

## 9. The Heritage Coasts

### Our vision

In 2034... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. A new focus and collaborative effort has transformed the management of the coasts which is now more integrated and effective, meeting the needs of the landscape and natural environment and communities, while supporting the sustainable regeneration of the coastal towns.

### 9.1 Overview

The magnificent chalk cliffs between Folkestone and Kingsdown form one of Britain's most evocative and best known landmarks. For many they are the first sight of Britain while views to France hold a special appeal; the Dover Strait is one of the world's most important, recognised and busiest seascapes.

Behind the rearing cliffs is a landscape of windswept coastal chalk downs, with areas of salt-wind sculpted scrub, open downland, and arable farming punctuated by the remnants of thousands of years of exchange and conflict. The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a feeling of wilderness. The ever changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea and exposure.

Globally coastal Chalk is a scarce resource, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource.

The geology and landform of the coast is internationally important with the cliffs being home to many rare birds, plants and invertebrates.

This extraordinary natural and cultural resource can strongly assist the regeneration of Dover and Folkestone, and has been identified as the basis to secure World Heritage Site status for the Dover Strait. Equally this part of the AONB is particularly sensitive and is facing continual challenge, from the impacts of climate change, discordant coastal development, general development and recreation pressure.



The White Cliffs coastline



Coastal grazing

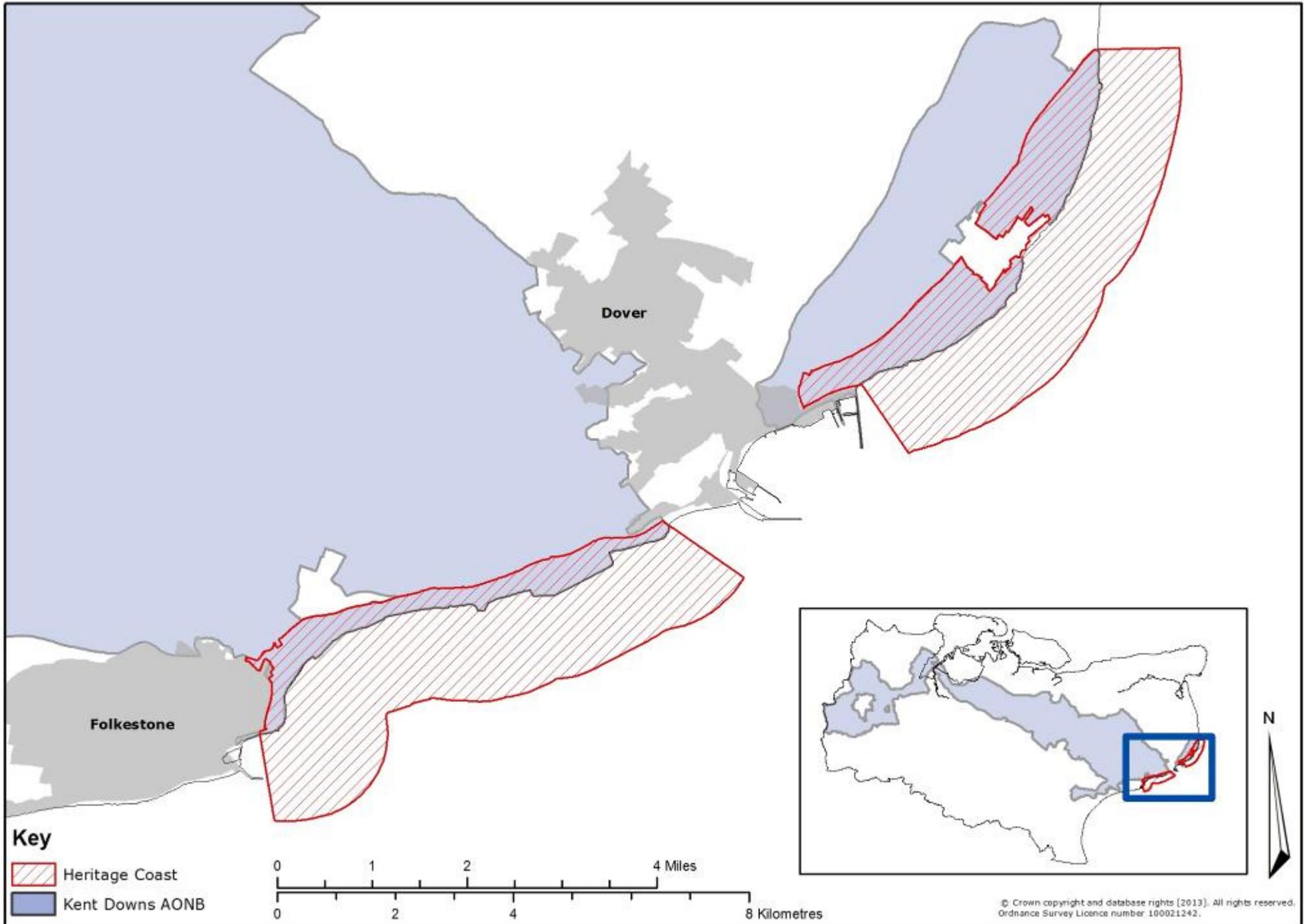


Habitat surveying at South Foreland

Josie Newman

Figure 12 - Heritage coasts and the Kent Downs AONB

9. The Heritage Coasts



### The Heritage Coasts

England's 32 Heritage Coasts have been identified for the conservation and enhancement of their natural beauty, their terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, and heritage features. They also have objectives to:

- facilitate and enhance the public's enjoyment.
- maintain and improve the quality of inshore waters and beaches.

In delivering these objectives account must be taken of the needs of land management activities and local communities.

Natural England's Designation Strategy promotes AONB management plans incorporating policies for the management of Heritage Coasts at a strategic level.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) has a Heritage Coast management function as part of its purpose and in this Plan's period of operation a Landscape Partnership "Up on the Downs", funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and local partners will operate; both can be important vehicles for managing the Coast.

## 9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover, include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of our national identity; forming a soaring landscape with a seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

The Heritage Coast's wildlife is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and the only Kent population of Kittiwakes. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

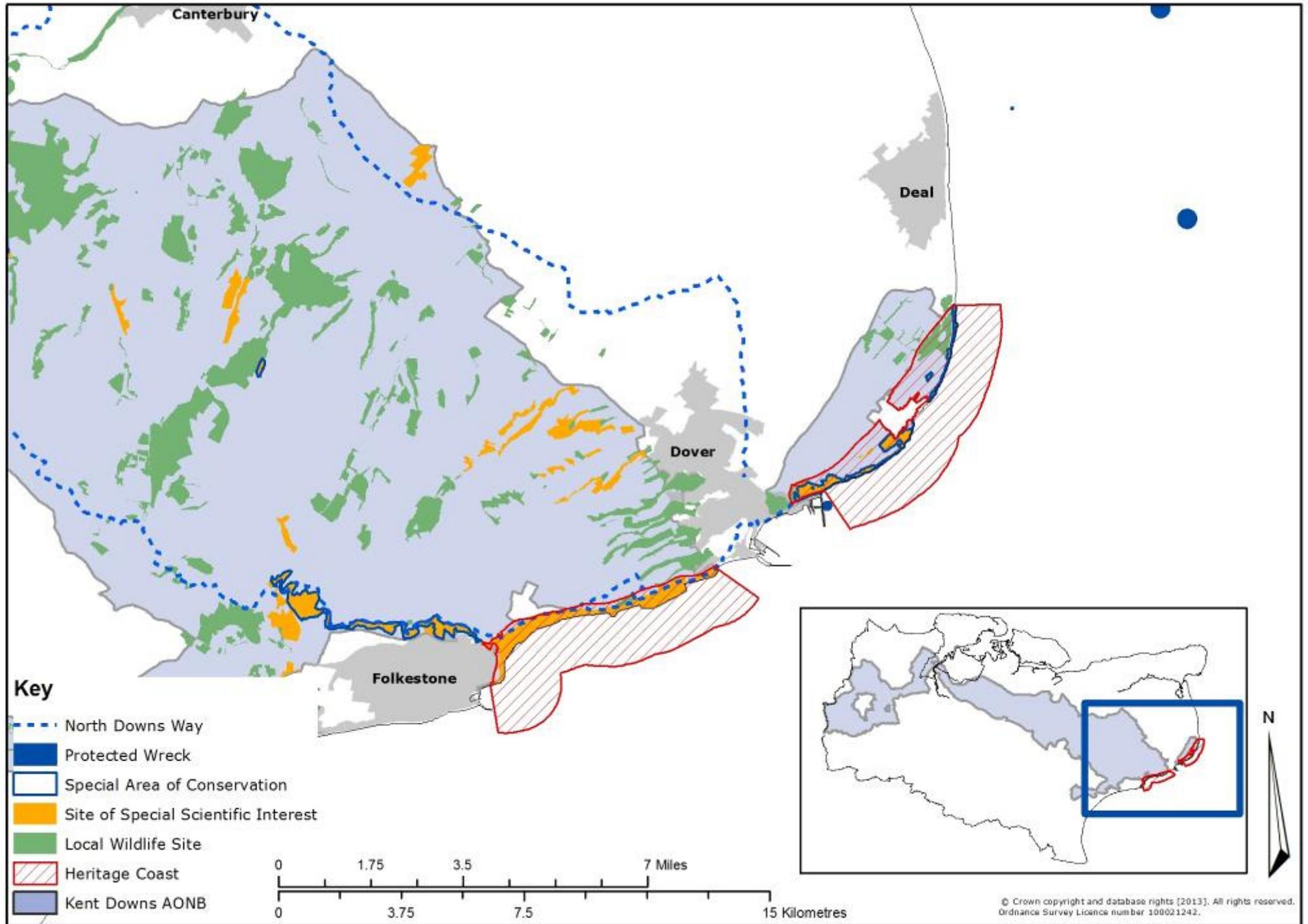
The cliffs and grassland contain rare plants such as Hoary and Sea Stock, Rock Sea-Lavender, Sea Heath and Wild Cabbage. Most of the area is notified as SSSI, not just for the rich communities of birds, wildflowers but also seaweeds and particularly for the invertebrates. Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) have been identified off the Heritage Coasts. MCZs will protect areas of nationally rare, threatened or especially representative habitats and species. The Heritage Coasts are a vital landing point for migrating birds and insects and are home to many rare species. The proximity to mainland Europe places the Heritage Coasts in a key position as species migrate in response to climate change.



View from High Meadow to Dover Castle

Figure 13 - Heritage Coast designations in Kent

9. The Heritage Coasts



The predicted impacts of climate change, including sea level rise and the greater frequency and intensity of storms, is expected to have a significant effect on the Heritage Coast, making adaptation strategies, particularly, an important priority for the future management of the coast.

Defence and invasion is one of the themes of the Heritage Coast and forms an important reference in the cultural landscape. Features include the magnificent Dover Castle described as 'the key to England', Napoleonic Martello towers, the 'listening ears' built between the wars and superseded by radar installations some of which are now listed. World War II frontline fortifications, defences and anti-tank devices along the whole coast are exemplified again at Dover Castle. Following evacuation from Dunkirk the cliffs formed a welcoming sight for many thousands of troops.

Communication and cultural exchange are important themes. In 1899 the first international wireless transmission was sent from Wimereux, France to South Foreland lighthouse. Cross channel trade and cultural exchange continues apace – the Strait of Dover being one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The close proximity of Dover Harbour and views of the Strait's central shipping channel means ferries and large cargo vessels are frequent features.

Arising both from conflict and seagoing transport there is an extraordinary and outstanding collection of wrecks comprising both air and water craft, including the Dover Boat, the oldest sea-going boat in the world. Another example is the protected wreck of the Langdon Bay (English Heritage), located on the edge of Dover Harbour. It is thought to be the remains of a Middle Bronze Age vessel carrying a scrap metal cargo from France to Britain, indicating early cross-channel trade.

Navigation marks are often conspicuous in the landscape for example the National Trust-managed South Foreland lighthouse, which stands 21 metres high on the headland, and a white windmill (near to the lighthouse).

The geological exposures of the cliffs form an internationally important stratigraphic reference site for extensive and near-continuous exposures of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk, historically important for their contribution to the sciences of geology and coastal geomorphology and are all designated as SSSI. The Chalk cliffs and to the west Gault Clay are rich in fossils. On the seashore at Copt Point the exposed Greensand forms a series of rock pools with important seaweed colonies. The Greensand was also the home of an active quern stone (corn grinding) industry dating to the first century BC.



Andy Vidler

Common tern



Paul Sampson

Dexter cattle on St Martins



Josie Newman

Harebells



View towards France

The Heritage Coasts are a popular area for recreation; the cliff tops are crossed by the Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Path and North Downs Way National Trail. The route of the new National Coastal Path will soon be defined along this section of coast and there are several areas of open access land and visitor attractions such as the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel le Ferne. Several areas offer panoramic views across to France and views of the bustling ferry port and shipping lanes. Access to the base of the cliffs can be dangerous but where available provides a real feeling of wildness. Both the Folkestone Warren and Samphire Hoe offer access below the cliffs in a more managed setting.

Where there is an absence of settlement or transport infrastructure there is a strong relative sense of tranquillity, with exposure to the elements being a key feature.

Much of the Dover-Kingsdown Heritage Coast is managed by the National Trust; this provides a strong framework for the landscape's conservation and enhancement. Ownership of the Dover-Folkestone Heritage Coast is more complex and, while the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership actively manages key sites at Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Warren, overall there is a less cohesive overarching approach or focus.

#### ◆ **Seascape assessment of the Strait of Dover**

The description of seascape character, like landscape character describes what is distinctive, special and characteristic in an area of sea (and land in coastal areas). Seascape character assessment is a tool and spatial framework to help integrate management decisions. In a pilot seascape assessment carried out in 2012 the Dover Strait was described as 'a cohesive seascape unified by geology, socio-economic functions, biodiversity, history and culture, and indivisibility'. A full assessment of the Strait of Dover is expected to be prepared during the plan period; the pilot assessment is available from the Kent Downs AONB website.

#### ◆ **Marine Management Planning**

The Marine Management Organisation describes marine planning as 'a new approach to the management of our seas'. The aim is to ensure a sustainable future for our coastal and offshore waters through managing and balancing the many activities, resources and assets in our marine environment.

Marine planning is following a similar approach to terrestrial planning – setting the direction for decision making at a local level to lead to efficient and sustainable use of our marine resources. The Marine Management Organisation is responsible for Marine Plan Making and will complete a Marine Plan for a section of the Dover Folkestone Heritage Coast area during the plan period.



Sheer cliff face of the White Cliffs of Dover

### 9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Cultivation and coastal erosion have reduced the botanically-rich chalk grassland on the cliff tops to a narrow strip, making management difficult and placing the habitat at risk.
- b. High visitor pressure, particularly at the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and Folkestone Warren threatens to degrade important habitats and reduce the valued sense of tranquillity.
- c. Arable agriculture can sit uncomfortably with the natural beauty and wild scenery of the cliff tops, a significant opportunity remains further to expand the valued semi natural coastal grassland.
- d. Discordant development, for instance caravan parks, visitor resources, and unsympathetic screening attempts.
- e. The enthusiasm for the area brings an opportunity to act collaboratively to address the lack of coordinated management where this exists outside areas of 'protective ownership'.
- f. Major development pressures and previous developments now falling into disrepair or are prone to marine erosion.
- g. The need to increase understanding of the dynamic nature of the coast, accelerating coastal processes and the potential impacts of climate change.
- h. Widespread inappropriate, antisocial and illegal activities, such as off-roading vehicles, extensive wild camping, fly-tipping and vandalism in parts of the Heritage Coasts.
- i. The safety and interpretation of remaining military and historic structures, particularly from the Second World War.
- j. The very high quality, iconic natural environment can be an important component of a package to regenerate the coastal towns of Dover and Folkestone, but the Heritage Coasts are in themselves extremely sensitive to development and visitor pressure.
- k. Marine litter and air pollution are significant detractors from the qualities of the Heritage Coast.
- l. The opportunity identified and supported by Kent County Council and the Pas-de-Calais Department to achieve World Heritage Site status for the Strait of Dover.
- m. Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (yet to be designated), while primarily protecting wildlife could also be managed to have a positive impact on fisheries, thereby avoiding unnecessary disruption to livelihoods.
- n. The Heritage Coasts are much loved, iconic national landscapes with partnerships in place to support their management.



The White Cliffs

## 9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims

A landscape in which:

1. A wide collaborative approach achieves management of, respect and international recognition, for the Heritage Coasts which reflects the extremely high national esteem in which they are held.
2. The extreme importance and sensitivity of the Heritage Coasts are recognised publicly, through appropriate international status and in policy and development management decisions.
3. The importance and value placed on these iconic landscapes delivers resources and partnerships to ensure their management supporting the regeneration of the nearby coastal towns.

## 9.5 The Heritage Coasts - policies

The Sustainable Development section (3) identifies guiding and recurrent themes for the management of the Kent Downs AONB. These themes and the Management Plan policy responses should be considered before referring to specific policies set out below.

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| <p>HC1 Coastal defence policies, allowing, where practicable, a naturally functioning coastline will be supported.</p> <p>HC2 The opportunity to support economic regeneration through the sustainable and integrated management of the Heritage Coast in accordance with its defined purpose will be supported.</p> <p>HC3 Threats to the qualities and character of the Heritage Coast will be resisted and managed.</p> <p>HC4 A collaborative approach, such as that employed by the WCCP and the Up on the Downs Landscape Partnership, will be pursued to secure the objectives for Heritage Coast management and address the specific threats and opportunities identified.</p> | <p>HC5 Achieving World Heritage Site status or other appropriate international recognition for the Strait of Dover will be pursued.</p> <p>HC6 The conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the Heritage Coasts and Strait of Dover will be pursued through influencing the Marine Plan making process – and the development of new Heritage Coast Management Plans.</p> <p>HC7 The New National Coastal Trail will be managed in partnership to meet National Trail standards. The conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the corridor of the National Coastal Trail in the Heritage Coasts will be pursued.</p> |
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***The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in South East England which offer a feeling of wilderness.***