



# A Management Plan for the West Sands, St. Andrews

## 2012 – 2025

The West Sands Partnership

St Andrews, Fife, Scotland

Approved by the North East Area Committee, Fife Council

January 25, 2012



## Summary

The West Sands area is a part of a world - class landscape and a diverse coastal ecosystem. The challenge is to ensure that this international destination continues to be well planned and managed sustainably. Competing pressures from a variety of users will increase as visitor numbers grow, demographics change and interests shift. The area is also confronted with an immediate and growing threat – the effects of climate change. The West Sands are highly vulnerable to flooding and coastal erosion. On March 31, 2010, a storm surge destroyed parts of the dune system, eroded the landfill at Out Head, and flooded farmland adjacent to the A 91 and parts of the golf courses.

Coastal erosion and flooding are priority issues for the eight North Sea countries, – concerns made more urgent as high-value coastal areas are increasingly threatened by sea level rise and other effects of climate change. Fife Coast and Countryside Trust is the Scottish partner in the EU North Sea Region *SUSCOD* Project. *SUSCOD* aims to improve coastal development practices in locations of high value at risk due to climate change, as well as providing specific management recommendations for each location. N.E. Fife was selected as a *SUSCOD* project area and offers the opportunity to address long-standing issues in coastal zone management in a highly vulnerable area. These include the need for a long-term, sustainable management plan for the West Sands, and the protection and management of the closed landfill at Out Head.

The West Sands Partnership, chaired by Cllr. Robin Waterston, was formed in 2010 to prepare a plan for the West Sands area and to develop a consensus on the management of the landfill. Julian T. Inglis, EU Project Manager, Fife Coast and Countryside Trust drafted the plan on behalf of the Partnership. ([julian@fulcrum-environment.com](mailto:julian@fulcrum-environment.com)).

The Partnership agreed that to be effective, the plan must be developed in the broader context of the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary Natura 2000 site and adjacent areas. In essence the plan functions on two scales: it addresses issues particular to the West Sands, and issues that can only be addressed in the larger context of the natural coastal unit within which the West Sands area is located. This approach underpins the objective of developing a management scheme for the entire Firth of Tay – Eden Estuary area. This scheme would provide an umbrella for all local management plans and harmonise with a future marine plan to be prepared by a local Marine Planning Partnership. It would contribute to the complex task of bringing land and sea together in the planning process.

The West Sands Plan includes a Vision for the West Sands in 2025, principles to guide the plan, and a set of objectives and recommended actions organised according to the eight subject areas that make up the plan.

## **The Vision for the West Sands in 2025**

“The West Sands will be the gold standard for the conservation and wise use of coastal landscapes in the North Sea Region.”

### **The Principles**

The draft plan has been developed, and will be implemented and monitored according to the EU Principles for Integrated Coastal Zone Management.

### **Objectives and Actions**

#### **a. Conservation: Landscapes and Biodiversity**

##### **Landscapes**

**Objective:** To maintain the distinct identity, diversity and special quality of the West Sands landscape.

**Actions:** Six actions are recommended: developing an integrated suite of measures for the conservation and restoration of the landscape; developing an understanding of the physical processes that shape the coastline; developing a computerised 3D visualisation of the project area; restoring the entire dune system; fencing the worst affected dunes as an interim measure, and monitoring the effectiveness of coastal protection measures through periodic topographic surveys.

##### **Biodiversity**

**Objective:** To conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the West Sands area

**Actions:** Eleven actions are recommended to conserve biodiversity at the regional (ecosystem) level and the local (West Sands) levels. These include the preparation of a management scheme for the Firth of Tay – Eden Estuary Natura 2000 site and adjacent coastal areas; extending additional protection to marine life including harbour seals, bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, supported by a research and monitoring agenda; a coordinated programme of environmental management measures for the entire West Sands area, harmonized with management plan for the Eden Estuary LNR; contributing to the 25 year vision of the Fife Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and removing invasive plants.

#### **b. Access, Recreation and Tourism**

**Objective:** To provide an outstanding, year-round visitor experience for all-abilities with appropriate and well managed recreational opportunities, consistent with the landscape and conservation values of the area.

**Actions:** Visitor facilities and recreational activities will be managed year-round consistent with the high international standing of the area, competing demands for space and in the interests of all users. While it may not be possible to consistently meet the demanding requirements of bathing water quality in the short term, there will be no retreat from efforts to reduce point source and diffuse pollution and to meet or exceed the other criteria set out by Keep Scotland Beautiful for the Seaside Award and Blue Flag Award.

The plan sets out an extensive list of recommended actions, addressing each of the 32 award criteria. These include a programme of public information, communication and education including predictive signage on bathing water quality; beach zonation; environmental management measures; upgraded lifeguard facilities; lifeguarding, and health and safety.

### **c. Infrastructure**

**Objective:**

To ensure that infrastructure, facilities and services are developed, maintained and monitored to ensure they are fit for purpose and are suited to evolving needs and high environmental standards.

**Actions:** The plan lists nine recommended actions. These include the delivery of a fully integrated package of measures to enhance visitor experience for the period 2012 - 2025. The package will be based on an assessment of existing facilities and services. A priority action is the development of a new facility that integrates the need for interpretation, information, toilets, beach management and refreshments. Planning will be supported by annual visitor surveys. Measures to control vehicle traffic, enable all-abilities access, promote walking and cycling, and reduce the maintenance of amenity grassland will continue, taking into account the requirements of major golf tournaments. A voluntary system of parking charges will be implemented.

### **d. Waste Management**

**Objective:** To monitor landfill and waste disposal sites in the region, and take remedial measures to contain waste, prevent and remediate the pollution of the environment, and address threats to health and safety.

**Actions:**

A plan will be developed and implemented, at the earliest opportunity, to stabilise the landfill at Out Head, prevent the release of landfill contents onto the beach, and restore the sand dunes on that section of the shoreline.

#### **e. Research and Monitoring**

**Objective:** To encourage and support cooperative, long term socio-economic and environmental research and monitoring of the West Sands, the sharing of data and information, and the communication of results to stakeholders and the public.

**Actions:** The recommended actions are based on the need for an integrated, collaborative programme of research and monitoring which involves all of the agencies and organisations concerned as basis for developing a sound understanding of the area, major trends and changes. This programme ranges from research on the physical environment e.g. to develop a sediment budget for the coastal cell and a detailed understanding of sediment dynamics, and on the biological environment e.g. the need for a better understanding of the seasonal distribution and critical feeding and calving areas for marine mammals. Common platforms for the timely sharing of data and information and the communication of results to stakeholders and the public will be promoted e.g. with links to websites with summary information and data sources.

#### **f. Stakeholder Participation**

**Objective:** To ensure a high level of stakeholder participation and inclusiveness in plan preparation, implementation and monitoring.

**Actions:** Stakeholder participation is an essential part of the process of developing and implementing this plan. The West Sands partnership has proven to be a good example of partnership working. A technical workshop has been held together with two public meetings together with an online consultation. Recommended actions include the extension of the partnership to include all of the key agencies, organisations, user groups, and other interested parties. Partnerships will be particularly important at two levels: in developing, implementing, and monitoring action plans for the West Sands area, and in developing the management scheme for the larger project area based around the Firth of Tay – Eden Estuary Natura 2000 site and coastal cell. Both will take into account the structure and functioning of the Eden Estuary LNR Advisory Group, Tentsmuir Management Group, Tay Estuary Forum, River Basin Management and the introduction of a marine planning

partnership. A communication plan will be prepared in support of plan implementation and monitoring taking into account the information needs set out in the plan.

#### **g. Health and Safety**

**Objective:** To ensure that the West Sands is managed throughout the year with high priority for the health and safety of all users

#### **Actions: on Health and Safety**

Health and safety criteria are set out in the section dealing with Access, Recreation and Tourism. These pertain to the bathing season and the designated activity zones. Health and safety measures under the *Land Reform Act 2003* and *The Occupiers Liability Act 1957* will be in place throughout the year reflecting the current and projected use of the beach and inshore area for many activities. Recommended actions include a coordinated health and safety plan, and measures to keep users fully informed on the safe and appropriate use of the area and the associated risks e.g. from stranding, disturbance to plants and animals, damage to the dune system and littering.

#### **Implementation and Resources**

**Objective:** To ensure coordinated action among the responsible agencies to implement, resource and monitor the West Sands Plan.

**Actions:** Plan implementation and monitoring will be coordinated through a partnership process. The structure and functions of the partnerships will be determined following the completion of the plan and its approval of the agencies and organisations involved. The partnerships will reflect the nature of the actions concerned. An enhanced West Sands Partnership will oversee the development and monitoring of the actions plans pertaining to the West Sands itself with operational measures put in place through the current Sands Liaison Group. User groups will be formed to advise on specific management measures e.g. recreational use of the beach.

The development of action plans for the wider area, and the development and monitoring of a management scheme for the Firth of Tay – Eden Estuary and surrounding areas will require the constitution of a new partnership with links to existing and future structures such as the proposed marine planning partnership. A technical workshop will be held following the review of the plan by the NEFAC to review the objectives and actions and recommend on the membership of a new partnership and the process to be followed. Planning for the Natura 2000 area will be guided by SNH, the competent authority.

Consensus on action plans at all levels will be key to accessing resources for implementation. A workshop will be held in 2012 to develop a funding strategy to implement the actions recommended in the plan.

