



TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Coastal Conservation Policy Development in England and Wales with Special Reference to the Heritage Coast Concept

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ABSTRACT

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The background to conservation policy in England and Wales is discussed with special reference to the philosophy and aims of Heritage Coasts. The emphasis for management in Heritage Coast areas is one of non-statutory, voluntary and community-based approaches to management. Key points in this approach are the roles of agriculture, recreation and conservation, management policies being geared to reinforcing the natural qualities of the coastline with respect to these potential areas of conflict.

ADDITIONAL INDEX WORDS: Coastal conservation, Great Britain, preservation, development, Heritage Coast, coastal management.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COASTAL CONSERVATION POLICY

Background to Conservation Policy

The rapidly increasing rate at which major British conurbations were expanding and engulfing rustic haunts, was giving cause for concern by the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the problem had been officially recognised even earlier, when the Select Committee on Public Works published its findings in 1833. By 1895 sufficient momentum for countryside and coastal conservation had been gained to enable the National Trust (NT) to become established. The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) also came into being at this time and, like the National Trust, were charitable and voluntary organisations.

The task of preserving the countryside fell, until recently, very largely to these three bodies. Much of their work was interrupted by World War One but in the years following the Armistice rural conservation received stronger Government support as official policy was gradually formulated and put into effect. Nevertheless no positive legislation was undertaken until 1949. Throughout this period voluntary organisations continued to press for action and were rewarded with the setting up of first the Addison Committee (1929) and later the Scott Committee (1941).

The Addison Committee was briefed to consider the feasibility and desirability of establishing National Parks in scenic areas, both to preserve their landscapes and to accommodate recreational pursuits. The Committee endorsed the concept of National Parks as a means of protecting areas of outstanding national importance. Its report was published in 1931 but, despite its findings, failed to instigate appropriate action. This is largely at-

tributable to the years of depression following upon its release notwithstanding that it was during this period that the CPRE published a definitive work (DOUGILL, 1936). This has been described as “the first coastal management report” (CULLEN, 1981, p.2) and identified the recreational pressures on the English coastlines. The issue had to wait until 1941 before being taken up again at an official level, this time by the Scott Committee. In its findings the SCOTT COMMITTEE (1941) considered that the designation of National Parks was already long overdue whilst emphasising the need to maintain prime agricultural land. Four important recommendations were made which laid the foundation for contemporary rural conservation planning. These were:

(i) Delimitation of the Parks should be undertaken nationally.

(ii) A body should be set up to control National Parks under the Central Planning Authority or other approved central authority.

(iii) The coasts of England and Wales, as part of a National Parks Scheme, should be considered as a whole with a view to the prevention of further spoilation.

(iv) Except where “nature reserves” already exist or are created within a National Park area it would be essential that prohibition of access should be a first consideration. For this reason nature reserves should also be established separately from National Parks.

A sense of urgency was instilled into the report and major legislation was enacted within the decade. Following a series of parliamentary debates between 1942 and 1944 the Scott recommendations were formally accepted by the Government in 1944. Concurrently a comprehensive survey of the coast of England and Wales graded undeveloped stretches according to scenic merit (STEERS, 1944). This report made a number of recommendations concerning access to and preservation of the coast which became the springboard for later Heritage Coast development.

In 1945 was created a Ministry of Town and Country Planning, whose efforts gave rise to, amongst others, the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. This defined “development plans” and delegated responsibility for development control to local councils. The Act brought most developments under legislative control but made important exceptions for farming and forestry. Another feature of the Act was to enable local authorities to place preservation orders on buildings and trees

and to undertake land acquisitions.

Policy and suggested sites for National Parks was laid out in the DOWER REPORT (1945). Intended as a discussion document, it became the plank upon which future policy was founded. In the report, ten areas were earmarked for designation as National Parks but, more importantly in the context of the coast, twelve areas were suggested for possible future National Parks. These included stretches of the Dorset and North Yorkshire coast. Dower also called for setting up of a national body responsible for the National Parks. The HOBHOUSE REPORT (the National Parks Committee, 1947) accepted many of these proposals and proposed another list of coastal stretches as conservation areas. In 1949 the National Parks Committee (NPC)—in England and Wales only—and the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) were established as national bodies and the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was passed in the same year. Despite Dower’s recommendations to the contrary, however, the NPC was given only an advisory role in matters concerning designated sites of natural beauty. Coastal conservation areas did not fare well in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, neither was the case furthered by the NPC, whose terms of reference were somewhat limited. HOBHOUSE (1947) had suggested setting up a coastal Planning Advisory Committee for which the Minister of Town and Country Planning was to be responsible. However, the case for coastal preservation had to wait until the 1960’s before positive action was taken to safeguard it.

The Increase in Coastal Awareness

A general review and reshuffle of national conservation bodies was undertaken in the sixties. Because of a perceived lack of commitment to coastal preservation, the National Trust launched its own “Enterprise Neptune” campaign in 1965 with the aim of purchasing for the Trust special areas of the British coast as and when they were put up for sale.

At an official level, circular No. 56/63 (“Coastal Preservation and Development”) was issued by the Minister of Housing and Local Government in September 1963. By this time nearly 30% of the coastline of England and Wales had been given some form of special designation but such stretches still lacked a cohesive policy. The circular recommended that coastal authorities should prepare special studies of the coastal areas in consultation with the

NPC. Scientific advice could be sought from the Nature Conservancy Council where this was needed. The purpose of the studies was to identify stretches of largely underdeveloped coast whose beauty merited protection, to take steps towards restoring lost amenities and to consider "the potential impact of proposals on areas of scientific interest" (Circular No. 56/63, para. 8). The demarcation of inland boundaries would depend on local circumstances. There followed in 1966 a further circular, No. 7/66, entitled "The Coast", which requested local authorities to submit to the Minister coastal plans for those areas already designated and those not as yet defined but considered worthy of preservation.

Annual reports of planning consents and refusals in coastal areas were also to be submitted, a policy which gave protection to underdeveloped areas whilst encouraging development in those areas already substantially developed.

Within the year (1966), the White Paper "Leisure in the Countryside" was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Wales. It recommended that the NPC be replaced by a new body, the Countryside Commission, as intensity of use of the countryside for leisure purposes had increased beyond the means and scope of the former (largely due to a growth in car ownership) which left it unable to meet its objectives. The Countryside Commission, whilst retaining the advisory capacity of the NCP, was to be granted wider responsibilities. The document also introduced the concept of Country Parks and suggested improvements to the grant system of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in order to cover the role of the new Countryside Commission. The Countryside Act (1968) duly arose from this paper, incorporating all aspects outlined above.

The Heritage Coast Concept

In 1966, at the request of the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the National Parks Commission commenced a study of coastal preservation in England and Wales. A series of nine regional conferences was held over the course of a year, the aim of which was "to provide a firm foundation for long-term policies for safeguarding the natural beauty of the coast as a whole and promoting its enjoyment by the Public" (Circular No. 7/66).

A number of publications arose out of this study.

Each of the regional conferences provided a report and two special studies, "Coastal Recreation and Holidays" and "Nature Conservation on the Coast", were prepared by the Sports Council and the Nature Conservancy respectively and published in 1969. The National Parks Commission study culminated in the publication of "The Planning of the Coastline" (1970) and "The Coastal Heritage" (1970) by what had then become the Countryside Commission. One of the principal recommendations of both reports was that "selected stretches of undeveloped coastline of high scenic quality should be given a special designation in order to protect their use for informal recreation" ("The Coastal Heritage," 1970, *qv.*). "The Coastal Heritage" identified a number of such coastlines which it termed Heritage Coasts.

Only a relatively small number of the highest quality stretches coastline were considered for inclusion in that scheme. The approach recognised that coastal sites are essential to some forms of development and thus more satisfactory conservation measures could be implemented if the geographical context of such zones were restricted to those areas of particular beauty or scientific interest. In this manner, erosion of the finer sites by developers could be prevented by providing, in conservation terms, alternative sites of less significance. "The Coastal Heritage" (1970) identified altogether 34 sites worthy of designation as Heritage Coasts, representing nearly 27% of the total coastal frontage of England and Wales. Some developed areas were inevitably included within the defined lateral boundaries. The essential criterion by which coasts were judged for inclusion in the scheme was scenic merit for which the assessment of the British coastline by STEERS (1944) formed the basis. Coasts were chosen from those in the categories of exceptional and very good as defined by Steers. Appropriate adjustments were made to their boundaries to account for small-scale but irremovable intrusions and for features of special significance near the extremities of the area in question which justified inclusion within a defined stretch of coast. While regretting the introduction of another designation, "The Coastal Heritage" (p. VII) noted that existing legislation and designations were unlikely to prove sufficient for the effective conservation of short stretches of coastline.

In response to these proposals, the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment issued a joint circular [No. 12/72 (DOE); 36/72 (WO)], "The Planning of the Undeveloped Coast" (1972). This

gave an enthusiastic welcome to the Heritage Coast concept but failed to endorse many of the proposals and refused to accept a new statutory designation procedure. Thus the Commission's task became one of liaison with local planning authorities and landowners to reach voluntary agreements with regard to the establishment of definitive boundaries and management policies of a particular Heritage Coast. It was also to provide grants to assume responsibility for the promotion nationally of the Heritage Coast concept. Following the acceptance of the basic programme, pilot projects were set up in Dorset, Glamorgan and Suffolk in 1973-74. These served to demonstrate the working of the scheme, acquiring support for it and gaining much invaluable management experience. A Heritage Coast Officer was appointed to each of the pilot areas with subsequent recruitment of wardens as practical improvements were begun. The Officers were employed by the respective County Councils, although initially 90% of their salaries were met by the Countryside Commission.

Responsibility for drafting and implementing management policy was left largely with the Project Officers, within the framework of the Countryside Commission guidelines. This was achieved through integration of ground-level management with the planning process. A simple management philosophy evolved to bring recognisable benefits to visitors and local residents alike. It is a philosophy which appears to be sound, as all three pilot schemes have achieved widespread acclaim both in their own right and for the Heritage Coast concept generally. They have been used by the Countryside Commission as models by which to advise other local authorities and have generated considerable interest from overseas. The scheme has been closely followed by organisations involved in coastal management from Australia, South Africa, India and North America. Already similar schemes are operating in France. Britain has therefore achieved a high international reputation for its coastal conservation policy, all the more remarkable for its slow uptake of the issue. Heritage Coasts have established a firm foundation in coastal management and current Heritage Coasts are shown in Figure 1. Probably the most successful Heritage Coast (HC) is undoubtedly the Glamorgan HC (WILLIAMS and HOWDEN, 1979, 1984, and 1985).

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE HERITAGE COAST CONCEPT AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF THE GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST

Conflicts of Interest and their Resolution

A need for definitive management arises when there is a conflict of interest over land use. Management policy should aim to ease or resolve such conflicts by limiting land use activities which, if not harmonious, are at least compatible with each other within a given frame of reference, whether this be the development of an industrial base or the pursuit of conservation. In the case of land having a designation for scenic quality, agriculture, conservation and recreation are the main sources of conflict, providing an eternal triangle to which management must address itself, with the ultimate aim of preserving and reinforcing the natural qualities of the area in question.

Which of these interests is most assertive will vary with location, but along the coast recreational pressures are particularly intense and may make strong demands on land use. Absence of strict development control and management plans can lead to overuse of certain coastal areas and to ramshackle developments such as kiosks and toilet facilities that significantly detract from scenic quality. Agricultural activities are largely exempted from the usually rigorous planning controls. In the absence of statutory designation for Heritage Coasts, the need to develop voluntary agreements with farmers and land owners becomes essential. This necessitates the work of a ground officer to establish contact with interested parties. If such agreements are to be successful then benefits must accrue to those with whom they are made. Access arrangements, for instance, should seek to reduce trespass. A recognition of the importance of agriculture is therefore essential if management of Heritage Coasts is to be successful. Agriculture will always feature highly on management plans because although Heritage Coasts are classed as undeveloped, most will be farmed for all or a substantial part of their length. It was a recognition of the threat to undeveloped coasts that gave rise to the Heritage Coasts concept, the aims and principles of which were set out in "The Coastal Heritage," and summarised below.

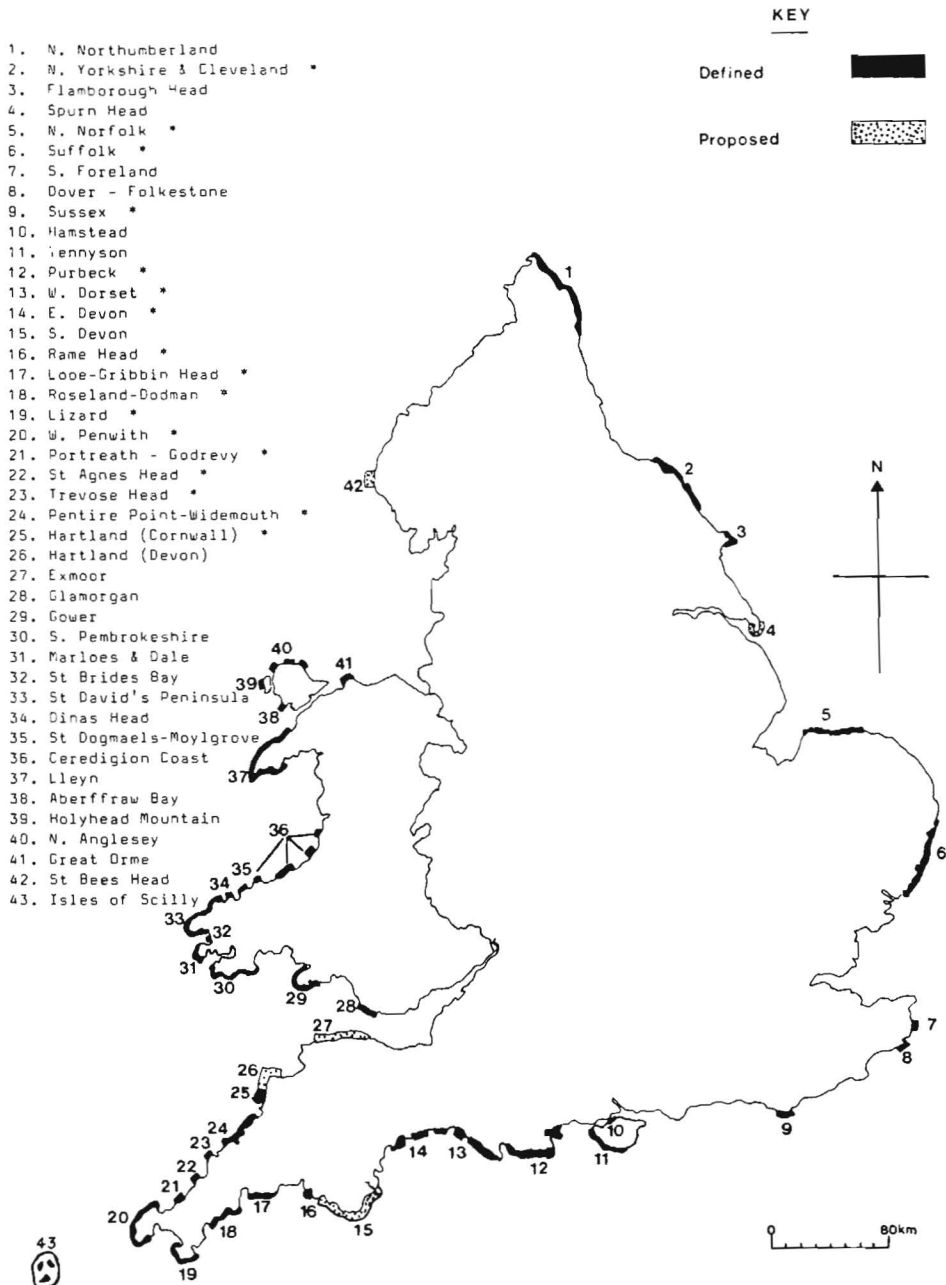


Figure 1. Heritage Coasts in England and Wales.

Heritage Coast Objectives and Management Principles

Management objectives for HC's are essentially twofold:

- (i) to conserve the quality of scenery, and
- (ii) to foster leisure activities which rely on natural scenery and not on man-made activities.

In respect of conserving the environment, the aim was to "make the wisest use of all coastal resources rather than to preserve scenic stretches for their own sake or to discourage access there to" (COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION, 1970b, p.16). The report also warned against "attempts to provide large-scale or sophisticated recreation facilities of the sort usually found in resorts" (p.16) and noted that popular beaches such as Land's End and Allum Bay are quite distinct from resorts. Careful management, it stressed, "may increase their capacity provided attractions are based on the natural qualities of the area" (p.16). As a key to effective management, *The Coastal Heritage* listed seven fundamental principles:

- (1) Determination of intensity of use—management policy should relate directly to an acceptable level of use according to each area's "ecological stability and landscape qualities."
- (2) Determination of management zones based on different intensities of use. Acceptable levels of use should be determined for each part of the Heritage Coast which should then be categorised into intensive, remote and transitional zone accordingly.
- (3) Regulation of access—incongruous and deleterious forms of development should be rigorously controlled within Heritage Coast boundaries.
- (4) Regulation of access—pedestrian and vehicular access to an area should be controlled as a means of regulating use to acceptable levels. Judicious siting of car parks and foot paths and the encouragement of motorists along certain suitable routes are important in this respect.
- (5) Landscape improvements—schemes should be initiated to improve landscape appearance by means of restoration, landscaping, tree planting and removal of disfigurements.
- (6) Diversification of activities—all opportunities for recreation that make use of existing resources should be encouraged, especially where these embolden people to move substantially away from their motor cars. In so doing, situations of overcrowding in the intensive areas may be relieved.

- (7) Provision of interpretive services—effectively prepared and displayed information can encourage the diversification of activities described in (6), above, and promote a closer understanding of the interest in the coastal environment and its noteworthy features.

Further to these management principles, "The Coastal Heritage" gave a detailed account of how Heritage Coasts should become established and their management plans implemented. Responsibility for designating Heritage Coasts lies largely with the Countryside Commission. Designation proposals are subject to the approval of the Minister of Environment (or Secretary of State for Wales in the case of the Welsh Heritage Coasts).

Local planning authorities retain a major responsibility for development control in Heritage Coasts. They are expected to establish a committee responsible for planning and management of their own Heritage Coasts and for providing appropriate information and recreation facilities. Each Heritage Coast plan should be incorporated into local planning authority development plans and a district plan should contain a policy statement for each of the management zones.

The role of the Heritage Coast Officer is clearly outlined in "The Coastal Heritage." The officer is to act as a ground co-ordinator advising the management committee on management issues, establishing contact with locals, obtaining other sources of funding and also to undertake practical management tasks. Much use is made of Government-sponsored youth training schemes to perform practical work. This provides a ready source of labour while providing interesting and varied work experience for trainees.

Management Structure of the Glamorgan Coast (GHC)

When in 1970 the Glamorgan Heritage Coast was proposed by the Countryside Commission, it fell under the jurisdiction of Glamorgan County Council. Negotiations between this Council and the Commission led to the establishment of the project in February 1974 and the appointment of a Heritage Coast Officer a month later. Following national local reorganisation in April 1974, however, the counties of Mid and South Glamorgan were brought into being, whose boundaries divided the Glamorgan Heritage Coast in two. This immediately gave rise to administrative problems concerning the division of responsibility between

the two County Councils and also the two District Councils, Ogwr Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan District Council whose boundaries also extend to the Heritage Coast.

At a Steering Committee meeting on the 18th October 1974, a series of recommendations proposed by the Countryside Commission concerning the issue of administration were considered and accepted. These set the plan simply as the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Plan and invested equal responsibility for it in the four councils concerned. For convenience the Heritage Coast Officer was officially based within the South Glamorgan County Council Planning Department.

Approval of the Heritage Coast scheme was to be the responsibility of the four authorities, the preparation of which was set under the direction of the Joint Advisory Management Committee. The Heritage Coast Officer was also to be directed by this committee.

Zonal policy as defined in the GHC Draft Plan recognised three types of area based on relative intensity of recreational use. These were Recreational Sites, Less Intensive Recreation Sites and Remote Zones. At Recreation Sites informal recreation was to be encouraged and supported by a range of ancillary services. Less Intensive Recreation Sites were to provide for fewer people, with limited facilities such as car parks and toilets. Vehicle access to Remote Zones was to be restricted or prevented and no inducements were to be made to encourage people to visit them. The interests of agriculture and conservation were to be dominant and to dictate management policy for these areas. In the Revised Management Plan (1976), considerable changes were made to zonal policy. Management now recognises Intensive Recreation Sites or "honeypots" (WILLIAMS and HOWDEN, 1979) which attract large numbers of visitors. Policies have been devised relating to the management of Specific Intensive Sites. All areas outside the "honeypots" are regarded as remote and are managed as such. Small recreation sites within remote zones can accommodate limited numbers of people, numbers being controlled by restriction of access to all but pedestrians.

Hopes were expressed in the management plan that a procedure for controlling agricultural development should be submitted to Planning Officers for comment. A scheme such as the Landscape Area Special Development Order currently operating in National Parks was envisaged. Policy for the improvement of the footpath network in-

cludes the establishment of an integrated hierarchical system of paths that aim to reduce innocent trespass and facilitate pedestrian access to all parts of the coast. In return for improved ecological awareness on the part of farmers the schemes recognised the importance of agriculture, which is benefitted through improvements to the footpath network and practical work being undertaken, such as stonewalling.

Recreation along the coast revolves around land-based activities. Dangerous currents in the Bristol Channel combined with high levels of pollution make it unsuitable for swimming and aquatic sports with the exception of sea angling, which has a large following along this stretch of coast. Management policy aims to remove static caravans from sensitive areas where their presence is particularly intrusive. Provision is to be made for an island site for camping and touring caravans in the Heritage Coast hinterland.

Pollution abatement is largely out of the jurisdiction and beyond the means of the GHC management. Representations have been made to shipping authorities in an effort to stop wanton offshore dumping. The control of sewage effluent in the vicinity would require massive funding to produce a notable improvement. A continuing programme to remove terrestrial litter is supported by voluntary workers.

Interpretation of Heritage Coast features forms an intrinsic part of management philosophy and an important basis upon which community support and involvement is developed. Information services for the GHC are now based upon the Heritage Coast Centre at Southerndown. A series of leaflets described way-marked walks and points of interest along the coast and information boards at key sites provide focal points which draw attention to the presence of a management initiative for the area.

The Revised Plan (1976) called for the establishment of a consultative forum to include groups and organisations having an interest in the Heritage Coast. This idea has now been dropped and community involvement and representation now rests with the contact that the Heritage Coast Officer has developed with interested parties.

In addition to the basic funding available from the Countryside Commission for the scheme, grants are available to support funding of specific tasks such as eyesore clearance, warden services, tree planting and creation of Country Parks. Grants are available to private individuals, organisations and voluntary bodies concerned with conservation.

For such tasks the Revised Plan noted that the Heritage Coast Officer would give assistance in the procurement of grant aid for individuals and organisations in the area. Thus the basic funding given to the GHC by the Councils and Countryside Commission acts as a driving force for management and is generously supplemented by additional grant aid and community funding as the scheme gains momentum. No Heritage Coast better demonstrates the role of the Heritage Coast Officer as a resource gatherer than Glamorgan. The funds received from grant aid for specific projects and those raised on a voluntary basis effectively double the available budget (WILLIAMS and HOWDEN, 1985).

CONCLUSIONS

A low cost, high benefit coastal management scheme, the Heritage Coast Concept is the latest in a long line of innovative management schemes to be produced in the United Kingdom since 1833. The two main Government-backed agencies for coastal management are the Countryside Commission and Nature Conservancy Council. A host of private, mainly charitable organisations also occur, headed by the National Trust. Heritage Coasts come under the Countryside Commission umbrella. They are jointly financed by Borough/County Councils and the Countryside Commission. Typical inputs are of the order of £20,000 from councils, matched by an equivalent amount by the Countryside Commission. Heritage Coasts are nonstatutory and rely heavily on community involvement. Voluntary persuasion of landowners to allow people access to beaches, cliff footpath works, etc., is the prevailing attitude, while the ethos is to preserve the area for posterity. Some one third of the England/Wales coastline is now designated as an Heritage Coast, and the idea has spread to India, France and South Africa.

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