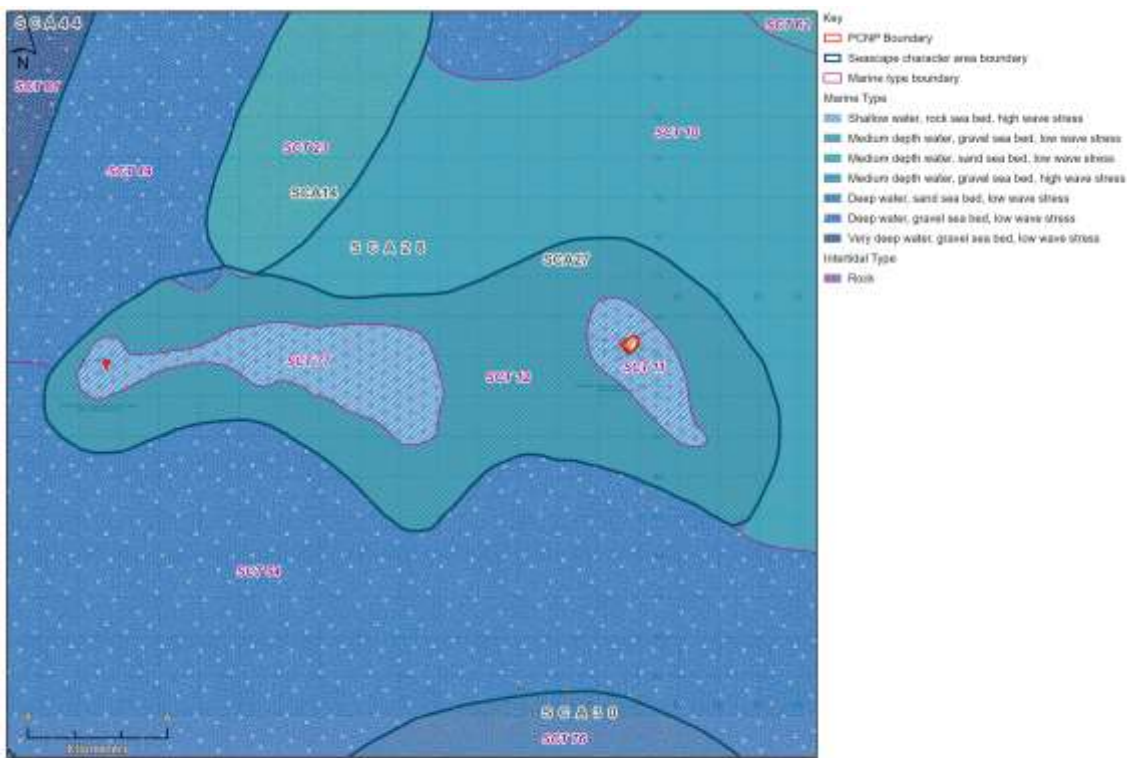


No: **27** Seascape Character Area Name: **Grassholm and the Smalls**



SCA27:Grassholm and the Smalls

Summary Description
<p>This exposed marine area is located west of Skomer as a continuation of a volcanic bedrock ridge. Grassholm is the nearest landform to shore and is known for its large gannetry. The other rocks are small or submerged as reefs and are dangerous for navigation but visited by divers and for wildlife. A tall lighthouse is located on the Smalls.</p>
Key Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sea overlaying an offshore east-west striking volcanic bedrock ridge extending west of Skomer.</li> <li>• Grassholm is an isolated rugged island animated by a large gannetry, and appearing as white on one side.</li> <li>• The Smalls and other rocks form a series of rock islets and reefs along the submarine ridge interspersed with moderately deep channels.</li> <li>• Exposed seascape area with high wave stress, strong tidal currents and tidal rips and overfalls around rocks.</li> <li>• Wildlife especially around rocks including whales and dolphins.</li> <li>• Many wrecks especially around the Smalls and Grassholm.</li> <li>• The Smalls lighthouse marks the western edge and emphasises the hazardous nature of the waters.</li> <li>• Some recreation including wildlife trips, sailing and diving.</li> </ul>

- Strong sense of remoteness, wildness and tranquillity with distant views to and from mainland and Skomer Island and feeling of drama and threat around rocky islets.

### Physical Influences

Grassholm (<45m aod) and the more westerly islets comprising the Smalls are formed of resistant Silurian Skomer Volcanic Group lavas, tuffs and sandstones, and represent exposed parts of an offshore east-west striking bedrock ridge. These same rocks are exposed along strike on Skomer and the Marloes peninsula. The intertidal areas comprise high energy rocky shores, and boulders are strewn at the foot of indented cliffs of sandstone and volcanics. Wind and wave erosion act through abrasion, attrition and hydraulic action.

The islets are surrounded by a shallow (<30m), low to moderately sloping (1-10°) rock and sandy gravel sea floor, shelving into sandy gravel of moderate depth waters (30-60m). The sea is exposed to high wave stress and tidal currents, especially on the south western side of islets. Some rocks/small islets are exposed tidally, other rocks remain permanently but shallowly submerged. Tidal currents set north and south, tidal flow <3 knots. The tidal range is ~6m.

The area is part of the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC.

### Cultural influences

Historically part of the Western trade routes from prehistory to the present day with a possible Viking, or Early Christian role. For ships sailing south through the Irish Sea, the Smalls and the adjacent Hats and Barrels, along with the vicious tidal rips, were a deadly threat and claimed many wrecks.

Grassholm has been inhabited since Prehistory; structures have been revealed by the caustic effect of seabird guano. Rectangular structures may date from Viking, or Early Christian times. A Viking sword hilt of the 11th century was discovered in the Smalls reef, from either having fallen overboard or from a Viking shipwreck of which no other trace has so far been discovered. The recorded wrecks are mostly around The Smalls including Clan Macduff, a passenger steam ship lost in a storm (1881), the Rowena (1893), Cambro (1913), and Ribicia (1929). Some lie around Grassholm including Mersey (1876), Dalserf, a steam collier (1910) and the Walter L Russ (1943). The island was used as a target for bombing practice by the United States Air Force during the Second World War, leaving bomb craters and fragments.

Little remains of the piled 18<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse; the present tower was built in 1861 and is listed. There are no scheduled monuments.

The place names 'hats and barrels', 'tump' and 'gut' are of interest. The Smalls is associated with the Quaker, John Phillips, master of St. George's Dock, Liverpool, who in 1773 obtained a lease and built the first lighthouse.

Diving on and around both Grassholm Island and The Smalls is popular but requires the more substantial dive boats that come out of Milford and St Bride's Bay. Wildlife boat trips visit these outcrops, Grassholm for its large Gannetry, although access is controlled, and The Smalls for the chance to see whales and other cetaceans. A heavily used coastal cruising route passes through the area linking Milford with Skomer and points north across St Brides Bay and west to Ireland and motor boats will also pass in transit.

Fishing in the area comprises of set nets avoiding the rocky islets and lobster and crab potting. The lighthouse on The Smalls has a navigation light, radar beacon and foghorn. [The area has previously been granted a Round 24 licence for oil and gas and future applications may be made. The area is also an explosives dumping ground \[currently not in use\].](#)

### Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities

The area has not been visited, although waters to the east around Skomer have. It would be expected that the whole area would feel isolated running from 7km to 26km west of Skomer. Parts of the coast would be apparent in good visibility such as Carn Llundain or Skomer from closer points and will appear as a single dimensional line on the horizon with simple colours.

The area has a simple, consistent and unified character at a vast scale and a sense of openness, isolation and exposure. Grassholm is the only identifiable island with its large colony of (c.60,000) gannets which create a white mass (through plumage and droppings) on the northern side of the island. This is an awe inspiring wildlife spectacle and it would be expected to have a

highly dynamic sense of movement from the birds and a strong aroma closer to. The remote tall, white, striking lighthouse on The Smalls rocks is a reminder of these dangers and is the main light source in the area and the only mark of man, heightening the sense of place. The Barrels Rocks are just apparent on the surface as a threatening reef.

The qualities are determined almost entirely by the natural forces of water, through swell and waves, and wind, although the island and rocks bring drama to the seascape with crashing waves and spray in some conditions. The area is exposed to the south westerlies and in poor weather conditions the sea is likely to feel highly threatening, particularly close to the island and rocks. There is a strong likelihood of tranquillity and sense of wildness and remoteness in this area. Wildlife, particularly around the island and rocks enhance the richness of experience of the seascape.

Leisure craft used for wildlife watching, sailing and diving will be apparent and will reduce the sense of remoteness and tranquillity in season. There may be occasional views of commercial vessels at a sensible distance.

From the mainland, the area forms part of the superb unspoilt vistas from Skomer and north St Bride's Bay coast and the Coast Path.

#### **Cultural benefits and services**

The area contributes towards leisure and recreational services in the form of marine recreation, to natural heritage in the form of wildlife in and around the islands and islets and an unspoilt marine area of sea visible from the sensitive coasts the National Park, and to cultural and spiritual services in respect of a sense of wildness and connectedness with nature and the interest of wreck sites.

Forces for change								
Summary	Key forces for change							
<p>Slow coastal erosion of rocky coasts. The shoreline management plan states 'do nothing'.</p> <p>Increase in commercial shipping traffic into Milford may reduce tranquillity.</p> <p>Increase in leisure craft including tours may reduce tranquillity.</p> <p><u>Future licences for oil and gas would change the character of the area if exploited.</u></p>	<b>Special Qualities</b>	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							
	<b>Key</b>		Change occurring in the area affecting the selected special quality					
Key sensitivities								
Factors that contribute to sensitivity				Factors that detract from sensitivity				
<p>Simple, open, wild and remote character with views of the western coast and islands.</p> <p>Forms part of the open setting for of the western coast and islands overlooked by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park contributing to the sense of remoteness and wildness in these areas.</p> <p>Marine and Grassholm nature conservation value.</p> <p>Pembrokeshire and Wales Coast Path as a sensitive receptor overlooking the area at a distance.</p>				<p>Presence of diving and other leisure boats.</p>				