

A possible marine extension to Hamford Water Special Protection Area (SPA)

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about the development of recommendations to extend the Hamford Water 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

Hamford Water SPA was designated in 1992 under the European Commission's Conservation of Wild Birds Directive for its:

- Nationally important breeding population of little tern.
- Nationally important wintering population of avocet.
- Internationally or nationally important populations of seven species of migratory waterfowl (dark-bellied brent goose, black-tailed godwit, redshank, ringed plover, shelduck, teal and grey plover).

The current boundary of the SPA comprises the large, shallow estuarine basin of Hamford Water, including tidal creeks and islands, intertidal mud and sand flats, as well as saltmarsh, shingle and areas of coastal grazing marsh.

The UK Government has an ongoing obligation under the Birds Directive regarding the protection of species listed on Annex 1 (including little tern) 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:

- Assessed recent little tern breeding data in the Hamford Water area.
- 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, including the little tern colony at Hamford Water.

Natural England is now compiling a proposal for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider a marine extension of Hamford Water SPA to include important foraging areas for little tern.

Special Protection Areas

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 to address 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.

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SPAs on land in the UK are now well established, but to provide seabirds, such as little 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 December 2015.

Hamford Water: a special place for little terns

A nationally important colony of little terns regularly uses areas of sand and shingle habitat in Hamford Water SPA for nesting in the late spring and summer. Waters adjacent to the nesting colony are used for foraging and these also need to be protected.



Little tern, *Sternula albifrons*. © Paul Lacey

Little terns are frequently observed foraging in the shallower water along the edges and mouths of creeks and channels within the current SPA boundary. Surveys conducted by the JNCC have demonstrated that little terns also use areas out to sea, adjacent to the SPA, for foraging.

A possible marine extension

Hamford Water, both above and below Mean Low Water (MLW), is used by the little terns for foraging and feeding in addition to the already protected breeding areas on land. Therefore these areas need to be considered for protection.

The recommendations developed so far propose that the current SPA boundary should be extended out to sea by approximately 1.8 km. In addition it is recommended that there should be a marine extension to the southerly and northerly alongshore boundary of the SPA.

A map showing the possible marine extension to Hamford Water SPA is provided below. We are undertaking further surveys of foraging little terns in the coastal waters adjacent to Hamford Water SPA (June/July 2015) to confirm the extent of the proposed boundary.

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 Chief Executive) as formal advice to Defra.

Towards the end of 2015 or early 2016, subject to Ministerial approval, the public consultation process will commence, which will last for 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 1st July 2015 over an initial 8 week period.

A formal public consultation is expected to follow in late 2015/early 2016, 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 marine extension of the 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.

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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*
- TIN139: *Little Tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

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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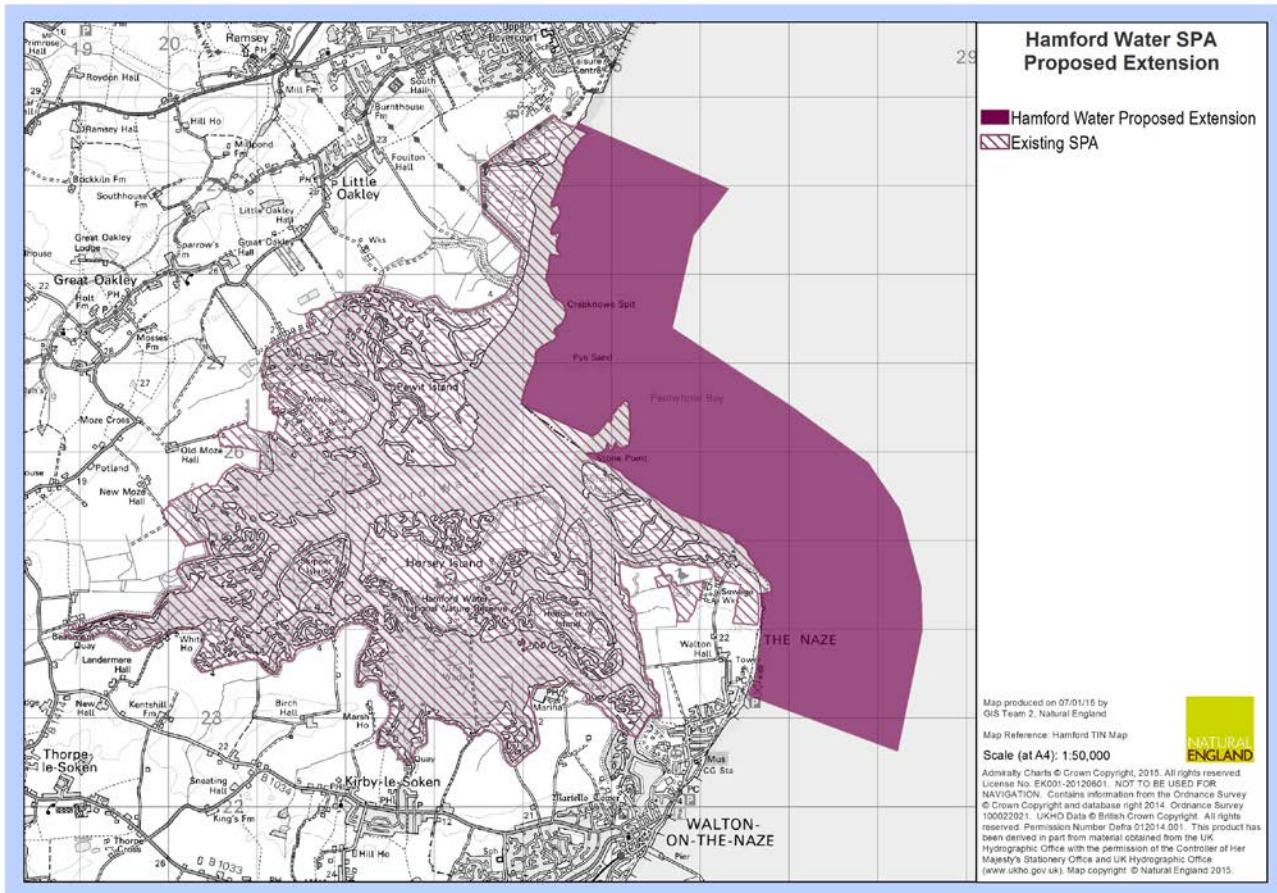
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Map showing the proposals for a possible marine extension to Hamford Water Special Protection Area (SPA)