

Local Nature Conservation Sites in Shetland: Tranche 1

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report outlines the methodology used to identify and assess potential Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) in Shetland. The report also highlights the background to the LNCS designation and the links with the Shetland Local Development Plan (LDP).
- 1.2 The candidate LNCS (cLNCS) identified through this process are listed and the report provides supporting information for the LDP Supplementary Guidance (SG) on LNCS.

2 Background to the LNCS Designation

- 2.1 Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS) are non-statutory sites, selected at the local level for biodiversity and/or geodiversity features of interest.
- 2.2 LNCS should:
 - Recognise places of substantive importance for biodiversity and/or geodiversity;
 - Contribute to the quality of the local environment;
 - Provide opportunities for local people to find out about, and take pride in their local biodiversity and geodiversity;
 - Be an area where biodiversity and/or geodiversity can be conserved; and
 - Provide opportunities for informal recreation.
- 2.3 There are exceptions to the listed objectives of LNCS. In some circumstances potential LNCS will not be assessed or promoted for education, amenity or recreation due to the sensitive nature of their features of interest. It is in the best interests of these habitats or species not to promote access to the sites.

3 LNCS & the LDP

- 3.1 Changes in National planning policy mean that the Local Protection Areas (LPA) included in the Structure and Local Plans cannot continue in their current form in the emerging LDP. These sites will be replaced by two new designations; Local Landscape Areas (LLA) and LNCS.
- 3.2 This report deals only with LNCS, LLAs are the subject of separate SG; Local Landscape Areas, and supporting report; Shetland Islands Local Landscape Designation Review.
- 3.3 LNCS are distinct from statutory designations; however planning policies recognise the contribution LNCS can make to the conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity. Therefore, planning policy will seek to ensure that development does not adversely affect them.

4 LNCS Policy in the Emerging LDP

- 4.1 The establishment of LNCS system within Shetland has been primarily driven by the development of the Shetland LDP, as described above. The first tranche of LNCS are those that can be offered protection through policy in the LDP. The list will undergo periodic review in the future and further sites may be added.
- 4.2 Until the consultation on Supplementary Guidance (SG) is completed in January 2013 and the SG is adopted as part of the LDP in 2015, the LNCS will be referred to as cLNCS.
- 4.3 The policy protection offered to LNCS is two tiered; firstly, through general LNCS policy within the LDP; and secondly, through individual Site Statements that will act as SG. The LNCS policy in the emerging LDP is as follows:

Planning Policy NH4: Local Designations

Development that affects a Local Nature Conservation Site or Local Landscape Area will only be permitted where:

- It will not adversely affect the integrity of the area or the qualities for which it has been designated; and
- Any such effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits.

5 Site Statements as Supplementary Guidance to the Shetland Local Development Plan

- 5.1 Each cLNCS that goes forward for designation through the LDP will have a Site Statement. The Site Statement includes:
- A map showing the site boundary;
 - Identification of the primary interest of the LNCS;
 - Identification of any secondary interest of the LNCS (where applicable);
 - The primary purpose of the designation;
 - The secondary purpose of the designation (where applicable); and
 - Relevant contacts for further information.
- 5.2 The contacts identified on each site statement should be used in the early stages of planning in order to determine the suitability of the development and its location. Proposals in an LNCS, or that may have an impact upon an LNCS will be referred to the relevant contact for further information. It is therefore recommended that any developer

approach the relevant organisation prior to submitting a proposal to Shetland Islands Council.

6 Call for Sites

- 6.1 As part of the development of the LDP, a call for sites with development potential was made; these were to be submitted by 4th April 2011. This added to the need for a review of the existing Local Protection Areas and at the same time it was requested that the public submit areas for consideration as either an LNCS or as an LLA.

7 Stakeholder Sites

- 7.1 Following the call for sites, key stakeholders were asked to submit sites for consideration as LNCS. Those that submitted sites included:

- Shetland Biological Records Centre;
- Shetland Amenity Trust;
- Scottish Natural Heritage;
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds;
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency;
- Shetland Anglers' Association; and
- Shetland Bird Club

- 7.2 The comprehensive list of geosites already identified by the Geopark Shetland Working Group was also included in the review.

- 7.3 This process yielded greater numbers of proposals than the public call for sites; with over 130 sites submitted for consideration.

8 Key Stages in Site Selection

- 8.1 Guidance published in 2006, "*Guidance on Establishing and Managing Local Nature Conservation Site Systems in Scotland*"¹ identifies key stages in selecting potential sites for consideration as LNCS, including but not limited to:

1. Identify provisional sites, through consultation with local experts and communities;
2. Undertake a review of the existing information for the site and determine if there are any gaps in the available information;
3. The importance of the proposed site is assessed according to locally set criteria. A decision is made as to whether the site is designated as an LNCS. A formal record of the reasons for the selection is made;
4. A Site Statement is prepared; and

¹ SNH, 2006, *Guidance on Establishing and Managing Local Nature Conservation Site Systems in Scotland*, available at www.snh.org.uk/publications/on-line/heritagemanagement/LNCS/default.asp

5. Site Statements are made available for public consultation, and including information on the assessment and reasons for selection.

9 Assessment Criteria

- 9.1 Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)² sets the context for the review of Local Protection Areas. SPP suggests criteria for use when considering whether to designate LNCS, including but not limited to:
 - Species diversity, species or habitat rarity, naturalness and extent of habitat;
 - Contribution to national and local biodiversity objectives;
 - The potential to facilitate enjoyment and understanding of natural heritage; and
 - The value for scientific study and education.
- 9.2 Using the criteria in SPP, a number of local criteria were developed; expanding upon the SPP criteria and reflecting local circumstances. The specific criteria take the form of questions that can be used to interrogate each proposal.
- 9.3 The criteria used to assess the proposals are to a certain extent, but not strictly, hierarchical. In essence, the hierarchy is simple:
 1. Is there any biodiversity or geodiversity interest on site?
 2. Is this interest nationally significant?
 3. Is this interest locally significant?
 4. Does the site have potential for education, amenity and/or recreation?
 5. Is the habitat/species/geology/geomorphology resilient to change?
- 9.4 There are some circumstances where a potential LNCS has not been assessed for its potential education or amenity value. This is because the nature of the interest on site would be detrimentally affected by these activities. On the other hand some potential LNCS may have lower conservation or biodiversity interest but rate very highly for education and amenity or indeed both.
- 9.5 It is also important to note that the number of species present on a potential LNCS may not in itself be significant. Some rare species occur where few others do, and some rare habitats have very few species.

² Scottish Government, 2010, Scottish Planning Policy, the statement of the Scottish Government's policy on nationally important land use planning matters, Scottish Government

Table 1: Biodiversity and Geodiversity Criteria used in the assessment of Proposed Local Nature Conservation Sites in Shetland

Biodiversity Criteria
Is the habitat or species nationally rare?
Is the habitat or species locally rare?
Is the habitat natural/semi-natural?
Of the total habitat found locally, is a significant proportion found onsite?
Are there an average or above average number of different species present compared to the local context?
Would designating the site contribute to national or local biodiversity objectives?
Does the site provide links with other habitats?
Geodiversity Criteria
Is the site or feature nationally important?
Is the site or feature locally important?
Does the site aid our understanding of the geology and/or geomorphology of Shetland?
Would designating the site contribute to local or national objectives?
Amenity & Recreation Criteria
Is the site easily accessed e.g. by public road, Right of Way or Core Path?
Does the site offer opportunity for formal or informal recreation?
Education Criteria
Is the site of exemplar standard to attract visitors; is there significant scientific interest?
Does the site offer scope to feed into formal education and/or research at colleges and universities?
Sensitivity Criteria
Are the significant features of the site resilient to change?

10 Assessment Methodology

- 10.1 The following section describes the steps undertaken in identifying candidate LNCS (cLNCS). The methodology was devised to be able to be used in future reviews of the LNCS list.
- 10.2 The initial stage was to formulate a list of LNCS proposals, this included:
- Existing Local Protection Areas (LPAs);
 - All geosites;
 - Sites submitted in response to a public call for sites in Spring 2011; and
 - Sites submitted by key stakeholders
- 10.3 A desk-based assessment was then undertaken on the site proposals; this high-level assessment was based on 2 criteria:
- Evidence of biodiversity of interest on site; and/or
 - Evidence of geodiversity of interest on site
- 10.4 Sites without any demonstrable interest were discounted at this stage. LPAs that were considered to be of landscape interest were put forward for consideration during the Local Landscape Designation Review.
- 10.5 The sites remaining after this desktop assessment were termed the site long list. These sites were then subject to a much more detailed assessment using the specific criteria in Table 1.
- 10.6 A working group was formed to assist in the assessment and selection of cLNCS. This working group included representatives of:
- Scottish Natural Heritage
 - Scottish Environment Protection Agency
 - Shetland Biological Records Centre
 - Shetland Amenity Trust
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 - Shetland Islands Council (Economic Development)
 - Shetland Islands Council (Development Plans & Heritage)
- 10.7 As part of the detailed assessment of the site long list a series of site visits were undertaken during the spring and summer of 2011. Detailed site visit notes were produced to aid the detailed assessment of sites and included reference to issues such as access and the specific interests of the proposal.

- 10.8 At this stage in the assessment more sites were discounted for not fulfilling the criteria and the remaining sites form the shortlist of candidate LNCS (cLNCS).
- 10.9 Once the cLNCS were selected they were allocated a site number and site statements were prepared as described in paragraph 5.1.
- 10.10 Site Statements form part of the LDP, with the status of Supplementary Guidance. Therefore, they will follow the same path to adoption, with public consultation on their contents.
- 10.11 In order to properly record the assessment of all the submitted sites the findings of the assessment were entered into a matrix. Table 2 is an example of the matrix used.

Table 2 LNCS Assessment Matrix: a sample section of the full matrix for the assessment LNCS proposals

Criteria	Boddam Voe	Levenwick Marshes	Sands of Scousburgh
Biodiversity Criteria			
Is the habitat or species nationally rare?	-	-	++
Is the habitat or species locally rare?	++	+	++
Is the habitat natural/semi-natural?	+	++	0
Of the total habitat found locally, is a significant proportion found onsite?	++	--	+
Are there an average or above average number of different species present compared to the local context?	++	+	n/a
Would designating the site contribute to local or national biodiversity objectives?	++	++	++
Does the site provide links with other habitats?	0	++	n/a
Geodiversity Criteria			
Geodiversity criteria are not relevant for these sites, as they were submitted for their biodiversity interest			
Amenity & Recreation Criteria			
Is the site easily accessed e.g. by public road, Right of Way or Core Path?	++	--	0
Does the site offer opportunity for formal or informal recreation	++	0	++
Education Criteria			

Criteria	Boddam Voe	Levenwick Marshes	Sands of Scousburgh
Is the site of exemplar standard to attract visitors; is there significant scientific interest?	-	++	+
Does the site offer scope to feed into formal education and/or research at colleges and universities?	O	-	?
Sensitivity Criteria			
Is the site resilient to change?	--	--	--
Assessment Scale			
Strong Positive	++		
Positive	+		
Neutral	O		
Negative	-		
Strongly Negative	--		
Unknown	?		
FINAL MATRIX			
Criteria			
Biodiversity Criteria	YES	YES	YES
Geodiversity Criteria	n/a	n/a	n/a
Amenity & Recreation Criteria	YES	NO	YES
Education Criteria	NO	YES	NO
Sensitivity Criteria	YES	YES	YES
cLNCS?	YES	YES	YES

10.12 The outcome of this assessment process is the list of cLNCS, which are included in the emerging LDP. These are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: cLNCS to be included in the Shetland Local Development Plan

Site No.	Site Name
01	Scousburgh Beach
02	Scatness
03	Burn of Laxdale
04	Loch of Voe
05	Boddam Voe
06	Ocraquoy
07	Levenwick Marshes
08	Burn of Northdale
09	Long Ayre & The Wadill
10	Ollaberry Meadow
11	Semblister
12	Baltasound
13	Burn of Mailand

Site No.	Site Name
14	Haroldswick Mires
15	Loch of Bordastubble & Stourhoull
16	Skeo Taing
17	Burn of Setter
18	Voe of Snarraness
19	West Burrafirth
20	Clickimin Loch
21	Loch of Kirkabister
22	Leebitten Intertidal
23	Kettlaness
24	Ladies Hole
25	Stenness
26	Wick of Skaw
27	Belmont Quarry
28	West Sandwick
29	Haggrister Quarry
30	Meal Beach
31	Rerwick Reed Bed
32	Lang Lochs
33	Loch of Benston
34	Burn of Twa Roes
35	Glums Meadow
36	Bousta Cliffs
37	Loch & Mires of Funzie
38	Kergord
39	Voxter Wood
40	Tingwall Meadow
41	Bordigarth
42	Skuron
43	Catfirth
44	Grunna Water
45	Catpund
46	Maggie Kettle's Loch
47	South Bight Rova Head
48	Clibberswick Cross Geo
49	Hill of Clibberswick