

### WALTON-NAZE, ESSEX : SSSI to CRAG WALK.

After an informal notification to the planning authorities in 1958, the Naze at Walton-on-the-Naze in Essex was formally notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by the Nature Conservancy in 1961, under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Following this, Essex County Council refused to give planning permission to a development company for a holiday centre (associated with coast defence works and 'landscaping' on and below the cliffs). The developers then appealed to the Secretary of State against the refusal and a Public Inquiry was held on the 25th October 1961. The Nature Conservancy opposed the appeal; Professor W. B. R. King of Cambridge University gave evidence on the international importance of the Red Crag deposits at the Naze for research workers, Mr H. E. P. Spencer of Ipswich Museum emphasised the lack of any alternative sites of Waltonian type Red Crag, and Mr J. M. Bramson, County Inspector of Schools for Essex, wrote testifying to the use made by local educational institutions of the Naze exposures. The appeal was refused, and the Naze was subsequently purchased by Tendring District Council (the local authority) as an amenity area.

In 1975 a Save the Naze Action Committee was formed to

promote the case for coastal protection works, under the Chairmanship of the local MP, Sir Julian Ridsdale. In 1977 a Tendring 'Coast Protection Scheme' drained and graded the cliff area from Hipkin's Beach northwards almost to the Naze tower (an 18th century navigational tower); a new breakwater and a concrete sea wall were constructed along the base of the cliff area, and also a path between the cliff top (near the Naze tower) and the shore. A prominent cross-bedded (roughly southward dipping) section of Red Crag about 200 feet south of the tower was obscured by this work.

Further erosion led to calls to erect coast defences for the remainder of the Naze area. 'Save the Naze' chairman Reginald Bloom stated (The Observer 23 April 1978) 'these geologists don't realise that without the sea defences there won't be any Naze left very soon.' Following discussion by Tendring councillors, another Public Inquiry, held in November 1978, was solely to consider whether the proposed coastal defences should receive grant-aid. Former Frinton and Walton Urban District Council chairman Thomas Rainbird stated 'The people who want to examine the Red Crag have by now surely got sufficient knowledge about it — people all over the country have samples.' The Nature Conservancy again opposed the proposal. Professor B. M. Funnell of the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of

East Anglia spoke on the nature and importance of the Red Crag.

"The Red Crag is to be viewed rather like a cathedral or a Roman villa..... something which is unique". The Secretary of State for the Environment's decision refused grant aid, not considering stretches of undeveloped coast as appropriate for grant-aided coastal defence schemes.

The East Anglian Daily Times of 13 February 2010 reported that the £1.2 million target for the 'Naze Tower - Crag Walk Project' had been reached. The Naze Protection Society had raised more than £230,000 during their 20-year campaign to prevent more coastal erosion, Essex County Council contributed £500,000 and Tendring District Council donated £520,000 awarded to them by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Coastal Pathfinder Scheme. An c. 100 m long rock revetment ("enabled to be extended in future") was built below the section of cliff in front of the Naze Tower. The 'Crag Walk' was constructed (completed 2011) on this revetment and incorporated an 'educational public viewing platform.' With this section of cliff protected from the sea, Natural England (successor to the Nature Conservancy) required the 'geological strata of the SSSI be maintained and exposed through manual clearance of excessive undergrowth on the cliff face.'

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