



P360 Cantick Head

Bird Survey Report



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1 Introduction

SSER is in the process of identifying suitable locations for the onshore supporting infrastructure required for their proposed tidal energy array at their 'Cantick Head' site off the south coast of Hoy and South Walls, Orkney.

This document summarises the methods and findings of bird surveys carried out during the 2012 breeding season within a survey area that encompassed the search areas for locating the substation, the cable route link to the cable landfall and any offshore coastal waters that could potentially be affected by any landfall development.

The findings of these bird surveys will help to inform the site selection process to identify the preferred locations for the onshore supporting infrastructure. These surveys will also inform the Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed development.

2 Methodology

2.1 Survey areas

Two survey areas were established to cover five potential locations for a substation, as well as any areas providing potential cable routes between substation locations and potential landfall sites. Two survey areas were selected; one covering three potential locations on South Hoy the other covering two potential locations on South Walls (Figure 5.1).

The survey areas covered each of the potential locations for a substation and landfall plus an additional surrounding buffer extending out to a distance of approximately 500m.

2.2 Survey Methods

All surveys were carried out by suitably qualified and experienced surveyors.

2.2.1 Breeding wader surveys

Breeding wader surveys were carried out in accordance with the O'Brien & Smith (1992) method fully described in Gilbert *et al.* (1998)¹. In addition to breeding waders, records were made of any other breeding species observed within the survey area such as gull and tern colonies and breeding passerines. This method almost certainly underestimates the number of breeding passerines, particularly meadow pipit but should provide indicative data on their distribution within the area.

Three surveys were undertaken at each of the two sites. The South Hoy survey area was visited on 24th May, 11th June and 4th July while the South Walls survey area was covered on 25th and 28th May², 12th June and 5th July. These timings are slightly later than standard however, this takes into account the geographical variation in breeding times for northern populations. At least two weeks were left between visits.

All surveys were undertaken in suitable weather with wind conditions less than Beaufort force 3.

¹ Gilbert, G., Gibbons, D.W. and Evans, J. (1998) Bird Monitoring Methods: A Manual of Techniques for key UK species. RSPB

² A second visit was necessary to complete the survey as only part of the survey area could be surveyed on the 25th due to fog

2.2.2 Shoreline surveys

Shoreline surveys were carried out in accordance with the methods developed for the Non-estuarine Coastal Waterfowl Survey (NEWS) as detailed in Gilbert *et al.* (1998). Shoreline surveys were carried out to establish which species utilise the shoreline habitat and the numbers present. Each section of coastline was walked and all sightings of birds were recorded including the locations of breeding birds and simple count data on the numbers of birds present and any additional information on behaviour and habitat use by foraging, loafing or migrant birds.

Shoreline surveys were carried out along the southern coastlines of the South Hoy and South Walls survey areas. The South Hoy shoreline survey area covered the stretch of coastline between Sands Geo in the west, eastwards around the Brims peninsula to the west side of The Ayre, a distance of approximately 4.5km. The survey area for the South Walls shoreline covered the stretch of coastline between the west of The Ayre eastwards to a point to the east of Ruthi Geo, a distance of approximately 2km.

The South Hoy shoreline survey was carried out on the 25th May and the South Walls shoreline survey was carried out on the 29th May. Both surveys were undertaken in suitable weather with wind conditions less than Beaufort force 3.

2.2.3 Coastal waters surveys

Surveys of inshore coastal waters were carried out off the south coasts of the South Hoy and South Walls survey areas to establish which species utilise these areas and the numbers present. Surveys were carried out in accordance with JNCC methodology³ for shore-based counts which records the number of birds on the water from selected viewpoints around the coastline. The coastline was sub-divided into four sub-sections and four suitable count points were chosen on the basis of accessibility, sufficient elevation, and uninterrupted line of sight to give an optimal all-round view of the inshore waters (Figure 5.2). Landmarks along the coast were used to determine the boundary of each count area.

Three counts were carried out, once per month on the 29th May, 13th June and 6th July. Counts were made from each of the count points using a tripod-mounted telescope with a 30x fixed eyepiece. The maximum distance from the shore within which birds could be counted was estimated to be approximately 2km in optimal conditions.

All species observed on the water were counted and any additional information on bird behaviour was recorded such as foraging, loafing or bathing activities. The distance of birds offshore was also estimated in recording bands: <500m, 500-1000m and >1000m. To avoid double counting, flying birds were excluded from observations.

Counts were undertaken only during daylight hours and in suitable weather conditions, which are defined as very good to excellent visibility (little or no glare, haze or precipitation), calm seas (Beaufort Scale 3 or less) and high altitude, light cloud cover.

³ Shore-based count methodology as detailed in : http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/jncc414_web.pdf

3 Findings

Detailed summary data for each of the surveys can be found in the supporting information spreadsheet 'P360_Cantick Bird Survey Summary Data.'

3.1 Overview

For each survey area, a summary of all breeding species observed during the breeding wader surveys has been compiled based on the observations across the three visits. The shoreline survey data have been summarised to provide an overview of the breeding and non-breeding birds present within each survey area. An overall summary of the species and abundance of birds observed within the offshore coastal waters survey area has also been presented.

For each of the wader species, an estimate for the overall number of breeding pairs has been calculated according to the O'Brien and Smith (1992) method as described in Gilbert *et al.* (1998). For all other species, breeding estimates have been based on the maximum number of individuals or pairs recorded on any one visit.

For each potential substation and cable landfall location, the ornithological interests present within each area have been identified (see Section 3.5). A summary map has been produced that shows the locations of potential constraints to development including any protected species such as Annex I⁴ or Schedule 1⁵ species and any protected sites such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), listed for their ornithological interests.

3.2 South Hoy

The South Hoy survey area is characterised predominantly by agricultural fields, the majority of which are used as grazing pasture for cattle and sheep and as such, hold little of great ornithological interest. On the south coast of the Brims peninsula, there is an area of semi-natural grassland and marsh with coastal grassland and remnant coastal heath near the shore. This area is listed in the Orkney Local Development Plan as a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) for its ornithological and botanical interests (Figure 5.3). The coastline along the south coast of the survey area is mostly rocky or vegetated cliffs with boulder beaches backed by low earth cliffs along the north coast of the Brims peninsula.

Six species of breeding wader were recorded within the survey area (Table 3.1). A good density of oystercatchers was present throughout the survey area with a total estimate of 33 breeding pairs. A much lower density of curlew (7 pairs) was distributed mainly in the south and southeast areas of the Brims peninsula. Redshank (4 pairs), lapwing (3 pairs) and snipe (1 pair) were found only within the Brims LNCS. A single pair of ringed plover was present in a coastal field to the south of Melsetter Farm.

Eleven other species were recorded during the breeding wader survey including a small colony of Arctic tern, an Annex I species (Table 3.2). The Arctic tern colony (8 adults) was located at Geo of Rottenloch which lies within the Brims LNCS (Figure 5.3). This LNCS is of high ornithological interest as it holds five species of breeding wader: oystercatcher, curlew, lapwing, redshank and snipe as well as two pairs of breeding eider and a small colony of common gulls (11 adults).

⁴ Rare or vulnerable species listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)

⁵ Species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Witter Quarry is also of some ornithological importance, with a colony of common gulls (maximum 60 adults) which produced at least 25 chicks. In addition, up to 14 fulmar apparently occupied nests (AONs) and one pair of oystercatchers were recorded in this area.

A very high density of fulmar was recorded breeding along the vegetated cliffs to the south of the Brims peninsula (841 AONs) (Table 3.3). There were also two herring gull colonies (maximum 144 birds), a UK BAP species, located at Broo.

Other breeding species present elsewhere within the survey area included one pair of linnet to the west of Melsetter Farm, a common gull colony (maximum 28 adults) at Broo that successfully fledged at least three chicks and at least five skylark territories distributed within the Brims LNCS and the rough grassland and semi-improved grassland fields to the northeast. Small numbers of razorbill, black guillemot and shag and one pair of raven were also recorded breeding on the cliffs.

Six other common passerines were recorded breeding at low densities within the survey area. These are: wren, starling, blackbird, wheatear, meadow pipit and pied wagtail. A cuckoo was heard calling to the north of Melsetter House during the May visit. Non-breeding species observed included up to 10 whimbrel distributed throughout the survey area on the May visit. These are likely to have been birds on passage. A few twite were also recorded on the May visit. Other non-breeding species present along the shoreline included rock dove, jackdaw, rock pipit and pied wagtail. Species recorded loafing around the coastline included great black-backed gull, common guillemot, oystercatcher, twite, and eider.

Table 3.1 Breeding waders present within the South Hoy survey area

Species	Status	Overall ⁶
Oystercatcher		33 pr
Curlew	UK BAP ⁷	7 pr
Redshank		4 pr
Lapwing	UK BAP	3 pr
Snipe		1 pr
Ringed plover		1 pr

Table 3.2 Other breeding species present within the South Hoy survey area

Species	Status	Overall
Common gull		Maximum 100 adults
Fulmar		14 AONs
Arctic tern	Annex I (EU Birds Directive)	8 adults
Skylark	UK BAP	5 pr
Starling	UK BAP	2 pr
Eider		2 pr
Blackbird		2 pr
Wren		2 pr
Pied wagtail		2 pr

⁶ Overall estimates of breeding numbers have been calculated according to the O'Brien and Smith (1992) method as described in Gilbert et al. (1998)

⁷ Species listed on UK BAP list of priority species which identifies species in need of conservation action at a national level using the application of criteria based on international importance, rapid decline and high risk.

Species	Status	Overall
Linnet	UK BAP	1 pr
Wheatear		1 pr

Table 3.3 Species observed around the South Hoy shoreline

Species	Status	Overall
Breeding		
Fulmar		841 AONs
Herring gull	UK BAP	144 birds (in 2 colonies)
Great black-backed gull		1 pr (plus 6 pr loafing around coast)
Razorbill		23 birds on cliff (plus 16 birds on water, close inshore)
Black guillemot		7 birds on cliff (plus 18 on water close inshore)
Shag		4 pr (nests observed)
Raven		1 pr
Wheatear		1 pr
Non-breeding		
Shag		45 birds, loafing
Oystercatcher		16 birds, loafing
Rock dove		9 flew off from cliff
Jackdaw		5 flew off from cliff
Common guillemot		4 birds, loafing
Eider		1 male bird, loafing
Twite	UK BAP	1 bird, loafing

3.3 South Walls

The majority of the South Walls survey area comprises agricultural fields used for pasture, barley and silage with some areas of ungrazed grassland and a few small pockets of wetland. The main area of ornithological interest within the survey area is Fea Heath LNCS, located towards the centre of the survey area (Figure 5.3). This LNCS is an area of mostly dry heather moorland, with some wetter moorland areas and lichen heath in places, listed for its botanical and ornithological interests. The survey area also covers the western half of the Aith Head LNCS, a strip of coastal heath and grassland along the cliffs to the south of the survey area, listed for its botanical interests (Figure 5.3). The shoreline survey area covered an area of sandy beach on the west side of The Ayre with a section of boulder beach backed by low earth cliffs to the southeast of The Ayre. Further east, the coastline is predominantly vegetated cliffs rising to a height of up to 30m.

Seven species of breeding wader were recorded within the survey area (Table 3.4). The most abundant species present was oystercatcher, with 61 pairs distributed across the entire survey area. Good densities of lapwing and curlew were recorded predominantly in the ungrazed grassland, rough grassland and wetland areas most of which are in the eastern half of the survey area. A much lower density of redshank (3 pairs) was observed in wet grassland areas in the east of the survey area. One pair of ringed plover was present in the Fea Heath LNCS. One pair of dunlin was recorded in the east of the survey area at Green Hill, to the west of the Loch of Greenhill, and a single pair of snipe was recorded at Aithsdale.

Fifteen other species were recorded during the breeding wader survey (Table 3.5). The Fea Heath LNCS is of high ornithological interest as it holds an Arctic tern colony (max. 33 adults) as well as four species of wader (oystercatcher, lapwing, curlew and ringed plover) and a common gull colony (maximum 67 adults). A number of breeding passerines were also present including linnet, skylark, willow warbler and blackbird. A small area of wetland to the east of Fea Heath LNCS also holds four species of breeding wader: oystercatcher, lapwing, curlew and redshank.

At the eastern edge of the survey area, the field to the west of Loch of Greenhill LNCS is another area of high ornithological interest as it holds an array of wetland bird species such as shelduck, mallard, oystercatcher, lapwing, dunlin and a small colony of black-headed gulls (maximum 18 birds).

Along the shoreline, only four species were recorded breeding (Table 3.6). Fulmar was recorded breeding along the vegetated cliffs (158 AONs) along with one pair of herring gull and a few black guillemots. An oystercatcher nest was located on the eastern side of The Ayre.

A few other common breeding species were present elsewhere within the survey area including starling, greenfinch, wheatear, pied wagtail and hooded crow. Species recorded loafing around the coastline included great black-backed, oystercatcher, shag, curlew and pied wagtail.

Table 3.4 Breeding waders present within the South Walls survey area

Species	Status	Overall ⁸
Oystercatcher		61 pr
Lapwing	UK BAP	17 pr
Curlew	UK BAP	10 pr
Redshank		3 pr
Snipe		1 pr
Ringed plover		1 pr
Dunlin		1 pr

Table 3.5 Other breeding species present within the South Walls survey area

Species	Status	Overall
Common gull		Maximum 71 birds
Arctic tern	Annex I (EU Birds Directive)	Maximum 33 birds
Black-headed gull		Maximum 18 birds
Skylark	UK BAP	11 pr
Starling	UK BAP	4 pr
Mallard		3 pr
Pied wagtail		3 pr
Wheatear		2 pr
Shelduck		2 pr
Linnet	UK BAP	1 pr
Great skua		1 pr
Willow warbler		1 pr
Blackbird		1 pr
Greenfinch		1 pr
Hooded crow		1 pr

Table 3.6 Species observed around the South Walls shoreline

Species	Status	Overall
Breeding		
Fulmar		158 AONs
Herring gull	UK BAP	1 pr
Black guillemot		6 birds 'whistling' just offshore
Oystercatcher		1 pr (plus 7 birds loafing)
Non-breeding		
Rock dove		5 flew off from cliff
Shag		3 birds, loafing
Curlew	UK BAP	1 bird, loafing
Wren		1 bird in song
Great black-backed gull		1 bird, loafing
Pied wagtail		1 bird, loafing

⁸ Overall estimates of breeding numbers have been calculated according to the O'Brien and Smith (1992) method as described in Gilbert et al. (1998)

3.4 Coastal waters surveys

Thirteen species were recorded utilising the inshore coastal waters area (Table 3.7). Species recorded in highest numbers were common guillemot, fulmar, kittiwake, shag and razorbill. Very low densities of black guillemot, great black-backed gull, puffin, great skua and herring gull were recorded on each visit. Great northern diver and gannet were recorded on the second visit only. A single eider was recorded on the first and third visits.

The western extent of the coastal waters survey area overlaps with the seaward extension to the Hoy Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for its internationally important populations of breeding birds including puffin, kittiwake, Arctic skua, fulmar, great black-backed gull, guillemot, great skua, red-throated diver, peregrine and its breeding seabird assemblage (Figure 5.3).

Six of the Hoy SPA species were recorded within the coastal waters survey area however all six species were recorded at very low densities relative to the numbers listed in the Hoy SPA citation.

Table 3.7 Total numbers of each species recorded during coastal waters surveys

Species	29 th May 2012	13 th June 2012	6 th July 2012
Common guillemot	298	46	55
Fulmar	177	99	119
Kittiwake	0	125	181
Shag	84	91	32
Razorbill	75	29	87
Black guillemot	17	12	18
Great black-backed gull	2	4	19
Puffin	12	5	3
Great skua	7	1	1
Herring gull	2	4	2
Gannet	0	4	0
Eider	1	0	1
Great northern diver	0	1	0

4 Overview of development options and identification of potential constraints

The potential impacts from this proposed development on bird populations in the area include:

- Habitat loss through construction of the substation and associated supporting infrastructure; and
- Disturbance and displacement from nesting areas or regularly used foraging areas due to construction activities and/or the presence of the substation.

Construction activities timed to occur outwith the breeding season would avoid any potential impacts such as noise or visual disturbance to breeding birds.

The ornithological interests of the cable route options have not been discussed separately as all of the species of conservation interest present within the survey area have been covered in either the substation or landfall sections.

4.1 Substation development options

The ornithological interests present within each potential substation option and any key potential constraints to development have been identified (Table 4.1).

4.1.1 Green Hill

The presence of an Arctic tern colony within the Green Hill substation site is a potential constraint to this development option as Arctic tern is listed as an Annex I species in the EU Birds Directive and as such is a protected species. This means Arctic terns must not be deliberately killed, caught or disturbed, and their mating, breeding, feeding and roosting habitats must not be destroyed. Loss of this breeding habitat would need to be avoided.

The Green Hill site also holds four other breeding species including curlew and skylark, both listed as UK BAP Priority species and the site also lies within the Brims LNCS which is the area of greatest ornithological interest in the South Hoy survey area.

4.1.2 Gallow Tuag

The Gallow Tuag site holds little of conservation interest with the exception of one pair of curlew (UK BAP) however part of the development site includes a small field within the Fea Heath LNCS that has been used for tree planting. The Fea Heath LNCS has high ornithological interest as it holds an Arctic tern colony as well as four species of wader; a common gull colony and a number of breeding passerines (see Section 3.3).

4.1.3 Witter Quarry

The Witter Quarry site is of moderate ornithological importance as it holds a high number of breeding birds including a common gull colony and breeding fulmars.

4.1.4 Melsetter and Bu of Aith

The Melsetter and Bu of Aith options hold little of conservation interest.

Table 4.1 Ornithological interests and possible constraints for each potential substation option

Substation option	Breeding birds within potential development site		Potential constraints
	Species	Number	
Melsetter	Oystercatcher	3 pr	None – no species of particular conservation interest
	Ringed plover	1 pr	
	Raven	1 pr	
Witter Quarry	Common gull	(max. 60 adults)	None - however it does hold a high number of breeding birds
	Fulmar	14 AONs	
	Oystercatcher	1 pr	
Access to Melsetter and Witter Quarry sites	Oystercatcher	1 pr	None
Green Hill	Oystercatcher	3 pr	Part of this site is within the Brims LNCS and includes an area used by a colony of Arctic terns. Arctic tern is listed as an Annex I species therefore loss of habitat or disturbance to this species must be avoided. The Brims LNCS is an area of high ornithological interest.
	Curlew (UK BAP)	1 pr	
	Skylark (UK BAP)	2 pr	
	Eider	1 pr	
	Arctic tern (Annex I)	8 adults	
Access to Green Hill	Oystercatcher	2 pr	None – only one pair each of curlew and skylark.
	Curlew (UK BAP)	1 pr	
	Skylark (UK BAP)	1 pr	
Bu of Aith	Oystercatcher	6 pr	None
Gallow Tuag	Oystercatcher	4 pr	Part of this site is within Fea Heath LNCS which is an area of high ornithological interest as it holds a number of breeding species including a colony of Arctic tern, an Annex I species.
	Curlew (UK BAP)	1 pr	

4.2 Landfall development options

The ornithological interests present within each potential landfall option and any key potential constraints to development have been identified (Table 4.1).

4.2.1 Geo of Rottenloch

A potential constraint to development at the Geo of Rottenloch development option is the presence of an Arctic tern colony, an Annex I species therefore loss of this breeding habitat or disturbance to this species must be avoided. This site is also within the Brims LNCS, an area of high ornithological interest (see Section 3.2).

4.2.2 Broo

This site lies within the Hoy SPA marine extension. Of all the development options, Broo also holds the highest number of breeding birds including two herring gull colonies (UK BAP).

4.2.3 Long Geo

Long Geo lies within the Hoy SPA marine extension area however, in terms of breeding birds; this site holds little of conservation interest.

4.2.4 Langi Geo

Langi Geo holds little of conservation interest however this site is adjacent to the Brims LNCS.

4.2.5 The Clevies

This site holds little of conservation interest.

4.2.6 The Ayre

No breeding birds were recorded at The Ayre.

Table 4.2 Ornithological interests and possible constraints for each potential landfall option

Landfall option	Breeding birds within potential development site		Potential constraints
	Species	Number	
Long Geo	Fulmar	12 AONs	Lies within the Hoy SPA marine extension area.
Broo	Fulmar	100 AONs	Lies within the Hoy SPA marine extension area.
	Herring gull (UK BAP)	Max. 144 birds	Two herring gull colonies – potential habitat loss and disturbance.
	Great black-backed gull	1 pr	Holds a high number of breeding birds and is adjacent to Brims LNCS.
The Ayre	Nil	Nil	None
The Clevies	Shelduck	1 pr	None
	Fulmar	6 AONs	
Langi Geo	Fulmar	14 AONs	None – however is adjacent to Brims LNCS
Geo of Rottenloch	Arctic tern (Annex I)	8 adults	Presence of Arctic tern colony - Arctic tern is listed as an Annex I species therefore loss of habitat or disturbance to this species must be avoided. This site is also within the Brims LNCS, and area of high ornithological interest.

5 Figures

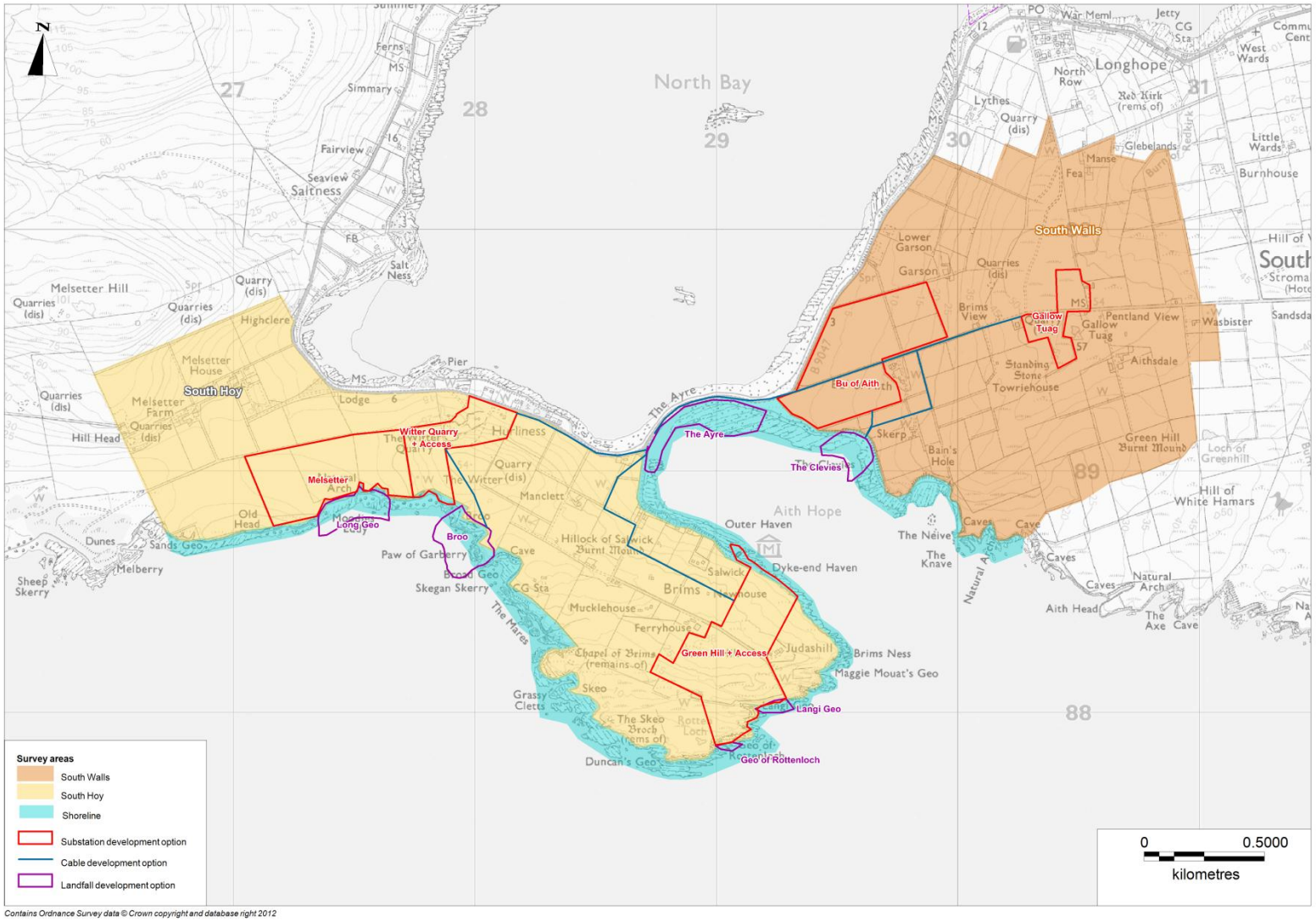


Figure 5.1 Survey areas and locations of potential development options

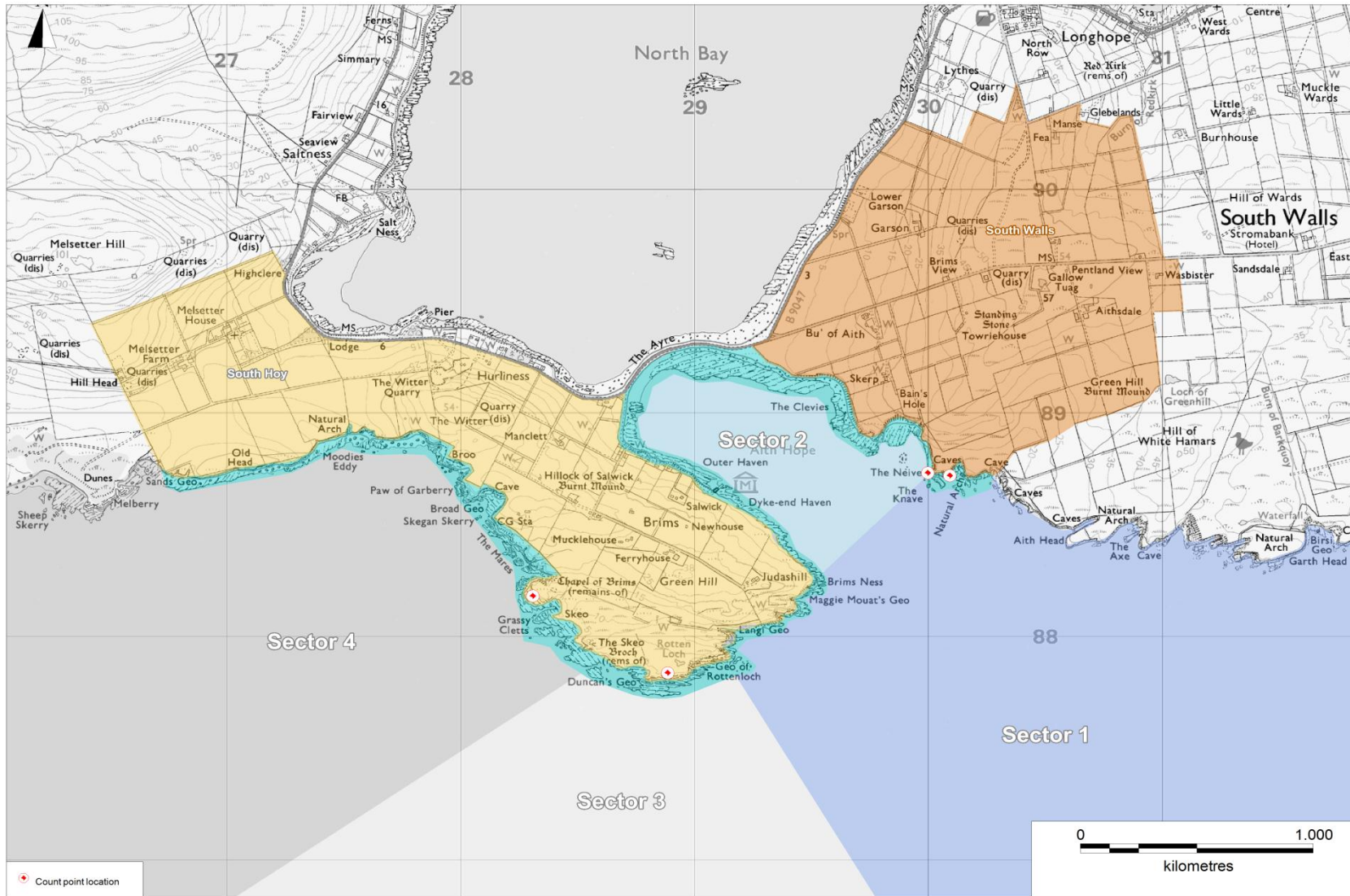
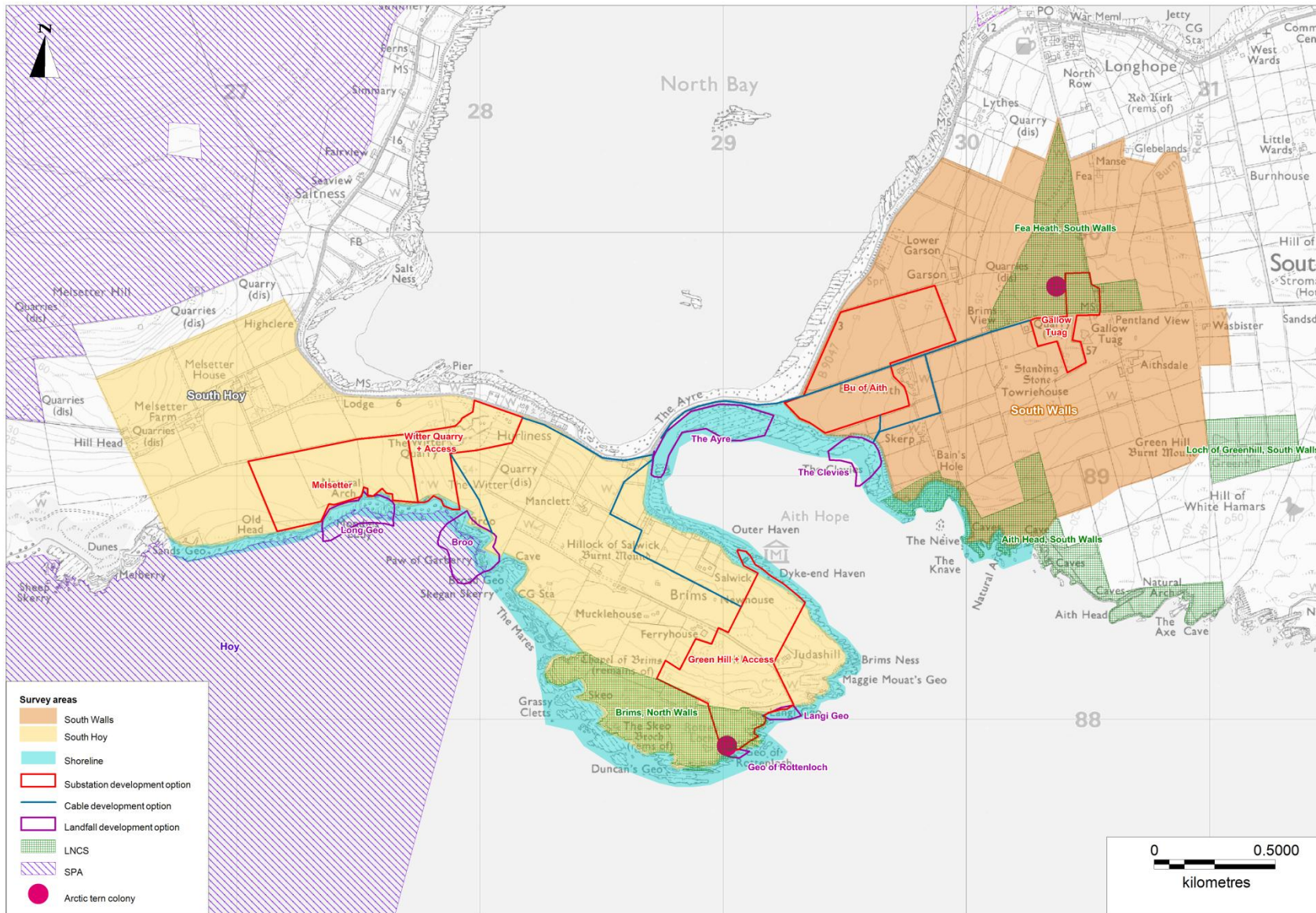


Figure 5.2 Sector boundaries and count point locations used in Coastal Waters Surveys



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Figure 5.3 Locations of Potential Constraints to Development

Appendix A: List of bird species

Common name	Scientific name
Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Black guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>
Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina schinzii</i>
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>
Great skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>