

**Broad Character: Unimproved Grazing**

**Character Type: Coastal Rough Ground**

**Regional Perspective: Southern England**

**Compiled by Seazone Solutions Ltd / M A Ltd, January 2011, after comment from D Hooley, English Heritage**

**INTRODUCTION: DEFINING/DISTINGUISHING ATTRIBUTES**

There are many scattered pockets of coastal rough ground along the Southern England coast. The dominant agricultural use is grazing of livestock, and they are generally unintensively managed. Sometimes this rough ground is held as common land, and in this region is often well-used for recreation purposes. There are few settlements associated with this type, although it has been utilised for military training, both currently and in the past.

Heathland and scrub in the region are often included in nature reserves or wildlife havens such as at the Seven Sisters Country Park and the Studland Heath Nature Reserve. The region also contains internationally important heathland related habitats such as the New Forest in Hampshire with other pockets of heathland surviving at Netley Common and Hamble Common.

Coastal grazing sites can be found near the mouth of Southampton Waters and west of Gosport. Chalk grassland is confined to a relatively small area where the chalk outcrops on Portsdown Hill. This most southerly area of chalk grassland in Hampshire



**Coastal rough ground overlooking the Solent  
(© Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology)**

**HISTORICAL PROCESSES; COMPONENTS, FEATURES AND VARIABILITY**

The human exploitation of this Character Type has varied in intensity through time. The weak and acid soils seem not to have been preferred for settlement and farming, although there is evidence for exploitation from the Mesolithic period onwards (Hampshire County Council, 2010). Coastal grazing sites continue to be found near the mouth of Southampton Waters and west of Gosport as well as on the chalk outcrops on Portsdown Hill.

This Character Type is typified by large areas of open access land with few lanes and roads. There are very few settlements, the prominent buildings mostly being associated with military training.

Since the late nineteenth century this land type has been targeted by the MOD for training purposes (Hampshire County Council, 2010). Examples in the Southern England region include the Royal Marines Training Base in Poole, Browndown Training Camp in Hampshire and West Thorney Military Airfield.

Maritime safety sites such as coastguard look-outs, daymarks and lighthouses are also often located on such ground. Examples in the Southern England region include the lighthouses on Beachy Head (East Sussex) and coastguard stations such as those at West Wittering and Hayling Island.



**Coastal rough ground at Beachy Head (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw the reduction of this Character Type by planting with conifers, changing its character to that of woodland.

Many parts of this Character Type also form havens for wildlife. This includes the New Forest, the Seven Sisters Country Park which forms part of the Sussex Heritage Coast and covers almost 700 acres, and the Studland Heath Nature Reserve, which contains wildlife ranging from wildfowl to lizards



**Seven Sisters Country Park (Cuckmere Estuary) (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)**



**Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)**

Where this Character Type occurs in New Forest and East Hampshire, there are several disused airfields (Hampshire County Council, 2010).



### **VALUES AND PERCEPTIONS**

This Character type provides significant recreational space and places which attract visitors.

Many of the areas of coastal rough ground are located close to settlements. They are subsequently enjoyed by local residents as well as visitors to the region as quiet and tranquil areas which contrast to the busier urban developments close by.



**Coastal rough ground at Pevensey Bay (© Maritime Archaeology Ltd)**

### **RESEARCH, AMENITY AND EDUCATION**

The Character Type is often located close to centres of population and is therefore easily accessible to many people, both residents and visitors. Much of these areas have been designated as open access, with most of the roads and lanes are unfenced.

There is enormous scope for education initiatives, focusing on the coastline, the cultural character of the Character Type and the wildlife habitats they contain. For example, the New Forest National Park, which contains internationally important heathland, is described as “an outdoor classroom for all ages” containing an unique landscape, abundant wildlife and important cultural heritage. Its website ([www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)) highlights the key topics and issues facing the Park and contains educational student and teacher areas. The New Forest Centre ([www.newforestcentre.org.uk](http://www.newforestcentre.org.uk)) is a permanent exhibition that provides information on all aspects of the forest and enables visitors to plan their trip. It also hosts the New Forest Museum. The Studland Heath National Nature Reserve and Seven Sisters Country Park also have their own educational facilities.

### **CONDITION AND FORCES FOR CHANGE**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 makes provision to improve access, creating a right to walk around England's coast; addressing uncertainty arising from lack of consistency, and securing and clarifying rights of public access to foreshore, beaches and coastal land. This will clarify, simplify and extend access through the creation of a coastal access corridor to which the public has right of access on foot for outdoor recreation. (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/index.htm>).

The increase in tourism in the area and the large numbers of visitors to this Character Type means that it is vulnerable to erosion problems. If it is carefully and strategically managed, however, this threat could be minimised.

#### **RARITY AND VULNERABILITY**

This Character Type could be considered as relatively rare in the Southern England coastal region. Heathland is no longer a widespread habitat in the region due to its almost total destruction in the Hampshire Basin outside of the New Forest (Cox 1997), and chalk grassland is confined to a relatively small area where the chalk outcrops on Portsdown Hill (Cox 1997).

The values generated by this Character Type have resulted in its extensive coverage by natural environment designations. Much of it is subject to Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) legislation. Some areas are designated as a Heritage Coast eg the Seven Sisters Country Park forming part of the Sussex Heritage Coast.

#### **PUBLISHED SOURCES**

Cox, J, 1997 South Coast Plain and Hampshire Lowlands Natural Area Profile

Hampshire County Council, 2010, Hampshire County Integrated Character Assessment 2  
*Status: Draft March 2010* South East New Forest Coastal Plain

LDA Design, 2010 Dorset Coast: Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment

Tapper B, Johns C. 2008. *England's Historic Seascapes. Consolidating the National Method. Final Report*, Historic Environment Service Cornwall County Council on behalf of English Heritage, Cornwall

#### **WEBSITES**

[www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/index.htm)

[www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

[www.dorsetforyou.com/C-SCOPE](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/C-SCOPE)

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-studlandbeachandnaturereserve](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-studlandbeachandnaturereserve)

[www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)

[www.newforestcentre.org.uk](http://www.newforestcentre.org.uk)

[www.sevensisters.org.uk](http://www.sevensisters.org.uk)