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# **Pembrokeshire Coast National Park**

**Management Plan (2015-2019)  
Local Development Plan 2  
(2015-2031)**

**Background Paper: Special Qualities of Pembrokeshire Coast  
National Park**

**March 2018**

**PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

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## **Why identify our Special Qualities?**

1. The National Park has two statutory purposes – the second of these is to ‘promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public’.
2. To achieve this purpose, we need to understand what these special qualities are, and so be better placed to help protect and enhance them, and help people understand what makes the National Park special.

## **What are special qualities?**

3. Special qualities are the characteristics and features of the National Park which, individually and in combination, contribute to making the National Park unique.

## **How were the special qualities identified?**

4. The Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales) (HMSO, 1947) describes the proposed boundary of a national park around the Pembrokeshire Coast, and the features of landscape, geological, wildlife, heritage cultural and recreational interest encompassed by the proposed boundary.
5. The National Park Authority asked visitors and residents for their views on special qualities in 2006, as part of the preparation for the Local Development Plan and Management Plan at that time. Consultants also identified special qualities as part of a Landscape Character Assessment, in 2007. This was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance on Landscape Character Areas to the Local Development Plan in June 2011. Further clarification was provided with Supplementary Planning Guidance on Seascape Character Assessment, which was adopted by the National Park Authority on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2013.
6. The special qualities identified by people reflect their perception of the National Park, and their own understanding of what ‘special qualities’ means, but together this information has allowed us to build a picture of what is special about Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.
7. The Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance is largely based on the format and information contained within LANDMAP, the Welsh landscape appraisal tool. Updates to the National Park aspect areas for the Visual and Sensory layer were released in March 2015, although these were not considered significant enough to warrant a review of the Authority’s adopted Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance.

## Special Qualities of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

8. The landscape of Pembrokeshire is a result of millennia of human activity and interaction with the environment. The Park's diverse character, cherished beauty and environmental quality, have all contributed to its uniqueness.
  - Coastal Splendour
  - Diverse Geology
  - Diversity of Landscape
  - Distinctive Settlement Character
  - Rich Archaeology
  - Cultural Heritage
  - Richness of Habitats and Biodiversity
  - Islands
  - Accessing the Park
  - Space to Breathe
  - Remoteness, Tranquillity & Wildness
  - Diversity and Combination of Special Qualities
9. The above special qualities are the keynote qualities of the National Park. Since special qualities are derived from perception, these may not reflect all the qualities identified by individuals but rather, a consensus.

### Coastal Splendour

10. The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is widely recognised as Britain's only predominantly coastal National Park. The splendour of its coastline, its spectacular scenery, and rugged, unspoilt beauty, provide a scenic quality which was recognised in its designation as a National Park.
11. To the north of the National Park, the pattern of tall cliff faces, headlands, and small sandy / shingle beaches, caves and stacks, provide strong sense of place and an outstanding rugged coast. Dinas Head, with cliffs at 140 metres, provides spectacular, panoramic views across Fishguard Bay to the south and Newport Bay to the North. Here, sea birds, choughs, peregrine falcons and ravens find nest sites at platforms and crevices of the cliff face.
12. The western stretches of the National Park are permeated by the constant presence of the sea, in sight and sound. There is a constant awareness of the wind and sea, sharpened by the sound of crashing waves along the beaches of St Brides Bay, when the prevailing south westerlies reach sufficient strength.
13. The southern coast continues with the Angle peninsula, and further along to the sandy beach and dunes of Freshwater West. From this point, the sheer cliffs are punctuated by sheltered coves, stacks, arches, swallow

holes and blow holes, etched out of the cliff face. The Green Bridge of Wales, near Castlemartin, is a spectacular natural limestone arch, carved by the actions of the sea, and provides just one example of the breathtaking landscape along this coast<sup>1</sup>.

### **Diverse Geology**

14. Pembrokeshire is renowned for its spectacular geology – Pembrokeshire is truly one of the planet’s most famous geological regions – it not only helped inspire the recognition of the Cambrian Period of geological time, which began around 500 million years ago, it contributed to the global understanding of the Ordovician Period and includes internationally important reference sites for rocks of Silurian and Carboniferous age – the latter around 350 million years old.
15. This long geological history intersperses episodes of volcanic and tectonic drama with quieter intervals of tropical seas, desert coastlines and equatorial swamps. This long geological history is recognisable in the County’s landscape – but most easily read in its complex rocky coastline. As a result the area has become one of the UK’s most important venues for geological fieldwork – a superlative natural classroom in which large sections of the story of Planet Earth can be unravelled as new skills are taught.
16. This rich and varied geological history has given us the powerful volcanic outcrops of Carn Llidi, St Davids, and the stunning doleritic extrusions which form most of the peaks of the Preseli Hills. The spectacular limestone cliffs and Elegug Stacks provide many fine examples of rock formations to the south of the National Park.
17. Processes over time have also significantly shaped the landscape. The ice age melts eroded deep gorges, including Cwm Gwaun, and sea levels rose to create flooded river valleys, or rias, the largest of which is the Cleddau Estuary.
18. Rising sea levels at the end of the Devensian Ice age, drowned many river valleys and produced spectacular ‘rias’, the Cleddau estuary being the most spectacular. Smaller scale rias such as that at Solva and Stackpole are also typical of the Pembrokeshire coast and contribute to its exceptional beauty<sup>2</sup>.

### **Diversity of Landscape**

19. Despite the density of population, and the coastal nature of much of the National Park, it still manages to intrigue and interest with its diversity. The

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.3.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.4.

varied landforms of the National Park are overlaid by millennia of activity by man, in many places the traditional hedgebanks provide a tangible link to the past, as well as defining the field pattern in ways which impart a rich texture to the open landscape where small areas of woodland and scrub serve as punctuation points. Much of the rural National Park is dominated by a farmland landscape and traditional built forms predominant in the villages and agricultural buildings, contributing strongly to the sense of place, and in the north of the National Park, contrasting strongly with the open moorland of the Preseli Hills.<sup>3</sup>

### **Distinctive Settlement Character**

20. The National Park retains settlements of strong distinctive character which encompass traditional architecture, and more formal architectural approaches. Tenby is dominated by Georgian architecture within the old town walls, planned medieval settlements are still evident within the streets of Newport and Angle and within the medieval field patterns which enclose them. Much of the character of the villages and hamlets comes from their function. The village of Solva retains a traditional appearance with many of the buildings reflecting its past function as an industrial harbour settlement and important post medieval lime works trade.
21. The National Park contains more than 1,240 listed buildings, recognised for their architectural or historic value. There are also 14 Conservation Areas located at the historic cores of Saundersfoot, Tenby, Caldey Island, Manorbier, Portclew, Angle, Little Haven, Solva, Caerfarchell, St Davids, Porthgain, Trevine, Newport and Newport Parrog. These conservation areas impart a rich and varied tapestry, including the building traditions of the National Park. For example, Caerfarchell is an early rural farming hamlet of farms and cottages centred on a village green and chapel abutting a possible Bronze Age site. The settlement is loosely developed with a random mix of houses and farm buildings, largely 19<sup>th</sup> Century in character, and which have remained largely unaltered despite the change in agricultural life over the last 50 years.
22. Elsewhere however, there has been erosion of the special character of the National Parks settlements and buildings, by inappropriate development of the 1960s, and 1970s, making the remaining treasures all the more special.<sup>4</sup>

“Small, vibrant settlements. A living working community in an area of great beauty”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.5

<sup>4</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.6

<sup>5</sup> Residents and Visitors Survey

## **Rich Archaeology**

23. People have lived in Pembrokeshire for millennia, using its resources and shaping the landscape. Evidence survives in a wealth of historic and archaeological sites of international and national importance. These reflect ancient settlement and trade routes, the ecclesiastical heritage of Christianity and the birthplace of St David, the National Saint of Wales, through to the strategic importance of defence installations in Pembrokeshire, and the relics of our industrial heritage such as the lime kilns at Kiln Park, and Solva.
24. A spectacular Iron Age fort lies at the summit of Carn Ingli. From this radiate outwards prehistoric field systems, evidence of settlements and standing stones, with abundant evidence of activity from Neolithic to Iron Age times.
25. Also at the north of the County, the industrial remains are at a landscape scale and include the iconic 'blue lagoon' at Abereidly and the hoppers at Porthgain. The stretch of coast between Abereidly and Porthgain is a walk-through of industrial history, with stone quarries, workers cottages, the manager's house, tramways and jetties, all of which contribute to the story of the archaeological landscape.
26. To the south, there is a wealth of historic and archaeological sites. The medieval buildings of Lamphey Bishop's palace, the moated house at Hodgeston, and the well preserved landscape of Manorbier with its castle church and dovecote, are examples of the rich and varied archaeology which pervades the National Park.<sup>6</sup>

## **Cultural Heritage**

27. Pembrokeshire has a rich and diverse culture which has been shaped down the centuries by waves of invaders and settlers.
28. Before the Norman Conquest, the whole area was Welsh speaking and ruled by Celtic chieftains. Entertainment was provided by bards who wandered from court to court recounting folk tales. These legends were later collected as "The Mabinogion".
29. During the "Age of the Saints" the county was home to a number of important Christian figures, most notably St David, who became the patron saint of Wales. After his death, his shrine attracted pilgrims from far and wide and eventually became the site of St David's Cathedral.

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<sup>6</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.7

30. The Norman Conquest created a divide of the county which still remains today. The native Welsh speakers were driven into the wilder areas of the north, while the south was repopulated with settlers from Flanders and Wessex. South Pembrokeshire became known as “Little England”, while the more rural north of the county became a stronghold of the Welsh language and culture.
31. The culture of Pembrokeshire today is still influenced by historic sites and buildings. Manorbier castle, the birthplace of Gerald of Wales, provides one example. Whilst the cultural influences of the islands off the coast of Pembrokeshire and the Milford Haven waterway, as well as more recent introductions, including the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail, provide a current sense of place and cultural dimension to the story of Pembrokeshire<sup>7</sup>.

### **Richness of Habitats and Biodiversity**

32. The wealth of important habitat and species within the National Park is supported by the climate, geology and land uses. The abundance of wildlife and the ability to get close to it is one of the charms of the National Park, and one which can change with the seasons, and which brings benefits for physical, economic and spiritual well-being. The Pembrokeshire coastline is special in Wales for the variety and abundance of coastal wildlife. In exposed areas, Pembrokeshire’s cliff, headland, coastal slope and dune grasslands and heath support some of the finest habitats found in the UK. In spring, cliffs and headlands exposed to sea salt laden winds are carpeted with maritime species such as thrift, sea campion, sea plantain and spring squill. Other common species include bird’s foot trefoil, kidney vetch, wild thyme and common centaury, while grasses such as red fescue form a soft springy turf. The area’s coastal waters also provide valuable over wintering areas for winter migrant species such as grebes, scoter duck and other diving species, and communities of chough and peregrine falcon.
33. Other habitats include open moorland, commons and heathland, estuaries, rivers and hedges, dunes and as well coastal flowers and fauna including seabirds, seals and porpoises. Oak woodlands occur in the river valleys of the Gwaun, the Nevern and the upper Daugleddau estuary. The mild oceanic climate helps to support exceptionally rich communities of lichens, ferns and typical woodland flowers such as bluebell, wood anemone, wood sorrel and violet as well as dormouse populations<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.8

<sup>8</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.9

## Islands

34. The spectacle of the islands off the Pembrokeshire Coast contributes greatly to the sense of place, and feeling of remoteness, with their outstanding visual and landscape scenery. They are highly attractive coastal wilderness areas, virtually undisturbed and rich in wildlife.
35. The islands are variously home to chough, peregrine and sea birds including Manx shearwaters, guillemots, storm petrels, razorbills and gannets as well as supporting in most cases, breeding colonies of grey seals, with pups being born each year amongst the caves and small beaches. The success of the island breeding colonies is celebrated, and recognised in their international designations. Skomer is also home to the unique Skomer vole.
36. It is not only the wonder of the wildlife which makes these islands special, their historical and archaeological significance can be dated back to some 5,000 years. Bronze Age cairns and Iron Age field systems make Ramsey and Skomer exceptional places.
37. Caldey – the most cultivated of the islands - is home to a Cistercian abbey and local population. The Christian presence continues a tradition of over 1,000 years. A sense of quiet and tranquillity pervades the island, despite the large number of day visitors through the season.<sup>9</sup>

## Accessing the Park

38. Access to beaches, the coast and its scenery via the National Trail are valued aspects of the National Park. The ease of getting around is valued, and the coastal buses often praised.
39. The Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail covers 299km of the most spectacular coastal scenery in Britain. It was Wales' first long-distance route, opened in 1970 and is one of 15 premier long-distance National Trails in England and Wales. 85% of the route is within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and it now forms part of the Wales Coast Path. As well as the National Park's spectacular coast, its wooded valleys, moorland and rugged hills are all accessible to the walker. Inland, there are over 850 km of public rights of way. Cycle paths within Pembrokeshire, also enter the National Park, and there are opportunities for off road cycling for example in the woodlands around Canaston Bridge and Stackpole.
40. Accessing Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and walking the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail has been made easier with the introduction of the coastal bus services.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.10

41. These services that travel up and down the National Park coastline, ensuring that the entire length of the National Trail, from St Dogmaels to Amroth, is accessible by public transport. It should be noted that services are under pressure and some sections are less well served than others.

### **Space to Breathe**

42. The sometimes blistering westerly winds, which bring clean and fresh air, the clean coastal water, and the clean environment are highly valued by residents and visitors alike and are a special quality of the National Park. The relatively undeveloped areas of the Park, and the opportunity to access many areas provides a sense of exhilaration and liberty, or moments for quiet reflection or enjoyment of the stunning views. All this is possible, even though the nearest settlement is never far away.<sup>10</sup>

“I’m sure it has all been listed before but I found the peace, beauty, clean air, exhilaration of the wind and waves while in a small boat to be paramount. To observe nature away from the crowds yet be near enough to friendly people when company was required went very well on my holiday”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Remoteness, Tranquillity and Wildness**

43. The relatively open character of the Preseli Hills, and the lack of cover and shelter provides a strong sense of exposure among the summits and upper slopes of these hills. They provide a sense of space and isolation, providing for moments of reflection and calm away from the bustle of everyday life. Whilst the feeling of upland exposure of the Preseli Hills is not much replicated elsewhere within the National Park, it can be found at Strumble Head and Cemaes Head. There are also however, areas within the National Park where the sense of tranquillity and peace are engendered from the intimacy and closeness of the landscape. Cwm Gwaun valley, with its pervading sense of shelter, provided by the enclosed landform, woodland and dense hedgerow network, provide a sense of tranquillity and solitude in a relatively small area, as does the Solva valley. And yet still a sense of remoteness and tranquillity can be found at the exposed and relatively isolated stretches of Freshwater West, evoked by the wind swept undulating sand dunes. And finally the upper stretches of the Daugleddau, provide a great sense of tranquillity, a sense of quiet backwater, magnified by the surrounding landform, dense woodland and strands of trees<sup>12</sup>.

“The silence has a magical quality all too rare these days”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.12

<sup>11</sup> Residents & Visitor Survey

<sup>12</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.13

<sup>13</sup> Residents and Visitors Survey

44. Part of the special appreciation of the National Park is the ability to absorb not only the tranquillity and sense of calm during the day, but the big skies of the evening and the radiance of the stars on a clear night<sup>14</sup>. Areas with substantial night time light pollution within the National Park, are centred upon the main settlements of Tenby and Saundersfoot and St Davids, although moderate night time light pollution is identified for the southern slopes of the Preseli Hills and the hinterland for Tenby and Saundersfoot.<sup>15</sup>

“One particularly unique aspect is the lack of light pollution of the night sky. It is wonderful to get such a clear view of the "greatest show on earth", this may be another aspect of the Park which is worth promoting”<sup>16</sup>.

### **Diversity and Combination of Special Qualities**

45. It is not only the individual special qualities which make the National Park special, it is the combination of special qualities, with the variety and distribution within a relatively small area which helps to create its uniqueness. The sound and sights of the sea, nestled alongside the rolling landscapes, wooded valleys and upland plateaus of the National Park create a distinctive combination of colour, contrast and change within just a few miles, and provides a range of landscapes and intangible experiences, which is rarely found.

46. It is not only the existence of these qualities, but the perception of their permanence, of the protection that a National Park affords which in itself provides reassurance.<sup>17</sup>

“The blend of sea, beautiful landscapes, rivers, cliffs and stunning views make this a unique environment in Britain”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> There are eight Dark Sky Discovery sites in the National Park. These are distributed around the Park and all lie on land managed by the National Park Authority or National Trust.

<sup>15</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.13

<sup>16</sup> Residents and Visitors Survey

<sup>17</sup> Based on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), paragraph 6.3.14

<sup>18</sup> Residents and Visitors Survey

## References

National Park Management Plans Guidance, 2007 Welsh Assembly Government and Countryside Council for Wales

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Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Landscape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance, June 2011.

<http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/default.asp?PID=249>

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Seascape Character Assessment Supplementary Planning Guidance, December 2013.

<http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/default.asp?PID=614>

Visitors and Residents Survey 2006, 6<sup>th</sup> form conference and Youth Conference, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Residents and visitors survey background paper (offline resource available from the NPA)

Web links shown above were accessed on 26 February 2018