

# A World Heritage Site for England's east coast wetlands, delivering for the people and wildlife of the Humber Estuary



# A personal love of the Humber and its people



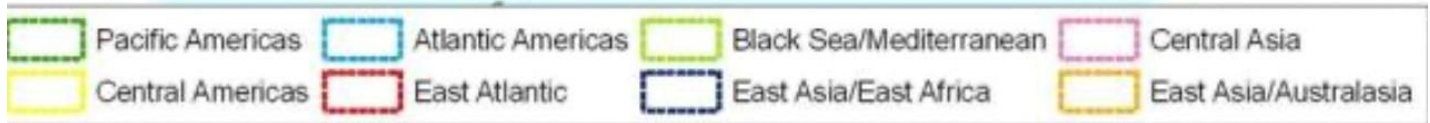
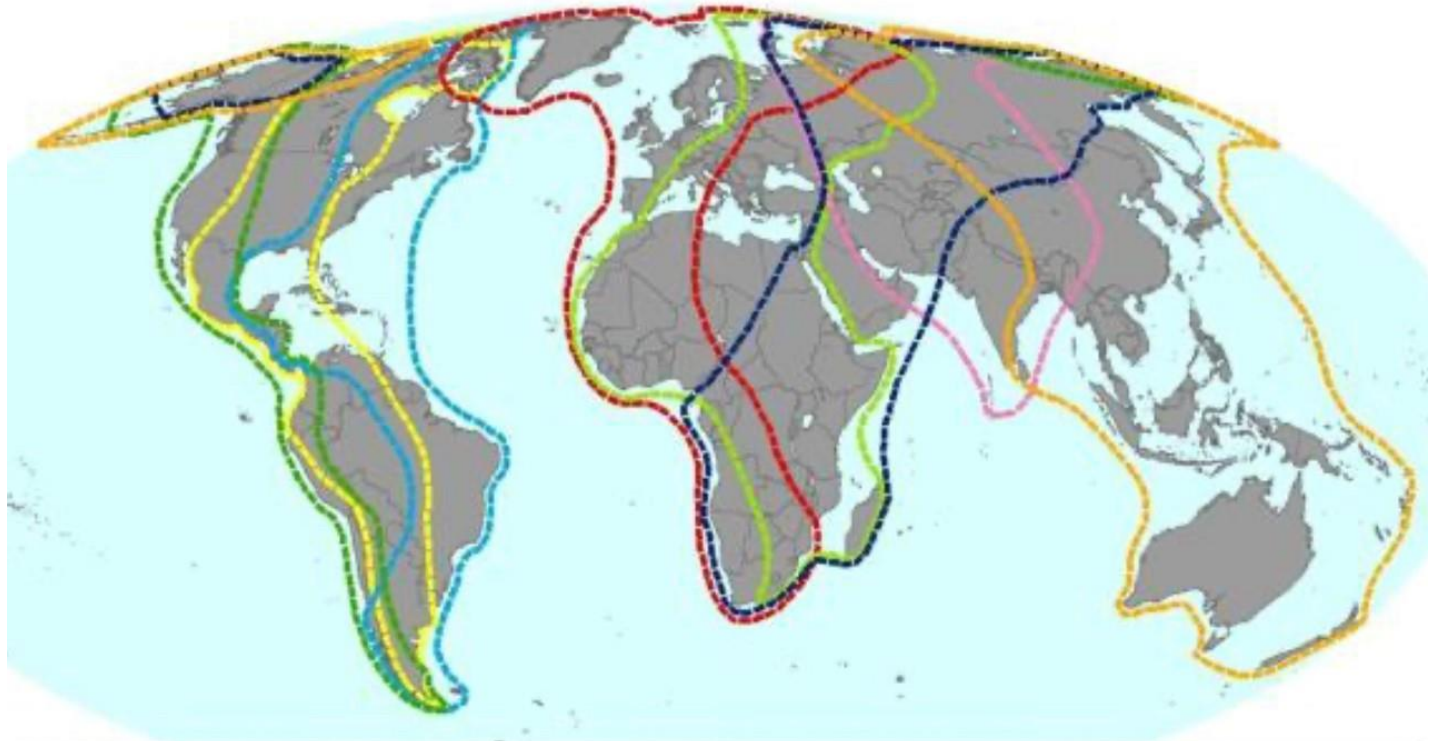
# What I'll cover this morning



1. The importance of our global flyways, our coastal wetlands and especially the Humber Estuary
2. Some thoughts on the changes we'll see in the Humber Estuary and the need for big thinking to tackle the climate and nature emergency for everyone
3. The opportunity to see England's east coast wetlands become a UNESCO World Heritage Site



# 'Superhighways for migratory waterbirds'

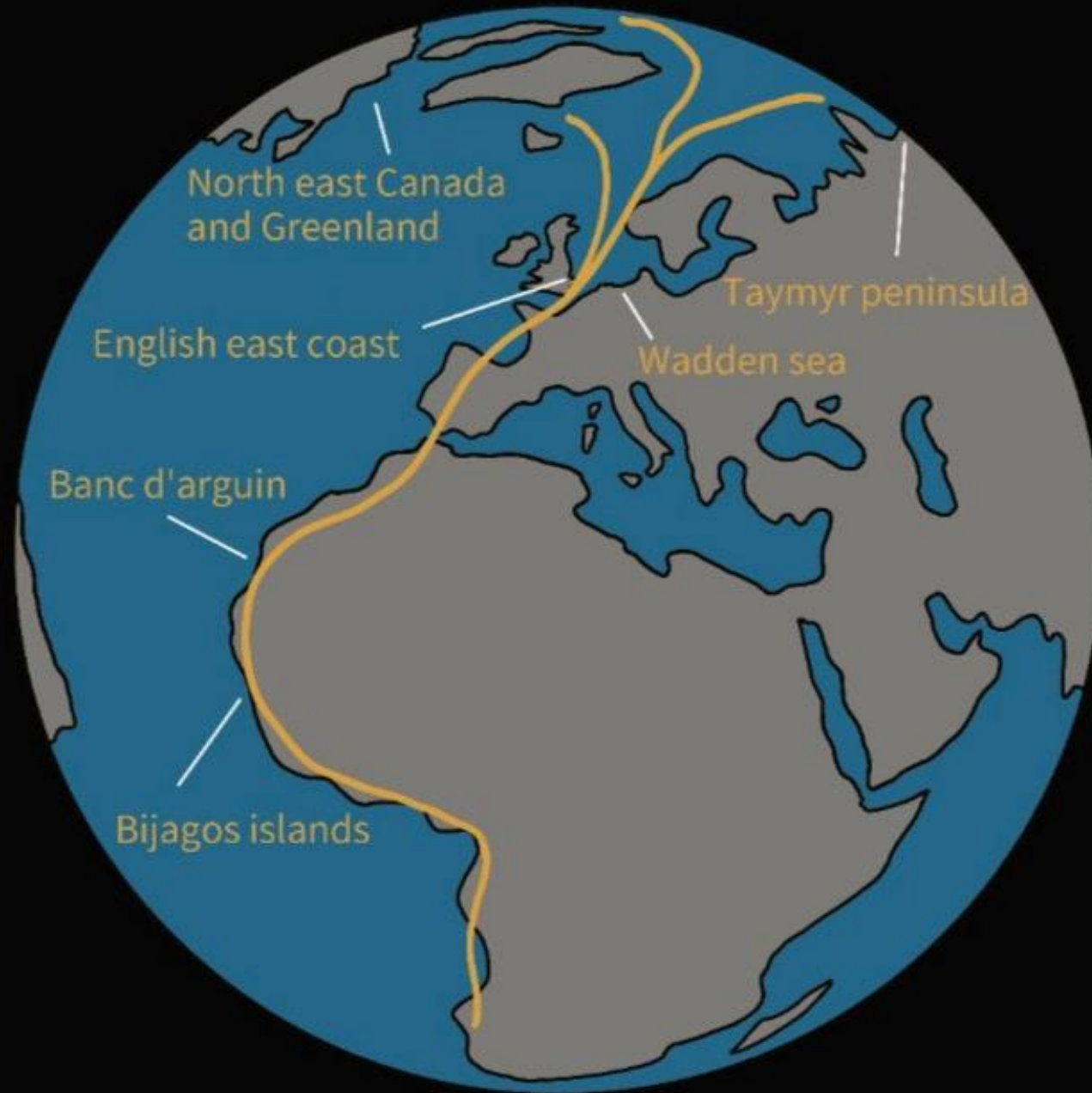


# Global Flyways



# East Atlantic Flyway

- Includes Waddensea and Banc d'Arguin 'Flyway' Natural World Heritage Sites



# Why are England's east coast wetlands important?

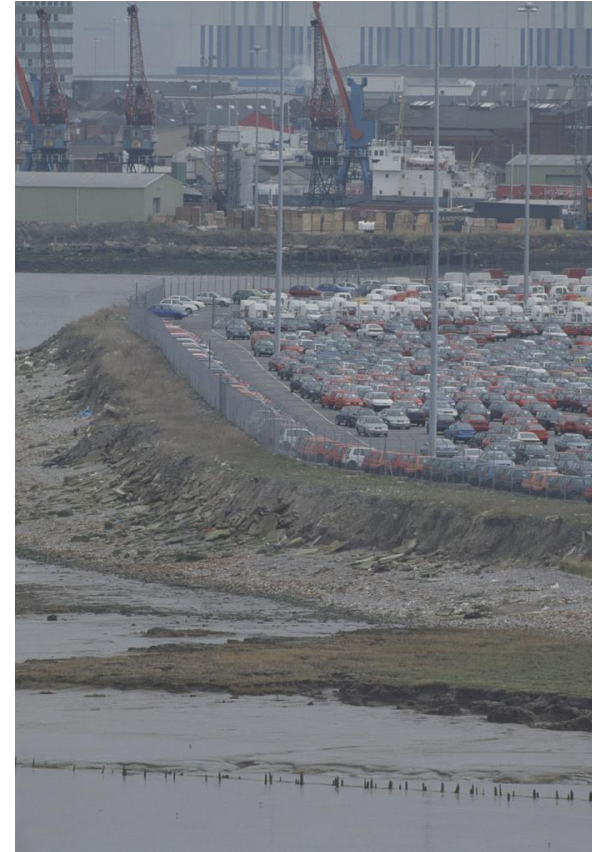
- Global exemplar in of coastal adaptation and nature conservation management in the face of climate change – demonstrating how well-planned adaptation can deliver multiple benefits including flood protection, habitat restoration, fisheries, recreation, tourism, water quality and carbon storage
- World class complex of coastal wetlands supporting globally important migratory populations on the East Atlantic Flyway of critical importance on one of the eight major global flyways
- Mid-way location on the East Atlantic Flyway importance as a staging area as well as for wintering birds (more than 1 million)
- Internationally important for 29 waterbird populations



# Deeper collaborations to address the challenge



- The Humber Estuary is an important industrial area and trade gateway with an average of 40,000 ship movements per year
- Our ports and wharves handle 14% of the UK's international trade. We are the country's largest port complex. Industries along the estuary include, chemical works, oil refinery complexes and power stations
- A lot of people live and work in its hinterlands (over a quarter of a million people in Hull alone) and recreational pressures are growing
- The Humber Estuary is also internationally important for wildlife – we have a responsibility to protect it



# Deeper collaborations to address the challenge



- Like all estuaries, the Humber is subject to a number of major challenges
  - increasing industrialisation and urbanisation,
  - scarcity of space to cope with everything people want to do, and
  - the impacts of climate change coupled with the related increases in vulnerability and decreases in resilience.
- Climate change is now increasingly recognised as having a range of severe impacts on estuarine functions and services we all rely on
- NASA (Sea Level Projection Tool) predicts up to 1m increase in sea level in the Humber over the next century (only London is deemed more at risk for flooding)
- It's a shared problem that needs shared solutions and the Humber is well served by organisations, partnerships and commissions who want to do this







## Our vision

“A near future in which coastal wetlands in England are valued for their benefits to society and their vital role in global wildlife conservation. This recognition drives a step change in investment and leads to improved resilience and ecological function of coastal wetlands in the face of climate change and related challenges, with the RSPB seen as a leader and pioneer of positive action.”

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# Why put forward as a potential World Heritage Site?



- We think the creation of a World Heritage Site across the east coast wetlands, from the Humber to the Thames, is a big part of how we can address these challenges
- The IUCN 'Benefits of Natural World Heritage' project makes a strong case for action, e.g. prevention of floods, opportunities for tourism, cultural and spiritual values, and the provision of food and water (together with benefits for nature) <https://iucn.org/our-work/topic/world-heritage/our-work/benefits-natural-world-heritage>
- RSPB internal East Coast Wetlands Programme developed as part of our corporate strategy to promote the global importance of English East Coast wetlands the East Atlantic Flyway
- Inspired by recent work on the Yellow Sea (China/ South Korea)



# UK Context : World Heritage Sites

- **33 World Heritage Sites**
- 28 Cultural
- 4 Natural
- 1 Mixed
  
- **2 Natural Sites (UK Mainland):**
- The Jurassic Coast (Dorset /Devon) (2001)
- Giants Causeway (Northern Ireland) (1986)
  
- **2 Natural Sites (UKOTs)**
- Gough and Inaccessible Islands (1995)
- Henderson Island (1988)
  
- **1 Mixed Site**
- St Kilda (1986)



RSPB, WWT and NT

## East Atlantic Flyway – England East Coast Wetlands: Potential Natural World Heritage Site

Proposal summary to inform stakeholder consultations and support application for placement on the UK's tentative list

June 2022



Innovative Thinking - Sustainable Solutions



# Steps in the Tentative List Application

- Collation of information to base a justification (work started July 2021!)

# Review of UNESCO World Heritage Site Criteria

## Cultural

### (i)

to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

### (ii)

to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

### (iii)

to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

### (iv)

to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

### (v)

to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

### (vi)

to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

## Natural

### (vii)

to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;

### (viii)

to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;

### (ix)

to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

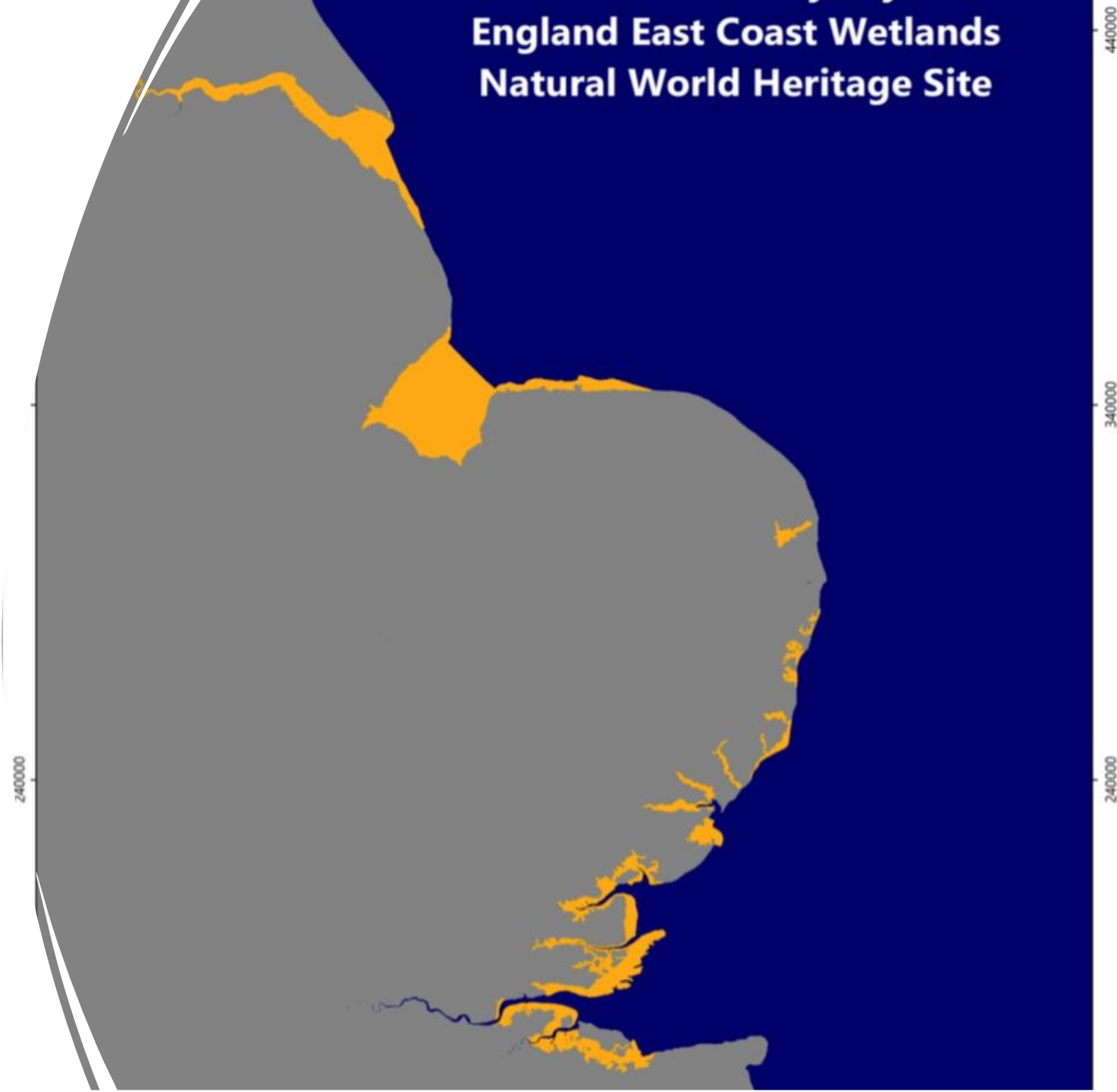
### (x)

to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

# Determining an 'indicative' boundary

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- 21 Special Protection Areas (these include 21 Ramsar wetlands and 19 Special Areas of Conservation)
- Major Habitat Restorations (incl Freiston Shore, Wallasea Island)
- 23 managed realignment projects within this area)
- No buffer zone identified



# Application to DCMS – RSPB, NT and WWT

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- Support from:
- County Councils
- Coastal Partnerships
- District Councils
- The Crown Estate



# Independent Panel Feedback

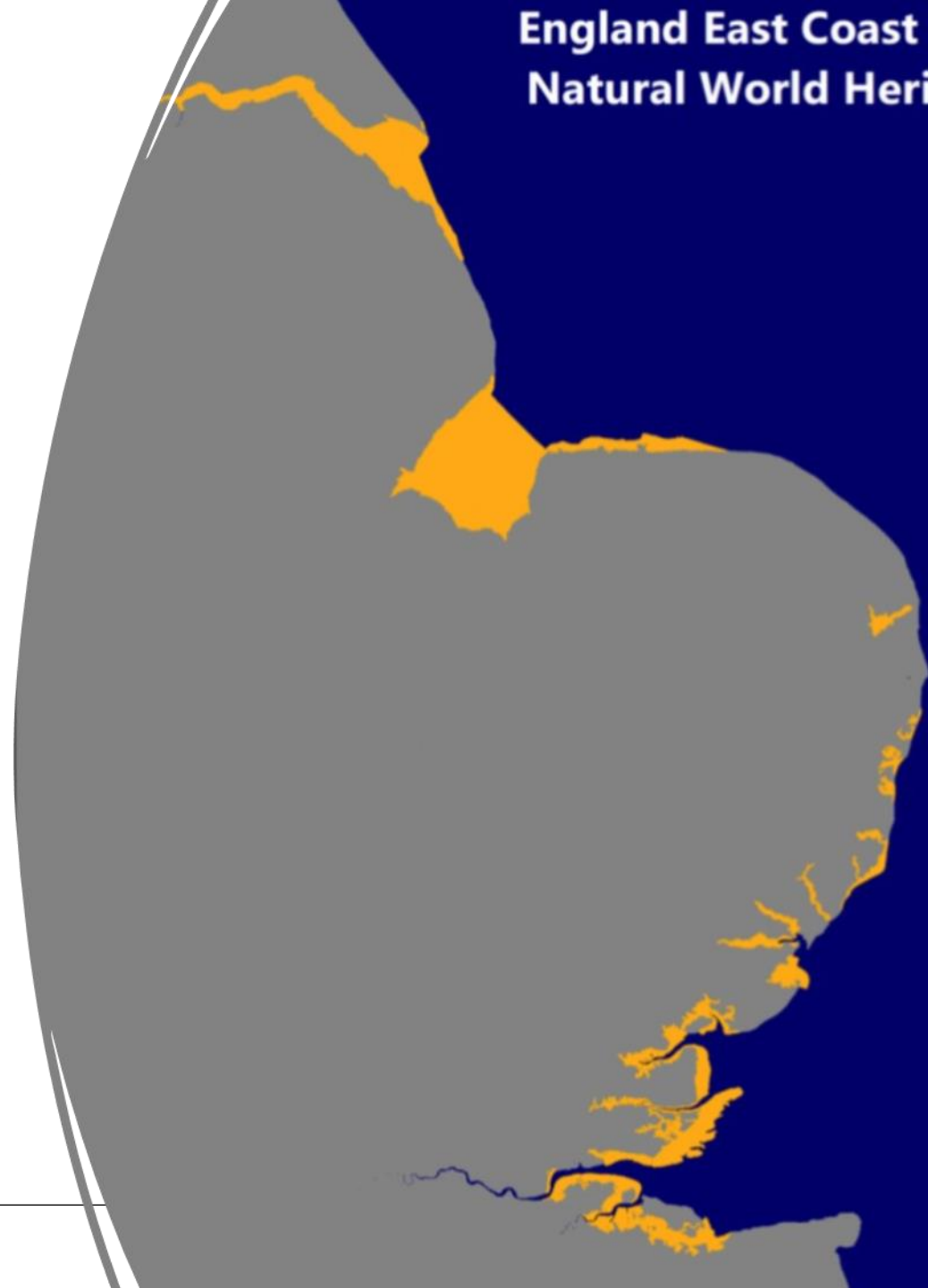
- *...very interesting and ambitious natural heritage proposal*
- *... makes a clear and convincing case for the potential to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value.*
- *...an interesting example for how natural heritage sites and their Outstanding Universal Value will need to adapt to climate change.*
- *...provides an opportunity for the UK to develop and demonstrate best practice for coastal adaptation in a changing environment.*
- *...noted the significant efforts that had gone into obtaining council and stakeholder support and were enthused about the potential and ambition of this application, and confident that support would be provided for this process.*
- *...the focus should be on 'realigning' and 'adapting' rather than 'protecting' wetland areas*
- *...suggested that the consideration of Criterion ix could improve the nomination bid.*
- *...Outstanding Universal Value could be refined in relation to other World Heritage site flyways and wetlands.*
- *...consideration as to whether a buffer zone should be included or not.*





# England East Coast Wetlands (Humber-Thames) c.170,000 hectares

1. **SUCCESS!** Added to the UK Tentative List of Potential World Heritage Sites (April 2023) and UNESCO list (September 2023)
  2. Shortened name "**East Coast Flyway**"
  3. Humber Estuary covers 37,630 ha
  4. Focus now on Preliminary Assessment (essentially seeking UNESCO view and detailed guidance on the nomination)
  5. We hope to submit the preliminary submission in 2026 (takes time!)
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# Current action



- We're reaching out to all 28 Local Authorities, 32 MPs, stakeholders and coastal forums
- Establishing lead contacts in Natural England, the Environment Agency and Marine Management Organisation
- Commissioning further work to determine the best approach to completing the nomination dossier (and indicative cost) to provide a basis for firming up partnership and funding
- Building relationships with the Waddensea Secretariat and the Getbol Korean Tidal Flats (World Heritage Site Promotion Team, Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, KOEM, Local Authorities, Eco-Horizon Institute)



# Our ask

- We need to cover the costs of the Preliminary Assessment Appraisal (£70k)
- We hope the Humber Nature Partnership and its members can help out with this part – we also expect need for significant stakeholder and community engagement (public events, consultations etc)
- Consider how World Heritage Site status could benefit you, your organization, your business, but perhaps most importantly the people who live and work on the Humber and what they need
- How could you promote it too?

# Thank you for listening

Dr. James Robinson

Chief Operating Officer

E: james.robinson@rspb.org.uk

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## Stay connected

Keep up to date with the latest thinking, news, events, and information from the RSPB in your local community.



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## Head Office

RSPB The Lodge  
Potton Road  
Sandy  
SG19 2DL



Protecting habitats, saving species  
and helping to end the nature and  
climate emergency.

**Nature is in crisis.  
Together we can save it.**