



National Trust Formby Public Consultation Report: The Future of Formby Coast

July-September 2017

Date of issue: 23 Nov 2017

NOTE ON THIS SUMMARY REPORT

This summary report was written by the team that organised and delivered community consultations across Formby between July and September 2017. It has been produced as a record of the key topics emerging from people's comments, and to inform stakeholders and other interested parties about the proceedings and discussions.

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1. Background

The National Trust is developing plans for the future of the coast. This comes in the year that Formby celebrates 50 years of caring for the Freshfield dunes and woodland, and has been entrusted with a further 204 hectares of land at Lifeboat Road and Ravenmeols, transferred from Sefton Council.

At the centre of any plans for the future is the need to conserve and protect this rare landscape while improving access and facilities for the local people and visitors who love it. Changes inevitably have an impact within the Formby community and the National Trust has developed a programme of community consultations to ensure that residents, businesses and other stakeholders are able to contribute to shaping Formby's future.

During the summer of 2017, local people were invited to contribute at a series of formal and informal consultation events. These included: a stall at the Formby Festival over the weekend of 15 & 16 July, a formal Open Day at the Gild Hall on Monday 17 July, and pop up events at the Victoria Road and Lifeboat Road sites, at Formby Pool and Formby Library.

At the festival and the open day approximately 150 people were consulted, and around 120 left comments at the pop-up events. A full list of consultation activities can be found at on the NT Formby website at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/formby/projects/get-involved---the-future-of-formby-point>

1.1 Consultation events

Formby festival. For the first time, the National Trust had a stall at the Formby Festival, on the 15th and 16th July. Pine cone weaving activities gave children a chance to show in words and pictures what they love about the Formby coast, while staff and volunteers talked to the adults about their hopes for the future of the site.

Open day. A more formal consultation event took place the following day, on 17th July, at Formby's Gild Hall. At the open day, stalls were opened for people to drop in and chat to National Trust staff and other members of the local community, and to share their views. Display boards provided information and key questions for people to discuss. Content of the display boards can be viewed at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/formby/documents/the-future-of-formby-point.pdf>

Central to the open day was a series of workshops, which were open to all. These focused on three themes:

- 1. Experiencing Formby, Access and Facilities.
 - Topics included: traffic and access, car parking, dog walking, facilities (toilets, coffee shops, and food), events and how to manage busy days.

- 2. Caring for the Coast, Caring for Formby
 - Topics included: nature and wildlife, car park location, sand dunes and woodland management.
- 3. Working with Local Businesses and the Community.
 - Topics included: opportunities for business and community organisations in Formby to work with the National Trust, food and retail partnerships, volunteering and work opportunities.

Early morning visitor events. On 31st July, 4th August and 22nd August, staff and volunteers got up early in the mornings to talk to visitors at Larkhill field, Victoria Road notice board, Lifeboat Road carpark and St Lukes Road footpath. Early morning dog walkers and runners are some of the most regular users of the site and the majority are from the immediate local area.

Formby Pool and Formby Library. On 9th, 16th and 23rd September, drop-in stalls attended by National Trust staff and volunteers were set up in Formby at either the pool or the library. At the pool there was an opportunity for children to take part in activities while their parents contributed to the consultation. Between 16th and 23rd September information was kept on display at the library, and written comments were invited.

2. Summary of findings

Throughout the consultation period people have been invited to share their views on four key topics:

- A vision for the future of Formby
- Conservation
- Access and facilities
- Food and events: Including opportunities for working more closely with local businesses and the community.

At most of the consultation events information and questions on these four topics was presented on display boards, which are available at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/formby/documents/the-future-of-formby-point.pdf>

2.1 A vision for Formby

There was a strong sense, that the National Trust has a core responsibility to care for wildlife and landscapes in Formby, and that with this responsibility comes both challenges and opportunities. The huge affection and sense of pride that the people of Formby have for their beach, dunes and woodlands was a recurring theme throughout the consultation.

In the main there was a high degree of positivity and optimism around the National Trust's ability to make choices for Formby, and provide a balance between conservation priorities and visitors' needs. Some comments highlighted concerns about pressure from increased visitor numbers and potential new developments, and the risks these could pose for nature conservation.

Alongside this, people were enthusiastic about the increasing extent of community participation in the care of the site, and were keen to have input into conversations about how the site should be cared for and managed into the future.

Box 2.1 Spirit of Formby: Coast and Community¹

- *It is a place away from the hustle and bustle of life, a place for all around the area to relax, learn, teach, value... for now and the future (Open day drop in, written comment).*
- *The wildlife is most important. More needs doing to safeguard, protect and allow it to flourish (Open day drop in, written comment).*
- *I am confident that the NT has the knowledge to make choices for Formby. This event is an excellent example of engagement. Thank you! (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *We do have concerns about conservation, but as long as commercial developments are planned and delivered correctly I would not be overly concerned (Formby Pool, written comment).*

2.2 Conservation

Local people are acutely aware of the rate of change of the Formby coastline and the conservation challenges that this brings. People discussed the difficulty of encouraging responsibility among those accessing the site, particularly visitors from further afield referred to as 'the beach crowd'. There was a perception that the site cannot take more people than it currently does and there was real concern about the impact of visitors 'trampling' the dunes.

Contributors at the open day workshop in particular stressed that changing behaviour among visitors would be necessary, and that clear conservation messaging was crucial. It was suggested that over defined short periods, targeted messaging could focus on the impact of human behaviour on particular species or habitats This was seen as a more positive and effective approach than policing, with reference to a case study in Anglesey, where a calendar was created to raise awareness about individual species (Open Day conservation workshop contributor).

Litter and dog mess were referred to very frequently as highly detrimental to people's enjoyment of Formby. Managing the needs of dog walkers, alongside conservation priorities, was identified as a particular challenge (e.g. the potential impact of dogs on nesting birds and fragile dune systems).

There was a perceived demand for more conservation volunteering opportunities around interacting with visitors and raising awareness, particularly where people who already use the site regularly could combine this with an official volunteer role with National Trust. A lack of conservation volunteering roles and in particular volunteering opportunities for young people was seen as a wasted opportunity to promote involvement and a sense of commitment to the welfare of the site

Many contributors felt that conservation is not in most people's minds, and communication needs to be carefully targeted in order to increase awareness about the challenges. Some people might only be interested in the red squirrels, but not in the wider conservation agenda. Participants perceived conflicts between conservation, car parking and access needs, especially as Formby is in a residential area.

Box 2.2 Conservation priorities and concerns¹

- *What is the key conservation challenge for dunes?... Sand blow balanced by healthy growth of marram. Conservation is not in most people's mind. They think of the squirrels and not a lot about wider conservation. (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *I'm concerned about visitor numbers causing a decline in nature on the sites - in conservation terms - the wear and tear on the site (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *I understand the natural conservation approach on the beach but sometimes it looks very untidy now that old construction is being exposed. Do we need sea defences for 50 years hence? (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *I am very concerned about litter and dog mess, especially by visitors from outside Formby. Rubbish is a big problem which should be addressed by more bins and more frequent collection of litter. I am very happy for the National Trust to 'improve' the new area (Early morning visitor, verbal comment).*
- *I would love to see an influx of younger volunteers, and more volunteering opportunities generally. Could more work be done with local schools to encourage volunteering – particularly litter-picking to raise awareness and foster a sense of ownership? (Early morning visitor, verbal comment).*

Conservation Priorities: Participants at the open day conservation workshop contributed to a discussion about what the conservation priorities should be for Formby. Several themes emerged strongly:

- **Woodland management.** People react negatively to seeing trees being cut down, however there was recognition of a need to take some trees out (e.g. sycamore saplings, and some old trees), plant new trees, and ensure the correct balance of deciduous and pine trees, especially as the native trees do not provide the most favourable habitat for red squirrels.

- Biodiversity. Protecting the local biodiversity was seen as essential, requiring looking after existing habitats and creating new ones. In particular, the wet areas of the site (dune slacks, including the Devils hole) were seen as being threatened, with consequences for natterjack toad breeding. It was suggested that restricting access to some areas may be necessary to aid conservation
- Minimising damage from visitors. Many comments highlighted the need to see more staff (in particular rangers) and volunteers across the site to support conservation. They were felt to have a strong potential role in preventing damage (e.g. managing flows of people, safeguards coast and creating fire patrols), and supporting public awareness of the conservation priorities. It was suggested that creating interesting areas which were central and robust would help prevent damage, by encouraging families to stay on paths.
- Finally, there were concerns about the impact of large vehicles such as motorhomes to the Caravan Park, horse boxes and coaches. If the widening of access roads was needed, it would have impact on conservation.

2.3 Access and facilities

Access, traffic and car parking

The challenges of access, traffic and car parking, especially on busy days, was a key topic, and one that was raised frequently by local residents. They felt that current access and car parking provision are not adequate to meet visitors' needs on busy days, and visitor numbers at times put enormous pressure on the local community.

Problems contributors associated with visitor numbers at peak times were:

- Inadequate numbers of on-site parking spaces to meet peak demand.
- Long queues through residential streets meaning that residents could not move around their neighbourhood (or in some cases drive to and from their homes).
- Illegal and inconsiderate parking on nearby residential streets.
- On extremely busy days traffic delays extending beyond the immediate neighbourhood and affecting main routes to and through Formby village.

A range of suggestions were made to tackle the traffic and car parking issues:

- Discouraging visitors from coming to Formby at busier times. There was a recognition that people have a right to come, but many local people don't want Formby to be promoted as a sunny day destination.
- Increasing car parking fees or offering discounted parking during the week i.e. to incentivise travel to Formby on weekdays and at quieter times of year).

- Improving traffic signage and access information (e.g. variable electronic signage when car parks are busy, live traffic data on National Trust app).
- Offering park & ride facilities; suggested locations included the industrial area near TESCO site, or other large brownfield sites.
- Providing overflow car parks; either on-site e.g. on Larkhill field, or off-site making use of existing car parking at local schools.
- Encouraging the use of public transport; in particular making better use of Freshfield and Formby train stations and facilitating travel between the stations and the beach with (shuttle buses).
- Encouraging people to arrive by bike. Offering bicycle hire and providing better cycling signposting were suggested.
- Increased partnership working between the organisations managing the Sefton Coast (e.g. English Nature, Sefton Council and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust). Better communication could help improve visitors' awareness of where facilities, services and attractions are located, and identify alternatives such as Ainsdale & Southport when Formby is full.

Box 2.3.1 Traffic and Parking at Formby¹

- *A new car parking scheme is essential! It is not right that visitors park in residential areas; they are paying nothing for car parking and neither are they contributing to the local economy (Early morning visitor, verbal comment).*
- *More parking spaces are needed with signage, as congestion in the surrounding residential roads is horrendous on sunny days and holidays (Formby Pool, written comment).*
- *2 or 3 satellite car parks? or park & ride car parks? (Open Day drop-in, written comment).*
- *I am really concerned about the narrow road access to LBR car park and what will happen if summer visitors increase. We need clear routes and signage through Formby (Early morning visitor, verbal comment). (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *Don't encourage more people to come to Formby. People have a right to come, but you don't want to advertise Formby more (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*
- *When NT Formby 'tweets' that the car park is full, could you also mention proximity of Merseyrail as an alternative? (Open Day workshop, verbal comment).*

With regards to access:

- Concerns were raised around access rights in St Luke's Church Road and Alexandra and Albert Roads.

- There was a strong feeling that improving disabled access and access for buggies should be considered, particularly in terms of access over the dunes onto the beach (e.g. providing additional board walks).
- There was a recognition of the tension between people's desire to 'roam freely' (i.e. that walking options should not be regimented) and the need to encourage visitors to stick to the paths to prevent destruction of the dune habitat and biodiversity. It was felt that routes for direct the access to beach should be robust, accessible and clearly signposted, while more adventurous visitors remained free to explore more widely. Encouraging families and children to get involved and play in nature was widely felt to be important (e.g. creating natural play areas in the woods, restoring the pond and recreation facilities at Wicks lane, promoting '50 things') and the view was expressed that by creating attractive and well-marked areas in the more robust parts of the site the needs of a wide range of visitors would be met while protecting more vulnerable areas from overuse.
- Various concerns were raised around the 'open' nature of the site, around the problem of anti-social behaviour:
 - Nuisance associated with dogs was mentioned frequently, with concerns expressed about irresponsible dog owners leaving dog mess, harassing livestock, and allowing uncontrolled dogs to spoil visitor enjoyment.
 - Horse mess was an issue for some, while other people expressed a wish to see better provision for horses.
 - Concerns were raised about wild camping and parties, and the resulting noise and littering.
 - Fire and vandalism was also referred to frequently, with particular reference to the behaviour of groups of children and young people.

Box 2.3.2 Access¹

- *My husband is disabled. I would like to see easier disabled access to the beach and better facilities such as more benches (Early morning visitor, verbal comment).*
- *Cyclists should be more responsible and also horse riders who go off the permitted routes. As the site is open access, cyclists and horse riders can go anywhere. There should be proper marked tracks for them and the system needs clarification (Early morning visitor, verbal comment).*
- *The site needs [both] areas for family beach holidays, and walkers areas. You could consider different signage e.g an easy access route for families, and a wilderness explorer route. (Formby pool, written comment)*

Facilities

Three key recurring topics emerged from the comments: the need for more toilet facilities, more bins, and improved catering options.

People expressed the following concerns:

- Toilets at Victoria Road were perceived to be inadequate for current needs on busy days, and the need for additional toilets was raised especially at Victoria Road car park. Porta-loos were suggested as a temporary option on peak days. A lack of any toilet facilities at Lifeboat Road was also an area of concern. On the whole the inadequacy of toilets was felt to be an issue that primarily affected occasional visitors from further afield who tend to stay for a longer period of time, rather than frequent local visitors.
- Litter is an issue on Formby beach, and there was a strong perception that this should be addressed by providing more bins (for general waste, recycling, and for dog waste). These bins would need to be as discreet as possible, while being solid enough to be wind-proof and bird-proof. Some people reported that they do independent litter-picking on the beach and there was a perceived demand for more volunteer litter picking events. There was a perception that more could be done to encourage people to take their rubbish away with them.
- Some people felt quite strongly that no permanent catering facilities or visitor centre should be allowed. There were fears that Formby could become too commercial and lose its unique character. However this was not a view shared by everyone. Many people said they would welcome facilities provided that they were in keeping with what Formby is about (i.e. wild and unspoilt). There was some consensus that developments should be small in scale and should integrate with the landscape. Suggestions included mobile vendors on bikes, converted mobile café Land Rovers, green powered 'Hobbit hole' style cafes. It was also suggested that any new catering or retail options should be located at main pedestrian points to prevent damage to the dunes. There were different opinions with regards to the need for a visitor centre. The idea of a visitor centre at Lifeboat Road was welcomed by some people but others were strongly opposed. More people were positive towards the idea of such a facility off site, perhaps near a park & ride, or in Formby village.

Box 2.3.3 Facilities – what do we need?¹

- *More toilet facilities! A coffee shop / gift shop with outdoor as well as indoor seating. More rubbish bins. Nature based adventure play trails for children (Formby Pool, written comment).*
- *Stop me and buy one pushbike vendors. Convert one of the Land Rovers to a mobile café. Green powered café in keeping with Landscape: 'Hobbit hole' style (Open day drop in, written comment)*
- *A local resident. Visitor facilities in the new area must be in keeping with the environment, as they are (e.g. the toilets) at Victoria Road. Any development must be environmentally friendly and sensitive to the area. (Early morning visitor, verbal comment)*
- *Cafes / facilities only at main pedestrian points to prevent damage to dunes by people wandering off (Open day drop in, verbal comment)*
- *Local dog walker. More dog poo bins are needed. Could bags be provided? Some paths have potholes, particularly in Larkhill field. On a busy day more staff are urgently needed to direct parking, deal with issues as they arise and pick up litter/empty bins. (Early morning visitor, verbal comment)*

2.4 Food and events: working with business and the community

Overall there was a great deal of positivity and towards creating a strong strategic partnership between the local business community and the Trust, and there was a frustration that until now, the National Trust had lacked a flexible and open approach to working more closely with local businesses. There was a strong perception that closer relationship could bring benefits to visitors, the local economy and the Trust, if handled right. Thinking strategically about transport links, promoting visitor 'dwell time' in the local area, and developing routes in and out of the site which exposed visitors to the other things Formby has to offer were perceived as crucial to this. The National Trust's involvement with local business networks was discussed, and invitations made to National Trust representatives to attend meetings to continue deeper conversations.

Suggestions were made on how the National Trust could work in partnership with local businesses and the community, especially with regards to the food offer and the organisation of events.

- There was discussion of how any new catering strategy could be made relevant to the local area. Use of local produce was suggested, including asparagus, local pies, shrimps, cockles and lamb.
- The workshop participants emphasised local sensitivity to pricing. They felt strongly that the visitor market was looking for affordability over quality, although there was recognition that catering would while remain in line with with National Trust quality standards.

- The availability of high quality, barista coffee, such as is already sold on site was popular, and several respondents made reference to the need for the environmental impact of littering associated with catering to be carefully managed. Use of biodegradable packaging was widely supported.
- There was substantial enthusiasm for the suggestion of the National Trust having a presence in the village, for example a shop and information centre. This would create a sense of the village being proud of 'their visitor attraction' run in partnership with the National Trust. There was a sense that the village could benefit more from the large numbers of visitors coming to Formby. A 'disconnection' between the village and Formby beach, was noted, and this was a priority to be addressed in the future. For example if local businesses were promoted on site, visitors might be encouraged to shop there on their way to or from the beach.
- A wide range of suggestions were made for extending the programme of National Trust events. These included photography or painting events, art workshops for adults and children and exhibitions. People noted the absence of good quality arts and craft activity on site and would welcome more short-term installations, pop up theatre, sculpture and workshops. Working with local organisations was seen as key to gaining maximum local involvement and benefit. Most respondents did not want events such as farmers markets that would primarily take trade away from the town.

Box 2.4 Catering and working with the community¹

- *Generate more good will between NT and local community. This is 'our woods and our beach'. It's a bit much to be asked to pay. Residents pass? It is a fantastic service that NT empties the bins, explain the value for money. (Formby Festival, verbal comment)*
- *Work with Formby business partnership. Add a panel promoting the village to the Formby entrance leaflet. (...come for food & toys etc). Provide advertising for local shops. E.g. 'Leaving the beach? Want to eat & drink?...' (Open Day drop-in, written comment)*
- *What food do you want? Local seafood, coastal, shrimps, cockles, lamb (Formby Festival, verbal comment)*
- *Could a visitor centre be in the village? (Formby Festival, verbal comment)*
- *Would it be possible to create 'pop-up' units or facilities which could be licensed to local businesses to sell goods, food, drink etc. Could we consider provision of other seaside items (chairs, mats etc). (Formby Pool, written comment)*
- *Concessions (e.g. Coffee shop / ice cream van) work well. (Open day drop-in, verbal comment)*
- *I loved the wool and woods project at Rufford. Day making, then exhibiting there and then. Get more local arts and crafts activities. Open air theatre? (Formby Festival, written comment)*

3. Next Steps

All the comments, ideas, suggestions and concerns generated in this first phase of the public consultation have been fed back to the project team working on plans for Formby's future. They have been incorporated into the process of 'proposition generation'. The next consultation stage will involve taking specific options and propositions back to the community to get feedback. Events will be publicised in the local press and on social media, and comments will also be accepted by email at talkingformby@nationaltrust.org.uk

Footnotes

¹ Comments are illustrative and not comprehensive