



Natural Economy Northwest

North West Coastal Trail: Strategic positioning and business case

Executive summary

Commissioned from Peter Scott Planning Services Ltd
by the North West Coastal Forum with funding
contributions from 4NW and Natural Economy Northwest

Funded by



Regional Leaders Forum

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Preface

This is one in a series of reports produced between 2007 and 2009 within the Natural Economy Northwest (NENW) programme. NENW is a regional partnership programme led by Natural England, the North West Development Agency and the SITA Trust on behalf of a wide range of economic and environmental partners. The main focus is to deliver priority action 113 in the Regional Economic Strategy, to optimise the natural environment's contribution to the regional economy and quality of life.

The programme also includes the Enriching Nature SITA Trust biodiversity programme and the aspirations of Natural England and other environmental and economic partners to mainstream the natural environment within sustainable economic development. Key work areas within the programme are to:

- increase awareness of the value of the natural economy,
- commission and disseminate research to promote and facilitate delivery,
- provide direction to promote effective use of limited financial resources,
- contribute to the development and delivery of regional and sub-regional strategies,
- facilitate natural economy project development and encourage project delivery,
- promote and facilitate Green Infrastructure and Natural Tourism especially through the Sub-Regional Economic Partnerships and the Tourist Boards,
- encourage strategic investment in natural economy projects, and
- to facilitate training, skills innovation and advice to business.

This particular report was commissioned by the North West Coastal Forum, with support funding from 4NW and NENW, from 'Peter Scott Planning Services' to summarise the evidence for the strategic positioning of the NW Coastal Trail, as well as providing the basis for the Business Case. The support and cooperation of many organisations within the Coastal Forum is very much appreciated

This work along with other NENW information and publications is on our website – www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk. You can contact us through our website. We are interested in the ways that this report has been of use to you so that we can take into account in the further development of the programme.

This report has been commissioned by Natural Economy Northwest in the delivery of its aims, outputs and outcomes and it should not be assumed that it represents the policy of the funders – Northwest Development Agency, Natural England and the SITA Trust.

Dr Will Williams

Programme Director
Natural Economy Northwest

NORTH WEST COASTAL TRAIL : STRATEGIC POSITIONING AND BUSINESS CASE

SUMMARY

The North West Coastal Trail

The agreed **vision for the North West Coastal Trail** is –

A continuous, multi-use trail running along the coast from Chester to Carlisle and encouraging residents and visitors to explore, appreciate and enjoy some of the North West's greatest assets: its coastal landscapes, heritage and settlements.

At one level, the Coastal Trail will comprise, promote and add value to existing coastal paths, cycleways and other routes along sections of the coast (e.g. Mersey Way, Cumbria Coastal Way) - at another level, it will comprise parts of the English Coastal Route and could provide a powerful brand for promoting the North West coast – regionally, nationally and internationally.

The proposed North West Coastal Trail is an ambitious project, which will -

- provide for, and encourage growth of, walking, cycling and, where practical, horse riding and all-abilities user markets, including regional residents and visitors
- cater for trips of all lengths – from end-to-end walks and cycle rides, to day walks and short strolls or rides, including linear, out-and-back and circular trips
- provide for recreational, tourism and utilitarian trips, and heritage and educational visits
- attract new, repeat and longer visits, with visitors' expenditures generating income and employment
- deliver significant economic, environmental and social benefits for the North West.

Report on the Strategic Positioning and Business Case for the Coastal Trail

The report on the *North West Coastal Trail: Strategic Positioning and Business Case*¹ –

- demonstrates the complementarity and strong 'strategic fit' between proposals for the North West Coastal Trail and relevant national, regional and sub-regional policies
- emphasises opportunities for Coastal Trail programmes to deliver, or support the delivery of, partner organisations' programmes and projects in an integrated and cost-effective manner
- presents a robust business case for developing the Coastal Trail and related programmes, by showing how these can maximise economic, environmental and social benefits and contribute to the region's sustainable development
- indicates potential sources of funding to support Coastal Trail development
- provides recommendation on the initial focus for Trail marketing and communications.

Potential Growth in Trail User Markets

There is strong potential for growth in a wide range of Trail user markets (see above). In addition to marketing, drivers of market growth will include demographics and increasing numbers of active elderly people, affluence and the 'experience economy', enhanced visitor products and information, growth in domestic breaks, interest in wildlife, and the promotion of active lifestyles and social inclusion.

¹ This Summary and the full report draw on information from the *North West Coastal Trail: Strategic Positioning Research*, prepared by Bowles Green Ltd. for the North West Coastal Forum in 2007 (unpublished).

Strategic Positioning of the Coastal Trail

The review of national, regional and sub-regional policy frameworks highlights the synergy between the Trail proposals and the following key policy areas -

- *Draft Marine Bill* and intended creation of the English Coastal Route and ‘spreading room’ – this will support the development of the Coastal Trail. In turn, the Coastal Trail will comprise sections of the English Coastal Route and, where feasible, will extend its provisions to enable use by cyclists, horse riders, etc.
- *Regional Spatial Strategy* and *Regional Economic Strategy* – these present a range of relevant policies, including policies for regional parks. The Coastal Trail will be the region’s most extensive regional park resource and will connect the coastal regional parks. Also, it will provide links to/from coastal resorts, attractions and national and regional trails
- NWDA’s economic objectives and funding roles – NWDA’s and its delivery partners’ programmes, projects and funding will support Coastal Trail programmes, which contribute to regional economic growth and associated objectives
- Natural Economy Northwest – the Coastal Trail will contribute to NENW’s objectives for embedding the natural environment and its enjoyment within activities to promote sustainable economic development and growth; thereby, delivering economic, social and environmental benefits
- natural tourism – the Coastal Trail will provide a valuable natural tourism asset
- green infrastructure – the Trail will be a significant component of the region’s green infrastructure
- active and healthy lifestyles – Trail-related programmes will provide for, and promote, physical activity and may gain funding from health authorities, charities, etc.
- integration of rights of way improvement plans and local transport plans – integration of these plans should result in higher priorities for developing and maintaining public rights of way, cycle paths and other routes and promoting walking and cycling
- coastal management and flood defences – sections of Trail may be developed or enhanced as part of such programmes.

Importantly, Coastal Trail programmes will provide a focus for the ‘joined-up’ delivery of the above policy areas and programmes - especially, programmes relating to the regeneration of coastal resorts, towns and rural areas, sustainable travel, recreation, sport and tourism, natural and cultural heritage, culture, community development and social cohesion.

Business Case for Coastal Trail Development

There is a strong business case for investment in the Coastal Trail and related programmes. While the proposals are at an early stage of development and detailed costs, etc. are not available, examples from similar projects show that Trail development, management, marketing and related programmes can –

- a. achieve a wide range of economic, environmental and social benefits, including -
 - economic benefits
 - enhanced visitor offer
 - visitor market growth and increased visitor expenditures
 - business growth, diversification and viability
 - employment opportunities
 - training and skills development for employees and volunteers
 - economic regeneration
 - positive image and identity for the North West
 - increases in property values.

- environmental and sustainability benefits
 - English Coastal Route and green infrastructure development and enhancement
 - biodiversity and habitat enhancement and coastal management
 - sustainable travel opportunities and promotion
 - enhanced air quality and mitigation of impacts of climate change
 - natural and cultural heritage interpretation and life-long learning.
 - social benefits
 - new and improved provision for recreation and sport
 - more active lifestyles, with benefits for health and well-being
 - enhanced social cohesion and community capacity.
- b. contribute towards achieving regional economic growth objectives - in particular, NWDA's regional priorities for *competitive business*, *competitive people* and *competitive places*
- c. provide good overall returns from public investment and benefits to users – as shown by examples of cost-benefit and willingness-to-pay evaluations from other routes.

Implementation of the Coastal Trail

While implementation of the North West Coastal Trail will be supported by the national programme to create the English Coastal Route, development of the Coastal Trail will comprise, primarily, a 'bottom-up' process, taking advantage of –

- existing coastal routes, national and regional cycleways and public rights of way – including strategic routes such as Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail, Cumbria Coastal Way, Lancashire Coastal Way, Sefton Coast Path, Trans Pennine Trail and the Mersey Way
- proposed new routes (e.g. Mersey Way extension) and other strategic routes linking to national and regional networks, cities, etc. (e.g. National Cycle Network routes, C2C cycle route, Lancaster Canal Towpath, Trans Pennine Way, Sandstone Way)
- regional park projects – especially the Mersey Waterfront and Ribble Coast and Wetlands Regional Parks. Also, proposals for similar projects at Morecambe Bay and West Cumbria
- urban and rural regeneration programmes (e.g. Chester Renaissance, Britain's Energy Coast), infrastructure projects (e.g. River Douglas Crossing) and tourism development and marketing programmes
- involvement of a wide range of delivery partners – including national and regional agencies (e.g. Natural England, Environment Agency, 4NW, NWDA), sub-regional partnerships, tourist boards and other partnerships, local authorities, user and community groups, and volunteers.

Funding of the Coastal Trail

The principal sources of funding of Coastal Trail programmes are likely to comprise –

- NWDA – Single Budget, Rural Development Programme for England and North West European Regional Development Programme funding, managed by the NWDA and delivered through the sub-regional partnerships, tourist boards and other partners
- Natural England – subject to resources, funding the creation and maintenance of new sections of the English Coastal Route over the 10-year implementation programme and funding for other programmes
- Environment Agency and/or Defra – funds for flood prevention and coastal management
- Lottery funds – especially HLF and BIG Lottery funding
- local authorities – including funding for local transport plan programmes, including rights of way and cycle route improvements and maintenance and promoting sustainable travel.

Initial Marketing of the Coastal Trail

Effective marketing will be a key to the success of the Coastal Trail. At this early stage in its development, the focus for marketing, brand development and communications will be on promoting awareness and support for the Coastal Trail concept and its development, amongst potential partner organisations, funders, communities, user groups and other key stakeholders.

Conclusion

This report –

- a. identifies a valuable ‘window of opportunity’ to capitalise on the strategic fit between proposals for developing the North West Coastal Trail and partner organisations’ policy intentions, funding regimes and implementation programmes – thereby, offering scope to achieve effective and expeditious progress towards the implementation of the Coastal Trail and related programmes**
- b. presents a strong business case for developing and promoting the North West Coastal Trail and related programmes, based on the potentially significant economic, environmental and social benefits which these may achieve and favourable economic assessments of investments in similar projects.** The business case draws on examples from coastal trails and other projects throughout the UK.