



Enhancing Access Opportunities Test and Trial

Access case study series

Enhancing Access Opportunities Test and Trial Example Holdings

A series of 5 reports based on interviews with farmers and land managers about recommended access actions.

Example Holdings

This element of the project consisted of a series of 5 case studies based on interviews with farmers and land managers giving worked examples of how access-based actions might be applied on their land. They all took place in 2021 as part of the Enhancing Access Test and Trial that was conducted by the Kent Downs AONB Unit. Three of the participants agreed for their reports to be included, one asked for their details to be redacted and one to be omitted.

Farm or organisation	Interviewee/s	Date
Kent Wildlife Trust	Ian Rickards	8 th March 2021
West Kent Estate	Name redacted	2 nd March 2021
Uplees Marshes Farm	Stephen Ledger	4 th March 2021
White Cliffs Countryside Partnership	Paul Holt	2 nd March 2021

The Enhancing Access Opportunities Test and Trial is being carried out by the National Association for the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty on behalf of Defra and delivered by the Kent Downs AONB Unit.

Environmental Land Management Tests and Trials

Access case study series



Hothfield Heathlands - KWT

Interviewee

Ian Rickards

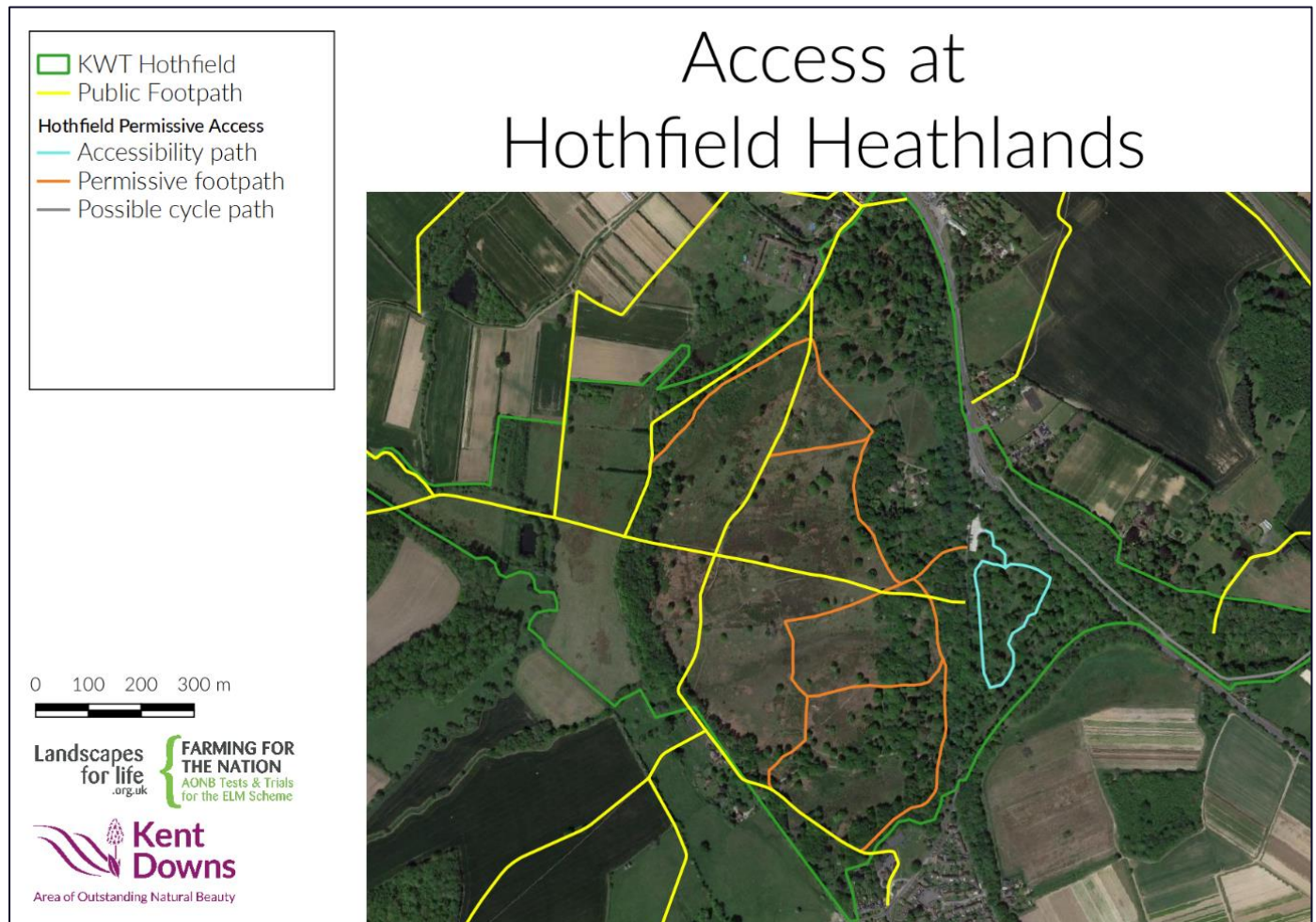
Interview date

8th March 2021



Hothfield Heathlands

Hothfield Heathlands is an 85 hectare reserve that contains Kent's largest areas of acid heathland and bog. It also contains an area of riparian grassland and an area of woodland to the north of the A20. Most of the site is owned by Ashford Borough Council and has a well-used car park. Just less than a quarter of the site is owned by KWT with the rest being owned by Ashford Borough Council. The car park and the proximity to Ashford makes Hothfield Heathlands a popular destination for walkers and others looking for a place to exercise or enjoy nature. The car park has been improved in recent years and approximately 200 cars use the car park daily during the summer and at weekends. It is also well used by local people who walk to the site. Visitor levels have been extremely high through the Covid pandemic.



Countryside Stewardship

Countryside Stewardship agreements are in place but this has generally been targeted at habitat restoration up until now.

Permissive access options

Being paid to provide permissive access would be a very welcome option for Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT). There is uncertainty whether this option would be permitted as the site is largely owned by a local authority and has been designated as public open space. There are a number of desire lines across the site as well as several public footpaths. Open access across the site would not be desirable as many of the habitats on the site are vulnerable to high levels of access. Permissive access and enhanced access would be welcomed as a way of trying to focus public access in areas where it will do least damage. Currently braiding of routes takes place (particularly in the wetter western half of the site) during periods of wet weather as visitors attempt to find dry routes to navigate.

Should the permissive access options be open to KWT one sensible option would be to allow permissive access on the four routes around the site that are mapped on interpretation panels and waymarked. It also includes a potential accessible route at the eastern boundary of the site. These routes are shown in figure 1 and are made up of both permissive routes and public footpaths. This would lead to the following payments being made (permissive routes only) annually.

Type of path	Rate	Length/area	Value
Permissive route (per m for 1 st 1000m)	£2.50	1000m	£2500.00
Permissive route (per m after 1000m)	£1.50	2507m	£3760.00
Permissive open access (per hectare)	£250.00	0 ha	£0
Total			£6260.00

This level of funding would help to offset some of the work that needs to be done to maintain these routes and keep the area litter free. This would allow for work to be done to these routes to keep them passable during all but the wettest periods.

Enhancing existing access

If the site is deemed as having open access due to being designated as public open space then and is not eligible for permissive access payments then the site may be eligible for enhanced access payments. These would be capital payments that would pay to make the site accessible to more people and may include:

- The creation of an accessibility route near the car park in habitats that are robust enough to withstand heavy use and are free draining.
- Enhanced waymarking and interpretation
- Boardwalks in areas that become impassable in winter
- Creation of raised paths in some areas where appropriate

As well as making walking easier for more people these additions will help people to keep to paths and reduce damage to sensitive habitats.

Access hubs

Although Hothfield Heathlands has a car park that is maintained by Ashford Borough Council there are no toilets or a café. It was felt that decisions of this nature need to be taken by The Council rather than by KWT. For sites such as this a balance needs to be struck. Some of the habitats are sensitive to disturbance and focusing high levels of public access on the site may be damaging.

Cycle paths

Hothfield Heathlands is located on the A20 which is the main route between Ashford and Maidstone. It is a dangerous road and would benefit from a cycle path. There is a length of woodland on the northern side of the road that would be suitable for a cycle path. However, this would need collaboration with neighbours and significant capital expenditure. If E.L.M. was to be ambitious in its expenditure on public access and about the impact it could make on both green transport and levels of accessibility this is the kind of project that could be financed. It may require either an agreement to the creation of a new statutory access or a long-term agreement to keep the route open.

Educational Access

Educational access was only discussed briefly as education within Kent Wildlife Trust is dealt with by the education team rather than the reserves teams. However, Hothfield has been used in the past to deliver educational events and whilst it does not have toilets, the habitats found on site are not possible to find anywhere else in Kent. Usage is limited currently by lack of resources to deliver this and because there are

no schools in the locality. However, there are a number of schools in Ashford that may use the site if additional resources were made available through E.L.M. funding.

Other points

KWT are well practiced at raising funding from a variety of different sources including grant making bodies and through public appeals as well as agri-environment schemes. Any use of E.L.M. funding to provide enhanced public access would allow other resources that might otherwise be directed to providing free public access to be spent enhancing habitats for wildlife.

The site is difficult to assess as there are several factors that make it difficult to know which actions would be available. These include:

- Although managed by a charity, the site is largely owned by a local authority.
- The site is designated as public open space.
- The site used to have common status.

Both of these are issues that E.L.M. will need to make a decision about.

Key points from the interview

Kent Wildlife Trust is pro-active about access, but it is not without cost in terms of finances and negative impact on wildlife.

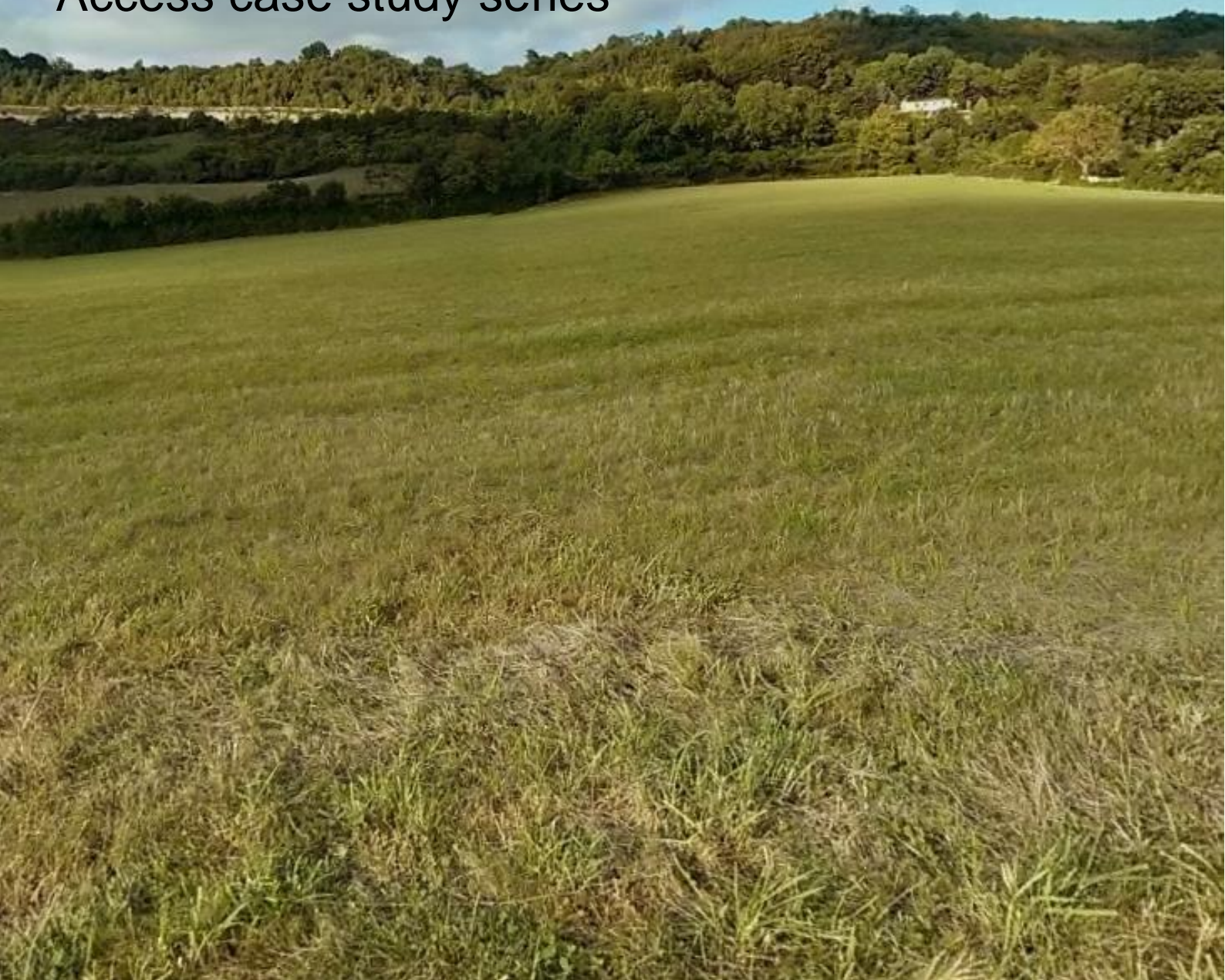
- Permissive access payments could make a significant difference to the resources that could be put into delivering good quality access.
- Enhancing access could be used to make parts of the site more accessible to people with mobility issues.
- Enhancing access can also be used to keep people to set paths, relieving pressure on more sensitive parts of the site.

This case study examining Enhancing Access Opportunities is one of three Environmental Land Management Tests and Trials managed and run by the Kent Downs AONB unit on behalf of the National Association of AONBs.



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[West Kent Estate]

Interviewee

[Estate trustee]

Interview date

2 March 2021

[West Kent Estate]

This report has had details redacted to help ensure the privacy of the respondents. Words that have been redacted are in square brackets.

The [West Kent Estate] is around 1500 hectares in size and consists of a mixture of arable, permanent grassland and woodland. The estate has a large number of public rights of way including footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways. The North Downs Way/Pilgrims' Way also passes through the estate. The settlements of [village] and [village] border the estate and both of these put public access pressure on the fringes of these villages.



Countryside Stewardship

Countryside Stewardship agreements are in place and the estate has some high quality chalk grassland on the scarp slope of the Downs. Restoration of grassland here has benefited from Countryside Stewardship payments.

Permissive access near [village]

An area to the west of [village] is well used by dog walkers but suffers from two issues. Firstly, there is fragmentation in the network with much of the access now on roads. Secondly, a section of the North Downs Way is a byway and as well as this becoming muddy and difficult to walk at certain times of the year, many walkers no longer want to use it because of the danger posed by motorised vehicles. This has led people to start using the field to walk in. A permissive agreement has been reached for people to use these areas but the preference would be to receive a payment through E.L.M. for this agreement. It was felt that one of the key elements of permissive agreements is that they should emphasise that this land is private, the access is permissive and no rights of access or village green status can be claimed in the future.



Figure 1: Proposed permissive access route

This option would lead to the creation of a circular route at the edge of [village] that would be made up of permissive access and an existing restricted byway. The draft payment rates would result in the following payments being made annually.

Type of path	Rate	Length/area	Value
Permissive route (per m for 1 st 1000m)	£2.50	957m	£2392.50
Permissive route (per m after 1000m)	£1.50	0m	£0
Permissive open access (per hectare)	£250.00	3.35 ha	£837.50
Total			£3230.00

Providing 957m of permissive pedestrian access and 3.35 hectares of open access would attract annual payments of £3230 per annum. This raised an important issue which is that applications such as these would need to be assessed locally to ascertain that they were necessary. It would be unusual to make a payment

for a permissive route that is adjacent to a public right of way though the local circumstances appear to necessitate this action. It was also considered that this agreement would benefit from some secure fencing to prevent trespass, particularly in the north-western corner of the route. Trespass is more likely to occur adjacent to areas where access is permitted so securing these possible trespass routes would be necessary.

Cycle paths linking [village and village station]

Partly because of the M26 and the railway, the public rights of way network is somewhat fragmented around the village. There is no way to cycle from [village to village station] without using roads. Providing this link could provide excellent pedestrian and cycle links between [village 1, village 2 and village 1 station].

These cycle paths would potentially be eligible for enhancing existing access payments but it was considered unlikely that this amount of capital money would be put into a permissive access scheme that could be withdrawn by the landowner. One option would be to pay for the cycle paths as part of section 106 agreement but then receive permissive access payments once they were in place. This may not be possible if the creation and maintenance of the cycle paths was a planning condition as these types of intervention are rarely eligible for agri-environment payments.

Educational access

Although it was felt that educational access was important it was not felt that this would be an option that would be pursued by the estate. The reason for this was that others would be better placed to provide these services locally.

Additional key points

It was felt that the access management plan should be easy to fill in and possible for the farmer or landowner to do themselves. Requiring an agent to fill in the form was not seen as appropriate.

It was considered that the facilitator role needed to help address antisocial behaviour issues amongst those that visit the countryside as there is a worry that the facilitators may become the enemy of the landowner.

It was also noted that the temporary nature of permissive access must be fundamental to any agreement. Ownership and usage rights must not be impacted by agreements.

Key points from the interview

The estate was generally positive about how E.L.M. could be used to help provide better quality access to local people without the estate having to bear all of the cost.

- Permissive access routes could be possible where this would provide enhanced access without significant disruption to farming activities.
- Permissive access should never threaten the current ownership status and usage rights.
- The access management plans must not be unnecessarily complex.

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Uplees Marshes Farm

Interviewee

Stephen Ledger

Interview date

4th March 2021

Uplees Marshes Farm

Uplees Marshes Farm is located on the North Kent coast in an area with international significance for overwintering and nesting birds. The land is managed by grazing and covers approximately 65 hectares. It also covers a large part of the historic explosives factory that extended to around 500 acres and employed upwards of 2000 people. This factory opened in 1878 and functioned until the 1930s. Evidence of the factory remain including footings for buildings and the sidings for the railway. The only current public access on the farm is a restricted byway that runs from the farmhouse to join the Saxon Shore Way at the coast.

Countryside Stewardship & BPS

As significant parts of the farm are parts of The Swale Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) they are part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme. The farm also receives money through the basic Payment Scheme (BPS) that is being withdrawn between 2021 and 2027. Stephen is interested in ways that the PBS shortfall can be made up by Environmental Land Management Scheme payments

Permissive access

The landowner has considered a number of options for providing permissive access. The first is to provide access to an area of the former factory that is just inland of the Saxon Shore Way and runs from the former jetty to the former dock that were active during the time the factory was open. This would result in either a permissive access route being made available to the public or for the entire field to be made open access. These options are shown in figure 1 and the payment rates proposed by this Test and Trial would lead to the following payments.

Type of path	Rate/m or Ha	Length/Area	Value
Permissive route (1 st 1000m)	£2.50 per m	450m	£1125
or alternatively			
Permissive open access	£250 per ha	9.36 ha	£2340

The heritage value of the site makes this permissive access an attractive proposition. There is genuine public benefit to be gained in an area that complements the nearby Oare Gunpowder Works which predates this site and is kept open by Swale Borough Council. The access is likely to be used, especially if there are interpretation panels on the well-used Saxon Shore Way. The open access payments are roughly equivalent to the BPS payments that are currently received for this area of land. However, there are a number of issues that need to be resolved including:

- The farmer would like the ability to temporarily deny access during lambing season or when the ground was wet. This could be accommodated by making pro-rata payments for the percentage of the year the site is open or having a minimum number of days that public access is allowed.
- It would need to be a requirement to have dogs on leads.
- Interpretation would greatly benefit a site such as this so that visitors could understand the meaning of the remaining industrial infrastructure. The enhanced access action also proposed as part of the Test and Trial could provide funding for this to be done. It is felt that this should not be a competitive scheme for the relatively small amounts of money required for two interpretation panels.
- The farmer is also concerned about levels of liability.
- The site is a SSSI. As such, SSSI consent would be needed to allow this access.



If this initiative were to be successful, access could also be granted at the former railway loading areas and permissive access could be provided along the line of the former railway. Collaboration with neighbouring farms could result in a circular historic walk around the entire site.

Educational Access

It was felt that whilst there were a lot of heritage, biodiversity and farming material for educational sessions, the limiting factor at Uplees Marshes Farm was the lack of toilet facilities. This would make providing educational visits a challenge.

Key points from the interview

- Permissive access needs to go at least part of the way to replacing the lost BPS payments.
- Seasonal blocking of permissive access would be needed to allow farming activities to continue and wildlife to have minimal disturbance.
- Additional permissive access could be provided by collaborating with neighbouring farms.

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Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Downs

Interviewee

Paul Holt – White Cliffs Countryside Partnership

Interview date

2 March 2021

Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Downs

Samphire Hoe and Folkestone Downs are both sites owned by Eurotunnel and managed by White Cliffs Countryside Partnership. These ongoing agreements allow White Cliffs Countryside Partnership to provide ranger cover on the sites that manage the grazing, site maintenance and visitors. The Covid pandemic has seen very high numbers of visitors to both sites, particularly Samphire Hoe, where visitor numbers in February, despite the snow in the first half of the month are similar to numbers usually seen at the height of the summer during school holidays. Both sites are close to urban centres as shown below.

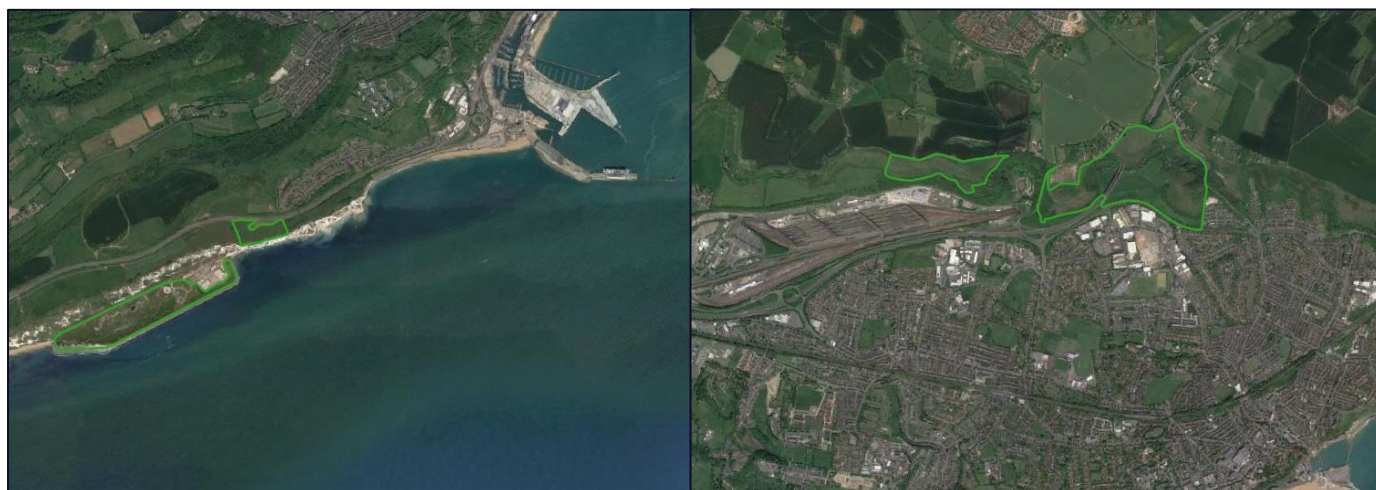


Figure 2: Samphire Hoe (Dover to the east) & Folkestone Downs (Folkestone to the south)

Countryside Stewardship

Countryside Stewardship agreements are in place at both sites but improving access and educational access have never been part of these agreements. The reason for this is that the payments just don't offer enough incentives to carry out the work. Payments need to at least cover the cost of the improvements and sessions provided.

Samphire Hoe

Samphire Hoe is a Country Park of around 25 hectares in size. It currently has a series of accessible footpaths running around the site and a cycle path. All of this is permissive access. However, the agreement that Eurotunnel is bound to includes an obligation to provide public enjoyment. This does not state that permissive routes need to be provided but may be an impediment to claiming permissive access payments. This short report assumes that payments would be eligible.

Samphire Hoe receives around 100,000 visitors per year making it one of the most well used sites in the area. This provides a significant level of public goods. Currently, no public money is received for providing this service. A car park on site charges £2 per day to visitors.

Samphire Hoe contains the following permissive paths that may be eligible for payment. The table below shows these paths as well as the recommended payment rates for the permissive action options.

Type of path	Rate/m	Length	Value
Permissive route (1 st 1000m)	£2.50	1000m	£2500
Permissive route (after 1000m)	£1.50	516m	£774
Permissive bridleway (1 st 1000m)	£4.00	949m	£3796
Permissive bridleway (after 1000m)	£2.50	0m	£0
Total			£7070

Providing 1516m of permissive pedestrian access and 949m of permissive bridleway would attract annual payments of £7070 per annum. The discussion also covered enhancing existing access but as the site is only open under a permissive agreement it was not felt that capital payments to enhance the site would be appropriate.



Figure 3: Permissive access at Samphire Hoe

Folkestone Downs

This area of land extends to approximately 70 hectares and is divided in two by an area of land associated with the Affinity Water owned Cherry Garden Upper Works. The site has open access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000. As such, it would not be eligible for payments for permissive routes. However, there are a number of features within this existing access that could be enhanced.

Although there is no parking at the site itself, it is well used both by people who park to the north of the site on Crete Rd West as well as the extensive housing estate to the south. Despite the fact that there are 15 entrances to the site, some areas around kissing gates become almost impassable during wet periods. There are also opportunities to provide access for people with limited mobility on parts of Folkestone Downs. Some of the slopes make access across the whole site particularly challenging the following could transform opportunities for those with limited mobility to access the site:

- Improved access including wheelchair accessible kissing gates with RADAR keys.
- Improved surfacing around some of the primary entrances to the site to ensure that access is maintained throughout the year.
- Small parking bays on Crete Rd West.
- Surfaced path across the eastern end of the site and around Castle Hill.

It was accepted that this may need to be a competitive process as there may be a finite amount of funds available for enhancing existing access. The process of picking a range of actions from a list with set payment

rates was found to be acceptable. However, it was felt that it was important for the payment rates to reflect both the cost of installation and the amount of time it takes to both organise and oversee the work. Also, it was felt that the chance of making a successful application is high enough to justify the application process.



Figure 4: Enhanced access at Folkestone Downs

Educational Access

Paul felt that most education programmes are run at a loss and was very positive about what could be achieved by a well-financed educational access programme. Being able to provide for and plan educational visits that cater for students and visitors with a range of different backgrounds was felt to be something that could fundamentally change the way that sessions are planned and delivered. There was again an acceptance that if more than a minimal number of sessions were to be delivered the process may need to be competitive.

Key points from the interview

- Substantial payments for educational access could fundamentally change the way that sessions were offered at Samphire Hoe.
- To be paid for the permissive access that is already provided would be a substantial boost.
- Competitive funding streams for enhancing access were deemed to be acceptable.

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