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**PROPOSED CHANGES TO
GRASSHOLM SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

Advice to the Welsh Government

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

October 2013

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1. Introduction and background

This document contains Natural Resources Wales' advice to the Welsh Government regarding proposals to amend the basis on which the Grassholm Special Protection Area (SPA) is classified under the EC Birds Directive. There are two main elements to this advice, which are based on two separate areas of work being conducted by the UK nature conservation agencies concerning revisions to the UK SPA network:

- (i) To give effect to the findings of the '2001 SPA review' (Stroud *et al.* 2001). The 2001 review indicates changes are required to the species data on the basis of which this site is considered to qualify as an SPA. The 2001 review itself does not recommend any boundary changes.
- (ii) To amend the boundary of the SPA to include adjacent sea areas that are used by birds from within the existing SPA for behaviours that are directly linked to their use of the breeding site.

1.1 The legal framework

The EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EEC¹) provides a legislative framework for the protection, management and control of naturally occurring wild birds of EU Member States.

Article 4 of the Birds Directive requires Member States to classify the 'most suitable territories in number and size' as special protection areas for the conservation of species listed in Annex I to the Directive, and to take similar measures for 'regularly occurring migratory species'. The classification of SPAs is to take into account the species' protection requirements in the geographical sea and land area where the Directive applies. According to case law of the European Court of Justice, the selection of areas as SPAs and the determination of their boundaries should not take account of social or economic considerations, but reflect only ornithological information.

SPAs in Wales are classified by the Welsh Ministers under section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972.² Once classified, SPAs become 'European sites' or 'European marine sites' under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended) and are subject to the provisions of those Regulations and Articles 6(2) to 6(4) of the Habitats and Species Directive.³ According to Welsh Government policy, potential SPAs (that is proposed SPAs that are the subject of consultation prior to a decision on whether to formally classify them) should have the same degree of protection as classified SPAs.

Grassholm SPA was classified in 1986 by the then UK Secretary of State for the Environment.

1.2 The 2001 SPA review

All SPAs in the UK are classified on the basis that they support populations of one or more named species of birds, or an assemblage of birds, that are considered of European importance.

¹ Formerly 79/409/EEC

² This is a general provision empowering ministers to give effect to obligations arising from EU legislation.

³ 92/43/EEC

The 2001 SPA review was carried out by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), English Nature (now Natural England), Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales) and published in 2001 (Stroud *et al.* 2001). Its overall aim was to establish a consistent basis for the identification of the UK's suite of terrestrial SPAs, based on data from the mid 1990's. One of the main outputs of the review was a series of 'site accounts' for 243 individual SPAs in the UK, setting out the basis on which each site is considered to qualify as an SPA under the Birds Directive. These site accounts were derived using the best available ornithological data available at the time, generally covering the period 1991/1992 to 1995/1996, unless there were compelling reasons to use earlier or later data. These were the most current data available at the start of the review. The recommendations in the review are based on application of the 1999 SPA selection guidelines, which are published by JNCC on behalf of the UK statutory conservation agencies and relevant government departments. Please see SPA selection guidelines – The Birds Directive report on the JNCC website.

Most of the sites included in the 2001 review were already classified as SPAs. In many cases the site accounts in the 2001 review identify different species as qualifying interests to those listed on extant SPA citations. In these cases, the intended function of the 2001 SPA review is to provide the basis for reclassification of the sites.

Grassholm SPA was included in the 2001 review. The basis on which Natural Resources Wales considers the site to qualify as an SPA under the Birds Directive has changed since the SPA was originally classified in 1986, and one of the purposes of this document is to recommend reclassification of the SPA to reflect the recommendations in the 2001 review.

1.3 Marine extensions to seabird breeding colony SPAs

Although the UK's series of SPAs suite currently includes appropriate areas of terrestrial habitat for seabird interests, the requirement now is to identify more fully the most suitable territories, taking into account the species' protection requirements at sea, noting that the UK's obligations to identify SPAs applies equally to the UK's land and sea area. The 2001 review did not consider marine SPAs, other than in relation to coastal and estuarine sites designated on the basis of their breeding seabird and waterbird interests.

Accordingly, the JNCC, on behalf of the UK conservation agencies, is considering the requirements of four types of marine SPAs:

1. Marine extensions to existing seabird breeding colonies on the coast
2. Inshore aggregations of non-breeding waterbirds
3. Offshore seabird aggregations
4. Other types of marine SPA

More information about this work can be found on the JNCC website under UK Marine SPAs.

Grassholm SPA is a breeding colony SPA for gannet. The current proposal is therefore in relation to item 1 above only.

2. The extant Grassholm SPA

The SPA was classified in 1986 by the then Secretary of State of the Environment to include the whole of the island of Grassholm and several small islets and rocks, down to the mean low water mark.

The only species listed as a qualifying feature of the existing SPA is the breeding population of gannet *Morus bassanus*, which meets Stage 1.2 of the 1999 SPA selection guidelines (area is used regularly by at least 1% of the relevant biogeographic region population of a regularly occurring migratory species).

The current SPA citation, map and copy of the 'Natura 2000 standard data form'⁴ are given in Appendix 1.

3. Proposed changes arising from the 2001 SPA review

Table 1 below compares the basis of the extant SPA (according to the current citation) with the site account published in the 2001 SPA review. It is proposed that the 2001 SPA review site account be formally adopted as the basis for the SPA classification.

There are no proposed changes to the boundary of the SPA arising from the 2001 SPA review (but see proposed marine extension described in section 4 below).

Table 1 Comparison of the extant Grassholm SPA with the 2001 SPA review site account

Species	Relevant article of Birds Directive ⁵	Extant SPA (citation)	2001 SPA review site account
Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i>	4.2	26,300 pairs, as inferred from 'apparently occupied sites' (AOS), representing 10% of the world population and 17% of the British population	33,000 pairs, representing at least 12.5% of the breeding North Atlantic population

4. Proposed marine extension

4.1 Rationale

Seabirds breeding in colonies on land use marine waters immediately adjacent to the colony for a number of essential activities, such as preening, bathing, displaying, and other maintenance behaviours (Tasker & Leaper 1993, Reid & Webb 2005). Targeted surveys

⁴ This is the standard form in which information on Natura 2000 sites (SPAs and SAC) is provided to the European Commission. The data forms for all UK SPAs and SAC are published on the JNCC website under Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

⁵ Article 4.1: species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. Article 4.2: regularly occurring migratory species and waterbird assemblages.

(McSorley *et al.* 2003) demonstrate significant use and clear ecological dependence by certain seabird species on these waters. Marine extensions to existing seabird breeding colony SPAs would recognise this essential aspect of the birds' ecological requirements, supporting the seabird colonies and ensuring compliance with the requirement in Article 4 of the Birds Directive to classify as SPAs the 'most suitable territories'.

Given that the essential activities mentioned above are not site specific, JNCC has endorsed generic guidance on how far extensions should be made into the marine environment, depending on which breeding species are present (McSorley *et al.* 2003, Reid & Webb 2005, McSorley *et al.* 2008). The guidance includes the following recommendations:

- breeding colony SPAs for which Atlantic puffin, common guillemot, or razorbill are qualifying features be extended by seaward by 1 km;
- breeding colony SPAs for which Northern gannet or Northern fulmar are qualifying features be extended seaward by 2 km;
- breeding colony SPAs for which Manx shearwater is a qualifying feature be extended by at least 4 km, and further where site specific data supports this;
- marine SPA extensions are not appropriate for the following qualifying features: great cormorant, skuas, gulls, black-throated diver, great crested grebe, Slavonian grebe, common scoter, red-necked phalarope; and
- further work is still ongoing to determine if there is a case for any additional SPA protection for tern species, European shag and red-throated diver.

4.2 The proposed marine extension

The extension that is being proposed is limited to areas on which the breeding gannet population of Grassholm is ecologically dependent, in this case for 'active behaviours' such as preening, bathing and displaying.

The proposed marine extension area does not necessarily need to include numbers of birds that meet the SPA selection thresholds, as it is an extension from the existing SPA on land, which already hosts qualifying numbers of gannet (McSorley *et al.*, 2003).

It is therefore proposed that Grassholm SPA be extended by a 2km radius to better represent a most suitable territory for gannet, and that this extension be measured from the existing SPA seaward boundary (namely mean low water mark). It is not proposed to include any additional land areas within the SPA.

Figure 1 shows the extent of the interest feature as defined by a 2km radius. It also shows a proposed boundary for the SPA to encompass that 2km radius. When defining boundaries for marine sites it is usually necessary to strike a balance between following the extent of the interest feature, and keeping the boundary relatively simple (without too many 'turning points'). The proposed seaward boundary in Figure 1 is essentially an octagon which has been determined using previously agreed principles, i.e. that it should be as simple as possible, and be placed along lines of latitude or longitude or as diagonal lines between two points where this provides a more easily identified or more practical

boundary (Johnston *et al.* 2004). A larger scale definitive map will be prepared should the site go forward for consultation.

Table 2 provides the proposed coordinates of the recommended seaward boundary extensions.

Figure 1. Map of the Grassholm SPA showing the recommended extent of the marine component of the interest feature, and a possible SPA boundary.

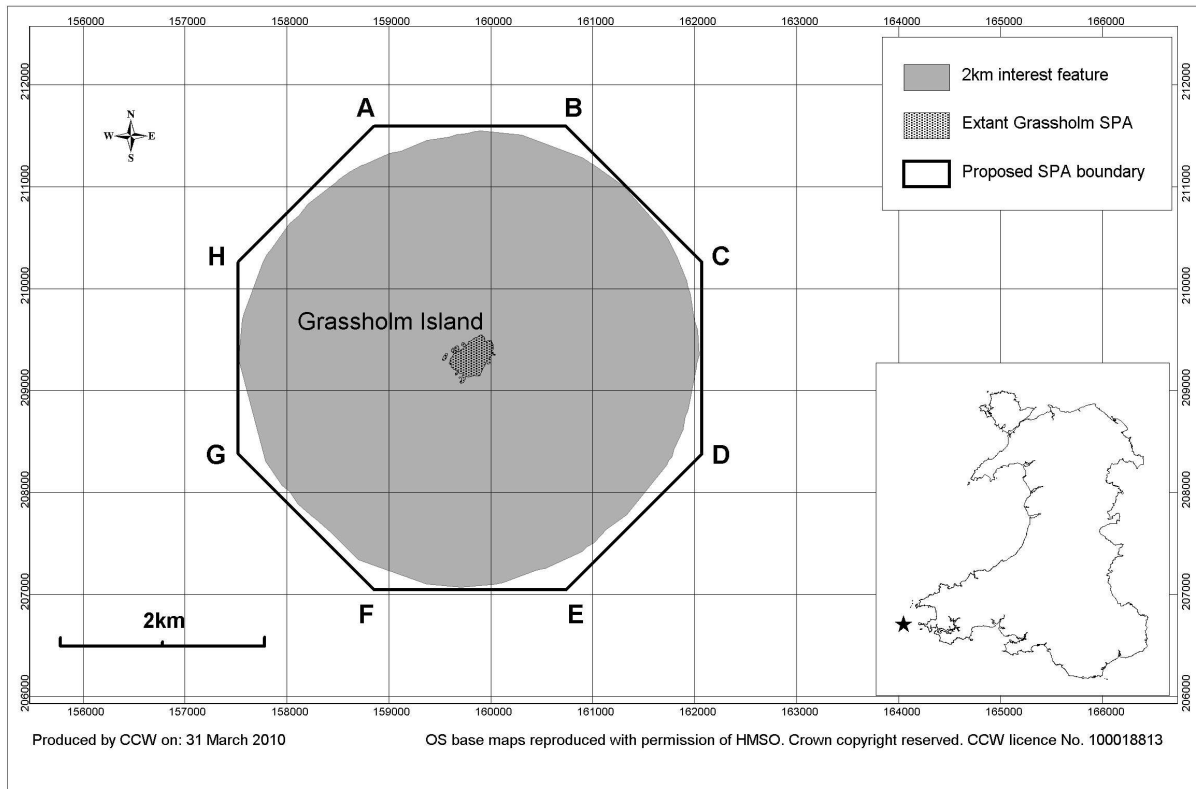


Table 2. Coordinates of proposed new boundary for the Grassholm SPA (given in degrees, minutes and decimal minutes (to three decimal places) of latitude and longitude.

Point	Longitude	Latitude
A	5° 29' 42.724"	51° 45' 03.510"
B	5° 28' 4.619"	51° 45' 6.419"
C	5° 26' 51.986"	51° 44' 25.397"
D	5° 26' 47.350"	51° 43' 24.520"
E	5° 27' 53.342"	51° 42' 39.456"
F	5° 29' 31.398"	51° 42' 36.549"
G	5° 30' 43.980"	51° 43' 17.545"
H	5° 30' 48.703"	51° 44' 18.396"

The seabed, water column and sea surface are included in the proposed extension.

The area of the existing SPA is 10.77 ha and the area of the proposed marine extension is 1733.65 ha, giving a total area for the extended SPA of 1744.42 ha. This area figure for the existing site is taken from the original, hand drawn, legal map and may change slightly following capture onto an up-to-date digital base map. This does not mean the existing site boundary will have changed on the ground in any way and it will continue to follow the original features, although where it follows a water mark, e.g. Mean Low Water Mark, this is liable to change due to natural coastal processes. The area figure of the proposed extension is calculated by taking the area of the whole new SPA minus the area of the existing SPA. As the area of existing SPA site may change slightly due to reasons outlined above, the area figure of the proposed extension may also change slightly.

All of the proposed marine extension lies within the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated by the National Assembly for Wales in December 2004 under the 1992 EC Habitats and Species Directive (92/43/EEC).

5. References

JOHNSTON, C.M., TURNBULL, C.G., REID, J.B. & WEBB, A. 2004. **Marine Natura 2000: Update on Progress in Marine Natura. Paper to the Joint Committee Meeting**, March 2004.

MCSORLEY, C.A., DEAN, B.J., WEBB, A. & REID, J.B. 2003. **Seabird use of waters adjacent to colonies: Implications for seaward extensions to existing seabird breeding colony SPAs**. JNCC Report, No. 329

MCSORLEY, C.A., WILSON L.J., DUNN, T.E., GRAY, C., DEAN, B.J., WEBB, A. & REID, J. B. 2008. **Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* evening rafting behaviour around colonies on Skomer, Rum and Bardsey: its spatial extent and implications for recommending seaward boundary extensions to existing colony Special Protection Areas in the UK.** JNCC Report No. 406.

REID, J.B. AND WEBB, A. 2005. **Marine Natura 2000 – Recommendations for the extension of existing seabird (colony) Special Protection Areas into the marine environment.** JNCC Committee paper 05 P14B.

STROUD, D.A., CHAMBERS, D., COOK, S., BUXTON, N., FRASER, B., CLEMENT, P., LEWIS, I., MCLEAN, I., BAKER, H. & WHITEHEAD, S. 2001. **The UK SPA network: its scope and content.** JNCC, Peterborough.

Volume 1: Rationale for the selection of sites. 90 pp.

Volume 2: Species accounts. 438 pp.

Volume 3: Site accounts. 392 pp.

TASKER, M.L. & LEAPER, G.M. 1993. **Protecting marine birds in the United Kingdom: A review of the United Kingdom's international commitments, and recommendations for action.** Unpubl. JNCC Report, Peterborough.

Appendix 1: Citation, map and Natura 2000 standard data form for extant Grassholm SPA

Citation

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds: Special Protection Area

GRASSHOLM ISLAND(DYFED)

Grassholm is a 9 ha. basalt island, lying about 18km off the south-west Wales coast. It is of outstanding interest for its foreshore and sub-littoral habitats because they are amongst the most wave- and tide-exposed in Britain. From January to October Grassholm Island supports the second largest breeding population of the north Atlantic gannet *Morus bassanus* in the world.

The boundary of the Grassholm Island SPA are coincident with the existing Grassholm Island SSSI.

Grassholm qualifies under Article 4.2 by regularly supporting internationally important numbers of breeding gannet. In 1994 it held 26,300 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS). This represents 10% of the world population and 17% of the British population of gannet. The population has been growing steadily since 1969 when 16,128 AOS were estimated which parallels the general trend in both the world and British population.

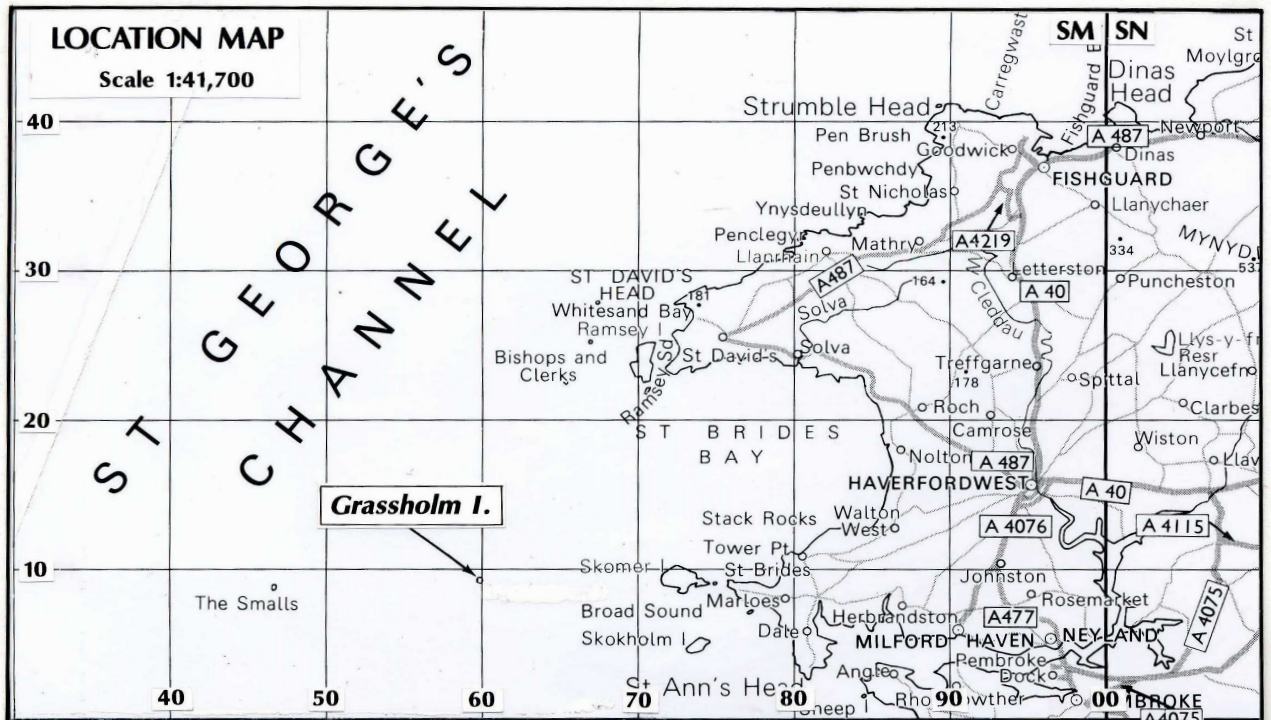
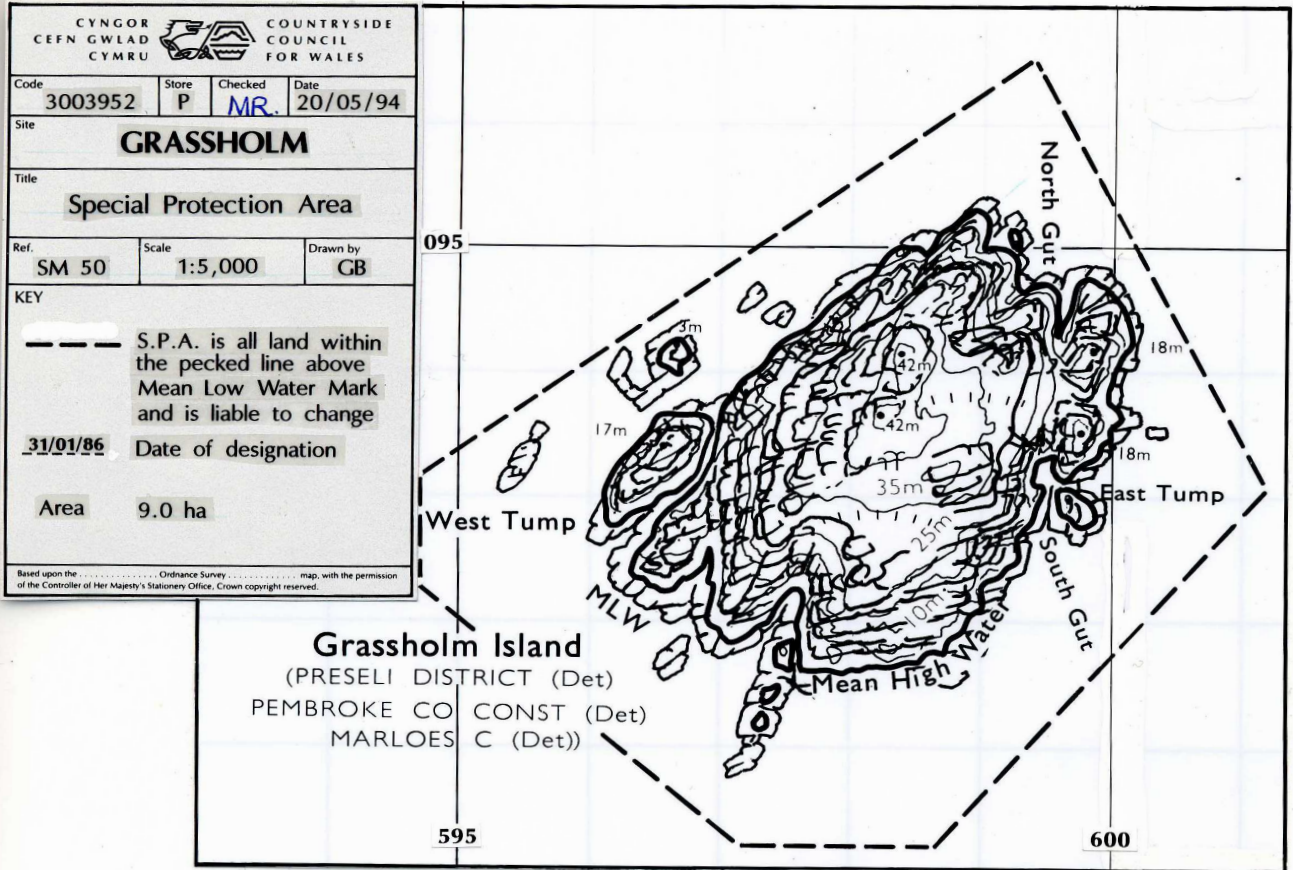
Other breeding bird species to which the site is notable include small colonies of kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, guillemot *Uria aalge* and smaller numbers of lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus*, great black-backed gull *L. marinus*, shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* and razorbill *Alca torda*. Grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* haul out but do not breed.

SPA Citation

SJP

November 1995

Appendix 1: Map



NATURA 2000

STANDARD DATA FORM

FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPA)
FOR SITES ELIGIBLE FOR IDENTIFICATION AS SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE (SCI)
AND
FOR SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

1. Site identification:

1.1 Type **1.2 Site code**

1.3 Compilation date **1.4 Update**

1.5 Relationship with other Natura 2000 sites

U	K	0	0	1	3	1	1	6
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1.6 Respondent(s)

1.7 Site name

1.8 Site indication and designation classification dates

date site proposed as eligible as SCI	
date confirmed as SCI	
date site classified as SPA	198601
date site designated as SAC	

2. Site location:

2.1 Site centre location

longitude	latitude
05 28 43 W	51 43 50 N

2.2 Site area (ha) **2.3 Site length (km)**

2.5 Administrative region

NUTS code	Region name	% cover
UK912	Dyfed	100.00%

2.6 Biogeographic region

Alpine
 Atlantic
 Boreal
 Continental
 Macaronesia
 Mediterranean

3. Ecological information:

3.1 Annex I habitats

Habitat types present on the site and the site assessment for them:

Annex I habitat	% cover	Representativity	Relative surface	Conservation status	Global assessment

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3.2 Annex I birds and regularly occurring migratory birds not listed on Annex I

Code	Species name	Population			Site assessment				
		Resident	Migratory		Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global	
			Breed	Winter					Stage
A016	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		33000 P			B		C	

4. Site description:

4.1 General site character

Habitat classes	% cover
Marine areas. Sea inlets	
Tidal rivers. Estuaries. Mud flats. Sand flats. Lagoons (including saltwork basins)	
Salt marshes. Salt pastures. Salt steppes	
Coastal sand dunes. Sand beaches. Machair	
Shingle. Sea cliffs. Islets	100.0
Inland water bodies (standing water, running water)	
Bogs. Marshes. Water fringed vegetation. Fens	
Heath. Scrub. Maquis and garrigue. Phygrana	
Dry grassland. Steppes	
Humid grassland. Mesophile grassland	
Alpine and sub-alpine grassland	
Improved grassland	
Other arable land	
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland	
Coniferous woodland	
Mixed woodland	
Non-forest areas cultivated with woody plants (including orchards, groves, vineyards, dehesas)	
Inland rocks. Scree. Sands. Permanent snow and ice	
Other land (including towns, villages, roads, waste places, mines, industrial sites)	
Total habitat cover	100%

4.1 Other site characteristics

<p>Soil & geology: Basalt, Igneous, Nutrient-rich</p> <p>Geomorphology & landscape: Coastal, Crags/ledges, Island</p>

4.2 Quality and importance

<p>ARTICLE 4.2 QUALIFICATION (79/409/EEC)</p> <p>During the breeding season the area regularly supports:</p>
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<i>Morus bassanus</i>	12.5% of the breeding population Count as at 1994/5
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4.3 Vulnerability

The gannet population on this island is vulnerable to pollution at sea, either directly by contact or indirectly via food sources. Certain changes in fishing methods if introduced into this area will also affect the birds' food source and cause direct mortality.

5. Site protection status and relation with CORINE biotopes:

5.1 Designation types at national and regional level

Code	% cover
UK01 (NNR)	98.1
UK04 (SSSI/ASSI)	100.0

Appendix 2: Supplementary information

AREA FIGURES ON MAPS

For the reasons outlined below, the area figure on the public consultation maps produced by Natural Resources Wales showing the proposed marine extension to the SPA site, will show a slightly different area figure for the existing site compared to the existing SPA hand drawn map.

- In the mid 1980's, the original SPA maps were hand drawn on small scale base maps and were captured digitally at a later date when GIS technology was adopted by UK conservation agencies. The data have subsequently undergone a Positional Accuracy Improvement Update by Ordnance Survey (OS), a programme carried out across the UK, in addition to being transposed from OS Landline, the largest available mapping scale available at the time, to OS Master Map. This series of changes has introduced slight changes to the area figure.
- In line with standard practice, the maps of potential site extensions in proposals submitted to Welsh Government are provided at a small scale and area figures quoted are approximate only. Following approval to proceed to public consultation phase, Natural Resources Wales prepares definitive maps, captured at the largest scale of mapping available. The minor difference in site area figures is due to the more accurate area figure calculation produced by mapping at a larger scale.
- In 2012, it was discovered that the existing digital data for the existing Grassholm SPA in the was incorrectly captured to Lowest Astronomical Tide (LAT) rather than to Mean Low Water (MLWM). This has now been corrected and updated in the main dataset. However the area of both the existing site and the proposed extension have changed slightly as the extension was calculated by taking the area of proposed extension polygon and subtracting the area of the existing site.