

# A review of the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs Special Protection Area

This note has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about proposals to extend the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA). Other notes about the process for classifying marine SPAs and about some of the species to be protected within them are available. For details see *Further information* below.

## Background

Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA was classified under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (the Birds Directive). The UK Government has an ongoing obligation under the Birds Directive, and as part of this Natural England has:

- Assessed recent breeding seabird data in the Flamborough and Filey areas.
- Reviewed recommendations from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) based on survey work carried out in the waters around a number of UK seabird colonies.

We are now compiling a proposal for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider extending the existing SPA due to the diverse assemblage of breeding seabirds found there. The extension would include the coastline between Filey Brigg and Cunstone Nab and a marine extension of 2 kilometres to protect the large numbers of seabirds that depend on the waters next to their colonies.

We are also reviewing the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the area to determine whether additional biological features might warrant notification as SSSI.



Flamborough North Cliffs © Natural England/ Robert Goodison

## Special Protection Areas

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 to tackle declines in wild bird populations across Europe. Each member state must identify SPAs to protect:

- rare or vulnerable bird species (as listed in Annex I of the Directive); and
- regularly occurring migratory bird species.

Regularly occurring migratory birds include the seabirds that return every year from far out to sea to breed at Flamborough and Filey.

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The network of SPAs on land in the UK is now well established, but to provide seabirds with the protection they need, further work is required to complete a network at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying a network of SPAs in the marine environment by 2015.

### Flamborough and Filey: special places for seabirds

The cliffs at Flamborough Head support large numbers of breeding seabirds. The Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA was classified in 1993 in order to protect its internationally important seabird colonies.



Black-legged Kittiwake © Natural England/ Mike Meadows

Recent counts at Flamborough Head and further north at Filey have been provided by the national Seabird Monitoring Programme and trained staff and volunteers working from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Bempton Cliffs nature reserve.

These counts reveal that over 185,000 individual seabirds are present during the breeding season and that the area supports important populations of:

- black-legged kittiwake;
- northern gannet;
- common guillemot;
- razorbill; and
- northern fulmar.

### A possible terrestrial extension

A possible terrestrial extension running from the cliffs at Filey Brigg to Cunstone Nab in the west

is being considered to incorporate important breeding colonies that currently fall outside the existing SPA. See appendix 1 for a map of the proposed extension. Between 2009 and 2011 the RSPB collected seabird colony data for the area that indicates that a diverse and extensive seabird population is present.

Further west and north from Cunstone Nab the softer rock and sloping cliffs support a less diverse assemblage of seabirds, and are therefore not being considered for inclusion.

### Review of SSSI interests

If brought forward, this potential SPA extension would warrant notification as an SSSI, as is the case with the existing SPA. Natural England is reviewing existing biological data and hopes to carry out further survey work to identify other features of interest that might warrant inclusion in a new, extended or revised SSSI. We will be contacting landowners and occupiers to request access for these surveys.

We are also reviewing the landward boundary of the existing and proposed designations in the area to take account of the likely coastal recession rates in the next 50 years. This will help ensure that these special sites remain protected in the future.

### A possible marine extension

Waters adjacent to seabird colonies are used by large numbers of some seabird species for a wide range of activities. Therefore, these waters, as well as the cliffs where the seabirds nest, need to be considered for protection.

JNCC has recommended species-specific marine extensions to the boundaries of existing seabird colony SPAs based on survey work and on an analysis of seabird distribution and density. The following are relevant to this site:

- 2 kilometre extension for northern gannet and northern fulmar; and
- 1 kilometre extension for common guillemot and razorbill.

Based on this, Natural England is considering recommending a marine extension of 2 km from all of the seabird colonies.

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The marine extension will start where the terrestrial SPA reaches Mean Low Water (MLW) and extend 2 kilometres offshore in all directions.

### What happens next?

Natural England is responsible for recommending potential SPAs in English waters (out to 12 nautical miles) to Defra for classification.

Once we have developed initial site recommendations for a potential SPA, and held informal discussions with stakeholders, we will submit proposals (approved by our Executive Board) as formal advice to Defra.

We then expect to obtain Ministerial approval to start the formal public consultation process, which will last twelve weeks. After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra.

### How can you get involved?

We are contacting stakeholders with an interest in the proposals from June 2012 onwards. A formal public consultation is expected to follow in 2013, when the full scientific case for the recommendations will be available.

We plan to carry out the public consultation on any new, extended or revised SSSI at the same time as formal consultation on the SPA proposals. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the extensions to the SPA.
- You hold any additional bird data that you would like to submit to us to inform the recommendations.
- You have any information about your interests or activities in the area that could inform the Impact Assessment that will be drawn up to consider the potential economic, environmental and social impacts of the classification.

### Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN122: *Northern gannet species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN123: *Common guillemot species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN124: *Razorbill species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN125: *Atlantic puffin species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN126: *Northern fulmar species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

If you would like to know more about the proposals or ask any questions, please get in touch:

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## Appendix 1 Indicative map showing broad locations of proposed extensions

