

**Appendix 15.2.2**

**SLVIA Coastal Character Areas**

## **Appendix 15.2.1 Coastal Character Areas**

### **CCA1: West Mainland**

Extending from Birsay Bay to Neblonga, this CCA is predominantly west facing and comprises an indented rocky/cliff coastline with a number of small bays at Mar Wick, Skaill and Billia Croo interspersed with a series of headlands and geos. Settlement is sparse with a scattering of dwellings at Marwick, Northdyke, Skaill, Yesnabay and Outertown. Historic features of note include the Kitchener Memorial, Skara Brae archaeological site, and Skaill House.

### **CCA2: Neblonga to Ness**

This south south west facing stretch of coastline is characterised by a rocky shoreline with occasional sand deposits and a hinterland of grazings. Settlement is generally set back from the coast at Outertown although there are buildings nearer the shore at Breckness, Brinnigar and the Citadel. The Skerry of Ness lighthouse lies at the eastern most extremity of this CCA.

### **CCA3: Stromness/Clestrian Sound**

The Stromness - Clestrain Sound CCA is generally south and south west facing and extends from Skerry of Ness to Houton Head in the south east, including Inner and Outer Holm, Bay of Navershaw, and Bay of Ireland. The greater part of the area is characterised by a low lying, gently indented coastline which extends around Bay of Ireland before stretching out along Clestrain Sound. Wide bands of generally rocky areas characterise the intertidal zone and provide a visual and physical link with Outer and Inner Holm and the mainland at low states of the tide. The coast is backed by simple, sweeping agricultural land and rough pasture that rises swiftly behind Stromness in the west. The concentration of activity and development at Stromness and the harbour is visible from the majority of the area. Large farmsteads and scattered dwellings appear well spaced and regular within the open hinterland overlooking the coast.

### **CCA4: Orphir**

The Orphir coastal character area extends from Houton Point in the west to Waulkmill Bay in the east. The area is largely influenced by its south facing aspect, open to Scapa Flow, and the effect sunlight has on seaward views, particularly in winter when the sun is low. The area is characterised by a series of south facing, shallow bays ranging from almost enclosed to wide and open, backed by low sandy shores and moderately high cliffs. Fairly wide stretches of shore characterise the intertidal zone. Holm of Houton is physically and visually linked to the mainland at low states of the tide. Settlement is concentrated along the main A964, typically set back from the coastline, from which a number of single track roads leading to the coast serve small clustered dwellings and farmsteads.

### **CCA5: North East Hoy**

The North East Hoy coastal character area extends from Out Taings in the north to Quoyness and takes in Bay of Creekland and Bay of Quoys. The area is characterised by rugged northeast facing and largely undeveloped, inaccessible cliffscapes which flank sheltered, settled bays where wide expanses of sand and shingle are revealed at low tide. The bays and immediate coastline are readily accessible from the road and from the sea. The area as a whole is overlooked by the rugged hills of Hoy to the south and sheltered by Graemsay and Mainland to the north.

#### CCA6: Graemsay

The island of Graemsay is characterised by a domed, 'whaleback' profile where smooth, improved grasslands sweep over gentle, convex slopes to a low lying, rocky shore broken only by sand and shingle bays, the pier and lighthouses. Settlement is sparse giving a sense of quiet isolation. The impressive backdrop of Hoy, when viewed from the north, provides stark contrast behind the unassuming island of Graemsay.

#### CCA7: Central East Hoy

The Central East Hoy coastal character area extends from Quoyness in the north to Green Head in the south and takes in The Bring and Chalmers Hope. The area is characterised by rugged northeast facing and largely undeveloped, inaccessible cliffscapes. The area as a whole is overlooked by the rugged hills of Hoy and is visible from both the Graemsay and Houton Ferries.

#### CCA8: Cava, Rysa Little and Fara

This area is characterised by a collection of three small, tear-drop shaped, isolated islands all of which are low lying with a domed profile and a blanket mosaic of moorland, rough grassland and pasture. Above the rocky coastline of low cliffs and small, shingle bays abandoned houses stand out as prominent features often silhouetted on the skyline or highlighted against the simple backdrop of moorland. Low cliffs, rock platforms and shingle shores characterise the relatively narrow intertidal zone.

#### CCA9: South East Hoy

Extending from Green Head to Crock Ness, this east facing coastal character area offers a varied and indented coastline, backed by moorland hills, with sheltered bays and a relatively intensely developed hinterland with a network of roads, tracks, dwellings, and ruins, and including several of piers and associated infrastructure. The intertidal zone is relatively wide, especially within the shallow bays, but is punctuated by the hard edge of Lyness harbour. Existing fin fish farms form visual elements within the water and extend the sense of industry from land to sea. This section of the coast is sheltered by the islands of Cava, Rysa Little, Fara, and Flotta, with occasional framed glimpses beyond to more open waters and the distant mainland.

#### CCA10: Flotta

The island of Flotta is characterised by low settled pasture, interspersed by rough grassland and scattered dwellings. Low moorland and rough grassland border the coast to the west and to the north along Golta. Moorland and rough grassland also flank cliff tops to the east. The coastline is largely stepped with a rocky shoreline and stretches of sand and shingle at low tide. Cliffs and rock platforms on the exposed south east corner shelter shingle bays to the north and west. Man made influences such as the oil terminal, gas flare and the wind turbine influence the character of this area and form key visual features within the simple landscape and associated coastline. Views of adjacent shores to the east and west provide a degree of shelter, however the open exposure, heightened at Tween the Wicks and Stanger Head, emphasises the influence of the sea.

#### CCA11: Switha

Switha forms a distinctive small island, isolated within strong tidal waters. It is simple in profile with a uniform cover of pasture and rough grassland. Pronounced cliffs with distinctive tilted strata form

a prominent feature at The Ool, while the majority of the coastline comprises rock platforms and shingle bays. The influence of the sea is strong in relation the scale of the island and is heightened by open sea/sky horizons to the south.

#### CCA12: Swona

Swona is approximately 2 km long by about 0.8km wide, with a maximum height of approximately 41 metres (135ft). Situated in the tidal stream of the Pentland Firth, a tidal race is present at both the north and south ends of the island, becoming briefly minimal at the turn of the tide. Between the races is a calm eddy which extends down-tide as the tide strengthens. It is made up of Old Red Sandstone with cliffs on the east coast

#### CCA13: North Bay/Longhope

The North Bay - Long Hope CCA includes North Bay and Long Hope and extends southeast to Cantick Head including Kirk Hope. The majority of this area is characterised by an enclosed area of coastline, with an outer sea loch and a shallower inner loch, both of which have sections of wide bands of rocky, shingle and sandy shore within the intertidal zone. The coast is readily accessible by road with dispersed linear development including a concentration of settlement at the boundary between the outer and inner lochs. The coastline is largely rocky, but broken in places by shingle shores and sandy bays.

#### CCA14: Brims and South Walls

This CCA extends from Tor Ness to Cantick Head. It comprises the rocky, outcropping coast at Brims and the southern and eastern coast of South Walls where there are frequent headlands, gloups, and geos. The coastline also includes small sandy bays at Sheep Skerry and Aith Hope.

#### CCA15: West Hoy

This CCA extends from Rackwick Bay Tor Ness. The undulating coastline is characterised by high cliffs, caves, heads and geos with occasional waterfalls.. The coast faces south west and overlooks the Pentland Firth.

#### CCA 16: Rackwick Bay

A broad bay open to the south-west, lying at the mouth of an enclosed glen through which access is gained from the north east side of Hoy. The bay is around 1km in length and is towered over by the flanking hills of Moor Fea (304m AOD) and Mel Fea (323m AOD). The picturesque settlement consists of dispersed stone cottages and bothies, with some abandoned ruins, nestling behind a wide, curved sandy beach backed by a prominent shingle ridge.

#### CCA17: North West Hoy

The North West Hoy CCA extends from Rackwick Bay northwards to Out Taings and includes St John's Head (378m), one of the highest vertical sea-cliffs in Britain. The world-renowned sea stack of the Old Man of Hoy lies some 2km to the south of the headland. Inland the land rises steeply to the prominent summit of Cuilags (433m).

#### CCA18: Loch Eriboll

The enclosed sea loch of Loch Eriboll is a glacially-deepened fjord extending around 14km inland from the distinctive white quartzite cliffs of Whiten Head. The shorelines are diverse in character, including tidal flats and sandy or shingle beaches, high cliffs, rocky headlands, and several small islands. There are dramatic framed views inland to the lone mountains of Sutherland, contrasting with those northward to the open sea.

#### CCA19: Loch Eriboll to Kyle of Tongue

This rugged north-facing stretch of coastline is characterised by towering cliffs extending eastwards from Whiten Head, rising to over 250m, interspersed with geos and coves. Inland lies the uninhabited moorland of A' Mhoine. At the eastern margin of the unit the character changes to one of small enclosed bays backed by crofting townships linked by a minor road from Skinnet to Achaninver.

#### CCA20: Kyle of Tongue

This sea loch is around 11km in length overall and is split by a causeway carrying the main A838 coastal road, separating the outer section, Tongue Bay, from the more landlocked kyle. The inner kyle is shallow, with extensive sand bars in the central parts. The Rabbit Islands are distinctive landmarks at the mouth of the bay, overlooked by remote cliffs to the east. The shores at the southern end are wooded while the northern portion is overlooked by settlement at Tongue and Coldbackie.

#### CCA21: Kyle of Tongue to Farr Point

This is a diverse section of coastline characterised by a rugged rocky section in the west, with a number of tiny bays and offshore islands, including Eilean nan Ron and Coomb Island. In the east, Torrisdale Bay is a fine enclosed bay with a wide beach and dune system at the mouth of Strath Naver. Farr Bay, further east is separated from the main bay by the rocky point of Creag Ruadh. The settlement of Bettyhill is sited inland of the headland, overlooking both bays.

#### CCA22: Farr Point to Sandside Bay

A deeply incised rocky coastline punctuated by headlands, promontories, points and small sandy coves. Cliffs rise to over 100m in places and there are a number of offshore skerries and islands. Minor roads serve crofting townships including Farr, Kirtomy, Armadale, Strathy, Portskerra and Melvich while the intervening stretches of coast are relatively remote and largely uninhabited.

#### CCA23: Sandside Bay to Holburn Head

A north west and north facing rocky shoreline with cliffs up to 70m in height. The western portion, overlooked by Dounreay, is lower and punctuated by geos. The eastern portion is interspersed with small bays, with some skerries and caves.

#### CCA24: Holburn Head to Dunnet Bay

This stretch of coastline is north and north east facing with views towards Dunnet Head. Thurso and Scrabster Harbour lie within Thurso Bay, enclosed and protected to a degree by the flanking

headlands of Holburn Head and Clardon Head. The easterly stretch is a low lying indented coastline with inlets at Clardon Haven and Murkle Bay.

#### CCA25: Dunnet Bay

Dunnet Bay is dominated by a sweeping arc of white sandy beach backed by an impressive dune system. The bay is over 2 miles wide and is relatively sheltered from the east and north. Castletown at the southern end of the dune system was formerly a thriving harbour exporting Caithness slabs.

#### CCA26: Dunnet Head

Dunnet Head forms the most northerly point on mainland Britain, characterised by its prominent headland, striking vertical cliffs which rise to 90m, and an inland expanse of isolated moorland. The peninsula forms a significant projection into the turbulent waters of the Pentland Firth, so that in rough weather the exposure at its northern tip can be comparable to being at sea.

#### CCA27: Dunnet Head to St John's Point

This is open east-west trending stretch of coastline predominantly characterised by low cliffs or rough vegetated slopes, with a rocky wave-cut platform below. The inland landscape is diverse, with settled crofts and intensive agriculture, and the prominent designed landscape at Castle of Mey.

#### CCA 28: St John's Point to Gills Bay

A short section of generally east facing coastline facing the island of Stroma. Gills Bay pier and ferry terminal form the focal feature at its southern end. The majority of the coastal edge is formed by low cliffs typically around 20m high, with rocky wave-cut platform below. The northern section near St John's Point is more rugged with deeply indented geos, stacks, and higher cliffs up to 30m high. An area of moorland dominates the hinterland to the west.

#### CCA29: Gills Bay to Duncansby Head

Linear, generally east-west trending coastline with subsidiary headlands at Ness of Quoys, Ness of Huna, and Ness of Duncansby, which enclose shallow embayments. The majority of coastal edge is formed by low cliffs typically around 10m high, with rocky wave-cut platform below and occasional stretches of sandy beach east of John O'Groats

#### CCA30: Duncansby Head

Forming the most north-easterly point on mainland Britain, the headland is notable for its spectacular cliff scenery and its commanding views. Huge populations of seabirds use the cliffs as a breeding ground in spring providing a distinctive experience of bird noise and activity.

#### CCA31: Duncansby Head to Sinclair's Bay

This coastline is east facing and predominantly rocky, interrupted by two sandy bays at Freswick and Sinclair's Bay. Settlement is concentrated around the two bays and along minor roads perpendicular to the A99 which runs close to, and parallel with, the coast. The rocky section of coast is characterised by cliffs and caves, headlands and geos, and small skerries.

#### CCA 32: Sinclair's Bay

A large open east-facing bay with a wide sandy beach backed by an extensive dune system. The hinterland is dominated by intensive farmland, and an extensive wetland system and inland loch drain to the bay through a wide stream which bisects the beach. Ackergill Tower forms a focal point in the central part of bay, and the dune system has a fine golf links, home to Wick Golf Club.

#### CCA 33: Sinclair's Bay to Noss Head

This short, rocky stretch of coastline includes the prominent landmarks of Castle Sinclair and Noss Head lighthouse, with easy access via minor roads and tracks.

#### CCA 34: Stroma

The island of Stroma is located in the Pentland Firth, separated from the mainland by the strong tidal streams of the Inner Sound. Once a densely-settled agricultural community, clustered within the townships of Nethertown and Uppertown, it was finally abandoned in the late 1950s and 60s. The empty and now partly ruined farmhouses are prominent in many views of the island. The distinctive coastline of low cliffs, clearly seen from the Gills Bay ferry, is formed of the horizontally-bedded Rousay flags, part of the middle Old Red Sandstone series of rocks. The grassland interior is still grazed by sheep and cattle.