

**LLA Name****Bay of Firth****Location and Extent**

The Bay of Firth Local Landscape Area is located in the West Mainland of Orkney and includes the land area surrounding the Bay of Firth. It extends from the western slopes of Wideford Hill, along the ridges of Keelylang and Swartabeck to Cuffie Hill in the west.

**Overview**

The landscape area includes areas of *Moorland Hill* and *Rolling Hill Fringe* that grade into the gentle *Inclined Coastal Pasture* which surrounds the sheltered waters of the Bay of Firth. The little offshore islands known as Holm of Grimbister and Damsay are examples of the *Holms* landscape.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- The moorland slopes of Wideford Hill, Keelylang Hill, Burrey Brae and Hill of Lyradale, along with the rolling hill fringe of Cuffie Hill, provide a stunning backdrop to the gently sloping pasture land which surrounds the sheltered waters of the Bay of Firth.
- Views out to sea are an important feature of this area where the little domed islands of Holm of Grimbister and Damsay add a further dimension to the seascape.
- The mature woodland at Binscarth is one of the larger plantations in Orkney and provides an attractive setting for the Category B listed Binscarth House.

**Special Qualities**

- The landscape is rich in features of archaeology and built heritage and includes sites which are valuable in terms of raising public awareness of Orkney's cultural heritage. Scheduled Ancient Monuments include chambered cairns at Wideford Hill and Cuween and brochs at Burness and Ingashowe. Research is ongoing into the underwater archaeology which is located offshore from St Mary's Chapel on the island of Damsay.
- The colours of natural vegetation make an important contribution to this landscape. In spring the brilliant yellow of gorse is a welcome sight along the ditches and field margins at Quanterness and Rennibister. Further inland the moorland hills have a rugged, wild quality and when the heather blooms in late summer their lower slopes are a vibrant purple.

**Other Designations / Interests**

- Keelylang Hill and Swartabeck Burn SSSI and Cuffie Hill which is part of the West Mainland Moorlands SSSI in turn form part of the Orkney Mainland Moors Special Protection Area for birds.
- A number of other areas are designated at a local level for their natural heritage value. These include Wideford Hill, Finstown Ouse, Heddle Hill and the entire intertidal area of this shoreline which provides important foraging territory for waders.
- The Bay of Firth provides an attractive setting to the village of Finstown which has undergone considerable expansion in recent years.
- Given its easily accessible location this landscape is popular for casual walks, fishing and sailing. There are numerous core paths in the area, connecting to the surrounding countryside. The path through Binscarth Woods is a particularly valued access route.
- There is a riding centre at Cruan and certain paths provide quiet routes, unhindered by traffic, for horse riding.

## **Sensitivity to Change**

### Moorland hills

- Moorland hills are sensitive to vertical developments such as wind turbines or electricity transmission poles;

### Holms

- Holms may be potential sites for new development.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development
- Possible impacts on archaeological/architectural heritage.

### Rolling hill fringe

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development.

## **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

### Moorland hills

- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;
- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.

### Holms

- Apply strict standards to siting and design of buildings to minimise visual impact and to establish a sympathetic relationship with other buildings or structures.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Encourage the restoration and re-use of any traditional structures;
- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;
- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing development along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/extending farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land

- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged;
- Protect archaeological and architectural heritage from obtrusive development which may detract from local views;
- New development in inclined coastal pastures should be oriented in relation to the coast, and should reflect vernacular tradition in distribution and design.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/expanding farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged.

#### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land Use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

**LLA Name****Bay of Skail, Sandwick****Location and Extent**

The area extends from the Point of Howana Geo in the north to Bor Wick in the south where it meets the northern boundary of the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area. It extends inland to include the Loch of Skail and the southern and western slopes of Sand Field and Kier Field.

**Overview**

This area forms part of the western seaboard of the Orkney west mainland, its coastline characterised by rugged, Old Red Sandstone cliffs interspersed by narrow geos and occasional, wider embayments.

The Bay of Skail is a *Coastal Sand Landscape* which grades eastward into the *Loch Basin* of Loch of Skail and its immediate surroundings. The bay and loch basin complex is bounded to the north and south by *Cliff Landscape* which is backed by *Coastal Heathland*. Bay of Skail is subject to the combined forces of wind and the highly energetic swell waves of the North Atlantic and the sandy substrate at the head of the bay is extremely vulnerable to erosion. The land use type is predominately farming. There is evidence of crofting in the area with smallholdings being present. The majority of the land use dates from the 18th-19th century.

There is evidence of a defensive establishment from the 20th century on the site as well as a mining area from the minerals waste and peat industries between the 19th and 20th century and an early prehistoric ritual area.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- Extensive, unbroken stretches of remote coastline, dominated by high cliffs and related landform features including caves, stacks and geos;
- The contrasting lower-lying Bay of Skail is a wide sandy beach backed by boulders, cobbles and fringed on either side by bedrock;
- This is a blown sand landscape which has covered earlier landscapes and archaeological sites and the blown sand extends up to the hill sides.
- Extensive, unimpeded sea views over the Northern Atlantic Ocean;

**Special Qualities**

- The intertidal rock platform at Hangabacks and the associated coastal cliffs on the north side of the Bay are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Bay of Skail SSSI is composed of the Upper and Lower Caithness Flagstone with the intervening Sandwick Fish Bed which contains important fish fossils but is also characterised by its distinct fossil floral assemblage.
- In the south, the cliffed coastline of Row Head forms part of the Stromness Heaths and Coasts SSSI which provides one of the best exposed and most scenically attractive sections through the base of the Old Red Sandstone and the underlying basement of Orkney. Here, the Hole of Row is an interesting geomorphological feature which illustrates the erosive power of the wind, waves and westerly swell.
- The exposed and elevated nature of Row Head promotes a sense of isolation and remoteness from human influence.
- The landscape is extremely rich in archaeology, built heritage and other features of cultural association and the Neolithic village of Skara Brae forms part of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site. This area has been the subject of an extensive geophysics survey which indicated that Skara Brae village extends further than the unearthed site.
- Other sites and monuments in this area include: Voydale Mound; Burial mound and possible cist at Skail links; Viking burial sites at Skail; Knowe

of Nettigarth; Knowe of Geoso; Knowe of Angerow; Castle of Snusgar; Knowe of Verne Iron Age/Pictish settlement; Sandwick Church settlement/burial/midden; Unigarth Bronze/Iron Age/Pictish earth house; Velzian burial mound; and a recently discovered Viking house within the dunes near to the Castle of Snusgar.

- St Peter's Kirk and Skaill House are both Category A listed and Skaill Doocot is Category B listed.
- Strong sensory and experiential qualities – open sea views that are at times tranquil and enriched by the sounds of bird life; at other times turbulent with immense breaking waves and white foaming sea spray.

### **Other Designations / Interests**

- Loch of Skaill, a small loch with marginal wetland, is a Local Nature Conservation Site and is important for overwintering wildfowl.
- Bay of Skaill is a very popular amenity beach and is also used by surfers and canoeists;
- Skara Brae and Skaill House are two of the most popular visitor attractions in Orkney and play an important role in the County's tourism industry.
- There are extensive views of Orkney's western, cliffed coastline, extending from the Brough of Birsay in the north to Hoy and the Old Man in the south.
- From the summit of Row Head there are key views of the Loch Basin landscape of the Lochs of Harray and Stenness and the central west mainland.

### **Sensitivity to Change**

#### Cliff landscape

- Marine erosion

#### Enclosed Bay landscape

- Visitor pressure;
- Intrusive development which would detract from landscape character and quality;
- Potential for extraction of sand/gravel;
- Potential sites for fish farm developments;

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration and potential loss of ruined crofts and farmsteads;
- Potential sites for radio masts or wind turbines with consequential visual intrusion and potential scarring by access tracks;
- Housing development on lower slopes to obtain good but remote vantage points.

#### Loch basin

- Residential pressures;
- Agricultural development pressures;
- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration of wartime relics;
- Visitor pressure on key archaeological sites.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Cliff landscape

- Restrict the development of barriers, signs and other "clutter" along cliff-top footpaths.

### Enclosed Bay landscape

- Monitor effects of visitor pressure on coastal paths etc.;
- Protect/manage archaeological sites and make thorough archaeological surveys a requirement of development proposals;
- Protect high amenity bay landscapes from fish farming;
- Provision of visitor facilities should be designed and located sensitively;
- Require substantial reinstatement measures for any aggregates extraction proposals to ensure sand stability and re-establishment of semi-natural habitats;

### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Maintain and restore remaining drystone walls;
- Strict limitations to new development should be applied, only accessible lower slopes should be considered;
- Support the restoration and re-use of abandoned crofts/farmstead buildings.

### Loch basin

- Restore and conserve drystone dykes.
- Protect the archaeological resources and improve its context through countryside management.
- Support the planting of small scale woodlands and tree groups around farmsteads, new buildings and village developments;
- Control the siting and design of buildings to prevent obscuring long views and compromising local building character.

### **Landscape Character**

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**LLA Name****Durkadale****Location and Extent**

The area extends from the southern margin of the Loch of Hundland through Durkadale and Glimps Moss.

**Overview**

The *Peatland Basin* of Durkadale and Glimps Moss forms the floor of a valley which is bordered by the *Rolling Hill Fringe* landscapes of Skelday Hill in the east and Greeny Hill in the west.

To the north the small area of *Loch Basin* landscape marks the southern margins of the Loch of Hundland and in the south and east the B9057 marks the boundary between the *Peatland Basin* and *Moorland Hill* landscapes.

Beyond the southern and south-eastern boundaries of this landscape area the Moorland Hills known as Kame of Corrigall, Little Billia Field and Starra Field form an effective backdrop.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- The valley of Durkadale is particularly attractive where the burn meanders through a mosaic of species rich vegetation. The little ruined stone buildings provide a further positive contribution to the landscape.
- The combination of visual elements and the low level of development in the area give this landscape a feeling of remoteness which is quite unusual as one travels along any of the Orkney mainland roads.

**Special Qualities**

- Durkadale lies within the West Mainland Moorlands SSSI which in turn forms part of the Orkney Mainland Moors SPA and is notified for breeding and non-breeding hen harrier, breeding red throated diver and breeding short-eared owl. Durkadale also forms part of the RSPB's Birsay Moors Reserve and important species found in the area include Merlin, Arctic Skua, Red throated diver and Hen Harrier. During winter roosting hen harriers can be observed from the road near Durkadale and red grouse can be seen foraging on the heathery slopes. Durkadale is the most northerly example of an alkaline valley marsh in Britain and the best example of this habitat found on the Old Red Sandstone of northern Scotland.
- The Loch of Hundland Local Nature Conservation Site has areas of marsh at its northern and southern ends. The loch itself has a great variety of aquatic plants, including locally and nationally unusual species. The site is important for bird life which includes breeding waders, ducks, birds of prey and red-throated diver.

**Other Designations / Interests**

- The Click Mill at Dounby which is the last of the horizontal water-mills of Orkney is still in use. It has been restored by the Ministry of Works, and has been scheduled.
- Stone bridges cross a number of small burns in this area. These include a four-span clapper bridge with drystone rubble piers and triangular cutwaters which is located close to the Click Mill.
- The remains can still be seen of a WW II decoy control bunker which was built to simulate an airfield power supply for decoy runway lights which were placed alongside the B9057.

**Sensitivity to Change**Peatland basin

- Vertical or large scale structures would be highly intrusive in this landscape;

- Wildlife interest of whole peatland basin may be compromised by any drainage activity.

#### Loch basin

- Residential pressures;
- Agricultural development pressures;
- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration of wartime relics;
- Visitor pressure on key archaeological sites.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings;
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development.

#### Moorland hills

- Moorland hills are sensitive to vertical developments such as wind turbines or electricity transmission poles.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Peatland basin

- Strict control of building developments should aim to keep the basin floor clear of development;
- Target mechanical peat cutting to visually contained but accessible areas, ensure reinstatement of surface vegetation;
- Small scale woodland and scrub planting should be encouraged in hollows and around wetlands;
- High standards in building design should apply to any building development.

#### Loch basin

- Restore and conserve drystone dykes;
- Protect the archaeological resources and improve its context through countryside management;
- Support the planting of small scale woodlands and tree groups around farmsteads, new buildings and village developments;
- Control the siting and design of buildings to prevent obscuring long views and compromising local building character.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/expanding farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged.

#### Moorland hills

- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;



- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.

### **Landscape Character**

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<b>LLA Name</b>	<b>Marwick, Birsay</b>
<b>Location and Extent</b>	The landscape area extends from Marwick Head in the north to Sand Geo in the south.

### Overview

The Landscape Area known as Marwick is a *Coastal Hills and Heath* landscape bounded to the north and south by *Cliff Landscape*. The land immediately behind the little embayment of Mar Wick and the Choin is low lying and wet and takes the form of a valley which rises gradually to the B9056 road. The more elevated land on either side of the valley contains scattered housing and dispersed farmsteads.

### Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- At Marwick an extensive abrasion platform carries an intertidal lagoon known as The Choin and is retained by a low-lying cobble bank which extends across the mouth of the bay.
- Orkney's western seaboard is exposed to the westerly wind and the waves of the North Atlantic, and its seascapes can range from blue and glistening on a sunny day to grey and turbulent during the frequent gales of winter. Whatever the weather, the wide expanse of sea along with the high cliffs of Marwick Head and the bedrock coastline bring dramatic elements to the landscape.
- Excellent views along the cliffed coastline from Marwick Head. These extend southward as far as the Old Man of Hoy and the cliffs of North Hoy, and northward towards Birsay Bay and the Brough of Birsay.
- Sand Geo is a sheer-sided, deeply cut geo in the south of the area.
- Open views from the B9056 westward down the valley towards Mar Wick, and beyond to the western horizon.

### Special Qualities

- The area extending from Marwick Head to Garson has qualities of isolation and remoteness from human influence.

### Other Designations / Interests

- The cliffs of Marwick Head are designated as a SSSI/SPA due to the assemblage of breeding seabirds which they regularly support.
- An area of wetland in the valley behind the bay is managed as a RSPB reserve.
- Many wildflowers can be found along the pathway up to Kitchener's Memorial.
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments in this landscape include The Knowe of Garraquoy; The Knowe of Scorn; The Knowe of Dale; The Knowe of Netherskaill; The Knowe of Flaws; Marwick Viking houses; Marwick Chapel and burial Ground.
- The Kitchener Monument/Memorial is listed Category C(s). It was built by public subscription to honour the memory of Lord Kitchener who was lost in June 1916, when the cruiser H.M.S. Hampshire sank nearby. Of the 667 officers and men on board, only 12 survived. The open and exposed headland and its distinctive memorial together form a well known landmark.
- Other notable sites in this area include the Fishermen's Huts and boat nousts which are located on the coast a little to the south of Mar Wick. These are easily accessed by the coastal path.
- Field soils in the Marwick area are known for their exceptional depth which is a product of soil improvement during the Iron Age and Norse period.

- The path along this coastline forms part of the core paths which extends along the entire west coast of the West Mainland and is a very popular route for walkers.
- It also provides excellent vantage points for viewing the breeding seabirds of Marwick Head; and at low water on a clear day waves can be seen breaking over the North Shoal out to the west.
- This area of coastline is a popular location for canoeists and surfers.

### **Sensitivity to Change**

#### Cliff landscape

- Marine erosion.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration and potential loss of ruined crofts and farmsteads;
- Potential sites for radio masts or wind turbines with consequential visual intrusion and potential scarring by access tracks;
- Housing development on lower slopes to obtain good but remote vantage points.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Cliff landscape

- Restrict the development of barriers, signs and other “clutter” along cliff-top footpaths.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Maintain and restore remaining drystone walls;
- Strict limitations to new development should be applied, only accessible lower slopes should be considered;
- Support the restoration and re-use of abandoned crofts/farmstead buildings.

### **Landscape Character**

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<b>LLA Name</b>	<b>Northside, Birsay</b>
<b>Location and Extent</b>	The landscape area extends from Northside along the northern coastline of Birsay to Marwick Head and includes the Brough of Birsay.

### **Overview**

The Landscape Area known as Northside, Birsay consists of an *Enclosed Bay Landscape* bounded to the north and south by *Coastal Hills and Heath* and to the east by *Loch Basin*. This landscape area includes the Brough of Birsay, an island which is separated from the mainland by a narrow stretch of water. At certain states of the tide the Brough can be accessed by a causeway leading from the Point of Buckquoy across the intertidal rock. This is not a unique feature in Orkney, as there are other small islands which can only be accessed at low tide. However, the cultural and natural heritage features of the Brough make it one of Orkney's most popular visitor attractions and a concrete causeway has been constructed to enable ease of access.

### **Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- The coastline exhibits a wide diversity of substrates. In the north the rugged and exposed rocky coastline features high cliffs, sea stacks and arches, sloping bedrock platforms and narrow geos with shingle/cobble beaches at their head. In contrast, the wide sweep of Birsay Bay is characterised by a broad, gently sloping intertidal with bedrock reefs running out to sea, perpendicular to the coastline. At low water, especially on a sunny day, these provide a pleasing textural effect when the low rocky reefs are interspersed with glistening rock pools.
- In spring and summer this is an excellent place to visit to experience the exceptional light and natural colours of Orkney's landscapes and seascapes. The uninterrupted seascape towards the western horizon provides the opportunity to experience stunning sunsets.
- Conversely, the drama of Orkney's winter gales can also be fully appreciated here, especially at the Point of Buckquoy when powerful swell waves buffet Orkney's western coastline, breaking into masses of white sea spray as they meet the opposing tide in the channel between the Point and the Brough.
- In spring and summer wildflowers add a colourful dimension alongside the core paths and in other areas of natural/semi natural habitat here.

### **Special Qualities**

- The landscape is rich in features of archaeology, built heritage and other features of cultural association. There are remains of Pictish and Norse settlements on the Brough. Birsay was the site of the first cathedral in Orkney and the remains of the Category B Listed Norse 12<sup>th</sup> century St Peter's Monastery can still be explored. The proliferation of archaeological remains makes the Brough of Birsay one of the richest historic sites in Scotland. An area of the Brough is a Property in Care. The Category A Listed two storey Earl's Palace at the village was built by Earl Robert Stewart in two phases, the first in the 1570s and the second in the 1580s. St Peter's Church and Settlement on the Brough and the Earl's Palace are also both Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the care of the Scottish Ministers. Associated with the Loch of Boardhouse are the old and new Barony Meal Mills and the Boardhouse Threshing Mill and Steadings which are all Category B Listed. The new Barony Meal Mill is the only remaining working mill in Orkney.

- This area's cultural association with fishing is illustrated at Skipi Geo where an interpretation plaque is mounted on a small stone cairn explaining how a former fisherman's hut and associated boat noysts were used.
- This is an exceptionally popular amenity area and has many qualities which make it suitable for families with small children.
- Good access routes for walkers.

### **Other Designations / Interests**

- The area includes rock formations which illustrate key features of Orkney's geological history. At the Point of Buckquoy a unique exposure demonstrates the consequences of oscillation in the level of the Orkney Lake during Sandwick Fish Bed times. A little further east along this coast, at Whitaloo Point, a typical monoclinical fold is visible in the Upper Stromness Flags. Folds of this type are rare in Orkney.

### **Sensitivity to Change**

#### Enclosed bay landscape:

- Visitor pressure in enclosed bay landscapes;
- Intrusive development which would detract from landscape character and quality;
- Potential for extraction of sand/gravel;
- Potential sites for fish farm developments.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration and potential loss of ruined crofts and farmsteads;
- Potential sites for radio masts or wind turbines with consequential visual intrusion and potential scarring by access tracks;
- Housing development on lower slopes to obtain good but remote vantage points.

#### Loch basin

- Residential pressures
- Agricultural development pressures
- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration of wartime relics
- Visitor pressure on key archaeological sites.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Enclosed bay landscape

- Monitor effects of visitor pressure on coastal paths etc.;
- Protect/manage archaeological sites and make thorough archaeological surveys a requirement of development proposals;
- Protect high amenity bay landscapes from fish farming;
- Provision of visitor facilities should be designed and located sensitively;
- Require substantial reinstatement measures for any aggregates extraction proposals to ensure sand stability and re-establishment of semi-natural habitats;
- Maintain and restore remaining drystone walls;
- Strict limitations to new development should be applied, only accessible lower slopes should be considered;
- Support the restoration and re-use of abandoned crofts/farmstead buildings;

- Protect the archaeological resources and improve its context through countryside management
- Support the planting of small scale woodlands and tree groups around farmsteads, new buildings and village developments;
- Control the siting and design of buildings to prevent obscuring long views and compromising local building character.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Maintain and restore remaining drystone walls;
- Strict limitations to new development should be applied, only accessible lower slopes should be considered;
- Support the restoration and re-use of abandoned crofts/farmstead buildings.

#### Loch basin

- Restore and conserve drystone dykes;
- Protect the archaeological resources and improve its context through countryside management;
- Support the planting of small scale woodlands and tree groups around farmsteads, new buildings and village developments;
- Control the siting and design of buildings to prevent obscuring long views and compromising local building character.

#### **Landscape Character**

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**LLA Name****Orphir East****Location and Extent**

The landscape is located in the parish of Orphir and extends from Waulkmill Bay in the east to The Bu in the west. It also includes the Loch of Kirbister in the north, along with the land bordering the loch.

**Overview**

This landscape includes the *Enclosed Bay Landscape* of Waulkmill Bay and Swanbister bay and the *Loch Basin* landscape of Kirbister Loch and an area of surrounding land. The remainder of this site is *Inclined coastal Pasture* which slopes gently towards the northern coastline of Scapa Flow. Waulkmill Bay is a relatively narrow bay which is defined by the higher ground on either side. Swanbister is a wider, more open embayment which is surrounded by gently sloping fields. Apart from Waulkmill Bay, the coastline in general has low relief. This contrasts with the higher topography of the Orphir Hills to the north of the landscape area.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- Waulkmill Bay is a deep indentation sheltered by steep, 20m high cliffs composed of sandstone and till with peat capping. At low tide a number of subdued, sub-parallel ridges and channels are exposed across an intertidal area more than 500m wide. The beach is backed by a stable and completely vegetated low shingle ridge and an area of enclosed marsh. The burn from the Loch of Kirbister enters the bay through a braided channel and low terraces are developed on either side.
- The intertidal of Waulkmill Bay and an area around the head of the bay are designated as a SSSI. At the head of Waulkmill Bay the area of saltmarsh is the largest (9ha) and most species-diverse in Orkney. The Mill Burn exits Kirbister Loch and flows through the saltmarsh before entering the sea at the western side of the bay.
- Kirbister Loch and its surrounding hills provide a number of pleasing features and visual contrasts, namely the darkness of the moorland hills against the water of the loch and its adjacent green agricultural land. These features are probably best appreciated from the north-eastern or eastern side of the loch. In calm weather conditions, particularly in the evening, the view across the loch with the dark hills in the background has an atmospheric, brooding quality.

**Special Qualities**

- The landscape is rich in features of archaeology, built heritage, literacy and other features of cultural association. Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the area include the Hillock of Brekna, the Groundwater Mounds and Enclosures on the Holm of Groundwater, Loch of Kirbister. Listed buildings include Swanbister House, Kirbister meal Mill, Old Orphir School and Orphir House. There are also the remains of a World War II pier and airfield at Swanbister.
- Close to the western boundary of this site there is the Round Church, otherwise known as St Nicholas' Chapel and the Earl's Bu. Both buildings are Category A listed. The Orkneyinga Centre, a tourism facility is also located here. The Centre presents the Orkneyinga Saga, a history of the Norse conquest of Orkney and the subsequent rule of the Orkney earls which was first written down at the turn of the 13th century by an

unknown Icelandic scribe. The Earls' Bu was the resident seat of the Orkney earls in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

- Veness Hill to the south of Waulkmill Bay is an isolated area which is relatively remote from human influence;
- In the Galaha Road, just above area of rocky intertidal known as The Lash and at The Bu, the settlement type consists generally of restored/renovated traditional dwellings which are oriented parallel to the coastline. The long, low buildings are sympathetic to the low-lying nature of the coastal landscape along with the vast, open seascape of Scapa Flow. Due to the proximity of the sea, there is a tangible connection with Scapa Flow at both locations.

### **Other Designations / Interests**

- A small area of heather moorland to the east of Kirbister Loch is part of the Keelylang and Swartabeck SSSI which, in turn form part of the West Mainland Moors SPA, an important area for breeding raptors, including hen harrier and short-eared owl.
- To the west of Kirbister Loch the Orphir Hills Southern Fringes Local Nature Conservation Site borders the West Mainland Moorlands SSSI /SPA and represents an important feeding area for species such as hen harrier and short eared owl. The varied colours and shapes of the natural vegetation in this area contribute interesting texture to this part of the landscape.
- The Fidge at Swanbister is another LNCS and contains areas of saltmarsh as well as freshwater marsh and includes dense stands of iris and rushes.
- There are areas of natural lochside vegetation around Kirbister Loch. The wildflower assemblages on either side of the track along the eastern banks of the loch are particularly interesting. Kirbister Loch itself provides an attractive water feature within the surrounding farmland.
- Waulkmill is one of Orkney's most visited sandy beaches and the excellent access routes make this a popular destination at all times of the year. The large expanse of sand allows the waters of the incoming tide to warm up quickly making this a good bay for enjoying a swim or a splash about in the water. Waulkmill is more sheltered than many other bays in Orkney.
- Kirbister Loch is a popular trout fishing loch and a track leading to a water pumping station on the eastern boundary of the loch provides easy access for anglers. This track also provides an excellent opportunity to walk along the banks of the loch, to enjoy the scenery and wildlife of this area. The track runs alongside the boundary of part of the Keelylang and Swartabeck Burn SSSI which is important for its birdlife, and many species of wildflowers can be seen on either side of the track.
- A Core Path follows a circular route from the group of houses at the Bu, westward along the coast to the Round Church, Earl's Bu and Orkneyinga Centre, returning back to the Bu by road. There are attractive views across Scapa Flow and towards Hoy and Graemsay from this part of the LLA.

### **Sensitivity to Change**

#### Enclosed Bay landscape

- Visitor pressure;
- Intrusive development which would detract from landscape character and quality;
- Potential for extraction of sand/gravel;
- Potential sites for fish farm developments.



### Loch basin

- Residential pressures;
- Agricultural development pressures;
- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration of wartime relics;
- Visitor pressure on key archaeological sites.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings;
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development
- Possible impacts on archaeological/architectural heritage.

## **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

### Enclosed Bay landscape

- Monitor effects of visitor pressure on coastal paths etc.;
- Protect/manage archaeological sites and make thorough archaeological surveys a requirement of development proposals;
- Protect high amenity bay landscapes from fish farming;
- Provision of visitor facilities should be designed and located sensitively;
- Require substantial reinstatement measures for any aggregates extraction proposals to ensure sand stability and re-establishment of semi-natural habitats.

### Loch basin

- Restore and conserve drystone dykes;
- Protect the archaeological resources and improve its context through countryside management;
- Support the planting of small scale woodlands and tree groups around farmsteads, new buildings and village developments;
- Control the siting and design of buildings to prevent obscuring long views and compromising local building character.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Encourage the restoration and re-use of any traditional structures;
- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;
- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing development along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/extending farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged;

- Protect archaeological and architectural heritage from obtrusive development which may detract from local views;
- New development in inclined coastal pastures should be oriented in relation to the coast, and should reflect vernacular tradition in distribution and design.

### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land Use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

**LLA Name****Rendall Moss****Location and Extent**

This landscape area is located within the parish of Rendall in the West Mainland of Orkney. It extends from the crossroads to the north of Quina in the south to Ellibister in the north and is framed in the west by the Rendall Hills.

**Overview**

The Rendall Moss Landscape Area is an area of *Peatland Basin* which is backed by *Rolling Hill Fringe* and *Moorland Hill* and also contains small areas of *Inclined Coastal Pasture*. The scale of the peatland basin and its extensive mosaic of wetland vegetation are striking features within this landscape.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- The wide, low-lying, flat expanse of the Rendall Moss contrasts sharply with the dark moorland hills behind. In the dark days of winter this landscape can promote a sense of bleakness and barrenness. However, with the advent of spring the colours, textures and forms of the many different plant species of this area bring about a transformation to the landscape. In late summer and autumn in particular the green mounds of dwarf shrub willow and cream-coloured, frothy heads of meadowsweet provide a striking foil for the vivid purple of the heather-clad hills.

**Special Qualities**

- The landscape has some features of archaeology including the Black Knowe and the Knowe of Lyron, both of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.
- Wetlands provide an environment which effectively preserves a range of organic materials which may become degraded in other environments and they are therefore extremely important for containing the pollen history of a wide area. They may also be specially singled out for specific activities in pre history with the deposition of Bronze Age weapons being a notable feature of some.
- The moorland hills to the west of the Rendall Moss are isolated and promote a sense of remoteness from human influence.

**Other Designations / Interests**

- Large parts of this area consist of natural or semi-natural habitat, e.g. the moorland hills in the west form part of the Orkney Moorlands Special Protection Area and contain habitat which supports populations of breeding hen harrier, short-eared owl and red throated diver. The moss itself supports an extensive mosaic of wetland plant species including dwarf shrub willow, flag iris, water avens and meadowsweet. It represents an important hunting area for the raptor species which breed in the nearby moorland hills and it is an ideal location for sightings of hen harrier or short-eared owl.
- Core paths provide access to the Rendall Hills above the Moss, enabling walkers to experience the considerable natural heritage of this area as well as outstanding views over the Moss and beyond to the waters of Wide Firth.

**Sensitivity to Change**

Peatland basin

- Vertical or large scale structures would be highly intrusive in this landscape;
- Wildlife interest of whole peatland basin may be compromised by any drainage activity.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings;
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development.

#### Moorland hills

- Moorland hills are sensitive to vertical developments such as wind turbines or electricity transmission poles.

#### Inclined coastal pasture

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development
- Possible impacts on archaeological/architectural heritage.

### **Potential for Landscape Enhancement**

#### Peatland basin

- Strict control of building developments should aim to keep the basin floor clear of development;
- Target mechanical peat cutting to visually contained but accessible areas, ensure reinstatement of surface vegetation;
- Small scale woodland and scrub planting should be encouraged in hollows and around wetlands;
- High standards in building design should apply to any building development.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/expanding farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged.

#### Moorland hills

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/expanding farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;

- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged.

#### Inclined coastal pasture

- Encourage the restoration and re-use of any traditional structures;
- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;
- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing development along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/extending farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged;
- Protect archaeological and architectural heritage from obtrusive development which may detract from local views;
- New development in inclined coastal pastures should be oriented in relation to the coast, and should reflect vernacular tradition in distribution and design.

#### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land Use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

**LLA Name****Scapa Bay****Location and Extent**

The Scapa Bay Local Landscape Area is located to the south of Kirkwall and includes the higher land on either side of the Bay, extending from Hellia in the west to Gaitnip in the east, along with the low-lying Crantit Valley to the north.

**Overview**

The Landscape Area is made up of four landscape character types. The *Enclosed Bay* landscape of Scapa Bay is backed by a small area of *Urban and Rural Development*, with an area of *Rolling Hill Fringe* to the west and *Plateau Heaths and Pasture* to the east. The Council's Marine Services Department is based at Scapa but otherwise this area is predominantly managed for agriculture with scattered housing.

**Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics**

- The landscape provides important views from the southern boundary of Kirkwall along the Crantit Valley out to Scapa Flow. Views in from Scapa Flow show the townscape of Kirkwall in the distance, with St Magnus Cathedral being the tallest and most notable feature on the skyline.
- In the east the cliffs which border the plateau heaths and pasture landscape and extend southwards to Gaitnip provide a pleasing contrast to the sands of Scapa Beach, which is particularly marked at low states of the tide when a wide expanse of sand is uncovered.

**Special Qualities**

- Scapa Flow was an important anchorage for the Royal Navy during World Wars I and II and this part of its history is explained in a small interpretation centre which is located at the head of the bay;
- A critical event in World War II was the sinking of the battleship HMS Royal Oak, which was torpedoed by a German U-boat in the early hours of October 14, 1939. The ship went down off the eastern coast of Scapa Bay with the loss of 833 lives. A buoy marks the location of the wreck which is designated as an official war grave, and each year a wreath is placed at the buoy as a mark of remembrance. The cliffed landscape along the eastern shoreline provides a poignant setting for the location of the wreck of the Royal Oak.
- **Other Designations / Interests**
- Very popular amenity beach, due in part to its proximity to Kirkwall, Orkney's largest centre of population.
- Popular circular walking route along the main road. Core Paths also extends part of the way along the Crantit Canal and along the western coastline of Scapa Bay towards Dykend.
- Today, Scapa Bay plays an important role in the Orkney economy as the Council's Marine Services Department is based here, and the tugs and pilot launches which service oil industry interests at the Flotta terminal operate from Scapa Pier.
- The name Scapa comes from the Viking word *scalpeid* meaning portage and it is believed that historically boats were pulled through the flat, low-lying valley from Kirkwall to Scapa Bay.

**Sensitivity to Change**

Enclosed Bay landscape

- Visitor pressure;
- Intrusive development which would detract from landscape character and quality;
- Potential for extraction of sand/gravel;
- Potential sites for fish farm developments.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings;
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development.

#### Plateau heaths and pasture

- Open plateau makes built structures highly visible for within the landscape.

#### Urban and rural development

- The effects of expansion of development into neighbouring Greenfield sites, particularly elevated sites where visual impact is likely to be considerable;
- The redevelopment of existing built up areas may result in the loss of significant buildings and trees or may obscure important buildings / views within the town (particularly Kirkwall).
- Remote developments just outside the main urban area of Kirkwall may constitute urban sprawl and could introduce obtrusive features onto the skyline;
- The clear definition between the agricultural landscape and the town could be blurred by the expansion of urban fringe developments such as caravan parks etc.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Enclosed Bay landscape

- Monitor effects of visitor pressure on coastal paths etc.;
- Protect/manage archaeological sites and make thorough archaeological surveys a requirement of development proposals;
- Protect high amenity bay landscapes from fish farming;
- Provision of visitor facilities should be designed and located sensitively;
- Require substantial reinstatement measures for any aggregates extraction proposals to ensure sand stability and re-establishment of semi-natural habitats.

#### Rolling hill fringe

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/expanding farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;
- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged.

### Plateau heaths and pasture

- Enhance landscape structure by restoring/extending areas of stone wall field boundaries;
- Maintain the widely dispersed settlement pattern; site and design new buildings with regard to skyline views;
- Encourage woodland planting of small and medium scales and particularly around developments.

### Urban and rural development

- Protect the skyline dominance and integrity of St Magnus Cathedral;
- Define and protect the landscape setting of Kirkwall and Stromness;
- Restrict urban fringe development around Kirkwall to the lower parts of the town's topographic basin.
- Establish a landscape framework around Kirkwall and Stromness to assist integration of new "greenfield" sites development;
- Establish housing design guidance for developers.

### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)



<b>LLA Name</b>	<b>Woodwick</b>
<b>Location and Extent</b>	Woodwick is a little sheltered embayment in the parish of Evie. The landscape area extends from the Taing of Midgarth in the south to the Point of Vastray in the north.

### Overview

Woodwick Bay is an example of an *Enclosed Bay Landscape*. It is mainly surrounded by *Inclined Coastal Pasture* but to the NW it is overlooked by Vishall Hill which is described as an *Isolated Coastal Knoll*.

Woodwick is an attractive little bay which forms an important part of the landscape of this part of Evie. It is a key element in views from the A966 and settlements in the area, in particular those settlements along the lower slopes of Vishall Hill.

### Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Vishall Hill and the adjacent Hill of Dwarmo provide an effective and contrasting backdrop to the low-lying Woodwick Bay and the *Inclined Coastal Pastures* landscape which immediately surrounds the Bay.
- In the west, Hammars Hill, which is now the location for five large-scale wind turbines, provides a further strong backdrop to the bay.

### Special Qualities

- Important area for biodiversity. The adjacent Hill of Dwarmo is a proposed Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) due to the diversity of plant species it supports.
- The Oyce of Isbister, an area of mudflat along with the saltmarsh and rough grassland which surrounds Woodwick Bay is an LNCS due to its importance for wintering wildfowl and waders.
- A Core Path extends from below the Hill of Dwarmo to the shoreline south of the Loch of Vastray, another LNCS which is important for ornithology and is also frequented by otters.
- The Taing of Midgarth is a haulout location for common seal.
- Woodwick Bay/Burn is an important area for the migratory fish species, sea trout, a UK BAP Priority Species. Each autumn trout migrate upstream to spawn. Juvenile fish enter the sea during spring.

### Other Designations / Interests

- The remains of an Iron Age/Pictish broch are located on the Ness of Woodwick. The Broch is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Knowe of Midgarth, also a SAM, is located close to the southern shoreline of the Bay. Assuming that the position of the coastline remains broadly similar to when the Knowe was constructed, this suggests that the coastal location may have been an important factor in the siting of these monuments. During April/May the Knowe is enlivened by the flowers of butterbur, a valuable early source of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects.
- Woodwick House is an attractive country house surrounded by mature bluebell woodland. Although the house is largely obscured by the surrounding trees, the plantation provides an attractive focus at the head of the Bay.
- The Woodwick Doocot is Category B listed.
- Vishall Hill was a former site of execution.
- A little stone hut is built into the south shore of the Bay – possibly an old fishermen's' hut.

## **Sensitivity to Change**

### Coastal Bay landscape

- Visitor pressure;
- Intrusive development which would detract from landscape character and quality;
- Potential for extraction of sand/gravel;
- Potential sites for fish farm developments.

### Isolated coastal knolls

- Decline in drystone dykes;
- Elevated position makes any development along the coast highly visible.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Decline in drystone walls;
- Derelict farm buildings;
- Large farm developments, particularly cluttered ancillary buildings;
- New building developments, including possible demand for housing along main roads, creating linear development;
- Possible impacts on archaeological/architectural heritage.

## **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

### Coastal Bay landscape

- Monitor effects of visitor pressure on coastal paths etc.;
- Protect/manage archaeological sites and make thorough archaeological surveys a requirement of development proposals;
- Protect high amenity bay landscapes from fish farming;
- Provision of visitor facilities should be designed and located sensitively;
- Require substantial reinstatement measures for any aggregates extraction proposals to ensure sand stability and re-establishment of semi-natural habitats.

### Isolated coastal knolls

- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures;
- Avoid developments in key views along the coastline;
- Avoid skylining of structures;
- New building should be oriented in relation to the coast;
- Sites of archaeological interest should be protected from agricultural or developmental pressures;
- Encourage the restoration of old farm buildings.

### Inclined coastal pasture

- Encourage the restoration and re-use of any traditional structures;
- Examine the potential for native woodland establishment in gullies and valleys;
- Site development carefully with regard to visibility from other landscapes;
- Utilise existing tracks and sites of former development in preference to all new developments in the exposed moorland landscape;
- Maintain and extend stone wall enclosures; where possible extend round new developments; visual emphasis should be placed on those running down to the coast.
- Linear housing development along roadsides should be prevented;
- Large/extending farm developments should use coordinated massing and roof pitch to achieve greater coalescence;
- New building should reflect the surrounding geology and vernacular tradition in building materials and style;

- New building should be sited with respect to the contours and orientation of the underlying land;
- Small scale tree planting should be encouraged around individual residential and farm developments;
- Restoration of old farm buildings should be encouraged;
- Protect archaeological and architectural heritage from obtrusive development which may detract from local views;
- New development in inclined coastal pastures should be oriented in relation to the coast, and should reflect vernacular tradition in distribution and design.

### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land Use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

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<b>LLA Name</b>	<b>Yesnaby Sea Cliffs</b>
<b>Location and Extent</b>	The landscape area is located on the west coast of the Orkney West Mainland and extends from Bor Wick in the north to Billia Croo in the south.

### Overview

This area forms part of the western seaboard of the Orkney west mainland, and is a coastline characterised by rugged, Old Red Sandstone cliffs interspersed by narrow geos and occasional, wider embayments. The *Cliff Landscape* grades inland into *Coastal Hills and Heath*.

### Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Extensive, unbroken stretches of remote coastline, dominated by high eroded cliffs and related landform features including caves, stacks and geos;
- This landscape forms part of the Hoy and West Mainland National Scenic Area. Its setting is particularly important, with spectacular coastal cliff views both north and south, heathland inland to the east as well as the dramatic landscape of Hoy to the south.
- A major feature of this site is the juxtaposition of different coastal habitats and the natural landward transition from typical maritime communities to a heathland community interspersed with species-rich flush and mire communities.

### Special Qualities

- The Yesnaby – Gaulton coast which forms part of the Stromness Heaths and Coast SSSI/SAC provides one of the best exposed and most scenically attractive sections through the base of the Old Red Sandstone and the underlying basement of Orkney. The section consists of a dramatic series of almost vertical cliffs up to 60m in height, occasionally broken and cut by narrow inlets and geos. It exposes the junction between crystalline basement rock and the Lower Old Red Sandstone and shows the angular conformity at the base of the Middle Old Red Sandstone Stromness Flags. The Flags include a variety of sedimentary features and an unusual array of stromatolites. Active erosion of this cliff line has produced a fine assemblage of geomorphological features, especially stacks, geos and caves.
- Stromness Heaths and Coasts SAC is notified for its base-rich fens, dry heaths and vegetated sea cliffs. The large tract of semi-natural coastal heath and grassland south of Yesnaby and Gaulton Cliffs is greatly influenced by both the prevailing climatic conditions and the sea. Throughout the site a number of colonies can be found of the nationally scarce Scottish primrose *Primula scotica*, with its tiny purple/pink flowers.
- The high level of exposure of this coastline and the sense of remoteness from human influence lend the area a strong experiential quality of isolation in an often physically harsh environment.

### Other Designations / Interests

- Cliff-top landscapes such as these tend to contain multiple archaeological features. The Brough of Bigging promontory fort and the Broch of Borwick are both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Other notable historic sites include the remains of St Bride's Chapel which is situated at the head of the Noust of Bigging and a farmstead and head dyke which is located alongside Burn of Selta. Qui Ayre is the site of a former mill stone quarry. The car park at Yesnaby is constructed alongside the remains of a number of World War II military buildings which include a wartime training station.

- Yesnaby is one of the most popular west mainland locations for walkers and the coastal path through this area forms part of a wider path which extends from Birsay in the north to Stromness in the south.
- People visit Yesnaby at all times of the year. A major element of the area's appeal is its "wildness" – the exposed and undeveloped nature of its landscape and the wide open seascapes that are sometimes calm and tranquil; sometimes turbulent with breaking waves and white foaming sea spray.

### **Sensitivity to Change**

#### Cliff landscape

- Marine erosion.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Decline of remaining drystone walls;
- Deterioration and potential loss of ruined crofts and farmsteads;
- Potential sites for radio masts or wind turbines with consequential visual intrusion and potential scarring by access tracks;
- Housing development on lower slopes to obtain good but remote vantage points.

### **Potential for Landscape Conservation / Enhancement**

#### Cliff landscape

- Restrict the development of barriers, signs and other "clutter" along cliff-top footpaths.

#### Coastal Hills and Heath

- Maintain and restore remaining drystone walls;
- Strict limitations to new development should be applied, only accessible lower slopes should be considered;
- Support the restoration and re-use of abandoned crofts/farmstead buildings.

### **Landscape Character**

The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in Land Use Consultants 1998 Orkney Landscape Character Assessment. Scottish Natural Heritage Review No 100.

All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)