SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

LONGMAN AND CASTLE STUART BAYS
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT
Site ref: 1675

EAST HIGHLAND AREA
Fodderty Way
Dingwall Business Park
Dingwall
IV15 9XB

Tel: 01349 865333
Fax: 01349 865609
Email: EAST_HIGHLAND@snh.gov.uk

Purpose

This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It outlines the reasons it is designated as a SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

Description of the site

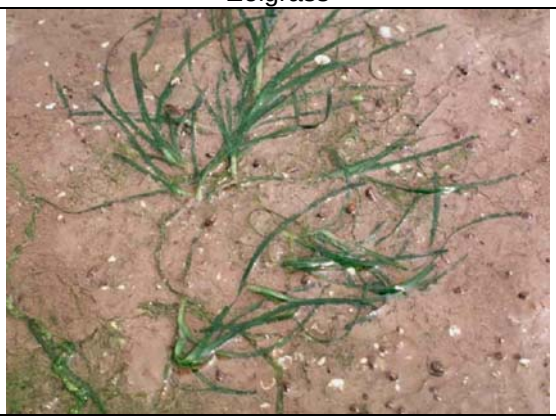
Longman and Castle Stuart Bays Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a coastal site extending north eastwards from Inverness for approximately 8km to Fisherton. The natural features of the site include extensive areas of sandflats, mudflats and saltmarsh. These habitats support a diverse range of wintering wildfowl and waders, including nationally important populations of red-breasted merganser (8% of wintering UK population), cormorant (2%), wigeon (1%), goldeneye (1%) and redshank (1%). There are also substantial areas of pioneer plant species typical of northern firths, such as the nationally scarce narrow-leaved eelgrass and dwarf eelgrass. Eelgrasses have a very localised distribution within the UK, and dense beds such as those found at Longman and Castle Stuart Bays are scarce. The site is also of interest for other intertidal plants such as glasswort and beaked tasselweed.

The SSSI notified natural features were monitored during December 1999 and February 2004 and the following features were found to be in a favourable condition: saltmarsh (monitored August 2001); goldeneye, redshank and wigeon (monitored December 1999 – February 2004). However, monitoring of cormorant and red-breasted merganser within the site between 1999 and 2004 concluded that both were in unfavourable condition. Average numbers at both were less than 1% of the British wintering population, cormorant substantially so.

Eelgrass and mudflat habitats have not yet been monitored but will be reported on in the next monitoring cycle.

The site is an integral component of the Inner Moray Firth SPA which regularly supports internationally important waterfowl assemblages. Longman and Castle Stuart Bays are particularly significant for the bird species mentioned above, but large numbers of teal, oystercatcher, curlew and scaup are also commonly seen here. Within the SPA as a

whole the following features were found to be in favourable condition when monitored between 1996 and 2001: bar-tailed godwit, curlew, goldeneye, greylag goose, oystercatcher, redshank, scaup, teal, wigeon and the waterfowl assemblage. However, red-breasted merganser, goosander and cormorant were considered unfavourable since their populations were less than the expected proportion of the British population. The breeding common terns were also considered unfavourable owing to the population within the SPA being smaller than expected. It should be noted that common terns only breed at Whiteness Head. The decline of cormorant, goosander and red-breasted merganser is thought to be related to climatic change, and possibly associated decline in fish stocks, on a scale wider than the site. No licences for predator control have been issued for a number of years, but the impact of past shooting activity is unknown.

Eelgrass	Redshank
	

Natural features of Longman and Castle Stuart Bays SSSI	**Condition of feature (date monitored)**	**Other relevant designations**
Eelgrass bed	Not yet monitored	
Mudflat	Not yet monitored	
Saltmarsh	Favourable – maintained (August 2001)	
Cormorant*	Unfavourable – no change (February 2004)	SPA
Goldeneye	Favourable – maintained (February 2004)	SPA
Red-breasted merganser	Unfavourable – declining (February 2004)	SPA
Redshank	Favourable – maintained (February 2004)	SPA
Wigeon	Favourable – maintained (February 2004)	SPA

Features of overlapping Natura sites that are not notified as SSSI natural features.	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Bar-tailed godwit	Favourable maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Common tern	Unfavourable – no change (June 2000)	SPA
Curlew*	Favourable - maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Goosander*	Unfavourable – no change (February 2001)	SPA
Greylag goose	Favourable - maintained (December 2001)	SPA
Osprey	Favourable – maintained (June 2003)	SPA
Oystercatcher*	Favourable - maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Scaup	Favourable - maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Teal*	Favourable - maintained (February 2001)	SPA
Waterfowl assemblage * indicates assemblage qualifier only	Favourable - maintained (December 2001)	SPA

Past and present management

The site has not been intensively used in recent times.

Hand collection of cockles and mussels from the mudflats around Castle Stuart Bay occurred in the past, but this now happens on a very occasional and small-scale basis and is not considered to adversely affect the interests of the site. No commercial harvesting of shellfish has taken place within the site. There was interest in large scale mechanical shellfish extraction and development of an oyster farm in the mid 1990s, but these proposals never materialised.

There are two parties exercising net and cobble salmon fishing rights within the site. Salmon fishing is not considered to adversely affect the interests of the SSSI. There is also occasional mooring of light craft around the Castle Stuart Bay area.

Much of the land adjacent to Longman and Castle Stuart Bays is agricultural and in the past, low numbers of cattle have been given access to graze small areas of the saltmarsh at Castle Stuart Bay. Fencing was erected in 2001 to prevent damage to the saltmarsh from poaching by livestock. Native broad-leaved trees have been planted under a woodland incentive scheme on land adjacent to Castle Stuart Bay.

A number of sewage outfalls discharge into Longman and Castle Stuart Bays, either directly or via incoming burns. The Allanfearn waste water treatment works in between Longman Bay and Castle Stuart Bay serves Inverness and adjoining landward areas and discharges to the Firth via a long sea outfall crossing the site.

Recreational activities occur at a low level throughout the site, and include walking, wildfowling and bird watching. The disused A96, which runs along the edge of part of Longman Bay, is occasionally used as a walk way. The proposed Inverness to Nairn coastal trail will pass close to the site and there are proposals for additional trails, interpretation and a bird hide as part of the Castle Stuart golf course development.

Immediately to the west of the SSSI lies the Longman Landfill site – an extensive area reclaimed from the intertidal flats and managed by the local authority. The area was used as the main disposal site for household, commercial and some industrial wastes from much of the Highlands for many decades. Waste disposal at this site ceased on 31st March 2003 and the area is now being restored and landscaped. There are currently plans to consider turning parts of the former landfill site into a country park. Planning permission was granted in March 2006 for two golf courses, a hotel and timeshare units adjacent to Castle Stuart Bay. The golf courses will be landscaped in such a way as to minimise disturbance to the wintering birds, and buffer strips will be incorporated to safeguard the intertidal flora and fauna.

Objectives for Management (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owner to protect the site, and to maintain and, where necessary, enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

1. To maintain the mudflat habitat and eelgrass beds in favourable condition by ensuring that disturbance and contamination from point sources and leachates from the landfill site are appropriately managed.

2. To maintain the extent of saltmarsh habitat and ensure it is in favourable condition by managing grazing by cattle and other livestock. Poaching damage should at most be rare, with not more than 25% bare mud. The vegetation should continue to support key species such as sea plantain, sea milkwort and saltmarsh rush.

3. To maintain conditions suitable for the wildfowl interest including by managing disturbance. Numbers of cormorant, goosander and red-breasted merganser should increase on the site. The local fisheries boards should work with RSPB, the Scottish Government and SNH to develop a sawbill management plan

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

The numbers of birds using the site may change due to influences beyond those affecting this site alone such as climate change or fish stocks.

Disturbance to bird species at Longman should also be put into context with sites elsewhere in the Moray and Cromarty Firths. These areas are also under pressure, not least from increased recreational pressure. This means that the potential for Longman birds to find additional undisturbed habitats is diminished in the context of the overall picture within the Moray Firth.

Current monitoring of leachates from the Longman landfill site by The Highland Council indicates that they are below levels likely to cause an adverse impact. Now that the site is decommissioned, continued management and monitoring is necessary to ensure that levels of leachate remain within acceptable limits.

Restoration and subsequent use of the landfill site could affect the adjacent intertidal area. The nature of any impact – positive or negative – will depend on future use. Developing the area as a country park with wildlife watching facilities, interpretation and informal recreation would be compatible with the interests of the SSSI.

The site lies close to an area of major current and proposed industrial, retail, amenity and residential development. These developments, individually and cumulatively, could lead to impacts both on the quality of water entering the site and to disturbance of wintering birds.

Date last reviewed: 25 January 2008