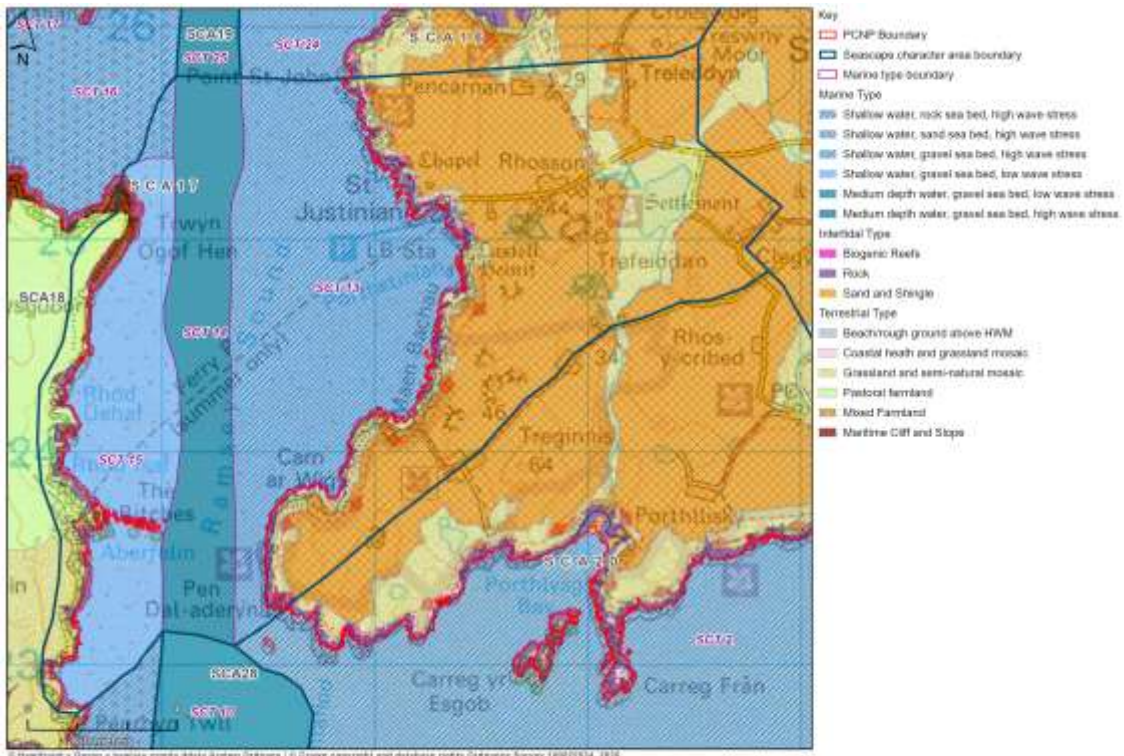


No: **17** Seascape Character Area Name: **Ramsey Sound**



SCA17: Ramsey Sound



Ramsey Sound viewed from Carn Rhosson



St Justinians with Lifeboat station and moorings



Mainland coast from Ramsey Sound- the lifeboat station is centrally located with Carn Llidi to the left and Carn Rhosson to the right

Summary Description

Ramsey Sound is located at the western end of St David's Peninsula between Ramsey Island and the mainland. It is a dynamic stretch of water with strong tidal currents and hazardous rocks with very limited settlement but rich in historic and wildlife features and with superb maritime views. It is very popular for wildlife trips and thrill seekers in kayaks and other craft.

Key Characteristics

- Ramsey Sound is a north-south tidal sea passage separating the island from the mainland with a central deep channel, strong tidal currents and hazardous rocks.
- Indented rocky coasts on both sides with cliffs up to 20-90m high interspersed with one small anchorage on the mainland and small inaccessible sandy coves.
- Coastal edge with heath and coastal grassland and bracken with a wild character.
- Open pastoral landscape gently sloping to the coast with some medieval strip fields and low cut hedgebanks.
- Built form limited to St Justinian's chapel which is a monument, the lifeboat station, a few dwellings and one farm on Ramsey Island.
- St Justinians is the embarkation point for RHIB wildlife boat trips around Ramsey and offshore and the anchorage is popular and busy in season.
- The Sound is a dynamic stretch of water used by kayakers and others for white water around the Bitches and other rocks.
- There is rich wildlife using the sound and adjacent coasts including porpoises and seals.
- The Coast Path runs along the length of the mainland coast.
- Vehicular access to coast limited to the one locations with associated car park.
- Unspoilt open views out to Ramsey Island, out to sea and long views along coast to major headlands to north east and south west.

Physical Influences

Ramsey Sound (<500-1600m) is a north-south tidal sea passage separating the island from the mainland. The sea floor of sandy gravel, covering north east-south west striking bedrock, can be subdivided into three marine types: a central moderately deep channel (30-60m) is bordered by a moderate to steeply sloping (>10⁰) sea floor towards the east and a moderately sloping (1-10⁰) sea floor to the west. The sea is exposed to high wind and wave stress in the central and eastern types, but to reduced wave stress in the lee of the island. Tidal currents are strong (<6 knots), with gyres and tidal races (around the Bitches) leading to treacherous waters. Horse Rock is the main hazard which dries to 0.9m at low tide. Tidal currents split around Ramsey

Island. The tidal range is ~5.5m.

The mainland headlands (60-70m aod) are composed of a north east-south west striking succession of Precambrian-Cambrian tuffs, intrusions and sandstones. The Ramsey Island bedrock, which is much faulted, also includes Ordovician shales, and reaches 134m aod at Carn Llundain. The Sound is bordered by cliffs (25-90m aod), some with caves and coves. Intertidal areas are almost entirely (98%) high energy rocky shores, with minor sandy coves. Wind and wave erosion occur through abrasion, attrition and hydraulic action.

The sea and intertidal areas are covered by the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC. The cliffs, associated coastal heath and grassland are designated as the Ramsey Island and St David's Peninsula SPA and they are also an Important Bird Area as defined by RSPB. Ramsey Island is designated as a National Nature Reserve and SSSI. It is an important reserve owned by RSPB - puffins, seals, auks, razorbills, porpoises and occasional dolphins are all evident. The mainland cliffs are designated as St David's Peninsula Coast SSSI. The strong currents cause the upwelling of organisms from the deep channel which attracts fish and birds/larger predators.

The coast is a mixture of semi-natural grassland and heath along the cliff tops and on outcrops such as Carn Rhosson. The mainland hinterland is predominantly a mix of pasture with some arable use, rough grazing and wetland. Ramsey Islands east coast is mainly semi-natural grassland and heath with bracken.

Cultural influences

Historic use includes Medieval communication between Ramsey Sound and the mainland episcopal estate and pilgrimage. The hinterland's farming economy was supported by coastal trading and fishing.

Clegyr Boia to the west of St Davids was occupied in the Neolithic and Iron Age periods. Dated Neolithic settlements in Wales are extremely rare, but the discovery of crude huts and Neolithic round-bottomed pottery confirms occupation of this rock 5-6,000 years ago. St Justinian's Chapel a place of pilgrimage for medieval travellers to St David's and gathered donations which were passed to the cathedral. The present 16th century stone building may obscure an earlier structure, possibly dating to the early Christian period. The tidal race in Ramsey Sound is fierce. Four recorded shipwrecks all lie on the eastern side of the Sound including the coastal cargo ship, Count d'Aspremont's whose boiler still stands proud of the seabed (sunk in 1903). The Magella, a small fishing boat, was sunk as recently as 1991, even though the lifeboat station is located nearby.

Scheduled monuments include:

- PE014 (St Justinian's chapel): community: St David's
- PE109 (Clegyr Boia hillfort): community: St David's
- PE295 (Castell Heinif promontory fort): community: St David's
- PE421 (chambered tomb): community: St David's

This area lies entirely within the St David's Peninsula and Ramsey Island Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest.

Clegyr Boia is associated with the 6th century Irish pirate Boia although is of Neolithic origin. There is place-name evidence for other Irish settlement. The area as a whole is associated with the sea-borne nature of early Medieval Christianity.

Settlement is limited to a few dwellings around St Justinians, vernacular farmsteads further inland and the one farm complex on Ramsey, close to the landing place and now used by the RSPB. There is a Lifeboat Station at St Justinians. The current facility is located on columns with a slipway in front of the old station which is a small stone built shed set back against the cliffs. A further modern lifeboat station is proposed which indicates the changing requirements of life saving around Pembrokeshire's waters.

St Justinians is a major centre for wildlife boat trip operators taking visitors out and around Ramsey Island, Ramsey Sound and The Bitches which are known as a wild water phenomenon. There is pontoon access to the water, swinging moorings for operators' boats and a well used car park both close to the Station and inland in a discreet location. Motor and sail cruisers are active throughout this area as well as day boats, kayaks, sailing dinghies and jet-skis. The Sound

is used as a coastal cruising route linking Milford and Solva to North Wales/Cardigan Bay. Sea angling also takes place both from boats and the rocks. Coasteering is a popular activity around this coast. Walking the Coast Path affords spectacular views across the Sound to Ramsey Island in addition to wildlife watching from cliffs.

Fishing in the area comprises of lobster and crab potting and potential for light otter trawling. [The area has previously had a Round 24 licence for oil and gas and future applications may be made.](#)

Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities

The scale of the Sound is large and open but with enclosure from Ramsey Island and the mainland cliffs running south from St John's Head backed by outcrops back from the coast. These landforms focus views out to sea north to St David's Head and the Bishops and Clerks rocks and south to St Bride's Bay and Skomer in the distance. The rough textures of the cliffs and rocks are complemented by qualities of the water which, apart from around 20 minutes slack, clearly moves swiftly north or south on the flood and ebb tides respectively, creating standing waves and turbulence over rocks such as the Bitches. On the water these create drama and excitement and attract sightseers and thrill seekers on powerful RHIBs and kayakers who surf the waves in optimum conditions. The indented cliffs which provide interest and superb changing vistas onshore from the Coast Path appear to be two dimensional when halfway across the Sound [around 500m] and man-made structures such as the lifeboat station are hardly apparent. This gives a strong sense of tranquillity, wildness and remoteness which is reinforced by sightings of grey seals and, occasionally, porpoises. Tranquillity is reduced to an extent by the RHIBs and other boats which frequently ply the Sound, emanating from St Justinians which is a busy and colourful little harbour in season. However, this use does not significantly diminish the natural beauty, unity and balanced composition of this stretch of water and coast, rather providing further animation of the water, with sweeping wash. Detractors include the few isolated mid 20th century houses and bungalows in prominent locations, the caravan and camping sites and ad hoc WCs adjacent to the car park at St Justinians.

Cultural benefits and services

The area contributes significantly towards leisure and recreational services in the form of marine recreation including wildlife trips, to natural heritage in the form of the sound with the strong tidal streams and rocks, and mainly unspoilt coast, and to cultural and spiritual services in respect of its national historic interest and features related to St David's including the chapel at St Justinian's.

Forces for change								
Summary	Key forces for change							
<p>Slow coastal erosion of rocky cliffs, more in back of bays. The shoreline management plan states ‘do nothing’.</p> <p><u>A second, more modern lifeboat station was opened in 2016 indicating the changing requirements of life saving around Pembrokeshire’s waters.</u></p> <p>Increasing use by boat trip operators and other boat users, emanating mainly from St Justinians- with effects on tranquillity and potentially on wildlife and habitats.</p> <p>Coast Path increasing use by walkers.</p> <p>Increasing use of car park and access.</p>	Special Qualities	Natural processes/ climate change	Visitor pressure	Marine use- commercial and fishing	Offshore energy or minerals	Development pressure	Land management changes	MOD use
	Coastal Splendour							
	Islands							
	Diversity of Landscape							
	Remoteness, Tranquillity and Wilderness							
	Diverse Geology							
	Richness of Habitats and Biodiversity							
	Rich Archaeology							
	Distinctive Settlement Character							
	Cultural Heritage							
	Accessing the Park							
	Space to Breathe							
	Key		Change occurring in the area affecting the selected special quality					
Key sensitivities								
Factors that contribute to sensitivity					Factors that detract from sensitivity			
<p>Unspoilt Sound with strong tidal currents and hazardous rocks.</p> <p>Indented, natural rocky coasts and small inaccessible sandy coves with strong natural and wild character.</p> <p>Nature conservation value including coastal habitats.</p> <p>Rich wildlife using the sound and adjacent coasts including porpoises, seals and chough.</p> <p>Historic rural pastoral character of the hinterland, and hill backcloth.</p> <p>Historic features and very limited settlement.</p> <p>Prominence of small hillsides and intervisibility of the coast.</p> <p>Superb, virtually unspoilt views across the Sound and along the coast.</p> <p>Pembrokeshire Coast Path as a sensitive receptor.</p> <p>Boat trips users as sensitive receptors.</p>					<p>Lifeboat station is a functional structure.</p> <p>St Justinians is the embarkation point for RHIB wildlife boat trips around Ramsey and offshore and the anchorage is popular and busy in season.</p> <p>Presence of scattered 20c dwellings.</p>			