

Hornsea Project Three
Offshore Wind Farm



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Hornsea 3
Offshore Wind Farm

Orsted

Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Statement

Volume 6

Annex 4.4 – Qualities of Natural Beauty of the Norfolk Coast AONB

Liability

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Characteristics	Elements, or combinations of elements, which make a contribution to distinctive landscape character.
Development	Any proposal that results in a change to the landscape and/or visual environment.
Elements	Individual parts which make up the landscape, such as, for example, trees, hedges and buildings.
Feature	Particularly prominent or eye-catching elements in the landscape, such as tree clumps, church towers or wooded skylines.
Key characteristics	Those combinations of elements which are particularly important to the current character of the landscape and help to give an area its particularly distinctive sense of place.
Landform	The shape and form of the land surface which has resulted from combinations of geology, geomorphology, slope, elevation and physical processes.
Landscape	An area, as perceived by people, the character of which is a result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
Landscape character	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse.
Tranquillity	A state of calm and quietude associated with peace, considered to be a significant asset in the landscape.

Acronyms

Unit	Description
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
QNB	Quality of Natural Beauty

Units

Unit	Description
m	Metre

1. Introduction

1.1.1.1 This annex summarises the key qualities of natural beauty of the North Norfolk Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) as described in the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan Strategy 2014-19 prepared by The Norfolk Coast Partnership, referred to in volume 3, chapter 4: Landscape and Visual Resources. The AONB Management Plan Strategy sets out the purpose of the designation and identifies the qualities of natural beauty (QNB) of the AONB. It then goes on to provide an assessment of the condition of the QNBs, identifies key drivers for change and sets out a series of objectives and policies to guide future development of the AONB.

1.2 Summary of the Key Qualities of Natural Beauty of the AONB

1.2.1.1 The AONB Management Plan Strategy defines seven key QNBs. These are summarised as follows in section 3.1 of the AONB Management Plan Strategy:

- **Dynamic character and geomorphology of the coast** - Movement and interchange of internationally recognised geomorphological features and habitats.
- **Strong and distinctive links between land and sea** - The area's distinctive and unique character is based on the visual, ecological, socio-economic and functional links between land and sea.
- **Diversity and integrity of landscape, seascape and settlement character** - Key quality is based on maintaining diversity of character types rather than uniformity across the area, including landscapes and seascapes, settlement pattern, building materials and styles.
- **Exceptionally important, varied and distinctive biodiversity, based on locally distinctive habitats** - Recognised by a range of national and international designations. Coastal habitats are particularly important and most famous for birds, supporting iconic species. Inland habitats and species are also important, particularly lowland heath.
- **Nationally and internationally important geology** - Mainly based on past glaciation and current coastal processes. Includes landforms and landscape scale features as well as individual sites.
- **Sense of remoteness, tranquillity and wildness** - A low level of development and population density for lowland coastal England, leading to dark night skies and a general sense of remoteness and tranquillity away from busier roads and settlements and, particularly for undeveloped parts of the coast, of wildness.
- **Richness of archaeological heritage and historic environment, particularly that relating to the coast and its character** - Evidence and features of human use of the area since prehistoric times and links to current uses and features.

1.3 Summary assessment of the Key Qualities of Natural Beauty

1.3.1.1 Section 3.2 of the AONB Management Plan Strategy provides a summary assessment of the condition of the seven key QNBs, these are rated as follows:

- GREEN - quality is being conserved and enhanced;
- AMBER - some grounds for concern; and
- RED - quality is not being conserved and enhanced.

1.3.2 Dynamic Character and Geomorphology of the Coast

Movement and interchange of internationally recognised geomorphological features and habitats.

Summary assessment

1.3.2.1 Some form of flood defences exist for much of the 'low' coast from the western outlier to Weybourne but extensive marshes, mud and sand flats in front of sea banks means that the coast is extensively subject to change through the action of natural forces and coastal processes at present, maintaining the existing range of dynamic coastal geomorphological features and coastal habitats.

1.3.2.2 Realignment schemes and sympathetic management changes have taken place and the future trend is likely to be continued realignment.

1.3.2.3 Extensive stretches of the cliffed coastline are able to erode and change naturally, maintaining a dynamic variety of habitats and providing vital sediment for beaches down-drift. Major settlements are protected by hard defences, which are likely to remain for the foreseeable future and constrain coastal change in these locations. Away from settlements the current and future trend is for reduced defence.

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: GREEN
- Currently: GREEN

1.3.3 Strong and Distinctive Links between Land and Sea

The area's distinctive and unique character is based on the visual, ecological, socio-economic and functional links between land and sea.

Summary assessment

1.3.3.1 Ecological links are generally sound. A few species depending on both land and sea are under pressure, although not necessarily because ecological links are failing. Intertidal areas are a key component in the area's biodiversity and landscape / seascape character. Coastal wildlife and seascapes are strong factors in the local tourism industry.

1.3.3.2 Economic and social links with the sea remain strong, although different in emphasis from the past. Many local people maintain an active involvement with the coast e.g. through recreational activities such as sailing, through the 'longshore economy', including common rights (for example shellfish and samphire gathering), although wildfowling has decreased with increasing numbers of visitors. The local fishing industry, although employing few people, is relatively stable and continues to constitute a part of the area's character. Coastal water quality and the quality of beaches is generally good, providing a suitable environment for coastal recreation and bringing large numbers of visitors at peak times.

1.3.3.3 Panoramic coastal views and seascapes remain distinctive in character, although the wilderness quality of the seascapes of the North Norfolk Heritage Coast has been affected recently by the development of offshore wind farms, with additional wind farms consented (see QNB 6).

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: GREEN
- Currently: AMBER

1.3.4 Diversity and Integrity of Landscape, Seascape and Settlement Character

Key quality is based on maintaining diversity of character types rather than uniformity across the area, including landscapes and seascapes, settlement pattern, building materials and styles.

Summary assessment

1.3.4.1 Since designation in the 1960s some significant developments in the area have adversely affected the character of parts of the Norfolk Coast, mainly the A149 bypass in the western parts of the area and the expansion of some settlements outside or on the border of the AONB into the designated area – principally in the Cromer-Sheringham-Holt triangle.

1.3.4.2 Considerable development has taken place on the edge of the AONB, either straddling or just outside the boundary. Bacton Gas Terminal was anticipated at the time of designation and the boundary drawn on its anticipated western edge; the terminal exerts a strong influence on the character of this part of the area. Boundary settlements where particularly significant expansion has occurred include Dersingham, Snettisham, Heacham and the Woottons in the western part of the area; Holt, Sheringham and Cromer in the northern part of the area – although most boundary settlements have expanded noticeably. These have some impact on the setting of the AONB as well as adding to recreational pressures.

1.3.4.3 Within the AONB settlements have generally expanded to some extent, although designation of the cores of most AONB settlements as Conservation Areas has helped to maintain the character of these areas.

1.3.4.4 Growth has not necessarily had a significant effect on the area's character in itself, although insensitive changes to building and settlement character from building alterations / extensions and security lighting are a concern.

1.3.4.5 The wilderness character of seascapes on a large proportion of the undeveloped coast, principally the North Norfolk Heritage Coast, has been adversely affected by the development of offshore wind farms.

1.3.4.6 Otherwise in the wider coast and countryside of the Norfolk Coast, diversity and integrity of character has remained relatively conserved, although agricultural production has generally intensified in line with national trends. Recent changes having a minor effect on character include agricultural irrigation reservoirs (relatively few) and onshore wind farms (none recently approved in the AONB, although some outside the area will be visible to some extent).

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: AMBER
- Currently: AMBER

1.3.5 Exceptionally Important, Varied and Distinctive Biodiversity, based on Locally Distinctive Habitats

Recognised by a range of national and international designations. Coastal habitats are particularly important and most famous for birds, supporting iconic species. Inland habitats and species are also important, particularly lowland heath.

Summary assessment

1.3.5.1 Coastal nature reserves in the area were amongst the first to be established so sympathetic management by conservation organisations has long been in place. 95% of the area's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), comprising approx. 27% in total of the area, are in good condition, comparing very favourably with other AONBs and national parks in general.

1.3.5.2 Populations of most high profile, characteristic bird species are stable or increasing at present. Some of the relatively few exceptions are affected by pressure from coastal visitors, although this is not the only factor.

1.3.5.3 50% of the area is covered by Environmental Stewardship agreements, including 29% of the area's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats.

1.3.5.4 The benefits of this on biodiversity in the wider countryside of the area are not quantified, however. Statistically valid data on farmland bird populations, a useful high level indicator, are not available for the AONB although individual species such as turtle dove, for which the Norfolk Coast has been known as something of a stronghold, are known to be much reduced in line with national trends.

1.3.5.5 Assessment of the ecological status of the area's rivers under the Water Framework Directive suggests that 17% of their lengths are in poor condition, over 80% in moderate condition although initiatives are in progress to address these issues.

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: GREEN for designated sites, AMBER for wider countryside
- Currently: GREEN for designated sites, AMBER for wider countryside

1.3.6 Nationally and Internationally Important Geology

Mainly based on past glaciation and current coastal processes. Includes landforms and landscape scale features as well as individual sites.

Summary assessment

- 1.3.6.1 At least partly because of the relatively undeveloped nature of the area, large-scale geological formations, features and landforms are largely intact and visible in the landscape, and most are accessible. Coastal geomorphological features are dynamic and internationally known as classic examples (see QNB1). Individual sites are mostly the result of extractive activity, now almost all inactive. Many of these provide sites for geological record and study although not all are accessible or in good condition, and few have interpretation.

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: GREEN
- Currently: GREEN

1.3.7 Sense of Remoteness of Tranquillity and Wildness

A low level of development and population density for lowland coastal England, leading to dark night skies and a general sense of remoteness and tranquillity away from busier roads and settlements and, particularly for undeveloped parts of the coast, of wildness.

Summary assessment

- 1.3.7.1 Given the amount of development in and bordering the AONB since designation in 1968, the population both in and close to has clearly increased significantly, although it is still arguably of low density compared with lowland England as a whole.
- 1.3.7.2 Recent trends suggest a slight reduction in the population of some coastal parishes, possibly because of second / holiday homes. This may contribute to a sense of tranquillity but also has negative impacts on local services and communities and increases the pressure for developments including affordable housing.
- 1.3.7.3 Visitor numbers have increased significantly since designation and pressures arising from this were the main reason given for the foundation of the Norfolk Coast Project in the early 1990s. Evidence for the last five years suggests that visitor figures are stable, with a large difference between peak and low season numbers on the coast.

- 1.3.7.4 Most of the area has been objectively assessed as tranquil or very tranquil in a 2006 national study by CPRE, with western and eastern outliers and the North Norfolk Heritage Coast being the most tranquil areas, although the study has not been repeated to enable an assessment of trends.

- 1.3.7.5 Recent night sky surveys show dark skies away from the larger settlements of a quality to compare with areas that have been certified as 'dark sky reserves', although no data is yet available to show trends.

- 1.3.7.6 Recent development of wind farms off the north Norfolk coast have had a significant negative impact on the wilderness quality of the undeveloped coast, as noted by local observers.

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: AMBER
- Currently: AMBER

1.3.8 Richness of Archaeological heritage and Historic Environment, Particularly that relating to the Coast and its Character

Evidence and features of human use of the area since prehistoric times and links to current uses and features.

Summary assessment

- 1.3.8.1 Of the large number of designated heritage assets from a range of periods in the AONB, only around 1.5% are assessed as being 'at risk', which is at the lower end of the range for English AONBs as a whole. Two of the heritage assets 'at risk' assessments appear to be because of their vulnerability to coastal change / flooding.
- 1.3.8.2 Although agri-environment schemes have assisted in providing beneficial management for some archaeological sites, archaeological damage has occurred from ploughing and continues in some cases. There has also been some loss of historic landscape patterns, for example field boundaries since designation although this has also been reduced by changes in agricultural grants and incentives.
- 1.3.8.3 Coastal and offshore development such as wind farms has affected the setting of some coastal heritage assets.

Overall assessment:

- Since designation: GREEN
- Currently: GREEN

2. References

Norfolk Coast Partnership (2014) Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management plan Strategy 2014-19. Available online: <http://www.norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk/mediaps/pdfuploads/pd003457.pdf> [Accessed on 29 January 2018]