

# Character of coastlines to be secured for future generations

The county's coast of has always been special, creating jobs and also drawing in tourists. This week a planning document to help protect it was launched...

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**S**OME of Kent's most iconic images are captured from the coast, with the White Cliffs of Dover and the views from Thanet's coast which inspired Turner among the gems.

This week saw the launch of a new planning tool – the first of its kind in the world – which will help to protect these areas for future generations.

The Seascape Character Assessment (SCA) for the Dover Strait was launched on Monday, ensuring the areas between Dungeness and Margate on the Kent coast, and Berck to Dunkirk on the French coast – as well as everything in between – are developed in a sustainable manner.

The document, which was funded by the European Union, was drawn up by Kent County Council working in partnership with the Pas-de-Calais to create the new planning tool.

It will help marine planners to manage the Strait from both the French and British sides, capturing

the unique environment's ecological and cultural importance.

KCC's cabinet member for environment and transport Matthew Balfour says that as the busiest shipping lane in the world, it is critical that any change in the Dover Strait recognises economic, social and environmental factors.

Mr Balfour said: "The Dover Strait is an iconic part of the UK's landscape. It's part of what makes Kent special.

"With its coastal communities and marine space, the Strait is an environmental treasure trove, an area rich in heritage and history.

"It's also one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, and a growing economic hub. All of these factors make it a complex environment to manage, develop and protect.

"It's essential that we all understand, look after and develop the Dover Strait for future generations and The Seascape Character Assessment provides us with a way of doing this."

Heritage, according to KCC's coastal officer Chris Drake, is all important when considering the SCA.

He told KoS that it would be impor-

tant to ensure the coastline was saved for future generations.

Mr Drake said: "On the shoreline there have been landscape character assessments to ensure that beautiful parts of Kent are protected, and this is just a way of doing it for the coast.

"The hope of the assessment document is that it captures what people value about the environment of our seascapes, and what they feel is important to protect in the future.

"Tourism is really important to Kent, and the reason many of these people are coming is to enjoy our coastline. These areas contribute massively to our economy, so it's crucial to the county's success that they're protected for the future."

That's a view echoed by Nick Johannsen, the director of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit, which seeks to preserve the unique landscape of the AONB.

The unit helped to produce the new planning document, working alongside KCC and other groups.

Mr Johannsen said: "The Seascape Character Assessment reveals the in-

credible complexity that is often hidden when we simply look at a sea view – there is so much more than a view and the assessment provides a thorough, detailed and fascinating story which often lies beneath the waves.

"The Dover Strait includes important areas of the AONB and two of Britain's Heritage Coasts.

"I'm sure this new assessment of the Seascape Character will assist the many organisations which are involved in regenerating the area, conserving its natural beauty and encouraging people to visit and enjoy this extraordinary place in their important work."

Mr Drake says that the new SCA will help district and borough council's which have important stretches of coastline to protect them in the future.

Nick Delaney is the principal ecologist at Dover District Council. He told KoS the new planning tool would assist them in making the right decision on whether to allow development along the coast.

He said: "When considering projects on the coast the seascape

character assessment will prove a useful tool in increasing our understanding of the wider impacts of development, particularly on the low-lying coast between Deal and Sandwich where development inland, such as the Estover biomass Combined Heat and Power plant at Discovery Park, could impact the coastal land and seascape."

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**BEAUTY:** The natural beauty of the coast draws in tourists as well as providing business opportunities. KCC's coastal officer Chris Drake (inset) worked closely with the French on the SCA

their coastal planning though. Mr Drake says the SCA is valuable in a number of ways.

He told KoS: "The SCA has a broad reach with what it can achieve. It can tackle issues around the ecology of the marine environment, shipwrecks, offshore wind farm development and everything in between. It provides a

solid base of evidence for marine planning."

David Hutchinson, marine planner at the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) - the Government agency which licenses, regulates and plans marine activities - said the SCA would be a valuable tool for them.

He said: "The study will be used as

part of the evidence base for marine planning in the UK. The MMO produced a strategic scale seascape assessment for the South marine plan areas in July 2014.

"It's the MMOs intention to include locally-developed seascape assessments within their evidence base for marine planning purposes.

"The MMO expect to extend their programme of seascape assessments around the English coast as the marine planning process progresses."

The document will also help to support the British and French shared 20-year vision for the Strait.

That long term plan is key for the Strait according to Mr Drake.

He told KoS: "The Strait will become increasingly busy in the future, with more trade using it in the coming decades. That will create increasing pressure on the environment.

"That means that it's important decision-makers have the right tools, and knowledge to ensure that what happens is sustainable in the future."



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