

Teesmouth

National Nature Reserve



Front cover photograph: © Natural England

The Countryside Code

Respect other people

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available

Protect the natural environment

- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under effective control

Enjoy the outdoors

- Plan ahead and be prepared
- Follow advice and local signs

Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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Welcome to Teesmouth National Nature Reserve

Teesmouth NNR is a Nature Reserve with a difference. Set against a backdrop of heavy industry, it shows how nature can adapt and thrive in the most unlikely of situations.

Managed by Natural England, this coastal reserve covers over 350 hectares and has a rich range of habitats. It is split into two main sections:

North Gare is an area of dunes and grazing marsh north of the power station. During winter, this is the domain of lapwings and flocks of curlew, which stalk the pastures alongside the approach road. During the breeding season, the grasses help to conceal the nests of skylarks and meadow pipits.

Seal Sands is one of the largest areas of intertidal mudflats on England's north-east coast. When the tide is out, hundreds of waders, including redshank and dunlin, peck through the mud looking for protein-rich invertebrates.

To the south, Natural England has created a tidal lagoon and a well-positioned hide gives good views of wading birds, as well as shelduck and teal.

Two well-surfaced way-marked trails cross the Reserve.

There is a way-marked nature trail at North Gare.

Follow us on social media:

- Facebook: Teesmouth National Nature Reserve
- Twitter: @TeesmouthNNR
- Instagram: @teesmouth.nnr



Burnet Moth

© Natural England/Don Stephenson

What's special about Teesmouth?

Arrive at Teesmouth and you know you've come to a Reserve like no other. But while power stations and other industrial sites may loom on the horizon, the Reserve is still home to an amazing array of flora and fauna.

Look out for common (harbour) and grey seals basking beside the tidal channels, rare plants including four different species of marsh orchid, and thousands of migratory waterbirds swooping down to feed on the mudflats.

The site contains two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the whole Reserve is part of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Special Protection Area and Ramsar site.

The history of Teesmouth

For thousands of years, the sea swept across the Tees Estuary, washing the shoreline at high tide and exposing mudflats and sand bars as it ebbed. Local people, eager to find more land to farm, built defensive banks against the tides, changing the currents and the flow. Gradually, the ground became solid, lost its saltiness and became fit for agriculture.

Areas still covered by the sea at the highest tides developed as saltmarshes and here sheep grazed and grew the thick fleeces sold by medieval monks to much of Europe.

Outside the old sea defences, sand formed dunes, and today this process continues, with

sand blown against the sea walls stabilising as grasses begin to take hold.

In medieval times the area was also important for its salt, which was extracted by boiling sea water until the liquid evaporated, leaving the precious salt crystals behind. The ash from fuel used in the process was left on Seaton Common, and now forms an historic landscape of grass-covered mounds.

Pollution in the estuary was heaviest during the 19th and 20th centuries, and wildlife only just hung on. But with the clean-up of industry during the latter half of the last century, it gradually began to move back in.

Natural England and its predecessors first became involved with the site in 1966, when Seal

Seasonal spectaculars

Of course, Teesmouth can be enjoyed at any time of year but there are also special reasons to pay a visit:

Spring and summer

Enjoy fantastic displays of wildflowers on the North Gare dunes.

Autumn

The best time to see the noisy aerobatics of common and Sandwich terns.

Winter

Marvel at the swirling flocks of knots arriving from Greenland and the Canadian Arctic – this is the coastal equivalent of those great inland starling roosts. Several hundred handsome, brightly-coloured shelduck also spend the winter on Seal Sands.



Early marsh orchid

© Natural England

Sands and Seaton Dunes and Common first became SSSIs.

While the area continues to be highly industrialised, Natural England manages the area to minimize pollution threats, maintain the quality of the site's habitats and reduce disturbance to wildlife.

If left alone, some areas manage themselves, while others need human intervention to help them thrive. For example, at North Gare, Natural England is introducing carefully controlled grazing, so that many flowering plants can survive without being swamped by vigorous grasses. And on Seal Sands, a ten hectare area has been excavated and flooded to recreate more of the now scarce intertidal mud.



Knot feeding

© Natural England/Carl Watts

Brilliant birds

Teesmouth has a large and wonderfully varied bird population. Over 20,000 waterbirds visit the Tees Estuary each year, making it an internationally important site for birdlife.

In the spring, small numbers of ringed plover, lapwing, oystercatcher and snipe arrive to nest, while Sandwich terns, having bred further north, are fleeting visitors during July and August. Then in autumn, cormorant, curlew and redshank all arrive in large numbers.

Birds of prey also enjoy rich pickings at Teesmouth; merlins and peregrine falcons patrol Seal Sands for much of the year.



North Gare Sands

© Natural England / Carl Watts

Butterflies, moths and other insects

When strolling on the dunes, look out for the turquoise flash of a common blue butterfly, or the red and iridescent black markings of the burnet moth. These day-flying moths can be very abundant, and their black and yellow striped caterpillars are easily spotted on ragwort plants.

Plantlife

Of all the plants at Teesmouth, perhaps the most spectacular are the four species of marsh orchid which flower in June and July on the damp dune grassland inland of North Gare. Lady's bedstraw and bird's-foot trefoil bring more colour to the dunes, with purple milk vetch, strawberry clover, adder's-tongue fern and various sedges adding to the display.



Common Seal

© Natural England / Carl Watts

How to get there

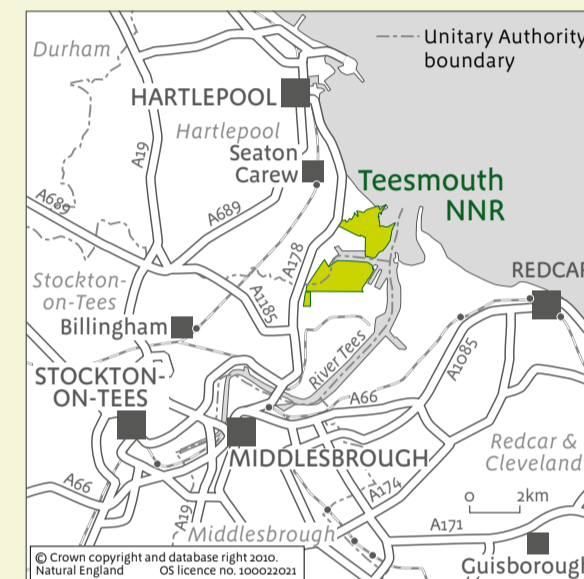
Teesmouth NNR is mid-way between Hartlepool and Redcar, approximately 5km to the north of Middlesbrough, to the east of the A178. The England Coast Path passes through the Reserve.

The North Gare car park (accessed via a minor road) is well signposted from the main road to the north of the Hartlepool Power Station. There is an orientation panel at the car park, and the nature trail begins by the Welcome Sign 100m to seaward.

Seal Sands can be accessed from the car park at Cowpen Marsh just south of the bridge over Greatham Creek.

The nearest train station is at Seaton Carew. A local bus service (1) to and from Seaton Carew is operated by Stagecoach and runs half-hourly along the A178 between Hartlepool and Middlesbrough (hourly on Sundays).

The reserve is linked to Route 14 of the National Cycle Network and there are cycle racks at both car parks.



Sensational seals

Pollution and hunting devastated the seal population around the Estuary and by 1860 one of our most impressive marine mammals had disappeared from the Tees completely.

It took over a century for them to return, but by the late 1980s, common and grey seals were seen again, and today there is a population of well over a hundred animals.

Several pups are born each summer, making Seal Sands the only regular breeding colony of common seals on England's north-east coast.

Facilities

An easy-access footpath connects the Cowpen Marsh car park with two wheelchair accessible hides overlooking Seal Sands, and with the Greatham Creek Seal Viewpoint.

There is a nature trail at North Gare, and Natural England runs a number of events and guided walks on the Reserve.

Teesmouth NNR is also featured on The Nationwide Access Register:
www.directenquiries.com

The Teesmouth Field Centre (tel:), is based at Hartlepool Power Station's Visitor Centre, and offers a range of activities for visiting groups. These activities must be booked in advance.

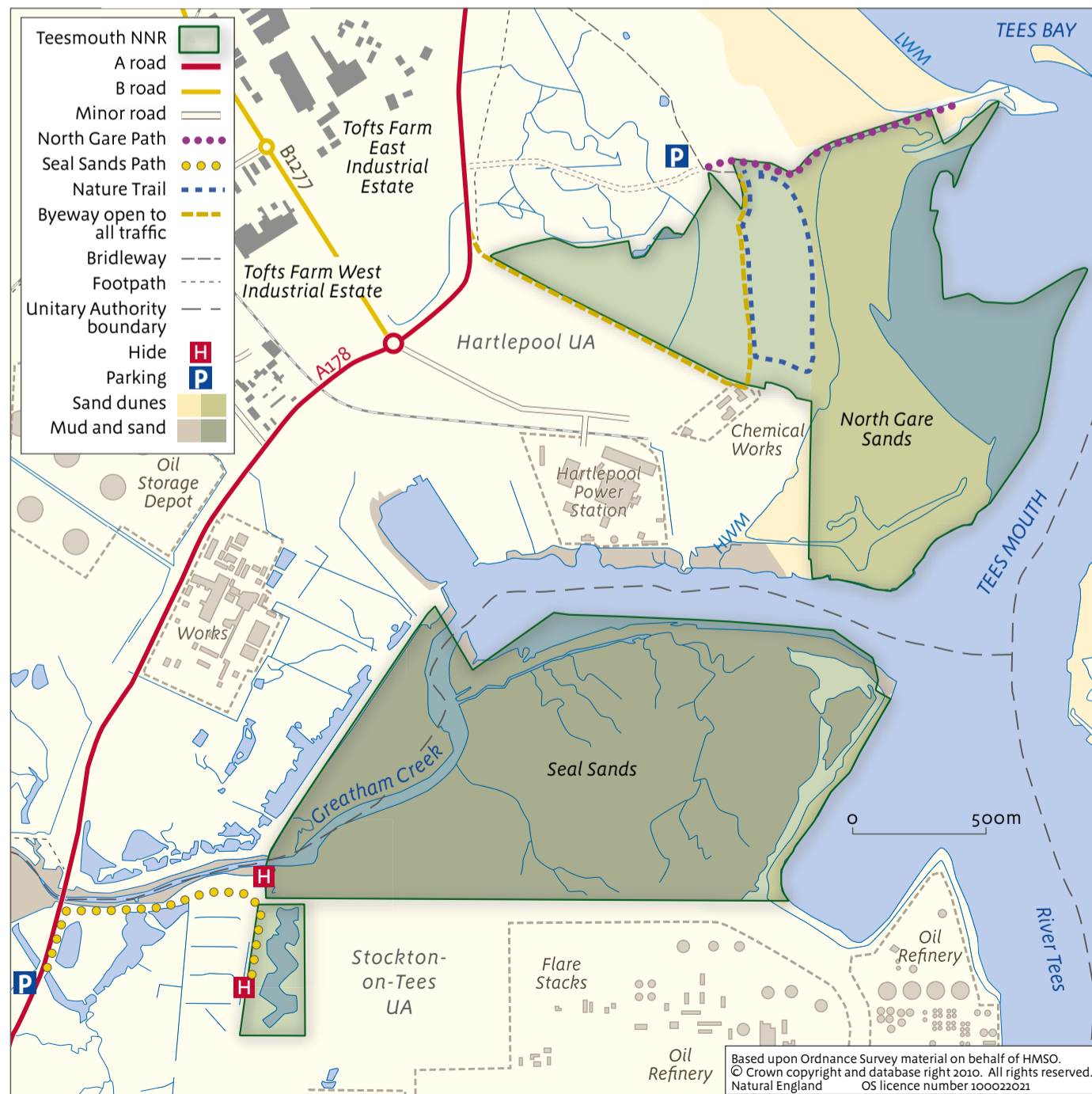
The nearest toilet and refreshment facilities are in Seaton Carew (2km to the north of the Reserve) and at the RSPB Saltholme Reserve (2km to the south).

The nearest accommodation is in Seaton Carew and Hartlepool. For more information visit www.thisishartlepool.co.uk or telephone Hartlepool Tourist Information on 01429 869706.



Corporate visit

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For further information please contact the NNR team: Castle Eden Dene Office on 0191 586 0004 or visit the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve Facebook page.



Wet grazing marsh

© Natural England / Mike Leakey