

PET(4)-11-12 : Monday 2 July 2012
P-04-369 : Against the proposed Cardiff to Newport Coastal Path

To: Welsh Assembly Petitions Committee.

Re Petition : Against The Cardiff To Newport Coastal Path and Beyond

25.06.2012

Response to letter of Mr Sean Christian of RSPB CYMRU - 11th June 2012.

Firstly we acknowledge the splendid work the RSPB does. The Society being generated out of a small group of conservation enthusiasts, who created the first reserve on the east coast of England. The RSPB reserves are usually enclosed areas of desirable habitat that they have purchased and which can be managed and protected on a continuous basis, since they are in control.

I am not aware of any interest the RSPB has had in the coastline of the Welsh side of the Severn Estuary, which is the subject of our petition. That is until, or just prior to, the Cardiff Bay Development when they became interested in the purchase of the Uskmouth Power Station settling pool reedbeds and also creation of a reserve area as part of Cardiff Bay.

As events turned out, the whole Uskmouth and Goldcliffe area was developed as a bird reserve by the CCW. In recent years the RSPB has built a visitor centre at Uskmouth, in some kind of arrangement with the Countryside Commission for Wales.

The concern at stake is to prevent any more disturbance to this coastline habitat. Reference is made to the Appropriate Assessment which was carried out by the CCW and completed in May 2011. The fact that their report concluded that there would need to be a comprehensive programme of monitoring and review of the measures proposed, confirms the CCW's previously stated opinion that 'all supporting habitats are highly vulnerable to noise and visual disturbance'. Regulation 33.5.7.2.3.viii.
THE SEVERN ESTUARY, SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION, SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA.

The RSPB letter repeats some key points of the CCW Report.

* Realignment of the path at certain locations.

The length of path which is of concern is 7 miles of route to the southeast of Newport, a mile at Goldcliff Pill and 2.5 miles at Magor Pill and Undy foreshore to the northeast of Newport. The opportunity for local realignment seems very limited.

*Screening of the path at certain locations.

This would presumably refer to heavy duty expensive wooden screening, but since the potential problem of disturbance exists all along the coast, we doubt whether it can be usefully or economically employed.

*Dog Control Orders.

This would be necessary if more dog walkers drove to sections of the coastal path in order to walk their dogs. However it is the presence of increased numbers of people, with or without dogs which is the concern.

*Signage: Straying from the seawall can exacerbate the problem. We do not wish the path to be created here in any case, bringing in a small number of coastal walkers who already have a marvellous choice for rambles in South Wales to choose from. Any such signage should be specific to the walkers, since fishermen, birdwatchers, wildfowlers etc already using the coast, do so over the whole area.

*Comprehensive monitoring.

When the monitoring discovers there is a problem, providing the monitors are present at the problem incidents, the likely solution will be to divert the path away from the coast. Walkers are

unlikely to respond to a request to use the track behind the seabank, since then they would lose the view. Monitoring along the length of the path around the year would be a major task.

The problems and the desire of the Welsh Government to have a continuous path to Chepstow can be resolved by putting the Shorebird conservation interest first, and routing the path north of the coast, in the way we have suggested on alternative route maps sent to the committee, and which is consistent with other necessary inland diversions of the Welsh Coastal Path, including those around bird reserves.