

The Aberdeen Landscape Study

Coastal Character Assessment

February 2021





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Acknowledgments

Douglas Harman thanks the Project Team for their dedicated support and hard work in producing this study. Thanks are also extended to members of the Project Steering Group and in particular, Claire McArthur, Deb Munro, Laura Campbell, Jo Duncan, Donna Laing and Ailsa Anderson whose enthusiasm and helpful advice have been integral to the development of this project.

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1. Introduction

The Aberdeen coast

- 1.1 Aberdeen has a close connection with the sea, and its coast is one of its greatest assets. There are over 31 kilometres¹ of contrasting coastline, with a rich variety of habitats and wildlife, as well as a diverse built and cultural heritage. Along with the adjoining coastline in Aberdeenshire, the Aberdeen coast forms an important part of regional and local identity, and its distinctive character underpins a vibrant tourism industry while providing an important setting to daily life.



Aberdeen Esplanade

Purpose of report

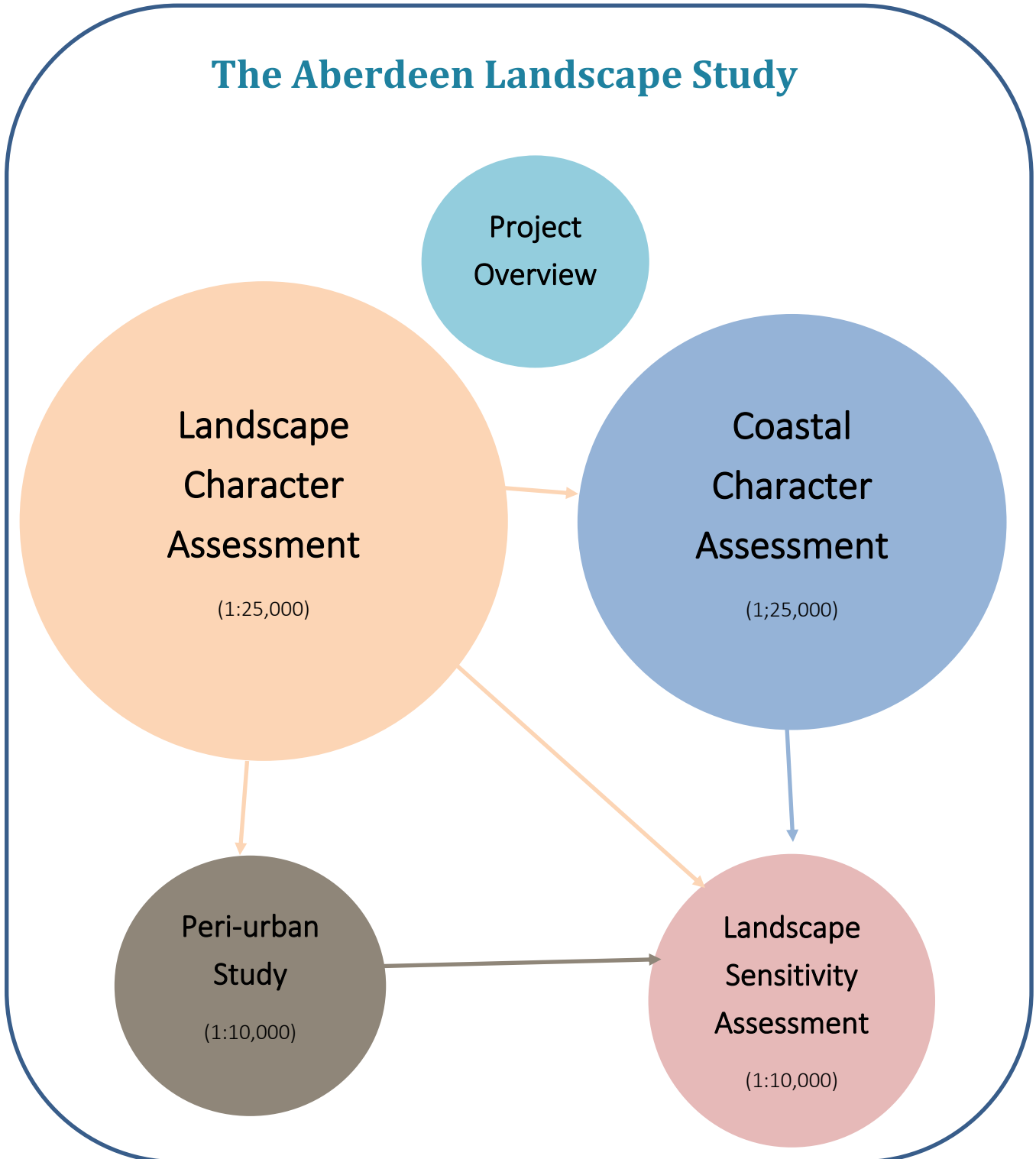
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide a robust, up-to-date baseline of coastal information to help shape future plans, strategies, policies and projects, including the review and implementation of the *Aberdeen Local Development Plan*. It complements the *Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment* although this Coastal Character Assessment examines the distinctive character of Aberdeen's coast in more detail. In particular, this report sets out an understanding of maritime influences, the nature of the coastal edge and its immediate hinterland, and how these factors combine to shape the identity of locally distinctive Coastal Character Areas.
- 1.3 By identifying and describing the various factors that influence coastal character, this study is intended to inform a wide range of planning and management activity taking place on and around the coast. To

¹ captured at 1:25,000 scale

help shape future change, a suite of management guidelines for each of the six Coastal Character Areas have also been identified.

The Aberdeen Landscape Study

1.4 This Coastal Character Assessment forms part of the *Aberdeen Landscape Study* (ALS), which is in five separate project ‘parts’, as illustrated in the following diagram. Collectively, these parts provide a comprehensive understanding of Aberdeen’s rural, coastal, and peri-urban landscapes. The ALS also includes a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for a range of development types, and a project overview provides a summary of the documents.



2. Coastal Character Assessment

What is Coastal Character?

- 2.1 Coastal character is made up of the often narrow margin of the coastal edge, its immediate hinterland, and the sea. These three key components of coastal character include what is commonly known as 'seascape' which refers to *"an area, as perceived by people, from land, sea or air, where the sea is a key element of the physical environment"* (Council of Europe, 2000). 'Seascape' is a widely used term which is included in the definition of landscape within the European Landscape Convention.



What is a Coastal Character Assessment?

- 2.2 A Coastal Character Assessment examines coastal influences in more detail than a Landscape Character Assessment although both assessments in this instance are undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000. The method for this study is based on *'Guidance on Coastal Character Assessment – Consultation Draft'* (SNH, 2016) and as noted in Tables 1 and 2 of the guidance, the process focuses on identifying areas of distinct character defined on the basis of:
- a) Maritime influences;
 - b) Character of the coastal edge;
 - c) Character of immediate hinterland;
 - d) Wildness/isolated coast; and
 - e) Visual assessment.

Coastal Character Areas

- 2.3 One of the main outputs of a Coastal Character Assessment is the identification and description of Coastal Character Areas (CCAs). These have a unique identity, are specific to one place, focus on differences and local distinctiveness, and are identified by a local place name.



The *Aberdeen Harbour* Coastal Character Area is characterised by its busy docks that provide shelter from the expanse of the North Sea.



The distinctive swathe of golden sand along the *Aberdeen Beach* Coastal Character Area provides an important recreational resource to the city.

Relationship to the Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment (2021)

- 2.4 This study has a close relationship with the *Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment (2021)* but this coastal assessment focusses on the specific characteristics associated with the coastal domain. As such, it is important to note that the boundaries of Landscape Character Types/Areas do not always correlate with those defined for coastal character. This situation can occur where the character of the coast is different in its form and scale to adjacent Landscape Character Areas.
- 2.5 An example of this occurs to the south of Aberdeen Harbour where the coastal hinterland is characterised by one Landscape Character Area, (*Girdle Ness*, LCA 22) but with three associated Coastal Character Areas. As illustrated in Figure 1, the coastal edge of the *Girdle Ness* LCA exhibits contrasting landforms including a headland, crescent-shaped bay and the rocky shore of the outer harbour and these factors contribute to variations in coastal character.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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Figure 1. Relationship of Landscape and Coastal Character Areas

Coastal Character Areas

- 2. Aberdeen Beach
- 3. Aberdeen Harbour
- 4. Girdle Ness
- 5. Bay of Nigg
- 6. Souter Head

Landscape Character Area

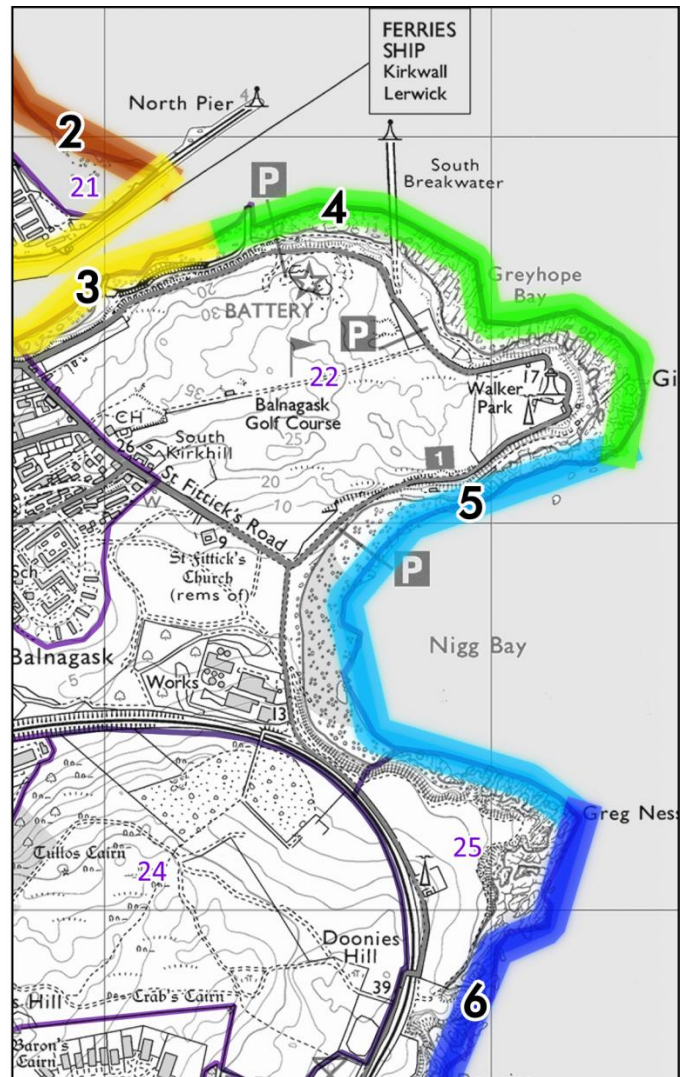
- 21. King's Links
- 22. Girdle Ness
- 24. Kincorth Hill
- 25. Souter Coast



0 300 m



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2.6 Although the boundaries between Coastal and Landscape Character Areas do not always coincide, the *Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment* (2018) has provided useful information when describing the relationship between the immediate hinterland and the coastal edge.

Using the Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

2.7 Coastal Character Assessment can inform coastal and marine planning, as well as individual development proposals, for example, through landscape, seascape and visual impact assessments. Where the character and value of the coast is material consideration in assessing the acceptability of development proposals in undeveloped coastal areas, this study provides the essential baseline to inform development proposals and the associated assessment of their acceptability.

2.8 As context to this, *Policy NE7 – Coastal Planning* of the *Aberdeen Local Development Plan* (2017) states that “Development will only be permitted in undeveloped coastal areas if it can be demonstrated that... It respects the character and value of the natural and historic environment, as well as the recreational value in the surrounding area...”.

2.9 In support of this policy, the plan notes that “Aberdeen City’s coastline is an important environmental, social and economic asset which needs to be protected and enhanced. It has been classified into two

types of area, developed and undeveloped coast (shown on the Proposals Map). In general, the developed coast is already a focus of economic or recreational activity and is likely to be suitable for further development, whereas the undeveloped coast is largely unspoiled and likely to be unsuitable for development.”

- 2.10 To inform the implementation of this policy, this Coastal Character Assessment provides useful information to help identify potential sites that might be suitable for development. In particular, it describes the character and value of the coastline to be respected in any development proposals and the extent to which development might be acceptable.
- 2.11 As part of this, it may be necessary to consider the effects of a development proposal on both landscape and coastal character when undertaking landscape, seascape and visual impact assessments. The nature and scale of a development will influence whether impacts on both coastal and landscape character need to be considered. For instance, a large coastal power station or near-shore wind turbines will have a wider landward influence than smaller offshore wave devices. Many offshore renewable energy developments will require onshore facilities and effects on landscape character may also need to be considered if these are situated well within the hinterland of the coast.

3. Approach

Key stages

- 3.1 The approach to this study follows ‘*Guidance on Coastal Character Assessment – Consultation Draft*’ (SNH, 2016) which in turn is based on ‘*Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland*’ (Countryside Agency & SNH, 2002). In common with Landscape Character Assessment, there are four key stages involved in the process of undertaking a Coastal Character Assessment. These are:
1. Defining the scope of the Coastal Character Assessment;
 2. Desk study and review;
 3. Field survey; and
 4. Classification and description of coastal character.

Defining the extent of the coast

- 3.2 As noted in the SNH guidance, ‘*the process of defining the extent of the coast is considered on a case-by-case basis and influenced by the dominance of the sea in terms of physical characteristics, views and experience. The landward boundary of the coast can be narrow where edged by cliffs, settlement, or woodland, but can also broaden to include raised beaches, dunes or open coastal pasture*².’
- 3.3 In defining the extent of the coast for this study (see Figure 3), a relatively narrow strip of coastal hinterland has been identified due to the proximity of built development, dunes, links, promenade, cliffs and agricultural areas.

Desk study

- 3.4 The desk study considered the findings of the *Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment* (2021) and a wide range of terrestrial and marine data (see Appendix 1 for further details). Following the desk study, draft Coastal Character Areas were identified as a basis for a detailed field survey.

Field survey

- 3.5 The field survey, which included assessment from the sea, was carried out by two Chartered Members of the Landscape Institute, in accordance with best practice³. As far as possible, the coast has been explored along most of its length, where accessible. The assessment of views from the sea took place during the August 2016, with sunshine and excellent visibility. This entailed travelling by boat near to the coastline of each Coastal Character Area to record relevant physical and experiential characteristics. The terrestrial survey was undertaken in February 2016, with generally good visibility and varying weather.
- 3.6 It is important to note that the field survey captures the character and experience at a specific point in time, while changes in daylight, noise, human activity, and weather conditions can significantly affect

² *Guidance on Coastal Character Assessment – Consultation Draft*’ (SNH, 2016)

³ *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) 3rd Edition* (Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013) & *Guidance on Coastal Character Assessment – Consultation Draft*’ (SNH, 2016)

the nature of coastal experiences. Where possible, these variations have been captured through local knowledge of the project Steering Group.

National context and scale of assessment

3.7 SNH have published a national level coastal characterisation⁴ (1:250,000) which identifies 13 Coastal Character Types based on coastal, hinterland and marine character and these occur in 33 indicative ‘National’ seascape areas. At this national scale, the study area of the *Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment* (see Figure 2) is formed of *Rocky Coastline with Open Views* (Type 2) and *Deposition Coastline with Open Sea Views* (Type 3). To provide detail at the local level, and to coincide with the *Aberdeen Landscape Character Assessment*, the *Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment* has been undertaken at a scale of 1:25,000.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

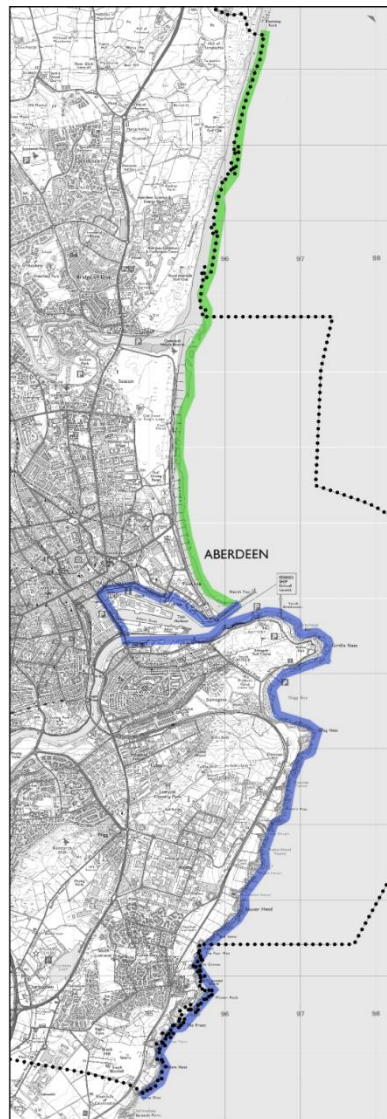
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Figure 2. National Coastal Character Types

- ⋯ Aberdeen City Council boundary
- National Coastal Character Types
 - 2. Rocky Coastline with Open Sea Views
 - 3. Deposition Coastline with Open Sea Views



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⁴ An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape in relation to offshore windfarms (Scott et al, 2005).



Study area

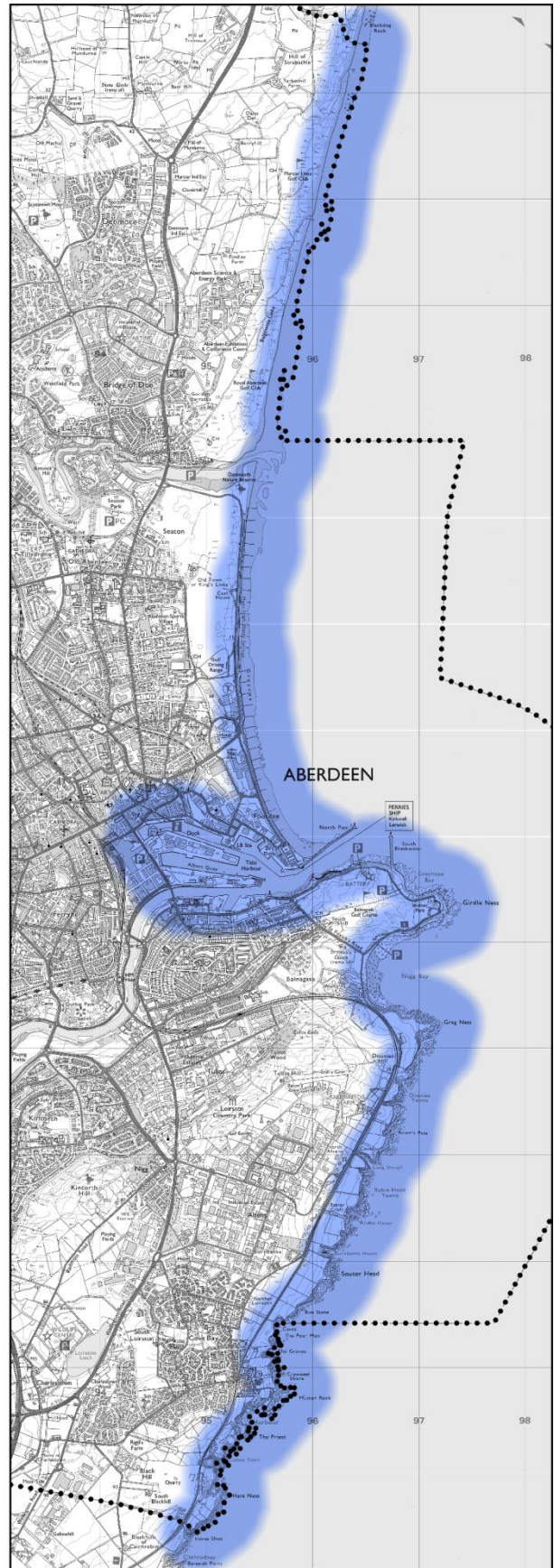
3.8 The study area (see Figure 3) covers the entire coastal extent of the administrative area of Aberdeen City, and includes the sea, coastal edge and its immediate hinterland.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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Figure 3. Study area

-  Aberdeen City Council boundary
-  Indicative study area



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Classification criteria

3.9 In classifying and describing coastal character, the following criteria have been assessed through desk study and field survey.

Topic	Physical Characteristics	Experiential Characteristics
Maritime influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspect and orientation • Existing marine based activities • Maritime processes • Scale, distance and expansiveness of open sea • Offshore development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of space and light • Sense of exposure • Sense of containment/openness • Sounds and smells
Character of the coastal edge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape and scale of coastline • Degree of indentation and enclosure • Presence of offshore islands • Fragmentation of edges, sediment deposition features, tidal variations • Landmarks • Shoreline development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of exposure • Sense of containment or openness
Character of immediate hinterland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key elements of landscape character • Topography and relief • Vegetation pattern • Existing settlement and structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of containment or openness • Presence of maritime influences • Activity, noise and lighting
Wildness and isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of natural processes • Presence of development or human activity • Accessibility • Ruggedness of terrain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of naturalness • Perceived remoteness • Sense of isolation
Visual Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of the coastal edge • Presence of the open sea • Focal points or features within views 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views from settled areas • Views experienced as part of a sequence • Elevated viewpoints and panoramas

Topic	Physical Characteristics	Experiential Characteristics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspect and orientation of viewpoint, character of seascape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudden revelations • Glimpsed views

4. Overview of the Coast

- 4.1 The coast is formed by the interaction of physical influences, such as geology, climate and vegetation and the effects of human activity upon the natural environment. This section provides an overview of how the natural diversity and cultural interest of the Aberdeen coast has influenced its distinctive character.

Natural diversity

- 4.2 The coast between Aberdeen Harbour and Cove has some dramatic scenery. The rocks and sediments provide clues that help us to reconstruct a remarkable story of past oceans, mountain ranges, volcanoes and glaciers⁵. The igneous (Dalradian) bedrock is some of the oldest in Scotland. Approximately 360 million years ago, volcanic activity was widespread and this resulted in the formation of igneous dykes which were subsequently eroded by the sea to form the numerous inlets. Above the bedrock, there are generally thin accumulations of tough reddish clays and silts containing boulders laid down by the last ice. These glacial deposits are exposed in the cliff section at the Bay of Nigg, which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 4.3 The coastline has been sculpted over millions of years by wind, wave and tide to create what we see today as a spectacular landscape of relatively high cliffs and narrow coves, often subject to pounding waves. Walking along the cliff tops provides a journey through history with the different rocks below providing stories of the incredible journey that Scotland has taken through geological history



Striking coastal landforms along the *Souter Coast*



Shingle beach at *the Bay of Nigg*

- 4.4 In contrast to the rocky coastline that extends south of Aberdeen Harbour and into Aberdeenshire, the Aberdeen Bay coastline (to the north of the harbour) comprises extensive sand dune systems and golden beaches. The dune system extends in land up to one kilometre and in places has been changed by human activities. At King's Links for example, the dune system has been heavily modified by a range

⁵ *Nigg Bay To Cove Coastal Footpath Geology And Geomorphology* (Prof. A Dawson, 2009)

of extensive recreational land uses and north of the River Don, golf courses extend across much of the dunes. The bay also supports intertidal and subtidal habitats, including saltmarsh, sand spits and mud.



Species rich dunes



Natural character of Donmouth

4.5 As illustrated in Figures 4a and 4b, the composition of bedrock and surface geology has resulted in a notable contrast in intertidal habitats between the northern and southern parts of the study area.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

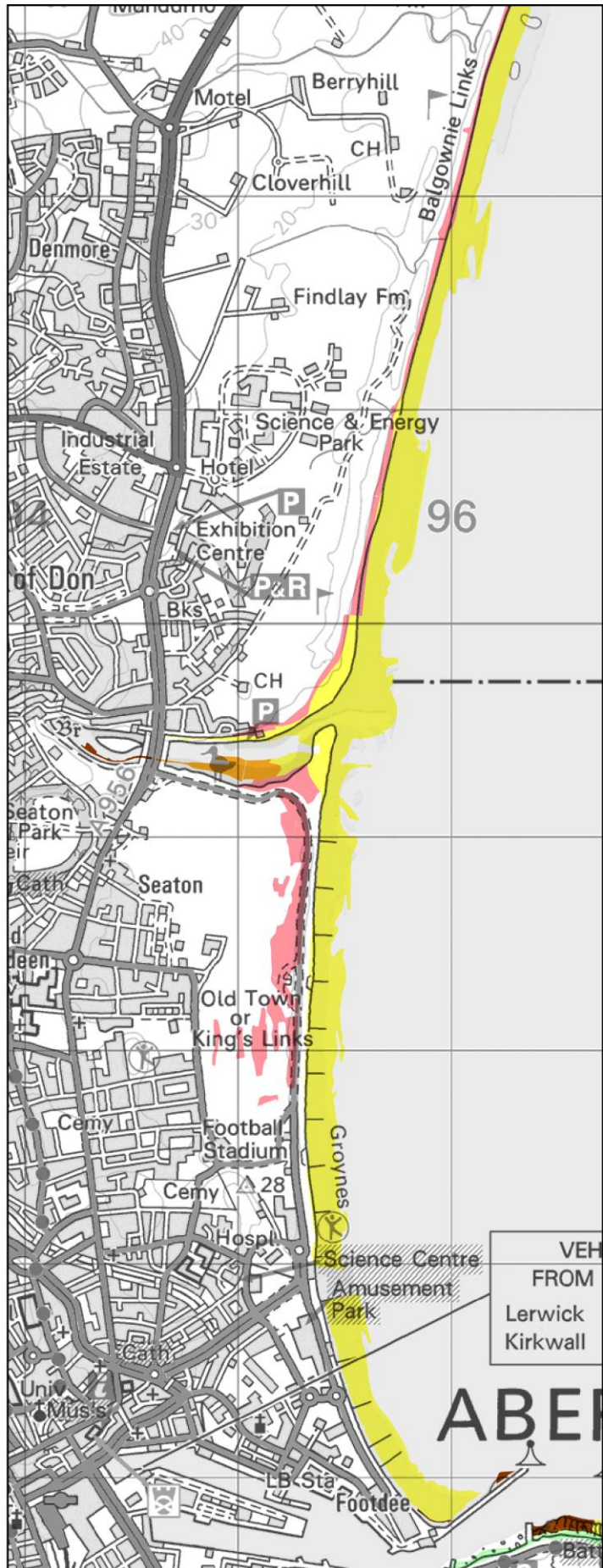
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Figure 4a. Intertidal habitats

Source: North East Scotland Biological Records Centre

Intertidal Habitats

- LR0 - littoral Rock
- LS4 - mudflats
- LSZ - other littoral sediment
- SR0 - supralittoral Rock
- SRZ - other supralittoral rock
- SR111 - coastal grassland
- SSZ - other supralittoral sediment
- SS1 - coastal sand dunes



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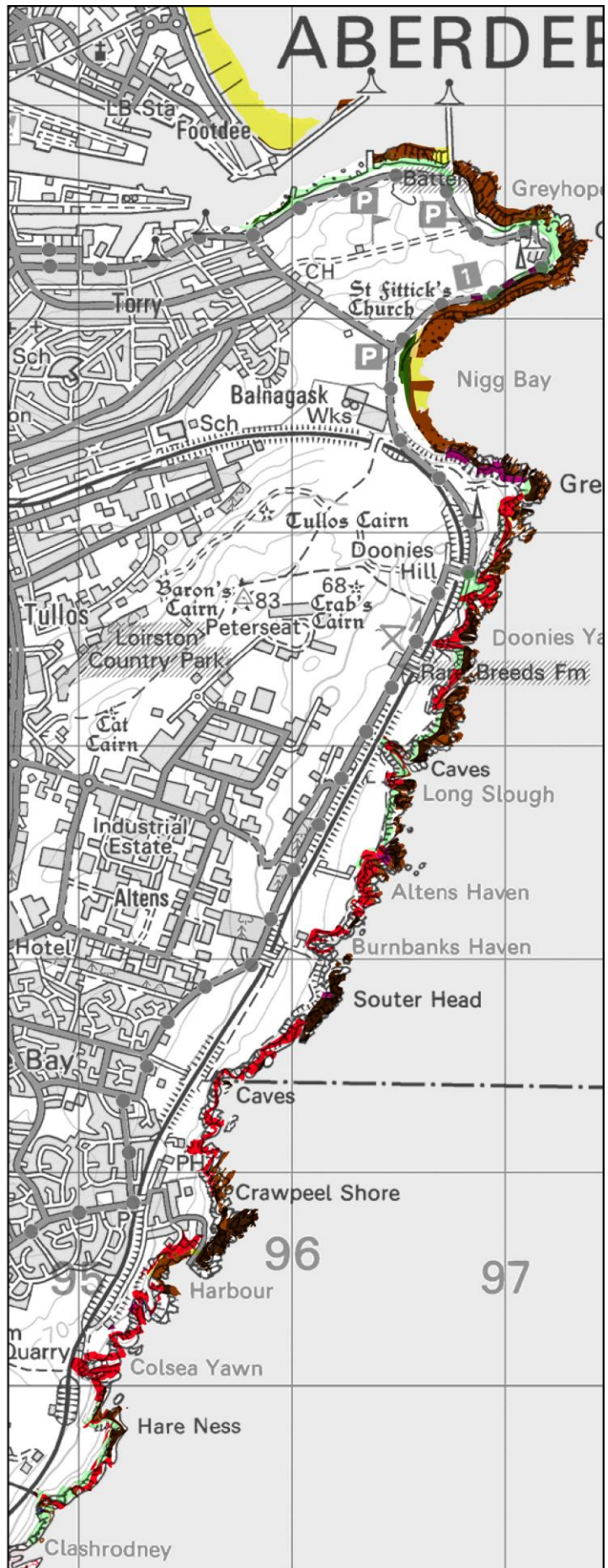
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Figure 4b. Intertidal habitats

Source: North East Scotland Biological Records Centre

Intertidal Habitats

- LR0 - littoral Rock
- LS0 - littoral Sediment
- LSZ - other littoral sediment
- SR0 - supralittoral Rock
- SRZ - other supralittoral rock
- SR1 - maritime cliff and slopes
- SR1Z - other maritime cliffs and slopes
- SR111 - coastal grassland
- SR112 - coastal heath
- SR2 - boulders and rock above the high tide mark
- SS0 - supralittoral sediment
- SSZ - other supralittoral sediment
- SS3 - shingle above high tide mark
- SS3Z - other shingle above high tide mark



0 1 km

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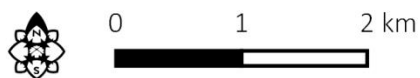
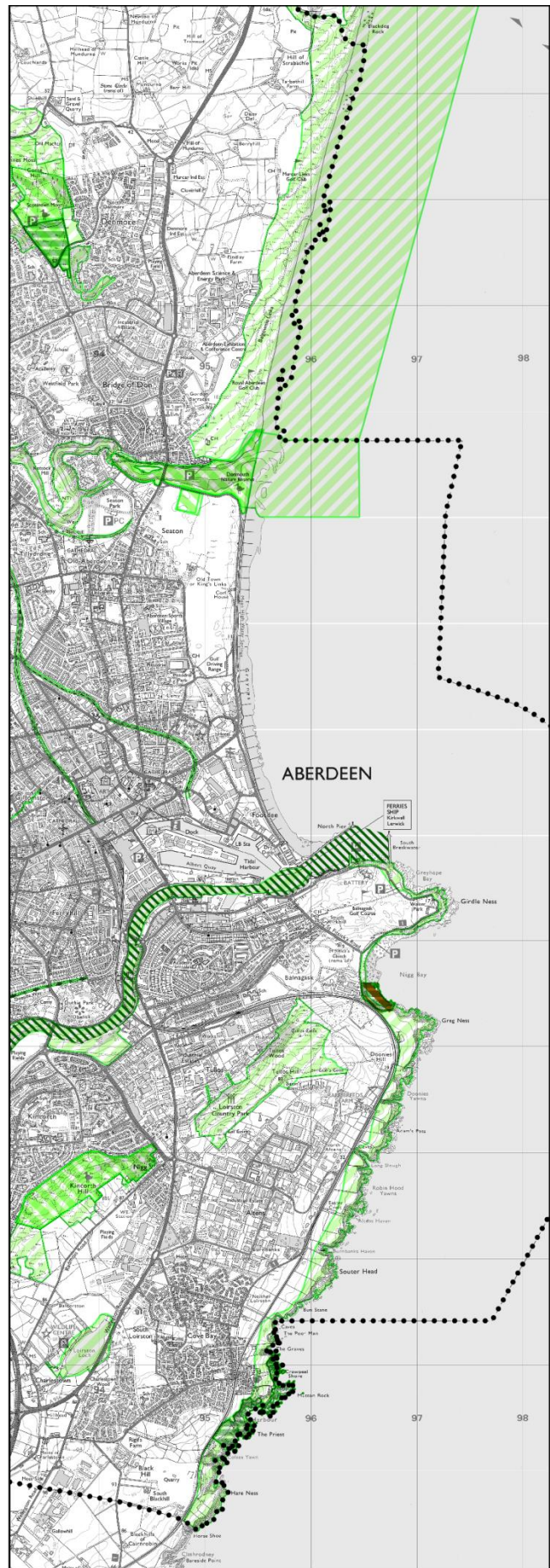
- 4.6 The River Dee is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It also designated a Local Nature Conservation Site (LNCS) (See figure 5) and supports a range of important tidal habitats including sandflats and mudflats, fens, marshland, wet grassland, scrub and the estuary itself. The river also contains freshwater pearl mussels, otter, Grey seals and Atlantic salmon.
- 4.7 The mouth of the River Don has not experienced the same degree of human influence. It is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and a Local Nature Conservation Site, supporting a range of wading bird species, including oystercatcher, redshank and sandwich tern. It is very dynamic in nature with a spit-bar complex deflecting the channel to the north.
- 4.8 Due to its proximity to the sea, Aberdeen has a milder winter climate than its northerly location would suggest although with easterly winds during the winter, it can be extremely cold. The cooling sea breeze in summer means that Aberdeen is recorded as the coldest UK city. The coastal location is also responsible for 'haar', a sea mist which forms over the city. It is most common in spring but can occur at any time during the year. Due to the northern latitude and general lack of pollution, visibility is sometimes excellent. With the influence of low sunlight, long views and changing patterns of light can have a notable influence on the experience of the seascape.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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Figure 5. Nature conservation designations

-  Aberdeen City Council boundary
-  National Nature Reserve
-  Special Protection Area
-  Special Area of Conservation
-  Ramsar Site
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Local Nature Conservation Site



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Cultural interest

- 4.9 The coast has been integral to the origins of Aberdeen's early settlement and underpins today's primary industries of oil extraction and associated services. It was first settled by hunter-gatherers around 6000 BC, who established themselves around the mouths of the rivers Dee and Don, where the nearby coast would have provided an important source of seafood.
- 4.10 Aberdeen was probably first founded by the 8th century AD as a fishing settlement. By the early 12th century, it had grown into a town and thriving port, whose exports included salted fish, hides and wool. In 1136, merchants and craftsmen of Aberdeen were given the right to charge a tithe (a tax of one 10th of all goods) on ships entering or leaving the harbour.
- 4.11 During the medieval period, Aberdeen continued to be an important port. In 1542, a blockhouse (fort) was built to protect the tidal harbour and in 1607, a bulwark was built along the south of the estuary so that when the tide ebbed and flowed it would scour the harbour, making it deeper. In 1618, a large rock that blocked the harbour was removed and Aberdeen port continued to thrive.
- 4.12 Despite the constantly changing character of its shallow basin, Aberdeen harbour had proved adequate to cope with the demands of medieval shipping and was continually re-shaped throughout the 19th century. The North Pier was built in 1815, followed by the construction of Trinity, Waterloo and Regent Quays in 1829; the building of several wet docks; and the diversion of the channel of the River Dee to its present course in 1874. From 1839, Aberdeen clipper ships, operating out of the improved facilities, dominated the China Tea Trade. There are many submerged ship wrecks in nearby coastal waters that also indicate a long history of fishing and maritime industry. These include 19th century steamships, 20th century motor and steam trawlers and a 20th century U-40 submarine.
- 4.13 During the late 20th century, the discovery of North Sea oil transformed the city. The oil boom brought unprecedented wealth to the area and Aberdeen has been termed the 'oil capital of Europe'. Today, Aberdeen Harbour is one of the UK's busiest ports. A world leading marine support centre, it is the principal port for the energy sector in western Europe and serves a number of industries as the main commercial port in the north-east of Scotland. With trading links to more than 40 countries worldwide, the harbour generates in excess of £1.5 billion gross value annually⁶.
- 4.14 Figure 6 illustrates the location and distribution of designated cultural heritage in Aberdeen.

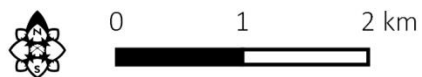
⁶ www.aberdeen-harbour.co.uk/about-us/ (2017)

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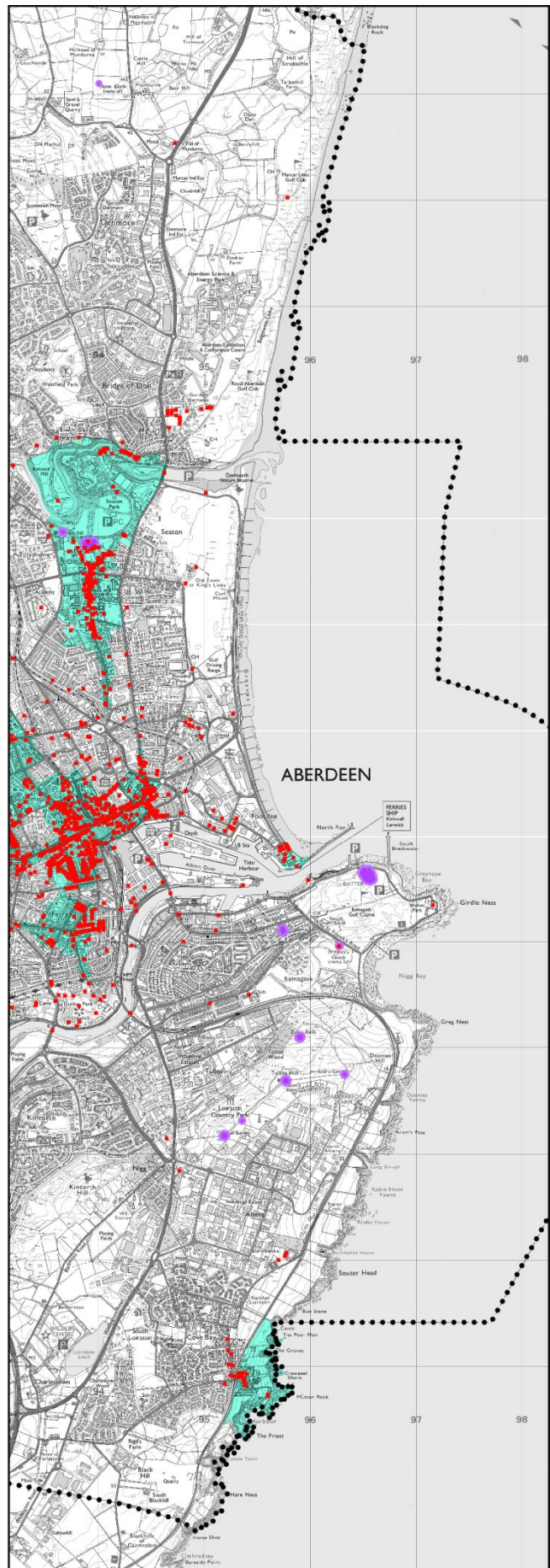
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Figure 6. Cultural designations

-  Aberdeen City Council boundary
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Listed Building
-  Conservation Area



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Derelict salmon netting station at the Bay of Nigg



Footdee is a distinctive early 19th century planned fishing settlement, located at the mouth of Aberdeen Harbour.



Shipping activity associated with the oil industry at the entrance to Aberdeen Harbour.



20th century amusements are a distinctive feature on the skyline of the Esplanade.

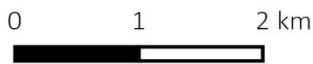
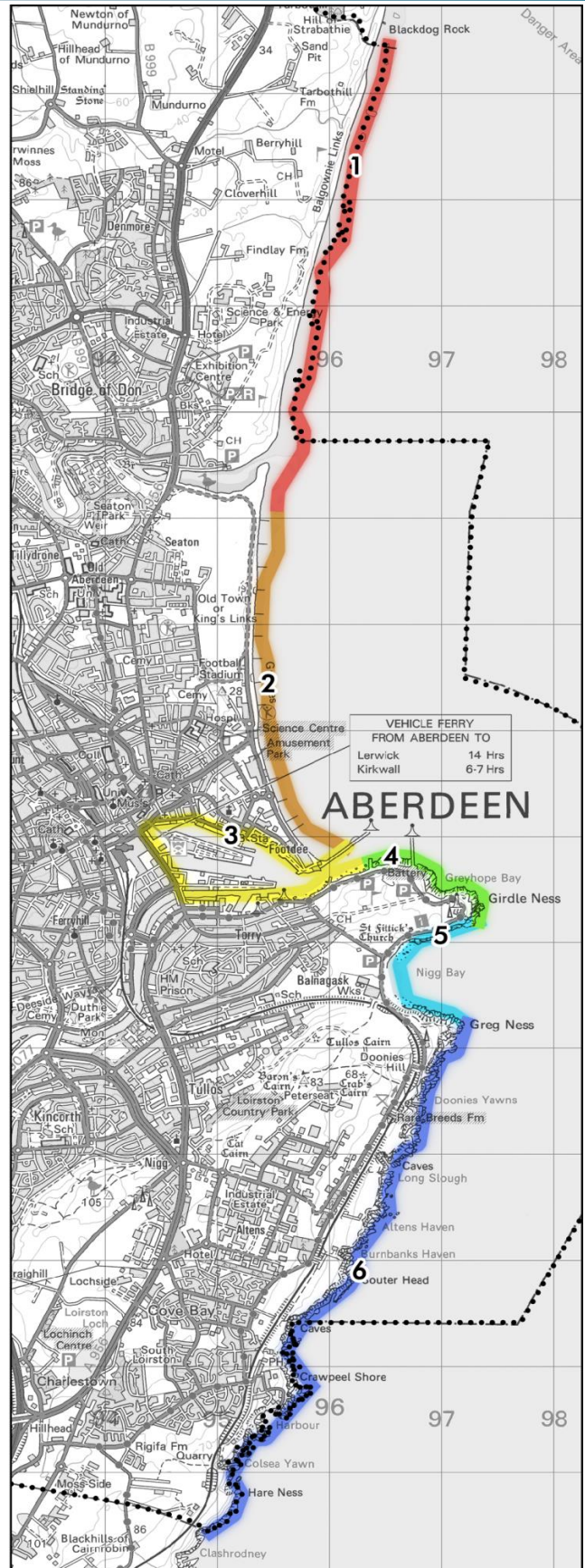
5. Coastal Character Areas

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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Figure 7. Coastal Character Areas

-  Aberdeen City Council boundary
- Coastal Character Areas**
-  1. North Beach
-  2. Aberdeen Beach
-  3. Aberdeen Harbour
-  4. Girdle Ness
-  5. Bay of Nigg
-  6. Souter Head



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CCA 1: North Beach

**Location and context**

The *North Beach* Coastal Character Area (CCA) forms the coastal extent of the *Murcar & Balgownie Links* Landscape Character Area. Dominated by the influence of the North Sea, a continuous swathe of golden sandy beach backed by rugged sand dunes extends northwards from the mouth of the River Don and into Aberdeenshire. To the south of the River Don, there is an abrupt transition to the heavily engineered appearance of the *Aberdeen Beach* CCA. Inland, the extensive sand dunes provide a distinctive backdrop to the coastal edge and separate the Murcar and Balgownie Links from the beach.



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CCA Map 1

 Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

-  1. North Beach
-  2. Aberdeen Beach

Landscape Character Area

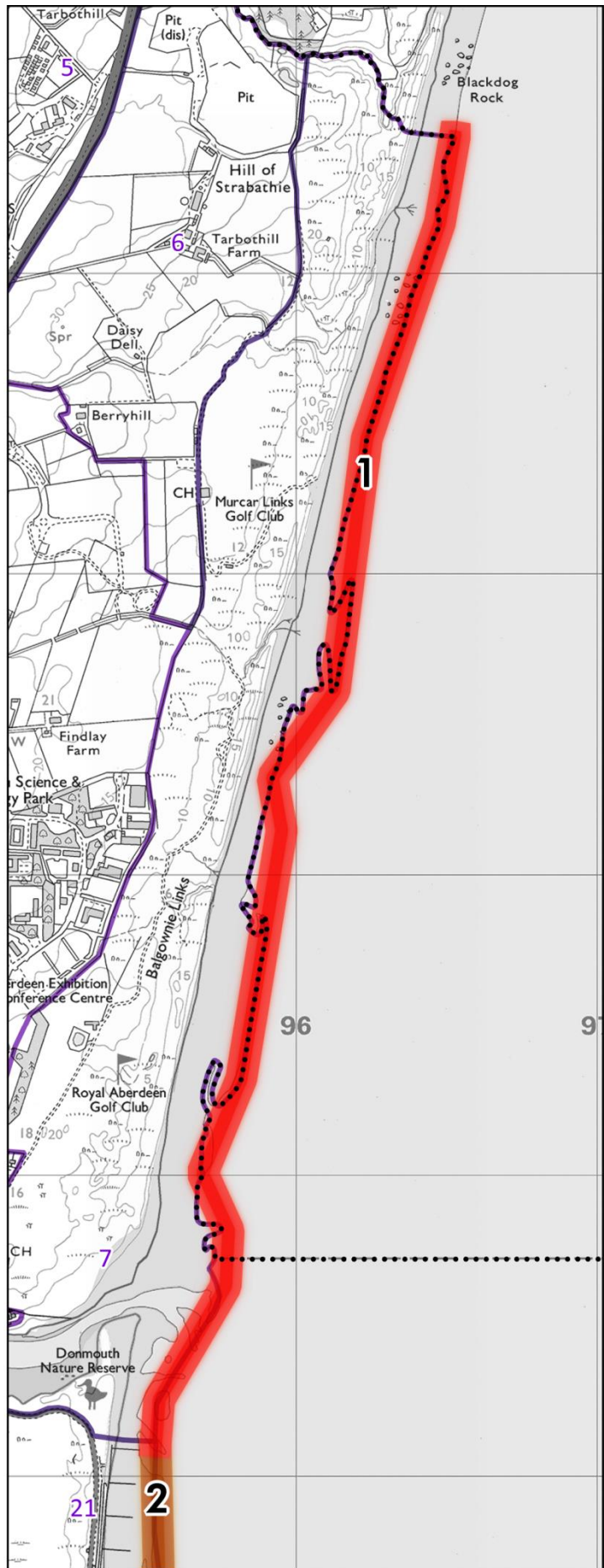
-  5. Mundurno
-  6. Murcar Plain
-  7. Murcar and Balgownie Links
-  21. King's Links



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Maritime influences

1. Rolling waves above sandy sea bed sediments influence dynamic coastal processes. There is ongoing migration of blown sand across the beach and at Donmouth, and sand dunes are being eroded by wave action at their bases.
2. Constantly changing patterns of water and sand extend across the inter-tidal zone, emphasising the dynamic nature of the marine environment.
3. Frequent shipping movements associated with the oil industry are a common feature across the sea, and coastal waters are sometimes used for anchorage for up to approximately thirty ships. The Kirkwall and Lerwick ferries pass daily and commercial freighters are often seen on the distant horizon. Occasional recreational sailing and fishing boats are also evident, particularly during summer months.
4. Water-based recreational beach activities are quite popular, particularly surfing.
5. At Donmouth, a number of wading birds feed along the shoreline and sea ducks can be spotted offshore, particularly in the winter. Dolphins and whales can sometimes be spotted feeding and passing by, and as the tide ebbs, common seals often haul on sandy islands.

Character of the coastal edge

1. A distinctive landform of a broad, undulating swathe of sand dunes forms a soft linear edge that contrasts with a flat expanse of uninterrupted sandy beach, extending approximately 14 kilometres further north into Aberdeenshire.
2. The area is large in scale and generally horizontal in form, although the steep seaward slopes of the dunes introduce some near vertical landforms where the elevation rises from sea level to approximately 20 metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD).
3. Typical dune vegetation has a natural appearance, consisting of marram grass with distinctive clumps of gorse and rough grass across the landward margins. There is a diverse range of habitats at Donmouth Nature Reserve, including salt marsh, mudflats and scrub.
4. With a network of paths through the sand dunes, land-use is entirely recreational.
5. The coastal edge has a strongly undeveloped character, although a series of distinctive World War II concrete defences line the beach. Seventy years of tidal and sand movement has caused the structures to move out of alignment. Some are partly buried in sand, and others are toppled.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. Extensive sand dune systems separate The Royal Aberdeen and Murcar Links golf clubs from the beach. The sand dunes are a dynamic system which provide important coastal protection, and visually separate the hinterland from the coast.
2. The hinterland is almost treeless, apart from small clumps of stunted pines, planted amongst the links.

3. Within the links, built development is very sparse, mostly limited to golf clubhouses and associated out-buildings. To the south of the area, Bridge of Don is a distinctive built feature, consisting of a 5-arch granite structure constructed between 1827-1830.
4. The area has a long history of recreational land use. The Royal Aberdeen Golf club was established in 1780, and the course has been in its present coastal location since 1888.
5. The salmon netting station at Berryhill is a notable Listed Building (Category B). It dates from the early 19th Century and is still in use, with an unusually complete historic interior. A March Stone on the south bank of the River Don is also a Listed Building (Category B) and indicates the boundary of the medieval city.
6. The area has no roads although a footpath leads through the dunes to the beach from a car park north of the River Don.

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. The area has a natural and mostly undeveloped character, with a strong sense of exposure to the elements. Large skies with passing weather systems continually affect the character of the coast due to the changing light and wave patterns across the expansive sea.
2. A linear pattern of open sea, continuous flat sandy beach, and extensive sand dune systems combine to form a prevailing simple and unified appearance although the Aberdeen Exhibition Conference Centre (AECC) Tower, nearby wind turbine and test drilling rig are notable vertical features in an otherwise horizontal landscape.
3. A composition of static and moving boats and ships add interest to the long-range uninterrupted panoramic views across the expansive sea towards the distant horizon.
4. Looking south along the coastline, the lighthouse at Girdle Ness forms a striking feature on the low-lying headland while, to the north, there are long views along the low-lying Aberdeenshire coast.
5. From the hinterland, the undulating dunes restrict views along the coast and increase the sense of containment and seclusion from the city.
6. Viewed from the sea, the rugged sand dunes form a continuous backdrop to the extensive swathe of golden sand. The stone bridge across the Don is also a distinctive landmark.
7. During summer months, the beach is often quite busy with recreational activity although overall, the area has a sense of peace and relative detachment from the city.
8. Relatively distant from the noise of urban areas and roads, occasional helicopters ferrying crew to and from oil platforms and the sounds of seabirds are a common occurrence across the area.
9. At night, the absence of lighting on land contributes to the sense of detachment from the city and emphasises the undeveloped character of the area although ship lights can often be seen out at sea.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. *Conserve the continuous swathe of sandy beach.*
2. *Maintain the strong natural, undeveloped character and absence of roads and lighting.*
3. *Maintain natural dynamic coastal processes and avoid the introduction of hard coastal defence structures.*
4. Investigate opportunities to underground the outfall pipe on the beach.
5. *Conserve and enhance the diversity and connectivity of sensitive sand dune and beach habitats, and the diverse range of habitats at Donmouth Nature Reserve.*
6. *Avoid woodland and tree planting which would conflict with the natural and open character.*
7. Ensure that infrastructure and facilities associated with water based recreational activity do not adversely detract from the natural and undeveloped character.
8. *Maintain and sensitively enhance footpath access through the dunes, seeking opportunities to reduce erosion pressure.*
9. *Explore opportunities for improving the North Sea Trail.*
10. *Conserve features of archaeological and historical interest, notably the salmon netting station, pillboxes and tank traps, and their setting.*
11. *Maintain the open character and uninterrupted panoramic views along the coast and out to sea*



A horizontal composition of extensive sea, sand and dunes



Biodiverse sand dune system at Donmouth



The Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre Tower



World War II pillbox

CCA 2: Aberdeen Beach

**Location and context**

The *Aberdeen Beach* Coastal Character Area (CCA) forms the coastal extent of the *King's Links* Landscape Character Area. It extends southwards from the Donmouth Nature Reserve to the North Pier at the mouth of River Dee. In the northern part of the area, the raised esplanade road separates the beach from the adjacent King Links while further south, visitor-based attractions along the esplanade form a developed setting to the nearby coastal edge. To the south of North Pier, the headland of *Girdle Ness* (LCA 22) provides a degree of containment beyond the harbour entrance.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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CCA Map 2

 Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

-  1. North Beach
-  2. Aberdeen Beach
-  3. Aberdeen Harbour
-  4. Girdle Ness

Landscape Character Area

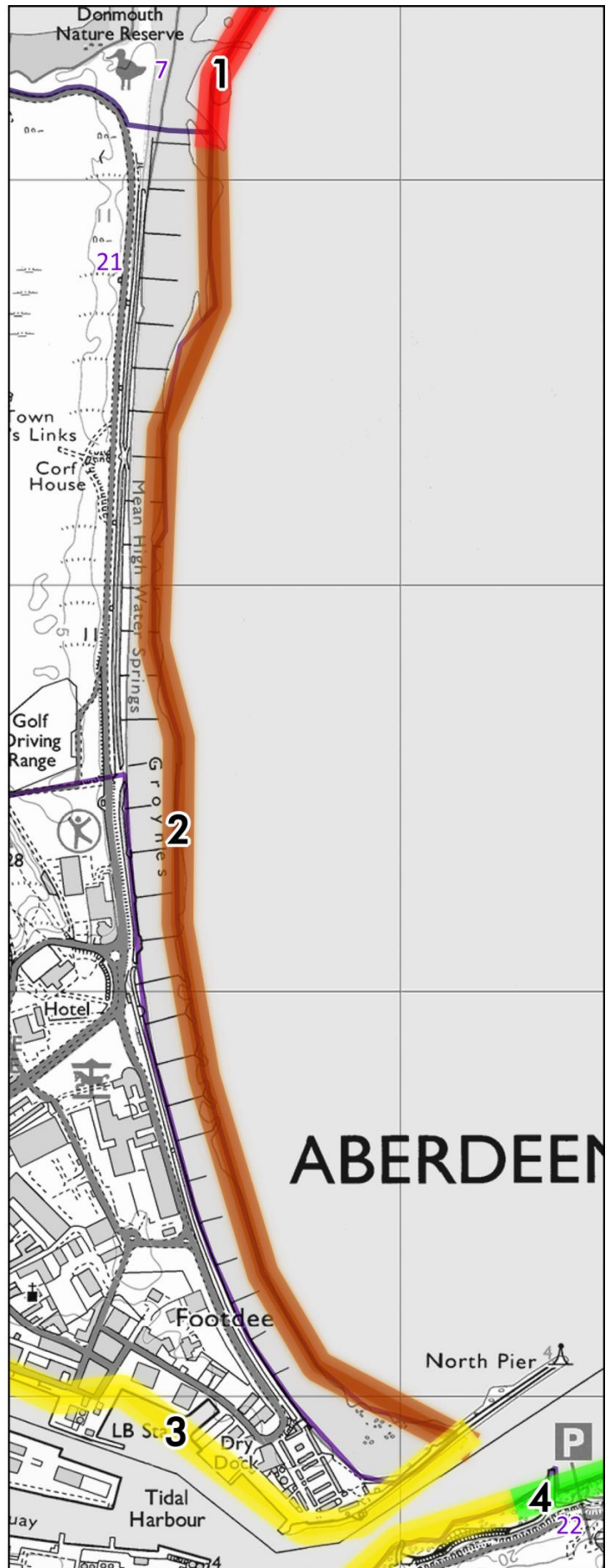
-  7. Murcar and Balgownie Links
-  21. King's Links
-  22. Girdle Ness



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Maritime influences

1. With rolling waves above sandy sea bed sediments, a regular series of prominent wooden groynes and areas of rock armour manage the constantly shifting sands. The groynes influence localised patterns of turbulent sea across the inter-tidal zone.
2. There are frequent shipping movements in and out of the nearby harbour entrance and the coastal waters are sometimes used for anchorage for up to approximately thirty ships associated with the oil industry. The Kirkwall and Lerwick ferries pass daily, and commercial freighters often appear on the horizon. Occasional recreational sailing and fishing boats are also seen, particularly during summer months.
3. Water-based recreational activities are popular in summer and part of the beach is a designated bathing area.
4. Seabirds are a common sight along the coast and dolphins and whales can sometimes be spotted.

Character of the coastal edge

1. A long gently curving swathe of golden sandy beach is backed by a similarly curved, raised pedestrian esplanade, with regular access points leading from the esplanade to the beach.
2. Subject to longitudinal drift, the beach is backed by sloping concrete coastal reinforcements and is more developed with a regular pattern of wooden groynes along its length.
3. The coast has a medium to large scale appearance and although generally horizontal in form, the sloping concrete reinforcements provide a containing backdrop to the beach.
4. As a popular recreational resource for the city, the coastal edge has a managed and developed appearance. Along the beach, land use is entirely informal recreation. The North Sea Coast Path runs along the raised esplanade and there are several interpretation panels at intervals.
5. The extensive sandy beach forms the only semi-natural habitat, and seabirds are a common sight.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. An open esplanade road runs above the entire section of the beach, separating the coastal edge from the adjacent hinterland.
2. In the north of the area, the coastal hinterland is dominated by the open expanse of King's Links and its associated recreational land uses.
3. Within the central part of the area, visitor and recreational facilities line the esplanade and provide a developed context to the beach. Amongst more recent 20th century development, there is some traditional seaside architecture, including the landmark Beach Ballroom building, designed in an art deco style and opened in 1929 (a Listed Building, Category B).
4. Towards the southern end of the area, harbour related development and Footdee village are contained by North Pier at the entrance to the harbour.

5. The use of this CCA for recreation goes back to the early days of golf, with records of ‘goffe’ being played on the links between the Don and the Dee in 1661. The present Kings Links site dates back to 1872.
6. In addition to the Kings links, the 1909 Ordnance Survey map shows a number of features which are now lost, but which help to tell the story of the landscape’s recreational military and industrial land uses. These include a beach-front bathing station, a magazine, a rifle range and a smithy. A March Stone marking the boundary of the medieval city survives near the Golf Clubhouse, and is listed Category B.

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. A simple and unified pattern of expansive sea, sandy beach and regularly spaced groynes, backed by engineered slopes and a raised open esplanade.
2. Changing light and weather often accentuate textures, shapes and colours across the North Sea. Passing and static boats and ships add interest to the long-range panoramic views across the North Sea towards the distant horizon.
3. To the north, beyond the mouth of the River Don, there is a visual connection with the *North Beach* CCA and beyond, into Aberdeenshire. To the south, North Pier and the headland of the Girdle Ness LCA beyond provide a sense of visual containment.
4. When looking south, the nearby Marine Operations Centre building and Girdle Ness Lighthouse are important focal points and to the north of the area, several high-rise flats at Seaton are prominent in views.
5. When viewed from the sea, the engineered slopes of coastal reinforcements form a continuous backdrop to the beach, with the Beach Ballroom and funfair, including a ‘big wheel’, forming notable features on the raised esplanade. Beyond, the extensive skyline of the cityscape forms a distinctive backdrop to the beach.
6. Particularly during summer months, the esplanade can be busy and noisy with recreational activity although a sense of relative peace can be experienced along the beach, which is separated by the sloping concrete reinforcements.
7. Lights from nearby buildings and a series of lamp posts at intervals along the esplanade emphasise the developed and often busy nature of the area at night and ship lights can often be seen out at sea.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. *Conserve the gently curving swathe of sandy beach.*
2. *Maintain the distinctive open coastal character.*

3. *Ensure that future coastal protection measures are appropriate in scale and design.*
4. *Conserve and enhance sensitive beach habitats.*
5. *Encourage the enhancement of rough grassland management and seek opportunities for the expansion of native grassland habitats amongst the links.*
6. *Maintain the network of footpaths, and the mostly recreational land use.*
7. *Maintain the simple character of the esplanade.*
8. *Enhance the condition and design of the esplanade, coast road and open links. The provision and management of infrastructure such as seating, interpretation, car parking and signage should be sensitively designed and implemented. Consider continuing a distinctive coastal or marine aesthetic for street furniture.*
9. *Explore opportunities for improving the North Sea Trail.*
10. *Maintain the contrast between the built-up southern section and less developed northern section, and avoid the introduction of structures such as street lighting along the northern section.*
11. *Investigate opportunities for traffic calming measures which do not contribute to clutter and which help the area retain a distinction from other more urban roads and traffic levels and speed.*
12. *Maintain the uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea and inland, towards the distinctive seaside architecture and skyline of the Esplanade.*



Aberdeen beach



Distinctive city skyline



Seaton high-rise flats

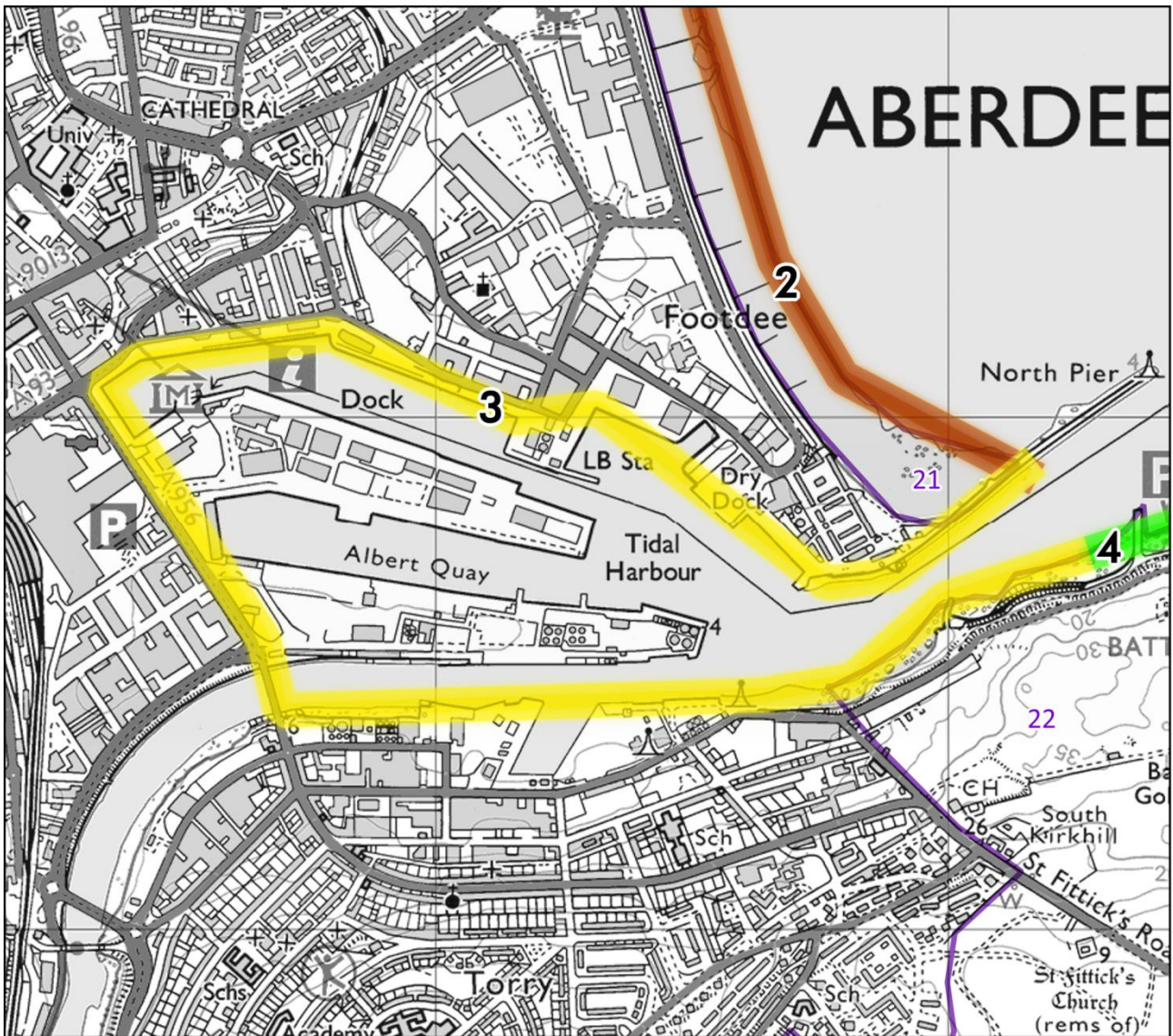


Coastal defences

CCA 3: Aberdeen Harbour

**Location and context**


Situated at the mouth of the River Dee, the *Aberdeen Harbour* Coastal Character Area (CCA) adjoins *Aberdeen Beach* CCA and *Girdle Ness* CCA and lies mainly within the urban area of the city. The CCA is centred on the busy docks and, to the east of Victoria Bridge, the mouth of River Dee leads into the navigation channel, before entering the North Sea. Most of the harbour is surrounded by built development apart from the undeveloped headland of *Girdle Ness* (LCA 22) which provides a semi-natural setting and sense of containment to the south-eastern harbour entrance.





Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

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CCA Map 3

 Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

-  2. Aberdeen Beach
-  3. Aberdeen Harbour
-  4. Girdle Ness

Landscape Character Area

-  21. King's Links
-  22. Girdle Ness



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Maritime influences

1. Aberdeen Harbour serves a number of industries, is the main commercial port in north-east Scotland and has trading links with more than forty countries worldwide. With several deep water berths, the harbour is a leading marine support centre and the principal port for the energy sector in Western Europe.
2. The tidal harbour is formed around two main docks which converge with the mouth of the River Dee into the main navigation channel that leads out to sea. The harbour is sheltered from the North Sea by the North Pier and South Breakwater at its entrance.
3. Frequent shipping movements including a large number of vessels associated with the oil industry, some cargo vessels and daily ferries to Kirkwall and Lerwick. The shipping berths are often full to capacity. Wildlife cruises also operate from the harbour to view dolphins, minke whale and porpoises.
4. Designated a Special Area of Conservation, the River Dee supports Atlantic salmon, European otter and fresh water pearl mussel. Seabirds are a common sight, sometimes forming large roosts on the breakwaters. Seals can occasionally be seen in the harbour, and dolphins are regularly visible by the northern breakwater.

Character of the coastal edge

1. The coastal edge is mostly heavily engineered to accommodate the docks.
2. The busy docks have a prevailing industrial appearance with a diverse range of port-related infrastructure and buildings.
3. Towards the mouth of the harbour, the southern edge is characterised by an undeveloped rocky shoreline, contained by the old south breakwater.
4. Along the northern entrance to the harbour where the Marine Operations Centre building is located, the North Pier extends into the open sea.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. West of the harbour, the busy city centre has a strong urban influence on the setting of the docks and to the east, the Footdee Conservation Area (see below) is a notable historic feature at the harbour entrance.
2. To the south of the industrial buildings along the southern bank of the River Dee, residential development extends across rising ground and, further east, the headland of the *Girdle Ness* LCA provides an open and undeveloped backdrop to the harbour entrance.
3. The Footdee Conservation Area is a very distinctive historic settlement on the northern side of the harbour. The planned village contains a concentration of Listed Buildings (Category C) including numerous houses in North Square and South Square, the mission hall in North Square, and a former pilot house on Pocrá Quay. Footdee was designed as a purpose-built housing development for Aberdeen's fishing community and comprises neat rows of granite houses, typically of 1 -2 storeys, set around a series of squares. Net sheds are also a distinctive feature of Footdee (known locally and historically as 'Fittie'). It is described as an 'Industrial Planned Village' in the Historic Landuse Assessment.

4. Several architecturally notable buildings and structures contribute to the distinctive appearance of the harbour. Many are listed, and relate to maritime and trade links. They include Victoria Bridge (constructed in 1881, following diversion of the course of the River Dee southwards, to enable expansion of the harbour); a traditional fish smoking house; Edwardian drainage terminals and valve house (part of the city's sewerage system); several historic warehouses, and a pilot house at the harbour mouth.
5. Many of these buildings are shown on the 1909 Ordnance Survey map, indicating the good level of survival of historic harbour buildings. However, several substantial buildings between the docks (presumably warehouses) shown on the 1909 map are no longer present. Today's harbour is an intriguing and distinctive mix of contemporary buildings, structures and ships within a strong historic setting.

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. The compact form of the harbour and dense pattern of nearby built development combined with the relatively steeply rising landform creates a strong sense of shelter and containment from the open sea.
2. With the diversity of land and sea uses, busy port activity and nearby main roads, the harbour has a prevailing industrial appearance and provides a dynamic and often noisy experience. The smells of diesel and fish are often evident.
3. The harbour's compact form generally provides short range views contained by nearby buildings, although there are some long views along the navigation channel out to sea.
4. When viewed from the sea, the concentration of harbour-related developments forms the foreground to the city. The Marine Operations Centre building and light towers on the North Pier and the south breakwater are distinctive focal points at the mouth of the harbour.
5. The sounds of seabirds are a common feature although the noise from busy port-related activity is much more evident. At night, the bright lights of the harbour contrast with the dark expanse of open sea.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. Conserve and enhance important natural and semi-natural landforms and habitats such as the rocky coastline, shingle beaches and associated vegetation north of Greyhope Road.
2. *Safeguard the setting of Footdee and other important historic features such as light towers from intrusive built development.*
3. *Ensure that future coastal protection measures are appropriate in scale and design.*

4. Explore opportunities for enhancing the interface between the harbour and the city, particularly at key locations where the harbour acts as gateway.
5. *Consider traffic management of the Greyhope Road which do not contribute to clutter, and opportunities for cycle lane provision.*
6. Explore opportunities to provide appropriately designed informal recreational path access to the stony shore to the north of Greyhope Road, where this would not disturb wildlife.
7. Explore opportunities for the provision of interpretation to understand the historical development of the harbour, notable buildings and structures and their importance to the city.
8. Explore opportunities for improving the North Sea Trail.
9. Maintain the open, mainly undeveloped character of the rocky shorelines to the north of Greyhope Road.
10. Maintain the uninterrupted views across the harbour to Footdee, the city and the panoramic views of the North Sea.



Harbour infrastructure



Seagulls along the harbour wall



Overlooking the harbour from Old Torry Battery

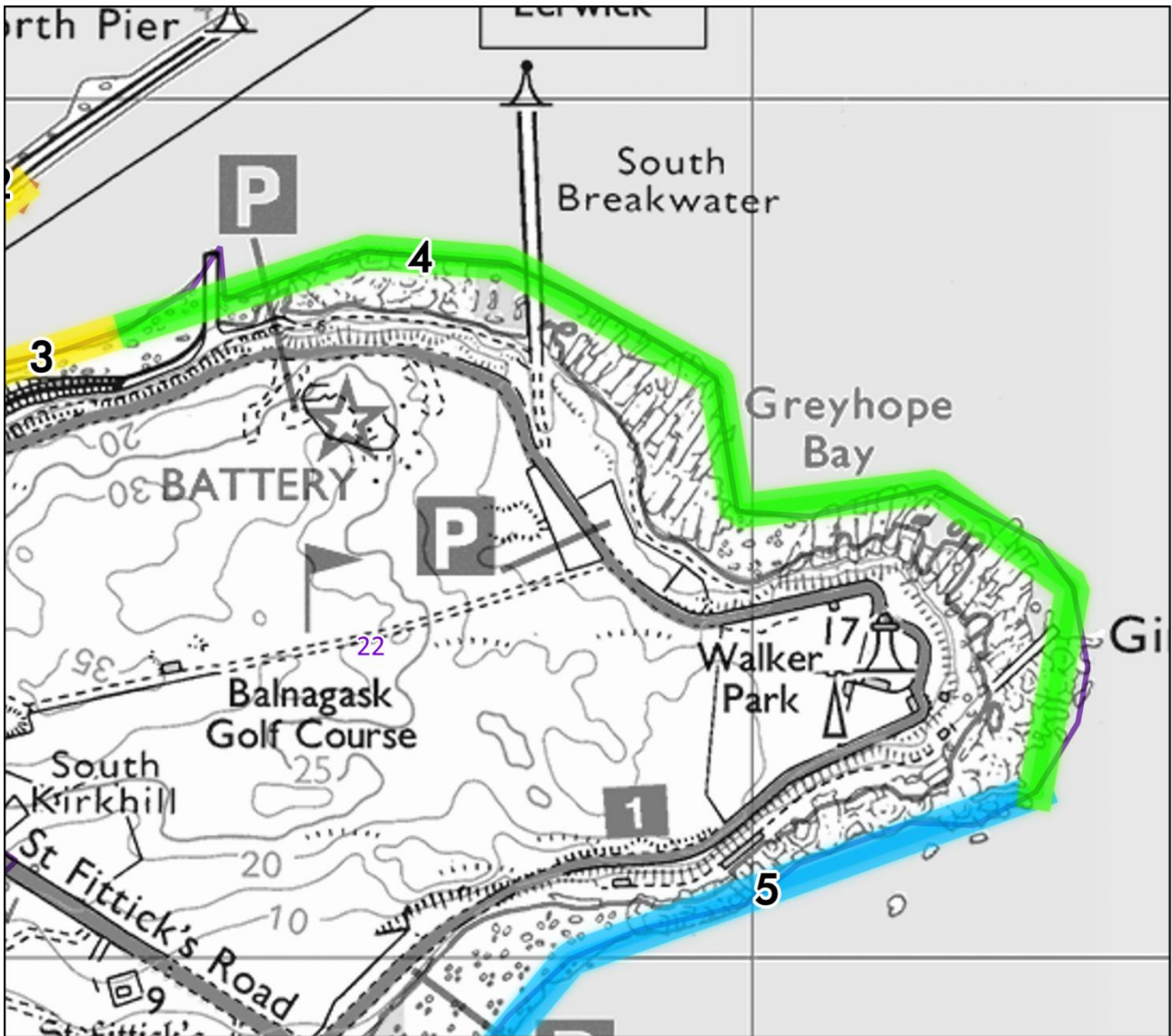


Marine Operations Centre building at harbour entrance

CCA 4: Girdle Ness

**Location and context**

The *Girdle Ness* Coastal Character Area (CCA) extends from the old south breakwater at the mouth of Aberdeen harbour, around Greyhope Bay, to the south of Girdle Ness lighthouse. The exposed headland juts out into the North Sea and, further south, the rocky promontory at Girdle Ness provides a sense of enclosure along the northern boundary of the *Bay of Nigg* CCA. On the landward side of the coastal road which follows the rocky shore, the open headland that forms much of the *Girdle Ness* LCA provides a gently rising backdrop to the coast.



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CCA Map 4

Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

- 2. Aberdeen Beach
- 3. Aberdeen Harbour
- 4. Girdle Ness
- 5. Bay of Nigg

Landscape Character Area

- 21. King's Links
- 22. Girdle Ness



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Maritime influences

1. Jutting out into the open sea, waves often crash against the exposed parts of the rocky shoreline.
2. Frequent shipping movements in and out of the nearby harbour entrance are common, while out at sea, cargo and oil related shipping, and ferries to and from Kirkwall and Lerwick are regular features. To the north of the area, the coastal waters are often used for anchorage for up to approximately twenty - thirty ships.
3. Constantly changing patterns of water, rock and sand extend across the inter-tidal zone and rock pools provide mini salt-marsh habitats along the northern coast.
4. Varieties of seabirds are a common sight and sound throughout and dolphins and porpoises can sometimes be seen near the harbour mouth. Minke whales are occasional summer visitors.

Character of the coastal edge

1. A rugged, rocky coastline interrupted by a few pockets of shingle and sandy beach. The small crescent-shaped form of Greyhope bay contrasts with the convex form of the headland.
2. The coastal edge is largely undeveloped with a natural form although the fog horn on the eastern coast is a notable feature, perched above the rocky shore.
3. Above the shoreline, the sloping cliffs are designated as a Local Nature Conservation Site and include a diversity of coastal and neutral grasslands and pockets of gorse. Seabirds and otters are often seen along the rocky shoreline.
4. The North Sea Coast Path generally follows the tops of the cliffs and provides good access along the coastline.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. An exposed, low-lying, rocky headland rising above the mouth of the River Dee and the shallow basin of the Bay of Nigg.
2. The immediate hinterland is entirely treeless with a very open and exposed appearance.
3. With extensive grasslands for public open space and a golf course, land use is mostly recreational.
4. Although the area has a prevailing undeveloped character, there are several buildings and built features of note including the Old Torry Battery, and the Girdle Ness Lighthouse, an adjacent cluster of communication masts and nearby holiday accommodation.
5. A narrow, winding road follows the coast and there are a number of car parks providing access to the coast and other recreational facilities such as Old Torry Battery and Girdle Ness Lighthouse.
6. The CCA contains discrete and often isolated features which provide evidence of the historic importance of the headland for both defence and marine navigation. These include the Torry Battery (Scheduled Monument) which dates from 1857-61 and was constructed in response to a perceived threat of French invasion. It was also used in World War I and World War II, and during the 1956 Suez

crisis. Girdle Ness Lighthouse (Listed Building, Category A) was designed by Robert Stevenson in 1833 and the distinctive adjacent fog siren is included within the listing. The capstan jetty on the north coast is also listed (Category C).

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. A prevailing natural and undeveloped appearance with a strong sense of exposure to the elements.
2. With an open and exposed appearance, the influence of changing light and weather often accentuates textures, shapes and colours across the large expanse of the North Sea.
3. Looking east, there are long-range uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea towards the distant horizon. From the northern shoreline, views are channelled towards Aberdeen Harbour while, to the south, there are short range views across the Bay of Nigg.
4. Girdle Ness lighthouse forms a striking feature on the low-lying headland and Torry Point Battery is locally prominent above the harbour entrance. Looking out to sea, the South Breakwater and associated light tower form a strong visual focus.
5. When viewed from the sea, the sloping vegetated cliffs form a rising backdrop to the rocky shoreline. Above the cliffs, the Girdle Ness lighthouse is dominant in views.
6. Although often busy with walkers, the coast has a sense of relative isolation from the city and the sounds of many seabirds and the crashing of waves contribute to a strong experience of nature.
7. At night, the lights of the Girdle Ness lighthouse contrast with the relatively dark backdrop of the surrounding headland and ship lights can often be seen out at sea.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. *Safeguard the distinctive landform of an exposed low-lying rocky headland, and coastline with pockets of shingle and sand.*
2. *Conserve and enhance the diversity of important habitats such as beach and cliff habitats, coastal and neutral grassland, and pockets of gorse scrub. Across the golf course, encourage the management and expansion of rough grassland habitat.*
3. *Ensure that any future coastal protection measures are appropriate in scale and design.*
4. *Retain the distinctive open and mainly undeveloped coastal character and avoid tree planting on the headland.*
5. *Improve the provision, design and management of visitor and recreational infrastructure such as seating, interpretation, paths (including the North Sea Trail), signage, car parking and the condition of roadside fencing.*

6. Consider traffic management of the Greyhope Road which do not contribute to clutter, and opportunities for cycle lane provision.
7. Explore opportunities to provide appropriately designed informal recreational path access to the stony shore to the north of Greyhope Road, where this would not disturb wildlife.
8. Seek opportunities to improve the visitor experience at the Old Torry Battery.
9. Conserve features of historical interest, notably the Old Torry Battery, Girdleness Lighthouse and breakwaters, and their setting.
10. Maintain the uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea and to the nearby harbour, city and beach.



Girdle Ness lighthouse and headland



Old Torry Battery



Greyhope Bay

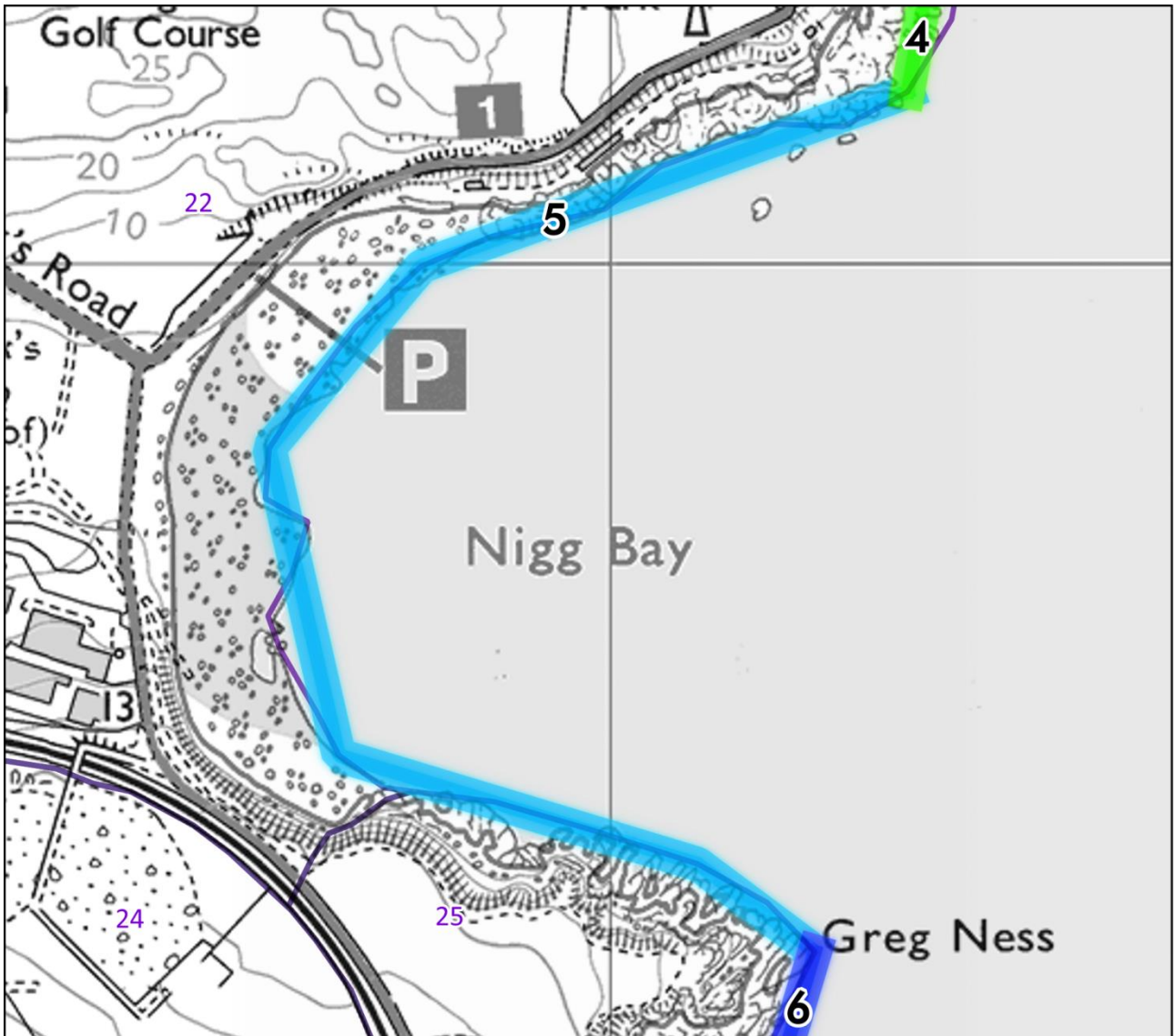


Sea birds on the South Breakwater

CCA 5: Bay of Nigg

**Location and context**


The *Bay of Nigg* Coastal Character Area (CCA) is located along the southern coast of the *Girdle Ness* Landscape Character Area and extends from Girdle Ness headland in the north to Greg Ness headland to the south. To the west, the area is backed by open, low-lying wetlands and through which flows East Tullos Burn, close to where the River Dee once drained out to sea. The rising ground of Girdle Ness and the lower slopes of Tullos Hill provide a sense of rising containment while, to the east, the open expanse of the North Sea dominates the bay.



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CCA Map 5

 Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

 4. Girdle Ness

 5. Bay of Nigg

 6. Souter Head

Landscape Character Area

 22. Girdle Ness

 24. Kincorth Hill

 25. Souter Coast



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Maritime influences

1. Although large skies with passing weather systems continually affect the character of the coast, nearby rising ground provides a degree of shelter.
2. Waves often crash against the exposed parts of the rocky shore around the outer parts of the bay. In more sheltered areas, constantly changing patterns of water, rock and sand extend across the inter-tidal zone.
3. Screened by the rising headland of Girdle Ness, the activity of harbour traffic is less evident than from areas further to the north, although occasional shipping movements are a feature on the distant horizon.
4. Dolphins and porpoises can sometimes be seen out to sea and, more rarely whales. A variety of seabirds are a common sight in the early morning, both on the water and in the sky.
5. Lobster pot markers buoys are dotted across the inshore waters.

Character of the coastal edge

1. A distinctive crescent-shaped bay contained by the headlands of Girdle Ness and Greg Ness. The coastal edge is largely undeveloped, with a natural and relatively sheltered form.
2. The outer parts of the shoreline are predominantly rock but, within the sheltered parts of the bay, there is a relatively wide, flat area of shingle, backed by a raised platform, with some sand exposed at low tide. Sand and shingle are constantly shifting and sometimes, sand can be seen higher up the beach.
3. Above the shoreline, the sloping cliffs are designated a Local Nature Conservation Site for their conservation interest including coastal and neutral grassland, pockets of scrub and other coastal plants and associated insects. The glacial deposits exposed in the cliff section to the south-east of the bay are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and regarded as a classic location for understanding the glacial history of Scotland.
4. With several interpretation panels, the area is important for informal recreation. The North Sea Coast Path follows the coastal edge and a nearby coastal road follows the curve of the bay. There is a car park located near to the beach, which is used for informal recreation.
5. To the north of the bay, a derelict salmon netting station is perched above the prevailing undeveloped rocky shore.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. Beyond the coastal road, the rising ground of Girdle Ness and the lower slopes of Tullos Hill provide a degree of shelter and containment to the lower-lying coastal edge.
2. To the west of the road, where the River Dee once drained out to sea, recent environmental improvements have re-naturalised the Tullos Burn. There is some woodland along the burn and around the water treatment works although apart from these areas, the hinterland is largely tree-less

3. The ruined St Fitticks Church overlooks the bay, and is a notable feature in views from the sea. Together with its surrounding graveyard, it is a Scheduled Monument. The church was founded in the late 12th Century, rebuilt in the 18th Century and abandoned in 1829. The walls survive, along with one gable topped with a bell frame, which creates a distinctive profile. The open and undeveloped setting of the church is currently used for recreation.
4. Girdle Ness lighthouse and the nearby cluster of communication masts are also prominent in the northern backdrop to the bay. Beyond St Fittick's Park, several tall apartment blocks are highly visible on high ground to the west, within the backdrop to the coast. A water treatment works is located further south.

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. Although partly sheltered by containing landform, there is a sense of exposure to the elements from areas of higher ground where changing light and weather often accentuate textures, shapes and colours across the North Sea.
2. Looking east, there are long-range uninterrupted views seaward, framed by the bay's headlands. To the north and south, views are curtailed by nearby rising ground while, to the west, there are short to medium-range views across the floodplain towards the urban edge of Balnagask.
3. From the sea, the urban backdrop of Balnagask with its prominent tower blocks is framed by contrasting undeveloped low rising headlands.
4. The lighthouse at Girdle Ness forms a striking landmark feature on the low-lying headland to the north of the bay, while inland, St Fittick's Church is a notable building, located in open ground above the floodplain.
5. Although often busy with recreational users and traffic, parts of the coast have a sense of relative isolation and detachment from the city.
6. At night, lights across the urban edge backdrop contrast with the relatively unlit, undeveloped coastline.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. *Safeguard the distinctive and important geological landform of exposed rocky coastline and cliffs, with sections of shingle and sandy beach.*
2. *Retain the distinctive open character and mainly undeveloped stretches of coastal as a setting for the city and the harbour development.*
3. *Conserve and enhance the diversity of important habitats such as beaches and cliffs, coastal and neutral grassland, wetland, broad leaved woodland and pockets of gorse scrub. Across the golf course, encourage the management and expansion of rough grassland habitat.*

4. *Avoid tree planting on headlands. Retain and manage the existing low-lying woodland and tree planting to mitigate the impact of new and existing coastal development, such as the harbour and waste water treatment works.*
5. *Conserve features of historical interest, and their setting.*
6. *Explore opportunities for enhancing the design of the gateway and routes between the harbour extension and the city.*
7. *Improve the design, provision and management of visitor and recreational infrastructure such as seating, paths (including the North Sea Trail), signage, car parking and roadside fencing, and interpretation of geology, habitats, wildlife, history and built heritage. These measures should not disturb wildlife.*
8. *Consider traffic management of Greyhope Road which does not contribute to clutter, and opportunities for cycle lane provision.*
9. *Maintain the uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea, the city and coast.*



Balnagask is prominent in backdrop of the bay



Distinctive crescent-shaped form



Shingle beach and coastal platform



Vegetated cliffs (SSSI)

CCA 6: Souter Coast

**Location and context**

With expansive views across the North Sea, the *Souter Coast* Coastal Character Area is located to the south of the Bay of Nigg. It forms all of the coastal aspect of the *Souter Coast* Landscape Character Area and extends southwards from Greg Ness, past Souter Head and Cove Bay, and to the south of Hare Ness. A similar composition of rocky coastline continues into Aberdeenshire and above the cliffs, the area is predominantly backed by open coastal farmland.

Aberdeen Coastal Character Assessment

February 2017

CCA Map 6

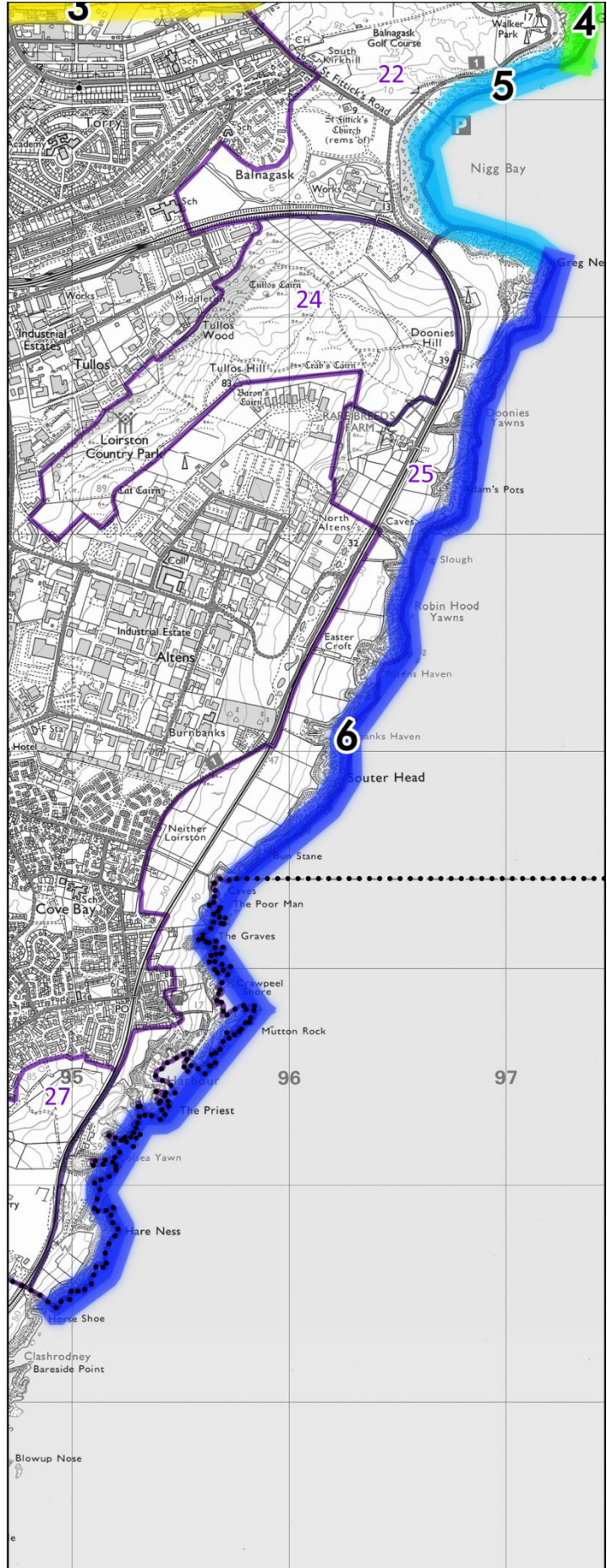
 Aberdeen City Council boundary

Coastal Character Areas

-  3. Aberdeen Harbour
-  4. Girdle Ness
-  5. Bay of Nigg
-  6. Souter Head

Landscape Character Area

-  22. Girdle Ness
-  24. Kincorth Hill
-  25. Souter Coast
-  27. Findon Plain



0 300 m



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Maritime influences

1. An exposed rocky shore with a diverse composition of geological features is often subject to crashing waves, with powerful turbulent surges an ongoing occurrence.
2. Shipping movements tend to be limited to occasional recreational sailing and commercial shipping on the horizon.
3. . Breeding fulmars, kittiwakes and razor bills are a common sight. Dolphins and porpoises can sometimes be seen out to sea and, more rarely whales
4. Lobster pot markers buoys are dotted across the inshore waters.

Character of the coastal edge

1. A dramatic, rugged and exposed rocky coastline with striking geological features. Along most of its length, the coastal edge has a very strong natural form and undeveloped appearance.
2. Jagged rock platforms form obvious discontinuous features along the entire length of the coast, mostly occurring at or slightly above the intertidal zone. Sea caves can be seen at various places usually at, or slightly above, sea level. There are several steep-sided narrow ravines and near-vertical igneous dykes and storm beaches with isolated boulders perched on cliff tops.
3. Above the shoreline, the sloping cliffs are designated a Local Nature Conservation Site for their conservation interest including coastal and neutral grassland, pockets of gorse scrub and other coastal plants and associated insects.
4. The North Sea Coast Path follows the cliff top and provides views of spectacular coastal scenery. In the spring and summer, the cliffs are home to a multitude of nesting seabirds. Sea fishing also takes place from the cliff edge.

Character of the immediate hinterland

1. Above the undeveloped coastal cliffs, there is a strong pattern of medium-sized rectilinear fields, enclosed by dry stone dykes and post and wire fences running perpendicular to the cliff tops. To the south of Cove, coastal land is used for rough grazing and a large opencast quarry. Apart from some occasional trees near settlement, the area has no woodland or notable tree cover.
2. Land use is mainly pastoral, although recreation is provided by cluttered appearance of Doonies Model Farm. There is also some limited fishing at Burnbanks and Cove Bay.
3. A coastal footpath along the cliff and a coastal road which runs beside the East Coast Mainline railway provide easy access to most of the coast although car parking is often very difficult.
4. In the northern part of the area the coastal hinterland comprises medium-sized rectilinear fields and farms while the southern part is primarily rough grazing land. Fields are generally divided by stone dykes.

5. Cove Bay harbour, village and the surrounding undeveloped coast are designated as a Conservation Area. Cove Bay contains a concentration of Listed Buildings (Category C) which are terraces of 19th Century stone-built fishermen's cottages. The Cove Bay Hotel (built in the early 19th Century as a coaching inn) is also listed (Category C). The picturesque harbour formerly protected a fishing fleet, but is now used for recreational boating. The remains of a disused fish meal factory is located on the cliff top to the south of the village, which (together with the nearby quarry structures) adds an industrial influence to the landscape.

Visual and perceptual qualities

1. A very natural and undeveloped character with a strong sense of exposure to the elements. Crashing waves and surges contribute towards a sense of wildness and drama. From the open cliff top, changing light and weather often accentuate textures, shapes and colours across the expansive North Sea.
2. From the cliff tops there are long-range, uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea towards the distant horizon. Looking along the coast, views tend to be medium-range, curtailed by rocky outcrops and small headlands. The railway embankment forms a degree of inland visual containment to the intervening farmland.
3. From the sea, the rugged cliffs form a rising backdrop to the rocky shoreline. Above the cliffs, the skyline appears largely undeveloped although some recent development at Altens industrial estate is clearly visible. Further south, the settlement of Cove extends across rising ground with some infrastructure at Black Hill quarry noticeable on the skyline.
4. From the cliff tops, the sounds of seabirds and the smell of sea salt contribute to a strong natural coastal experience.
6. At night, the lights at Cove Bay contrast with the dark surrounding coastline, emphasising the undeveloped character of the area and sense of detachment from the city.

Management guidelines

The following guidelines relate to the management of the marine influences, coastal edge and hinterland character. Any guidelines in *italics* are relevant landscape management guidelines from the LCA (i.e. those which relate to the coastal edge or its hinterland).

1. Improve the maintenance and management of infrastructure along the North Sea Trail such as seating, interpretation and footpath signage in a way which avoids introducing clutter.
2. Explore opportunities for additional footpath links across the farmland to the coast.
3. *Safeguard the diverse, natural rugged coastal landforms of cliffs, narrow ravines, jagged rock platforms, small rocky headlands, sea caves and storm beaches.*
4. *Conserve and enhance the diversity and connectivity of habitats including coastal cliffs, neutral grassland and pockets of gorse scrub.*
5. *Maintain the strong pattern of rectilinear fields, some of which are enclosed by dry stone dykes.*

6. *Conserve the open character of cliffs tops.*
7. *Avoid tree planting along the coast.*
8. *Maintain the mainly undeveloped character of the area and avoid increasing light pollution.*
9. *Conserve and enhance the open and rural character of the coastal road. Avoid urban style elements such as kerbs and unnecessary signage. Improve the management of car parking and the condition of roadside fencing and signage.*
10. *Retain the rugged, natural and exposed coastal character and the sense of detachment from the city.*
11. *Maintain the uninterrupted panoramic views across the North Sea and along the coast.*



Coastal grasslands above a narrow ravine



Dramatic rocky coastline



Cove Bay



Rock platform

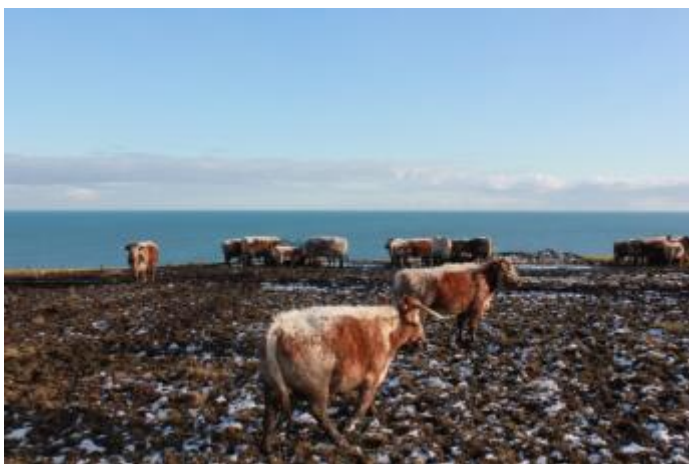
6. Managing Change

Pressures for change

- 6.1 The coast is subject to ongoing change as a result of natural and human influences which include:
- Natural processes (e.g. erosion from wave energy) and climate change;
 - Visitor pressure and recreational activity;
 - Fly tipping and vandalism;
 - Commercial marine activity and fishing;
 - Offshore energy and mineral development;
 - A range of development pressures along the coast; and
 - Land management changes.
- 6.2 Although some traditional marine-based activities are in decline, their cultural associations leave a lasting legacy which continues to shape the character and identity of the Aberdeen coast. As tourism and recreation continues to play an increasingly important role in people's lives, the coast provides an ideal setting to connect with nature and relax. As part of this, it is important to understanding what makes the coast special and the factors that contribute to its strong sense of place. Sensitive planning and management will help to safeguard its future.



The coast path along the rugged coastline to the south of the city is an important recreational resource for residents and visitors. It is eroded in places.



Land management of the distinctive coastal farmland along the *Souter Coast* will continue to be affected by changes in agricultural policy and markets and the likely impacts of climate change such as changes to growing seasons and land use



Visitor and recreational infrastructure is often subject to neglect and vandalism.



Fly-tipping and littering is an ongoing problem along accessible parts of the coast.



Industrial development along the *Souter Coast* is beginning to encroach on the prevailing undeveloped skyline.



Erosion of sand dunes at the mouth of the River Don is likely to accelerate due to the effects of climate change.

Appendix I: Data sources

Figure 1 – Relationship of Landscape and Coastal Character Areas

Coastal Character Areas: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 2 – National Coastal Character Types

Aberdeen City Council boundary: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

National Coastal Character Types: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 3 – Study area

Aberdeen City Council boundary: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Indicative study area: Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 4a/b – Intertidal habitats

Intertidal Habitat Survey 2004 -2007: © North East Scotland Biological Recording Centre, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 5 – Natural designations

Aberdeen City Council boundary 2016: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

National Nature Reserve 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Special Protection Area 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Special Area of Conservation 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Ramsar Site 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Site of Special Scientific Interest 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Local Nature Reserve 2016: © Scottish Natural Heritage, 2017

Local Nature Reserve 2016: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 6 – Cultural designations

Aberdeen City Council boundary 2016: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Scheduled Monuments 2016: © Historic Environment Scotland, 2017

Listed Buildings 2016: © Historic Environment Scotland, 2017

Conservation Areas 2016: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Figure 7 – Coastal Character Areas

Aberdeen City Council boundary 2016: © Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Coastal Character Areas: ©Aberdeen City Council, 2017

Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Raster, 2017.

Appendix II: References

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- [www.aberdeen-harbour.co.uk/about us](http://www.aberdeen-harbour.co.uk/about-us) (2017)

Appendix III: Glossary

Above Ordnance Datum (AOD): A measurement of spot height relative to the average sea level at Newlyn, Cornwall UK.

Coastal Character Area: Areas of seascape with a unique identity. They are specific to one place, focus on differences and local distinctiveness, and are identified by a local place name.

Containment: Where rising landform, built development or landcover such as woodlands provide a visually containing edge to adjacent areas of landscape and coast.

Exposure: Experience of the elements or being affected by them because of being in a particular situation or place due to elevation, lack of shelter from vegetation, landform or built structures, or a combination thereof.

Igneous: Rock solidified from volcanic lava or magma.

Landscape: An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/ or human factors [European Landscape Convention].

Littoral: Relating to or situated on the shore of the sea.

Maritime: Activities and characteristics associated with the sea.

Naturalness: Where qualities or state of the landscape and coast are considered natural.

Openness: The quality of a place not being covered with buildings, trees or other prominent landcover.

Remoteness: The state of being distant from the main centres of population and influences of built development.

Seascape: An area, as perceived by people, from land, sea or air, where the sea is a key element of the physical environment [European Landscape Convention].

Spit-bar complex: An assemblage of sand and/or gravel landforms at an estuary mouth or coastal embayment that are liable to change by marine deposition and erosion. The complexes incorporate spit(s) (attached to the coast at one end and often vegetated) and bar(s) (not attached to land, and unvegetated).

Supralittoral: The area above the spring high tide line, on coastlines and estuaries, that is regularly splashed, but not submerged by sea water.