

# Scrutiny Briefing Note

The Tourism and Visitor Economy Panel have asked to monitor progress on the following issues. This briefing contains the latest position as of 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

## Subject: Update of Progress on the Cleethorpes Habitat Management Plan

### Introduction

This note explains what the Cleethorpes Habitat Management Plan (CHMP) is and why we need to update it this year. We are fortunate to have part of one of England's and Europe's most important wildlife sites in our borough – The Humber Estuary. It has a range of rare habitats and internationally significant populations of endangered birds. For these reasons all of the coast here is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Local people and visitors alike enjoy it for sightseeing, walking and a wide variety of sports. The CHMP aims to balance the needs of people and nature, and the council has a critical legal role to play in ensuring that this balance is maintained. The area also has other environmental benefits as the unique habitats provide for flood mitigation and acts as a natural carbon store.

### Background to the Habitat Management Plan

The current Plan covered the period 2016-2021 - and was approved by cabinet in April 2016. It's the legal agreement between the Council as the responsible competent authority and Natural England. It sets out how the council manages the Cleethorpes shoreline, as agreed with Natural England, which is the government organisation advising on and enforcing legislation on the natural environment. Work began to update the plan in 2019 and it will cover the period 2021-2026. We have been working with our partners to do this, and they include the Humber Nature Partnership and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) .

### The Purpose of the Cleethorpes Habitat Management Plan

By law, all SSSIs have to have a management plan, to explain how activities that will impact on the SSSI will be managed; anything that the council does or permits on the SSSI land, or that will impact the SSSI has to have permission from Natural England. The Plan serves as the formal agreement from Natural England for the council, as the competent authority, to carry out management of the SSSI to meet habitat and species-specific conditions while allowing activities on it.

The CHMP is also the formal document which is used to detail the council's ambitions for the future management of the Cleethorpes Coastline and the SSSI area. This allows the plan to describe the current management of the SSSI area and any future plans for management of the SSSI area. The CHMP must be formally agreed with Natural England and it is used to fulfil the statutory obligation of maintaining and where possible improving the condition of SSSI. The Cleethorpes section of the SSSI is divided into 10 units and when the most recent assessments of their condition were undertaken by Natural England (in 2019) eight were in an 'unfavourable-recovering' condition and two were in a 'favourable' condition.

It is worth noting that as well as the SSSI designation along the Cleethorpes Coastline, there are also designations for:

- Humber Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA) – for the conservation of migratory and threatened birds.



- Humber Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – contains protected habitats and species.
- Humber Ramsar Site – an internationally important wetland area.
- Humber Estuary European Marine Site (EMS) – important marine and coastal habitats.
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR) – for its sand dunes, mudflats and special plants and birds.

It is the council's statutory obligation, in consultation with Natural England, to ensure these designated sites along the Cleethorpes Coastline are appropriately managed. This includes preventing damage or disturbance to the designated species and habitats and where appropriate and with NE agreement and mitigation for the disturbance of wildlife species that use these areas. The CHMP acts as the document to detail with the management of these designated sites alongside the statutory function for detailing the SSSI management.

### **Why does the Plan Need Updating?**

The plan is reviewed and updated every five years to ensure that the monitoring of conditions and any changes in how the council manages the designated sites are reflected within the plan, and that appropriate assents have been sought from and given by Natural England. Updates to mitigation and management measures for recreational activities (such as dog walking) requiring legislative advice are also included in the review of the plan. If increased incidents of disturbance to the protected features or wildlife are observed, then further measures to mitigate this disturbance would need to be taken by the council to ensure statutory obligations are met. Any changes to mitigating measures or management measures for recreational activities along the Cleethorpes Coastline will be updated in the plan.

Currently reports of incidents of disturbance to the protected features have increased, compared to those observed when the plan was last reviewed and updated in 2016. This has been noted by the council's ecology officers, RSPB, local residents and through disturbance reports that have been sent to members of the Humber Nature Partnership. It is expected that incidents of disturbance will continue to increase along the Cleethorpes Coastline as visitor numbers increase (due to the regeneration projects along the Resort area) and resident numbers increase in line with the Local Plan. These factors mean that more mitigation and management measures need to be done to ensure legislation is met and the protected features of Cleethorpes Coastline are protected.

The review and updating of the plan also enables the council to review the objectives and aims that are present within the plan, and allows where appropriate objectives and aims to be changed to match the strategic objectives of both the council and Natural England.

It should be noted that while the Plan acts as a formal agreement between Natural England and the council for management activities carried out and activities permitted by the council it does not remove the need for a Habitat Regulations Assessment for planning applications or for events.

### **What is Changing in the 2016-2021 Plan?**

Changes to the CHMP have been proposed following consultation with Natural England, Humber Nature Partnership and RSPB. Changes include new measures and approaches for managing disturbance and footfall through the designated areas of Cleethorpes. The plan will also include projects associated with the management of Cleethorpes and is intended link with other plans associated with the management of Cleethorpes Resort and the wider Humber Estuary area. Details of changes to the Plan and ongoing projects relevant to the update of the Plan are outlined below:

1. Resort Signage Project:
  - Work is ongoing with the council's Resort Manager to review the signs along the resort.
  - Signage will include messages promoting awareness of bird disturbance and the designated features.



2. Slipway Scheme:
  - The resort manager is undertaking a review of the slipway management scheme.
  - This includes distributing information about responsible water use and avoiding sensitive areas and SPA birds.
3. Codes of Conduct:
  - Work has been ongoing with the Humber Nature Partnership to create a new set of Codes of Conduct for water users across the Humber region.
  - The Codes of conduct aim to inform estuary users on the importance of the region with the aim of promoting responsible use.
4. Working with the Local Community and Local Recreational Groups
  - Through the Humber Nature Partnership work is being done to communicate with local water users and groups (such as paddle boarding and kitesurfing groups) and local paramotor groups to try to increase awareness of the designated areas and help them identify areas to avoid.
5. Eco-Tourism
  - A report brought to this Scrutiny Panel in October 2020, by the council's Resort Manager, set out intentions to develop eco-tourism in the resort.
  - The Habitat Management Plan will include a summary of these plans and will reference the possible implications of increased footfall to the resort area as well as including any necessary mitigation measures to manage increased visitor numbers.
  - The plans for eco-tourism are being worked on in collaboration with Natural England, RSPB and the Humber Nature Partnership and have been well received.
6. Recreational Activity Management
  - The plan will detail where recreational activities have been permitted along the Cleethorpes Coastline.
  - This includes where activities such as: dog walking, walking, horse riding, bait digging, recreational fishing, windsurfing, jet skiing, kite surfing, paddle-boarding and other recreational activities can occur.
  - Changes may be made to areas where recreational activities are permitted to ensure disturbance to SPA birds and other protected features is managed.
  - There will be no change for businesses and Donkey Rides will still be permitted.
  - Informal consultation with Natural England is still ongoing to determine whether any changes are necessary.

Currently both council officers and Natural England are aiming to take a collaborative approach for the management of recreational activities along the Cleethorpes Coastline. This means the primary method of management is to be through education and working with local people to promote the importance of the area and its responsible use. However, it is possible that stricter measures of management maybe needed in the future.

### **Consultation**

- Ongoing informal consultation with Natural England, RSPB and Humber Nature Partnership
- Scrutiny is being updated on the progress of the report with the intention to bring the full report to scrutiny once completed.
- The report will need to go through the formal approval process with Natural England.

### **Timeline**

1. Completion of informal consultation with Natural England, RSPB and Humber Nature Partnership
  - End of March 2021
2. Formally submit the Plan and completed Habitats Regulation Assessment for the Plan to Natural England
  - Submission to Natural England will be done End of March 2021



- Natural England has up to 12 weeks to comment.
  - Formal Feedback and Approval of the Plan to be received by June 2021.
3. Return to Scrutiny in July/August 2021.
  4. Formal submission of the Plan to Cabinet following Scrutiny approval.

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