

A possible extension to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform you about the development of recommendations to extend and add features to the existing Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). It also provides information on a review of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the area. Other TINs about the process for classifying SPAs and about the species to be protected within them are available. For details see *Further Information* below.

Background

The Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA was classified under the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the 'Birds Directive') in 1995 and extended in 2000. The UK Government has ongoing obligations under the Birds Directive requiring it to protect the breeding, moulting and wintering areas and staging posts along migration routes of bird species.

As part of the commitment to improving seabird protection within the SPA network, Natural England is advising the Government on sites that should be considered for classification or extension. We have:

- Reviewed information from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) based on survey work carried out in the waters around a number of seabird colonies.
- Reviewed a range of bird data for the area, including areas of land outside the existing SPA.

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

- Protect common tern *Sterna hirundo* and avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* as new 'qualifying features' within the extended SPA.
- Extend the boundary of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA into the marine environment to protect foraging areas for little tern *Sternula albifrons* and common tern.
- Include additional terrestrial areas within the SPA to protect breeding colonies of common tern and avocet, and non-breeding waterbirds.

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
- other regularly occurring migratory bird species.

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

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The Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast: an important place for birds

The existing Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA is centred on the Tees estuary and the adjacent open coastlines. The SPA includes a wide range of coastal habitats, including sandflats, mudflats, rocky foreshore, saltmarsh, sand-dunes, wet grassland and freshwater lagoons, which co-exist with a wide range of human activities in this busy industrial area.

The species protected by the existing SPA are breeding little tern, passage Sandwich tern *Sterna sandvicensis*, wintering knot *Calidris canutus* and wintering redshank *Tringa totanus*. The site is also classified for an assemblage of over 20,000 non-breeding waterbirds.



Little tern, *Sternula albifrons*. © Paul Lacey

Possible additional features to the existing SPA

Natural England has a responsibility to make recommendations regarding SPAs to Defra. As part of this process we have reviewed bird data for the Teesmouth area and intend to recommend the addition of features to the existing SPA as follows:

- breeding avocet; and
- breeding common tern.

These are both Annex I species which are present in nationally-important populations.

Possible marine extensions for foraging terns

During the breeding season all seabirds, including terns, are 'central place' foragers, meaning they must return to a central place (ie their nest) after each foraging trip. This constraint means that they have a limited foraging range and so have a strong energetic incentive to forage as close to their colony as they can, especially when rearing their chicks. Therefore, the estuarine and marine waters around the existing areas of SPA near where these birds breed and within which they forage, need to be considered for protection.

The possible marine extension for little tern foraging areas has been identified on the basis of shore-based and boat-based surveys of marine waters around the colony at Crimdon Dene. This possible extension reaches 5 km in both directions along the coast from the colony; between Hartlepool Headland and Castle Eden Dene mouth, and extends up to 3.5 km offshore.

For similar reasons, another extension to protect foraging areas for common tern has also been identified. These include the main channel of the River Tees below the barrage, estuary waters, and marine areas between Marske-by-the-Sea in the south and Crimdon Dene in the north, extending up to 6 km offshore.

This proposed foraging extension is based on visual tracking surveys of other common tern colonies in the UK by JNCC. On the basis of this survey work, and the development of statistical models of the tracking data that describe the environmental characteristics of the places where larger tern foraging was most concentrated, the JNCC provided suggestions as to the locations of the sea areas around colonies which might be most suitable for inclusion within SPA boundaries.

Natural England has identified a source of visual tracking data for the Tees, and has requested that JNCC carry out additional modelling using this data so that the draft boundary can be refined if necessary. In addition, Natural England is carrying out additional work over the summer of 2015 to add to our understanding of bird

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movements in the area and to ascertain whether common terns are using more complex and artificial habitat features such as inlets and harbours.

Possible terrestrial extensions to the SPA

Natural England has reviewed a wide range of data for breeding avocet, breeding common tern and wintering waterbirds, primarily Wetland Bird Survey core count data. This has identified a number of areas used by waterbirds outside the current SPA for potential inclusion, including intertidal, wet grassland, reedbed and open water habitats.

Natural England has commissioned wintering waterbird surveys on these sites and the results of these surveys are being looked at to refine the indicative boundaries shown on the map.

Review of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

If the SPA recommendations are approved for consultation by Defra, we would also need to consider the notification as SSSI of the additional terrestrial and intertidal parts of the SPA. In addition, Natural England is therefore 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, including vegetation and invertebrates. We will be contacting relevant landowners and occupiers to request access for these surveys.

What happens next?

Natural England is responsible for recommending potential SPAs, and extensions of current SPAs, in English waters out to 12 nautical miles to Defra for classification.

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

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. Towards the end of 2015, subject to Ministerial approval, the formal public consultation process will commence and will last twelve weeks. This period is the opportunity for stakeholders formally to submit views on the proposals. After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra. It is Defra's intention to have made a decision regarding the classification of the site by December 2016.

How can you get involved?

We are contacting stakeholders with an interest in the proposals from 1st July 2015 over an initial nine week period. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals.
- 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 determine 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: [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*
- TIN139: *Little tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

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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:

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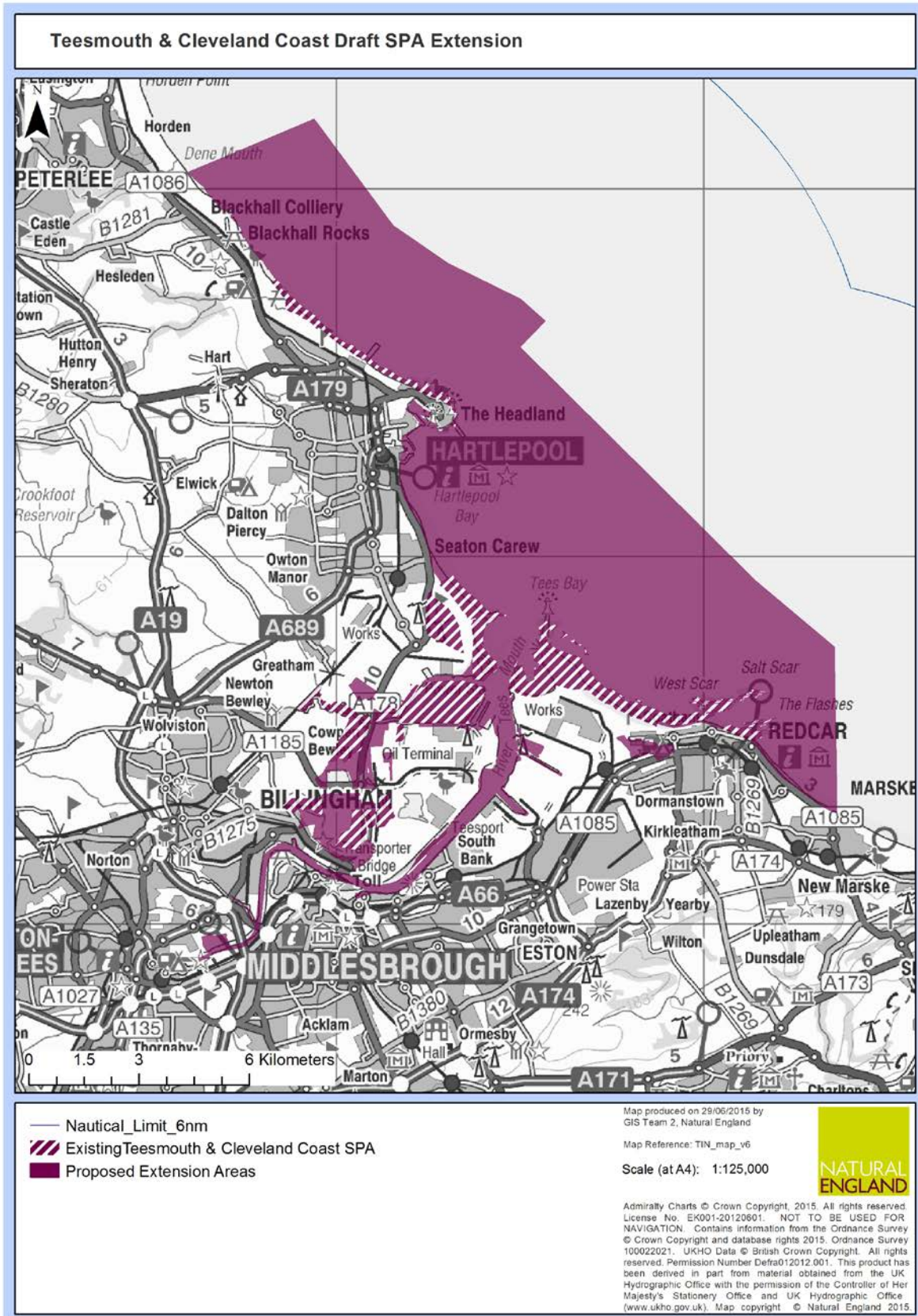
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