

Broad Character: Recreation
Character Type: Recreation
National Perspective

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES

The Character Type Recreation includes the following Sub-types:

- Aquarium
- Bathing/swimming
- Recreational dive area
- Golf course
- Holiday park
- Leisure fishing
- Leisure sailing
- Marina
- Parks and gardens
- Seaside entertainment
- Sports facility
- Wildlife watching
- Promenade
- Pleasure pier
- Leisure beach
- Recreational open ground

'Recreation' refers here to areas whose dominant character arises from activities whose primary purpose relates to leisure, pleasure, or inspiration. This broad definition includes areas devoted to a considerable diversity of coastal and marine specific tourist and leisure activities whose commercial income forms a very important sector of the coastal economy. But it also includes areas dominated by less directly commercial aspects, such as those frequented by wildlife watchers, and areas given over to extensive public art installations such as Antony Gormley's '*Another Place*' art installation on Crosby Beach.

An 'Aquarium' is an area of buildings, artificial ponds and/or tanks in which aquatic plants and animals are kept for observation and study (<http://thesaurus.englishheritage.org.uk/>).

A 'Bathing/swimming area' is as it states; used by people predominantly for bathing and/or swimming.

A 'Recreational dive area' is used by recreational divers, sometimes focussing on wreck sites and other aspects of the cultural topography and historic environment interest.

A 'Golf course' is a prepared area of ground used to play the game of golf on (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/>).

'Holiday park' refers to areas dominated by commercial complex(es) encompassing lightly-built holidaymaker's accommodation and associated facilities, sometimes including entertainment areas. These areas include self-contained complexes often styled 'holiday parks' but also caravan parks and aggregations of chalet accommodation.

A 'Leisure fishing area' is used for recreational fishing and angling.

'Leisure sailing area' refers to areas used for recreational sailing, yachting, and other small craft pursuits.

A 'Marina' is a dock or basin, often inland, used for mooring yachts and other small pleasure craft (<http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/>).

'Parks and gardens' refer to parks and garden areas used for entertainment and relaxation, but only those assessed as having a distinctly maritime character are included in HSC, otherwise they are of relevance to HLC alone.

'Seaside entertainment' refers to areas dominated by commercial facilities, such as amusement arcades and fun fairs, used for entertainment by coastal visitors.

'Sports facility' refers to areas whose dominant character comprises provisions for sporting activity, whether or not commercially provided, and whether or not in areas of purpose-built structures. Only those assessed as having a distinctly maritime character are included in HSC, otherwise they are of relevance to HLC alone. So in HSC these may include, for example, land-based sporting facilities aimed specifically at coastal holidaymakers or areas regularly used for water-sports and often designated as such.

'Wildlife watching' refers to areas whose character is dominated by the recreational observation of wildlife, for example, areas regularly frequented by bird-watchers, boat trips to observe seals or cetaceans, or underwater nature trails.

'Promenade' refers to a designed open space within or extending from a settlement area, usually linear and specifically intended for strolling and public walks. Such promenades are often associated with good coastal views and commonly form part of the planned complex of facilities of a coastal resort.

A 'pleasure pier' is a raised platform, generally of iron and/or wood, supported on spaced pillars or props and projecting out into the sea and designed to provide primarily recreational access over the sea from the shore to an adjacent position near or below the mean low water level. Pleasure piers varied in size and complexity, but are commonly support buildings providing light entertainment facilities and some incorporate embarkation points at their end and/or along their sides for ferries and pleasure shipping.

'Leisure beach' refers to inter-tidal areas, predominantly of sand, used mostly for leisure and relaxation by coastal visitors. A leisure beach may have a range of directly associated built facilities and may be managed actively by, for example, periodic scraping or beach replenishment, or passively by groynes, to retain the sand cover.

'Recreational open ground' covers open areas characterised by a principal use for public access and recreation. Any agricultural management of these areas is secondary and used as a tool to maintain the land's suitability for public recreation. Recreational uses of this land may include long distance footpaths, areas for the display and presentation of historic features, rural designed landscapes open to the public (but only where the design has a specifically maritime character), and areas of coastal land set aside for public appreciation of the maritime and coastal landscape.

Recreational appreciation of the coast has a relatively long history in England with origins in the earliest expressions of the Romantic movement. As such, areas dominated by recreational character today are likely to have had a number of previous recreational expressions in some areas. Later and current themes affecting the expression of 'Recreation' include the post-1950s decline of the English seaside resort and various current initiatives aimed at regeneration. Those recreational activities that have a maritime flavour could be exemplified by the gardens of many coastally-situated large houses open to the public, which are designed specifically to make use of the coastal topography and which display or shelter coastally-specific plant species. Similarly, golf-courses utilising coastal sand dunes rely for their physical existence on coastally-specific dune formations and for their economic existence by drawing on the coastal tourist trade.

Tourism is an important source of income and employment for many coastal regions and towns in England, Blackpool, Brighton, Scarborough, Clacton, Southend and Torquay being some well-known examples. The coastline attracts many people in pursuit of open-air leisure activities and many of these places have been visited historically for such purposes. Those visits have often prompted further commercial and visual attractions: Blackpool, for example, has been visited for well over a century because of the famous Blackpool Tower, its piers and seaside entertainment fun parks. Coastal recreational areas encompass a huge diversity, from small villages and high cliffs, to clear water and sandy areas offering a wide range of open-air leisure activities.

HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY

Typical components of this Character Type involve, amongst others, walking, bird watching, sunbathing, golfing, climbing, camping, wildfowling, sea bathing, sailing, surfing, diving, leisure fishing, angling, water and jet-skiing.

Outdoor swimming pools, whether roughly created among inter-tidal rock formations or more formally built as 'lidos', were a recreational feature in some English coastal resorts. These pools were seen, especially in the 1930s, as a modern day 'improvement' on the 'health-giving' dips in the sea which first became popular with the aristocracy, but later used by the wider population.

Other coastal amenities in England include beach donkey rides, aquariums, pleasure gardens and parks. The cliff gardens and parks, with their walkways, boating lakes, fountains, flowerbeds and bowling greens, were appreciated for their peace and tranquillity.

Although golf has a long history extending back to the medieval period in Scotland, it appears to have been the installation of James VI of Scotland as King of England in 1603 that provided the impetus for the spread of the game south of the border. The first club outside Scotland, the Royal Blackheath, was not formed until 1766 but it is believed that the game had been played here since 1608. The first 18-hole golf course was constructed in 1764 and since then many have been built, often in coastal locations, particularly following the growth of the railways in the 19th century (<http://www.golfeurope.com/almanac/history/>).

Coastal resorts providing recreational activities developed in the 18th century as wealthier members of society began to appreciate the healthy air and relaxation of the seaside and many bought summer homes on the coast. This was boosted by the arrival of the railways and higher levels of income among the middle classes in the 19th century (Williamson 2005, 141).

The development of landscape heritage conservation measures in the later 20th century was applied to specifically coastal landscape too. A 'Heritage Coast' designation was initiated in 1972 to highlight the special scenic and environmental value of some stretches of coastline when development proposals are under consideration.

The 20th century saw the rapid development of the 'heritage industry' too. Coastal heritage sites and facilities in England, such as abbeys, castles, cathedrals and churches, the countryside, historic houses, Roman remains and museums are increasingly being used to promote tourism as well as increasing awareness about our common heritage.

VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Coastal recreation and water related activities have a number of positive outcomes, including health benefits, greater social inclusion, cohesion and quality of life, environmental protection and economic benefits (Church 2008). Many recreational activities such as swimming, rowing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and other activities that

require sustained physical exertion are considered highly beneficial to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

Greater social inclusion and cohesion may be fostered through travel and recreation as a means of developing new social networks, acquiring knowledge and skills and gaining a sense of achievement whilst having fun.

In some regions of England, local authorities, including National Park authorities and other organisations, successfully manage a high level of water related recreation activity in very sensitive environmental sites using a wide range of tools such as permits, short closures and codes of conduct (e.g. the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, amongst others). This has shown that well-managed water-related recreation can happen alongside, and sometimes contribute to, sensitive environmental areas. As an example, angling organisations, landowners and private sector operators have all worked in partnership with the regulator, the Environment Agency to contribute to a significant increase in the availability and quality of riverine game-fish habitats (Church 2008: 7).

The economic benefits of recreational activity are closely related to the those of the tourist industry, which is beneficial as a source of income as well as employment. This Character Type also stimulates consumer spending of sport related goods.

Recreation is perceived as an economic resource: a source of income and employment, but also as a means of providing a better lifestyle, hence it is highly valued for its contributions to the society as a whole.

RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION

Recreation and tourism have had a profound impact on economy, infrastructure and social structure of England since the late 18th century. Further research of this Character Type could focus on a better understanding of the contributions of the tourist industry, past and present, to local coastal distinctiveness. Also to creating more effective tools to enable the prediction of tourism impacts from proposed developments.

Much recreation itself is essentially about various forms of human enjoyment of landscape and seascape as an amenity, whether simply perceived or artificially packaged and presented by public or private providers.

CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE

Coastal recreation plays increasingly significant and varied roles in the coastal and seascape perceptions both of tourists and coastal communities. Today, tourism is one of England's most important industries but cheaper and more attractive climatic conditions offered by easily available package holidays to the Mediterranean and beyond have put economic pressure on many seaside towns, although many of them are finding ways to regenerate, reinvent and re-launch themselves.

The UK Government has previously treated it as a national priority to promote sport and recreation in general as a means of improving people's health and quality of life. This has combined with the economic drivers for promoting the tourist industry in recent years in raising the profile of England's coastal recreation, sports in particular. Part of that has been a demand for better access to the coast itself, to which the 'England's Coastal Access' provisions are a response in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Coastal recreation and the tourist industry in general require an infrastructure to be in place to enable their access and success, such as roads, footpaths, car parks and hotels. The development of these infrastructures and the activities of tourists, for example, can have major effects on the very historic cultural landscape/seascape that people live in or travel to enjoy. These effects can be summarised as: 1) offering positive opportunities

to put provisions in place to increase public awareness, respect and enjoyment; 2) creating pressures for change and impositions on the present land/seascape, for example through new developments, signage, or increased visitor numbers, which some may welcome for the economic benefits but which others may perceive negatively..

RARITY AND VULNERABILITY

In character terms, recreational use has long been a major formative aspect along much of England's present coastline. Refurbishment and updating inevitably put pressure on earlier features but this is part of the ongoing change present and necessary everywhere. It needs to be managed and accommodated in the same ways too, with knowledge and sensitivity regarding those aspects from the past that lend distinctiveness to places or which are judged by society (at many levels) to be rare or otherwise special. The latter may or may not be formally designated, but planning constraints on development initiatives in coastal areas also exert some control on the locations and forms of proposed recreation complexes.

Diving clubs that dive on previously unknown wrecks could potentially provide local archaeologists and historians with a wealth of new and valuable information on these sites. Encouraging collaboration between local divers, archaeologists and historians would provide opportunities to continue developing general public awareness. Recent initiatives from the Nautical Archaeology Society (see <http://www.nasportsmouth.org.uk/index.php>) and the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology (www.hwtma.org.uk) provide some examples.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

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