

1.9 BROAD CHARACTER: RECREATION

1.9.1 CHARACTER TYPE: RECREATION

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: EAST ANGLIA

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

Recreation and seaside entertainment are very significant to the East Anglian coastal area. A string of holiday resorts bring many visitors and resulting income to the region every year. These vary from the large colourful resorts in the area known as Flegg



Felixtowe beach huts

(a former island) which encompasses Great Yarmouth, Caister and Hemsby and those on the Essex 'Sunshine Coast' including Clacton-on-Sea, Walton on the Naze, Holland on Sea and Jaywick. Here 20th century leisure and tourism related facilities exert great influence (Country side Agency 40) including sandy beaches, piers and amusement arcades, golf courses, seafront gardens, watersports and air shows, set in a background of distinctive seaside architecture. The piers at Clacton, Walton, Southwold and Felixstowe are particularly notable.



Holiday Park in California

A string of holiday parks comprising static caravans and chalets are present around these areas to accommodate the seasonal tourists. These are particularly prolific in the Flegg area, from Newport as far south as Benacre with a further cluster from Frinton to Jaywick.



Great Yarmouth pleasure beach

Smaller, more tranquil resorts include the small villages and towns of North Norfolk (eg Holkham, Brancaster) and Suffolk (eg. Aldeburgh, Orford, Southwold and Thorpeness). Aldeburgh is a popular upmarket seaside resort and small fishing village which is famous for highbrow events such as the annual Aldeburgh Music festival held at Snape Maltings. The latter is a dedicated tourist centre and concert hall. Similarly Southwold has a reputation as a very well-to-do seaside town and is frequented by large numbers of tourists every year. It is famous today for the Adnams brewery, once equally famous as the Sole Bay brewery. The area is popular with tourists looking for a quiet retreat with attractive views over sea or estuary.

CHARACTER TYPE: RECREATION

These resorts tend to act as centres for wildlife and countryside enthusiasts. The North Norfolk coastal path and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path run along the lengths of coastline classified as 'heritage coasts' due to their special scenic and environmental value. The Naze area is also internationally renowned for its wildlife and includes the Naze public open space, containing the John Weston nature reserve. The Suffolk estuaries are an important wildlife and recreation resource, protected areas for walking, birdwatching and wildfowling. Similarly the whole Broads area is a recreational haven, attracting ramblers, artists, anglers, birdwatchers and those looking for boating holidays.



Seals in Walton Backwaters

Attractions include Havergate Island, an RSPB sanctuary in the River Ore famed for its avocets, Holland Haven Country Park which has status as an SSSI. This comprises unspoilt grazing marshes with footpaths, cliff-top walks, access to beaches and birdwatching for visitors.

Golf courses are a common site along the East Anglian coast with a series of 13 courses from Hunstanton in the north through to Clacton in the south. These are often placed between holiday resorts in areas where recreational space remains, such as Great Yarmouth/Caister and Clacton/Jaywick.

A number of beaches along the coast are recognised for good water quality and have Blue Flags including Felixstowe South, Clacton-on-Sea and Dovercourt Bay. Water temperatures for bathing range from 4 to 14 °C. Beaches are composed of sand or shingle or a mixture of both, all of which are used for recreation.

The offshore area accommodates a number of recreational activities including swimming and watersports, diving, fishing and sailing. These are popular bathing waters with designated watersports zones as well as primary sailing routes.

Sailing is extremely important to the region, with numerous sailing and yacht clubs and marinas situated along the coastline. Most sailing activity in this area is concentrated in the estuaries. Orford is a haven for sailors who can navigate the treacherous entry to the Alde/Ore estuary at the southern end of the Orfordness spit (Countryside agency, 59). A number of Royal Yacht Association tertiary routes converge just to the west of Orford Haven, heading out along the coast in both directions and out to sea. The Hollesley Bay offshore area acts as a feeder area in and out of Orford Haven.



Boats moored in Lowestoft Harbour



Recreational sailing and fishing at Slaughden

The River Deben is navigable for more than 10.5 miles from the estuary mouth to Wilford Bridge. Its significance to the sailing community is evident in the town of Woodbridge at the head of the estuary and the hamlet of Waldringfield on the southern bank. The Orwell is one of the most popular sailing centres outside the south coast with 3000 boats based in its waters, six sailing clubs and five marinas, including Ipswich, Levington Creek and Woolverstone. The Naze area is very popular for recreational sailing and a number of marinas have been constructed within Walton Backwaters.

Recreational fishing takes place onshore and on private boats in the marine zone. Sea fishing is popular off most of the regions beaches such as Felixstowe which is particularly

popular, and piers including Clacton and Walton. Recreational sea fishing is also popular in the estuaries, occasionally resulting in disputes between commercial and recreational fishermen (ESFJC). Recreational fishing boats leave from ports and beaches such as Orford and Aldeburgh and are known to visit the areas around the offshore sandbanks. Catch includes whiting, cod, sole, bass, garfish and mullet (leader-lines).



Fishing off Dunwich Beach

Recreational diving takes place off the East Anglian coast despite the dense sediment in the water. Boats are launched from Southwold, Felixstowe Ferry, Harwich and Levington Marina in particular, generally heading 10-30 miles offshore. Dive areas are known at Aldeburgh and around the sandbanks such as Kentish Knock and the Gabbard.

Other offshore activities include windsurfing, particularly at Jaywick. Canoeing, sail-boarding and water-skiing occur on estuaries. Halliday Rock Flats which have a depth of 0 m - 2 m are specifically used as a recreation area for power craft.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

The emergence of East Anglia's seaside recreation began in the late 18th century when wealthier members of society were beginning to appreciate the healthy air and relaxation of the seaside (Williamson 2005, 141). A number of fashionable 'watering places' evolved along the coast including Cromer, Sheringham, Great Yarmouth and Walton (Williamson 2006, 119). These were generally used for summer residences. One of the earliest attempts to create such an attraction was Richard Rigby's planned transformation of Mistley on the Stour estuary in the 1770s, however the venture was never completed.

This process was accelerated by the arrival of the railways in the mid to late 19th century, coinciding with higher levels of disposable income among the burgeoning middle class (Williamson 2006, 124). As a result a number of 'holiday resorts' were purposely created by wealthy individuals or businesses including Hunstanton on the North Norfolk coast which was a venture of the Lestrange family in 1846. Existing watering places were quickly transformed into these recreational hubs (ibid, 125) and large-scale tourism began. White's directory of Essex described Harwich in 1848 as "much frequented in summer as a bathing-place, with three bathing machines on the beach and a commodious suite of baths"

Thorpeness in Suffolk is a good example of this deliberate placement, a creation of local landowner Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie in the early 20th century. Ogilvie dammed the sea creating a 25 ha lake from the natural meare and built a holiday village around it complete



The House in the Clouds

with mock Tudor houses and a Bavarian street, golf course and unusual buildings. These include the 'House in the Clouds' a water tower disguised (and since converted into) a house perched on top of a weatherboarded tower.

Resorts such as Southwold and Felixstowe were more organic in their development. The railway arrived in Southwold in 1879 and as a narrow gauge line run by an independent company became a tourist attraction in its own right (Williamson 2005, 142). A number of hotels and piers were constructed at the turn of the century and new docks in Felixstowe. In 1902 the Felixstowe and Walton Improvement Act allowed the council to acquire land along the seafront and construct a seawall with two miles of promenade.

This area of the Suffolk coast known as the Sandlings also attracted tourists for other reasons. The area was seen as lonely, remote and melancholy, characterised

by its decline from medieval greatness as exemplified by the ruined Perpendicular churches and the elemental force of the sea (Williamson 2005, 24). Resorts in this area generally remained small and remote from major centres of population and still have a strong appeal for this reason (ibid, 144).



Leisure boating on the Broads

The Broads area did not participate in the enormous growth of coastal tourism in the 19th century. In 1878 small yachts were available to hire from John Loynes and in 1908 Harry Lake created an agency for yachting holidays. The area truly took off in the early 20th century, becoming a popular holiday destination in the 1950s and 1960s (Countryside Agency, 47).

Piers were a major feature of the advent of large scale tourism and seaside recreation. Walton pier is one of the earliest, built in the 1830s and is now part of the Frinton and Walton Conservation area. Aldeburgh became an accidental tourist spot in the 1860s after a rail line was established to serve engineering works at Leiston and the fishing fleet at Aldeburgh. In the 1870s work began on a pier although this was never finished and eventually demolished. Southwold pier was constructed in 1900 by the Coast Development Company. It carried a small pavilion but was principally a place to land passengers brought by steamers from London (Williamson 2005, 142).

Felixstowe pier was built in 1905 and was at one time the second longest in the country at three quarters of a mile, until much of its length was demolished during the Second World War to prevent it being used as a landing point for enemy troops. The damage was never repaired and the pier was neglected until the late 1990s, when it was deemed unsafe and closed to the public.



Felixstowe pier

The annual Aldeburgh Music festival was established in 1948 with the help of Benjamin Britten who had settled in Aldeburgh. This expanded considerably in the 1960s when part of Snape Maltings was converted to a concert hall. The festival has been held there ever since.

The area was once home to the pirate radio station Radio Caroline, begun in 1964 anchored on Kentish Knock. The station was forced to move in 1967 when the territorial waters boundary was shifted from 3 to 12 miles.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Recreation and seaside entertainment are crucial to the coastal region in East Anglia, particularly from an economic perspective. Resorts such as Great Yarmouth and Clacton are perceived as centres for seaside entertainment, traditionally attracting families from urban areas. However the presence of large, loud coastal resorts is not seen favourably by all residents who consider them unattractive, bringing traffic and noise to the region on a regular basis.

In contrast some areas of the coast are seen as wild regions in which to retreat to avoid the crowds. The infrastructure in these areas tends to be less developed, discouraging some holiday makers.

This contrast is perhaps exemplified by the Scallop, a controversial sculpture standing on Aldeburgh beach which is dedicated to Benjamin Britten who used to walk along the beach. The monument is in the shape of a scallop shell standing 4 m high with the inscription "I hear those voices that will not be drowned" taken from Britten's Peter Grimes. It was created from stainless steel by local artist Maggi Hambling. Many find the sculpture inappropriate for the setting of the town and it continues to be regularly vandalised.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

The region has undoubtedly benefitted from the advent of large scale tourism which brings financial rewards. In addition the construction of recreational facilities has benefitted the residents who are able to utilise these facilities for much or all of the year. Recreational areas such as clean and managed leisure beaches or coastal paths can significantly improve the lifestyles of those who live nearby.

The recreational tourist industry in East Anglia has developed over a century and is generally well understood. In many cases it is well used for education with towns such as Great Yarmouth priding themselves on the history of their tourist industries as exemplified in local museums.

Research into tourism and recreation on a regional scale may better inform developments and management plans which aim to sustain the regions environment or build on its current facilities. It may also inform local communities of the advantages and disadvantages of tourism.



CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Recreation on the East Anglian coastline is a strong characteristic of the area and provides a stable income and employment. The tourist industry is well established and sustains itself, although the larger resorts have seen a decline in recent years as cheap foreign holidays become more accessible and popular. Overall the attraction of this coastline goes beyond the stereotypical resort and will therefore always encourage visitors.



Clacton Pier

Large areas of the coast and Broads are protected under designations such as SSSIs and heritage coast which does not allow for major change. However there is increasing pressure for development in the area which may impact upon its historic character.

Additionally anticipated climate change could have a large affect on the region's recreation as land is lost to the sea and the weather changes, affecting peoples activities.

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

The recreation character type as a whole is not rare, with coastal recreation very popular all around the English coastline. However the region contains a varied set of recreational characteristics which may be somewhat more unique such as the bleak appeal of the estuaries for walkers and wildlife enthusiasts. These characteristics may be at risk from development if it is allowed to take place in certain areas.

The tranquillity of the area is important to the local community and perceived to be at risk. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths management plan specifically highlights the need to manage and sustain tranquillity and initiatives such as 'Deben Watch' have been established, encouraging people to report crimes, collisions and irresponsible behaviour on the river.

A number of areas have been designated for their environmental potential but have become important recreation features, such as Hamford Water where wildlife trips are becoming popular. Such areas develop through human management creating rare landscapes.

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