

Proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about the development of recommendations to extend Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Areas (SPA) to afford protection to additional species. Other notes about the process for classifying SPAs and about the birds to be protected are available. For details see *Further Information* below.

Background

Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA was classified as a marine SPA in August 2010 under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (the Birds Directive) as the site supports internationally important populations of red-throated diver *Gavia stellata* and common scoter *Melanitta nigra*.

The UK Government has ongoing obligations under the Birds Directive, the legislation that requires SPA classification, to identify and classify new SPAs. As part of work to identify potential marine SPAs in UK waters, Natural England is compiling proposals for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider as part of the commitment to improving seabird protection within the SPA network. Natural Resources Wales are also compiling proposals for Welsh Government on sites across Wales. The proposals for this site are to:

- extend Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA to afford protection to little gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*;
- add additional named features to the site to protect the foraging areas of common tern *Sterna hirundo* from the colony at Seaforth (Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore

SPA) and little tern *Sternula albifrons* from the colony at Gronant (The Dee Estuary SPA);

- add red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator* and cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* as named features of the assemblage.

Special Protection Areas

SPAs in England are classified by the UK Government Ministers, under section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972. SPAs in Wales (including Welsh territorial Waters) are classified by Welsh Ministers also under section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972. 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
- other regularly occurring migratory bird species.

JNCC, on behalf of the UK conservation agencies, considered the requirements of marine SPAs. For Liverpool Bay / Bae Lerpwl which was classified in 2010, the considerations were for: inshore and offshore areas used by seabirds for feeding and other activities at any time of year; and other types of

Proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)

marine SPA, for example foraging areas for breeding terns.

Once sites have been formally proposed to Ministers by the statutory nature conservation bodies, and are approved by Ministers for formal consultation, they become potential SPAs (pSPA). However, the existing site remains fully classified throughout the consultation.

SPAs on land in the UK are now well established but to provide seabirds with the protection they need, further work is required to establish SPAs at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying SPAs in the marine environment by 2016.

Liverpool Bay: an important place for seabirds

Liverpool Bay supports important numbers of seabird species, including little gull. The site supports the third highest aggregation of little gull in the UK.



Little gull. © Andy Mason

The boundary of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA is contiguous with the boundaries of The Dee Estuary SPA, Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA, and Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPA.

Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA is an important foraging site for a number of species protected in these SPAs, including little tern in The Dee Estuary SPA and common tern in the Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA.



Common tern in flight. © Chris Gomersall RSPB Images

The breeding colonies for little tern and common tern are protected in these SPAs respectively. As these terns are coming from colonies, they are known as 'central place' foragers, meaning they move out from and return to a central place (their nest) on every foraging trip.



Little tern. © Paul Lacey

The areas utilised by both little tern and common tern extend outside the existing Dee Estuary SPA and Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore SPA boundaries. Therefore, their foraging areas also need to be considered for protection.

Extending existing SPAs

Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl was one of 45 areas of search selected where numbers of waterbirds are potentially present in high numbers outside of the breeding season.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has identified the boundary for little gull based on recent aerial survey data collected from 2001/02 to 2010/11.

In order to provide a good evidence base on which to identify areas at sea that might best afford protection for the larger species of tern

Proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)

(including common tern but not little tern), JNCC conducted a programme of survey work recording the distribution of foraging effort by tracking large tern species at selected colonies around the UK. Additional work combining shore-based and sea-based surveys of the near-shore distribution of little tern was also conducted at a number of UK colonies.

The results from these surveys were used to develop generic models which can predict the distribution of foraging terns around the colonies. These models have been applied to the colonies at The Dee Estuary, Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore, and Ribble and Alt Estuaries SPAs to identify the preferred type of area used for feeding.

Several options have been reviewed to identify how best to afford protection to the foraging areas for these terns. As shown in the map below we are developing recommendations to extend the boundary of the current marine SPA to encompass little gull and extend further inshore to offer protection to the tern species.

Natural England intends to carry out further survey work to help inform boundary decisions in 2015 for common terns in the Mersey estuary. Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and JNCC will also be reviewing existing bird data for the site to identify any additional species which may meet the UK SPA selection guidelines.

The proposed extension to the sites extends out to, and beyond 12 nautical miles at the northwest point of the existing boundary to Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl SPA and also into Welsh waters offshore of the mouth of the Dee Estuary. Therefore, this site specifically requires consistent cross-agency communication with agencies in England and Wales (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Joint Nature Conservation Committee).

What Happens Next?

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

Natural Resources Wales is responsible for recommending potential SPAs in Welsh waters out to 12 nautical miles to the Welsh Government for classification.

Natural England and Natural Resources Wales are providing joint advice to Defra and the Welsh Government respectively.

Once we have developed initial site recommendations for a draft SPA, and held informal discussions with stakeholders, Natural England will submit proposals (approved by our Executive Board) as formal advice to Defra and Natural Resources Wales will submit recommendations (approved by NRW Marine Programme Board) for a draft SPA to Welsh Government.

The informal discussions are intended to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are aware of our proposal and to give them an opportunity to provide information to inform our recommendations.

In early 2016, subject to UK and Welsh Government Ministerial approval, the formal public consultation processes will commence and will last for twelve weeks. This period is an opportunity for stakeholders to formally submit views on the proposals. After formal consultation Natural England and Natural Resources Wales will consider the responses and jointly submit final recommendations to Defra and the Welsh Government respectively. It is Defra's and Welsh Government's intention to have made a decision regarding the classification of the site by December 2016.

How can you get involved?

Natural England will be contacting stakeholders with an interest in the proposals from 13th July 2015 over an initial ten week period.

We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the combining and extending of the existing SPAs, or the addition of further species.

Proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)

- You hold any additional bird data that you would like to share with us to inform the recommendations.
- You have any information about your interests or activities in the area that could help determine if an Impact Assessment is required and inform future management of the site.

Further information

Natural England technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [Establishing Marine Special Protection Areas](#) and [Conservation Objectives for European Sites](#). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN133: *Little gull: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN138: *Common tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN139: *Little tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- European Site Conservation Objectives for Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area Site Code: UK9020294

If you want to know more

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

Katherine Nisbet

Cheshire to Lancashire Coast and Marine team,
Natural England, Hornbeam House,
Electra Way, Crewe, CW1 6GJ
Telephone: 0300 060 1418 or email:
Liverpool.BaySPA@naturalengland.org.uk

Or

Neil Smith

Natural Resources Wales, Ffordd Caer/ Chester Road, Bwcle/ Buckley Sir y Fflint/ Flintshire, CH7 3AJ
Ffôn/Tel: 03000 653884 or email:
marine.n2k@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

To find out more about the work of Natural England, please visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

Copyright

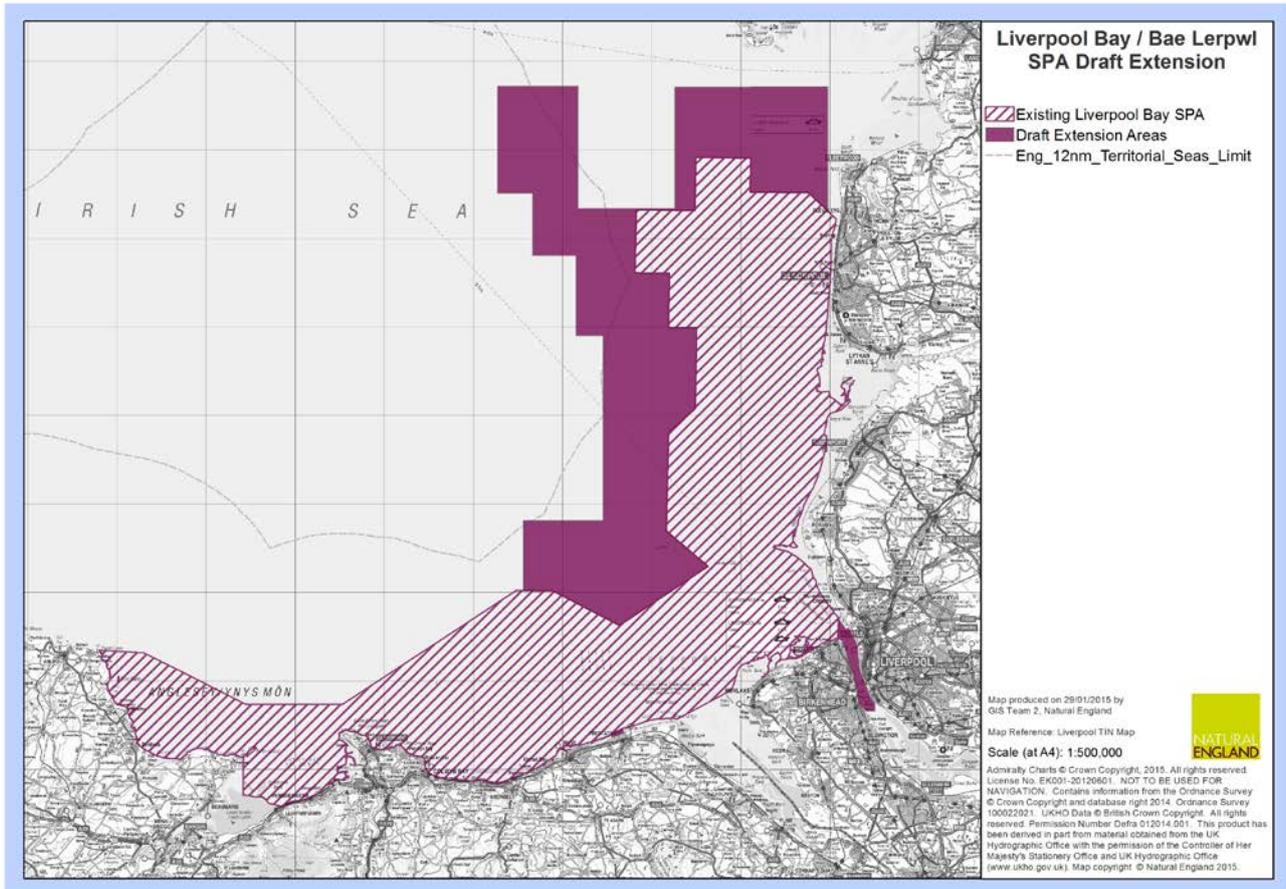
This note is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence v3.0 for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions. For details of the licence visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Please note: Natural England photographs are only available for non-commercial purposes. For information regarding the use of maps or data visit www.gov.uk/how-to-access-natural-englands-maps-and-data.

© Natural England 2015

ISBN 978-1-78354-235-2

Proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)



Map showing the proposals for an extension of Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl Special Protection Area (SPA)