

# Essex Coastal Path Access Guides - Proposed Model

## Supporting Notes

These notes explain our thinking in relation to the model's elements and provide a context for discussion.

Guides for two coastal path stretches are shown to demonstrate how the model works for sections of quite different character. The numbered points below are the same for both guides.

### Project/Guide objectives

The objectives of the guides are three-fold: to encourage mobility-restricted walkers and chair users to want to walk the coastal path i.e. to *motivate*, and to give them the necessary *information* and *confidence* to make informed choices about their own ability to do so.

### Accessibility Guide - supporting notes to the model

1. Route direction: Natural England's coastal path stretch reports run anticlockwise (is this always so?). However, this doesn't necessarily work well from an access perspective, where direction must be determined by the location of and facilities at the most accessible start/end point. Where the two can coincide though, in principle this is preferable, so that we can offer links to additional coastal path information that flows in the same direction.
2. Report ownership: we argue for inclusion of a named person, because it feels friendly and also accountable. 'Trust' in a guide is very important and this equates to trust in a guide-writer or body. If this becomes an ELAF role, we can also be 'looked up', and have a real face, whether this is as an organization or individual members, or both.
3. Date: this is important as an indication to the walker of how current the stretch information is and the season in which the report was written, both of which may impact on the accuracy of its information for their own visit. It is also a check for us, as report authors, as to when an audit update might be due.
4. Links to other related information: e.g. the same route section in other formats (mapped/slideshow etc). Also other coastal path info such as produced by ECC and/or NE.
5. Use of images and document length:

Supporting main image/s: an opening image is important, as much to bring the route to life and whet an appetite, as to inform (although even a single image, well-chosen, gives an immediate sense of route character).

On the use of images generally: no hard and fast rule on number, but sufficient and no greater than necessary to give a flavour of the route interest, and cover i) approach/exit, ii) key access features, ii) any notable obstacles, iii) changing terrain character. The quality/composition of images is important though and needs conscious consideration at the time of taking.

Document length (with images): Depending on route length and the issues it raises, guides should be as long as they need to be, to be fit for purpose. However, in the case of these 2 model guides, effort has been made to keep to no longer than 4 sides (text-only versions, 2 sides), and this seems a reasonable objective for all.

6. Route interest overview: a brief opening summary that acts as a scene-setter for this section of the coastal path, situating the walk geographically, and providing some environmental and heritage interest as relevant.
7. Accessibility overview: a brief opening summary giving an overall sense of route character and accessibility, such that the reader can make some summary judgment in advance of a full read.
8. Distance: the guides give 'distance' from the start/end points on the path itself rather than suggested parking etc, since the latter may vary. This will also mean that the distances of consecutive path stretches can meaningfully be added together. However, where there is an obvious (transport) arrival point, the additional distance to the start point is also given.
9. Start and End points: various indicators are included, to suit all comers, and to enable walkers to reverse route direction if they wish.
10. Wheelchair accessibility overview: this needs careful thought and wording to avoid second-guessing individual user needs/abilities, and/or lumping users together inappropriately. The point of the guides is to *describe the landscape, not the visitor*. Nonetheless, *some* indication where it can be reasonably made - albeit with caveats - is likely to be useful. We can give examples of wording to this end, and also explain our approach on a proposed Coastal Path web page (where the guides are hosted).  
  
NB: wheelchair users are not the only mobility-restricted walkers the guides are aimed at, but theirs is a reasonable yardstick that is meaningful to all users (including parents with buggies etc), and does present real and well-understood consequences in the face of specific obstacles (e.g. stiles, gradients etc)
11. Inset Map: As a result of initial feedback within Essex LAF, we agreed an inset map of the route should also be included.
12. Feedback: we need a means of ensuring users can feedback meaningfully i.e. a means of collating and actioning, so that the guides are kept reasonably up-to-date and users can continue to feel able to trust in them. But how, and whose responsibility? Details to be worked out...