

SEA FRONT/PROMENADE CYCLING: 10-POINT ACTION PLAN FOR OVERTURNING BANS	
1	Contact local cycling and environmental groups and representatives of people with disabilities to gather views, ideas, support and advice. It’s worth contacting Sustrans too, to see if they have any plans for the route. www.sustrans.org.uk .
2	Talk to the relevant council officers about your idea. It’ll help you find out how much support you’re likely to get and if the council itself has looked at the feasibility of revoking the ban already (there’s no point in duplicating effort!).
3	Carry out a thorough site survey, taking photos/videos and recording how much illegal cycling there already is (a lot of it shows that there is a demand; and a lack of incidents proves that making it legal is unlikely to cause problems).
4	Prepare a case for permitting cycling <i>experimentally</i> at first. Trials usually go well and help overcome qualms. Opposition often fades as a result. In your case, highlight the benefits, and include case studies of sea fronts where cycling has been successfully permitted. Don’t forget to address the fears too.
5	Contact your local councillors and ask them to back the scheme.
6	Find out about the formal council processes your proposal will need to go through. Make sure you understand it and prepare for each stage.
7	Submit your proposal to the council and ask them to begin the formal process for removing the ban temporarily.
8	Write enthusiastically to the local media in favour of the scheme. Get all your supporters to do the same. (This proved pivotal in Lowestoft!).
9	Work with officers on any necessary changes to the infrastructure (e.g. access, widths, links, markings etc.).
10	If things go well, celebrate the removal of the ‘No Cycling’ signs, launch and promote the route. If no success, <i>don’t give up</i> – sea front campaigns are often long-term. You may need to ask for an independent appraisal of the ban.



FURTHER READING

- Cycling UK's *CycleDigest* No. 63, 'Last Fight of the Proms' (p6).
<https://www.cyclinguk.org/publication/cycle-digest/cycledigest-back-issues>
- Cycling UK's briefings on *Rights of Way Improvement Plans* and *Local Access Forums*.
www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings

WEBSITES

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast> - Natural England coastal access site
- <http://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/?lang=en> - Wales Coastal Path

REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

- ¹ For a link to the Act, see: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/contents
- ² To ensure that the public is able to enjoy legal right of access to 'coastal land', the Government had to amend the description of publicly accessible land already set out in *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* (CROW). This was done by the *Access to the Countryside (Coastal Margin) (England) Order 2010 SI 2010 No 558*. (www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2010/9780111491249/contents) which added a new Section 3A to CROW. This makes "... land two metres either side of the line of the route, all land to the seaward of the route and any of the classic coastal land types (including dunes and cliffs) to the landward side" publicly accessible (although there are, inevitably, some exceptions). For more on the legislative aspects, see DEFRA's explanatory paper, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/pdfs/ukpgaen_20090023_en.pdf (Part 9)
- ³ Natural England. *Coastal Access: An audit of coastal paths in England 2008-09*. 2009.
- ⁴ See: <http://www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/?lang=en>
- ⁵ <https://www.cla.org.uk/rural-policy-advice/legal-and-professional/countryside-access/coastal-access>
- ⁶ For more on Local Access Forums, see Cycling UK's briefing. www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings (filter by 'off-road access')
- ⁷ For more on Rights of Way Improvement Plans, see Cycling UK's briefing. www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings (filter by 'offroad access')
- ⁸ For more on ways in which land can be opened up for cycling, see Cycling UK's guide on how to develop new paths for cycling in the countryside, <https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/campaigns-guide/developing-new-paths-for-cycling-in-countryside>
- ⁹ There are various reports covering interaction between pedestrians/walkers and cyclists demonstrating that conflict is often more perceived than real. These include:
- Countryside Agency. *How people interact on off-road routes: phase II*. CA report CRN69, 2003 (see <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/65057>)
 - D Davies et al. *Cycling in vehicle restricted areas*. Transport Research Laboratory. TRL583, 2003. www.trl.co.uk.
 - P Trevelyan and J Morgan. *Cycling in pedestrian areas*. TRL report PR15, 1993. www.trl.co.uk / Department for Transport's Traffic Advisory Leaflet TAL 9/93 *Cycling in pedestrian areas* <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-advisory-leaflets>.
- ¹⁰ Casualty figures from DfT, *Reported Road Casualties Great Britain 2015*. Sept 2016. RAS40004. www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics; road traffic figures from DfT, *Road Traffic Estimates in Great Britain: 2015*. May 2016. Tables: TRA0402 (pedal cycles); TRA0104 (motor vehicles). www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics
- ¹¹ See note 9
- ¹² For more on cyclists' behaviour and the law, please see Cycling UK briefing at www.cyclinguk.org/campaignsbriefings