

A review of Poole Harbour Special Protection Area

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about the development of recommendations to extend and review the Poole Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA). Other notes about the process for classifying marine SPAs and about the birds to be protected are available. For details see *Further Information* below.

Background

Terrestrial and intertidal areas down to Mean Low Water (MLW) of Poole Harbour were classified as an SPA under the European Union Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (the Birds Directive) in 1999, for their internationally important overwintering populations of shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, pied avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Icelandic-race black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa islandica* and overwintering assemblage of waterbirds. It was also classified for its internationally important breeding populations of Mediterranean gull *Larus melanocephalus* and common tern *Sterna hirundo*.

The UK Government has an ongoing obligation under the Birds Directive regarding the protection of species listed on Annex 1 of that Directive and regularly occurring migratory species, to “classify in particular the most suitable territories in number and size as Special Protection Areas for the conservation of these species in the geographical sea and land area where this Directive applies”, and as part of this, Natural England has:

- Reviewed information from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) based on survey work carried out in the waters around a number of tern colonies in the UK.
- Assessed recent breeding seabird data within Poole Harbour.



Poole Harbour. © Kitchenhams Photography

- Considered the distribution and abundance of waterbirds in the harbour in relation to the existing SPA boundary.

We are in the process of compiling recommendations for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider:

- Adding two new features to Poole Harbour SPA – breeding Sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and overwintering little egret *Egretta garzetta*; and
- Extending the existing SPA within Poole Harbour to the harbour mouth to protect areas for populations of overwintering waterbirds and breeding seabirds (including common and Sandwich terns and

A review of Poole Harbour Special Protection Area

Mediterranean gull) that use this area of the harbour to forage and roost and that occur in internationally important numbers within the harbour.

We are also reviewing the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the area.

Special Protection Areas

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

- rare or vulnerable bird species (as listed in Annex 1 of the Directive); and
- other regularly occurring migratory bird species.

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

Poole Harbour: a special place for birds

Poole Harbour SPA occupies 2,313 ha of intertidal area of the harbour, including around Brownsea Island. The unusual micro-tidal regime gives the harbour characteristics of a lagoon. The area supports saltmarshes and reed-beds; the north side is largely urbanised while the south and west areas abut Dorset Heaths SPA where valley mire and heath habitats exist. Grazing marsh along the river valleys also contribute to supporting the overwintering waterbirds.

The harbour supports large number of overwintering birds (including internationally important populations of avocet, black-tailed godwit and shelduck). It also supports internationally important populations of breeding common tern and Mediterranean gull. In addition to the aforementioned species, Sandwich tern and little egret now meet qualifying thresholds

and occur in internationally important breeding and overwintering numbers respectively.



Brent geese. © Paul Morton

Currently the SPA boundary extends to MLW, however the waterbirds and seabirds use the waters throughout the harbour to forage and roost.

A possible marine extension

Poole Harbour, both above and below MLW, is used by a large number of seabirds and waterbirds for foraging and roosting throughout the year (including common tern, Sandwich tern, black-tailed godwit and birds that form part of the overwintering waterbird assemblage, such as red-breasted merganser *Mergus serrator* and goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*). Therefore, these areas as well as the areas above MLW need to be considered for protection.

The proposed area requiring protection for foraging common and Sandwich terns breeding in Poole Harbour SPA extends out to sea beyond Poole Harbour and forms part of the area proposed for protection for the same tern species that forage here, but breed further east within the Solent area.

The recommendations developed so far propose an extension to Poole Harbour SPA, which will include the subtidal and intertidal areas not currently encompassed in the existing SPA. The seaward boundary will be at the harbour mouth, abutting the boundary of the proposed Greater Solent and Dorset Coast SPA for foraging terns. This is shown on the map in Appendix 1.

A review of Poole Harbour Special Protection Area

Review of SSSI interests

If Ministerial approval is obtained for consultation on these proposals, the areas would also need to be considered for notification as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England is therefore also reviewing the existing biological data to identify other features of interest that might warrant inclusion in a new, extended or revised SSSI.

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 an extension to the SPA, and have held informal discussions with stakeholders, we will submit proposals (approved by our Executive Board) as formal advice to Defra.

Towards the end of 2015, subject to Ministerial approval, the formal public consultation process will commence, which will last twelve weeks. After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra. It is the intention of Defra to have made a decision regarding the classification of the site by December 2016.

How can you get involved?

We will be contacting a range of local stakeholders who may have an interest in this proposal from 06th November 2014 over an initial twelve week period. A formal public consultation is expected to follow in late 2015, when the full scientific case for the recommendations will be available. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the designation of this new 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 us to

determine the potential socio-economic and environmental impacts of the classification.

Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [Establishing Marine Special Protection Areas](#). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN135: *Sandwich Tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN138: *Common Tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN166: *A possible new marine Special Protection Area for birds within the Solent and along the Dorset Coast*

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:

Maxine Chavner

Marine Adviser, Dorset, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Team, Natural England, Level 10, Renslade House, Bonhay Road, Exeter, EX4 3AW

Telephone: 0300 060 2576 or email:

poole.marinespa@naturalengland.org.uk

To find out more about the work of Natural England, please visit

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

Copyright

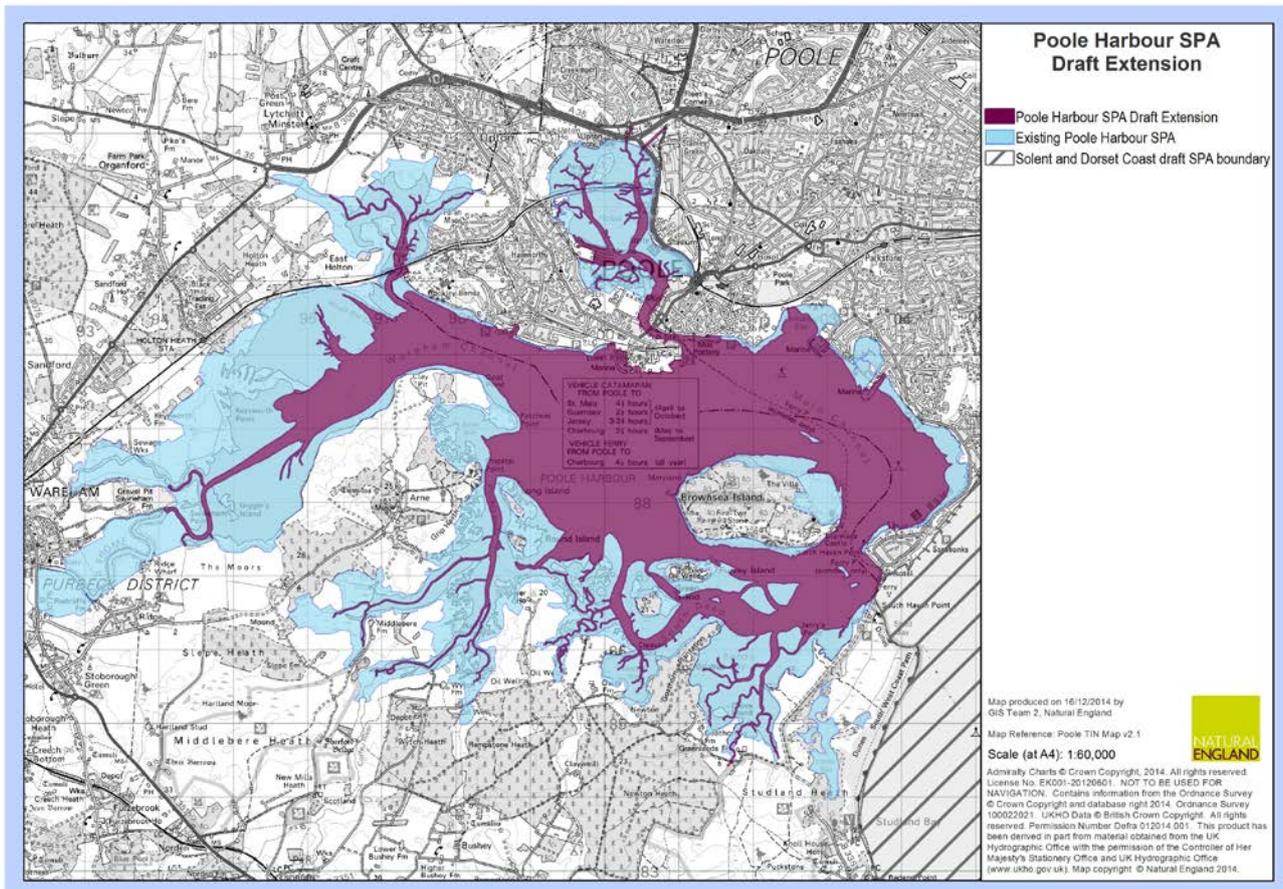
This note is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence - OGLv3.0 for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions. For details of the licence visit

www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright/. If any information such as maps or data cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note.

© Natural England 2015

ISBN 978-1-78354-155-3

A review of Poole Harbour Special Protection Area



Map showing the area under consideration as an extension to the current Poole Harbour SPA boundary and the boundary under consideration for the Greater Solent and Dorset Coast SPA