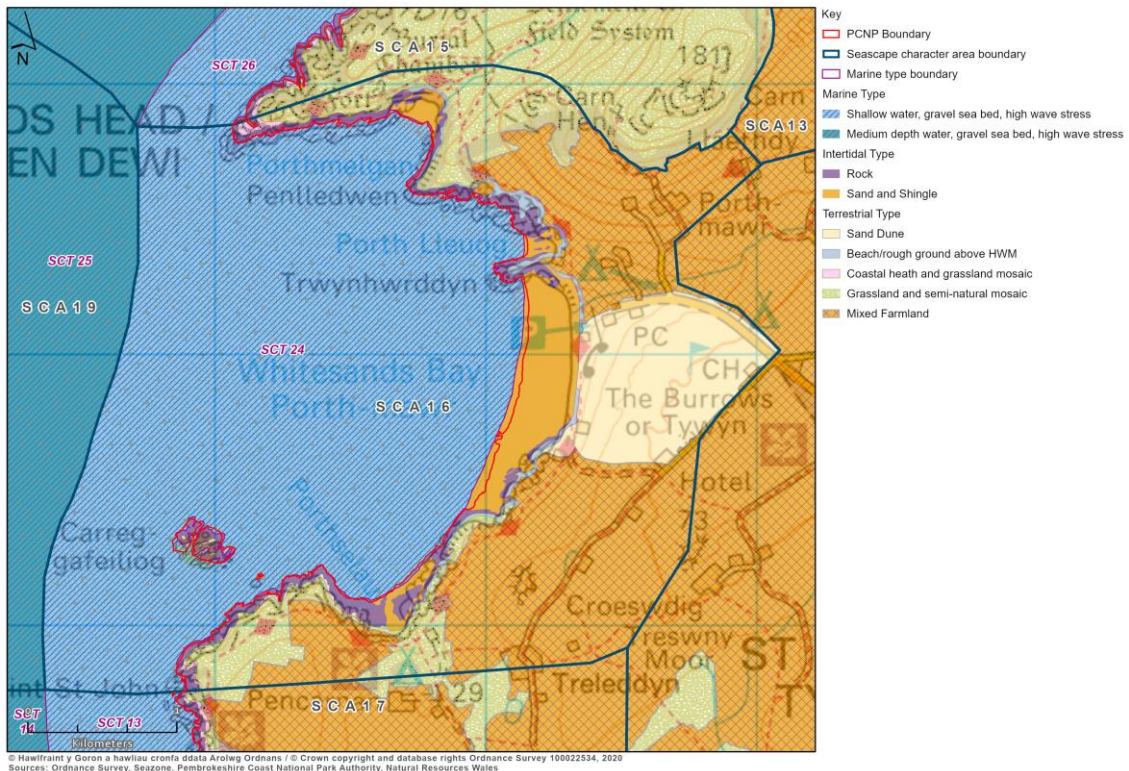


No: **16** Seascape Character Area Name: **Whitesands Bay**



SCA16:Whitesands Bay



View of the Bay and Ramsey Island from Carn Llidi



St David's Head looking across Whitesands Bay from Carn Rhosson

Summary Description
<p>The bay is located just south of St David’s Head on almost the westernmost point of the mainland peninsula in Wales. It is a wide sandy bay flanked by rocky headlands which is very popular for surfing and swimming and beach activities. The coast has a historic landscape pattern especially to the north with very limited settlement.</p>
Key Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide west facing bay with wide and gently sloping sandy beach with sandy coves to the north west and south interspersed with jagged cliffs and indented rocky foreshores.</li> <li>• Historical features, scattered rural settlement and landscape pattern of old hedgebanks especially around Carn Llidi.</li> <li>• Semi-natural heath and grassland on coastal edge.</li> <li>• Backcloth of Carn Lidi and St David’s Head to the north.</li> <li>• The headlands either side frame fine views out to Ramsey Island (an iconic Park view) and the Bishops and Clerks as well as across the bay.</li> <li>• Popular beach with moderately large waves for surfing and swimming and with beach activities.</li> <li>• The sea is partially sheltered by Ramsey Island and so within the bay the waters can be calm. The bay is used for kayaking.</li> <li>• The Coast Path runs around the edge of the bay with fine views.</li> <li>• A small links golf course lies behind the dunes and caravan parks and camping sites are limited but evident.</li> </ul>
Physical Influences
<p>This wide west-facing sandy bay is cut into a north east-south west striking succession of Precambrian to Ordovician rocks. Precambrian volcanic tuffs are overlain in the south of the bay at Ogofgolchfa by conglomerates at the base of an extensive Cambrian sandstone/siltstone succession exposed northwards, overlain at the promontory Trwynhwrddyn by black Ordovician shales that make up Pwlluog Bay. Cliffs are mostly &lt;30m around the bay. At the southern end of the bay a stretch of submerged rocks leads out to the small rocky islet of Carreggafeiliog (3m aod). The sandy intertidal areas of the bay (60%) are crossed by areas of rock foreshore that strike across the sands (40%). While rocky areas are subject to wind and wave erosion through abrasion and hydraulic action, the beach is a depositional environment where sediment is transported through saltation, traction and suspension. There is some dune development and net longshore drift.</p> <p>The shallow (&lt;30m) sea floor of sandy gravel across the bay slopes gently (&lt;1°) westwards above the Precambrian to Ordovician succession dominated by sandstones and shales. The sea is exposed to high wind and wave stress, with risk of tidal rips. The gently sloping west facing beach is known for moderately large waves. Tidal currents set north and south at the edge of the bay. The tidal range is ~4.1m.</p> <p>The sea and intertidal areas are covered by the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC. The cliffs, associated coastal heath and grassland and the beaches are designated as the St David’s Peninsula Coast SSSI and they are also an Important Bird Area as defined by RSPB.</p> <p>The coast is a mixture of semi-natural grassland and heath along the cliff tops with relict dunes behind the main beach, now partly used as a small links golf course. The hinterland is predominantly a mix of pasture and rough grazing, with some arable use.</p>
Cultural influences
<p>The bay has long historic linkages with Ireland. Its Welsh name is Porth-mawr or the ‘great gateway’, used for boat embarkations and arrivals.</p> <p>A possible Roman fort and an early Christian community, the precursor of St David’s, may be</p>

hidden in the dune system. Whitesands Bay has long been the favoured site for the so-called Roman port of Menapia. It is entirely possible that the great dune system of The Burrows/Y Tywyn on the coast at Whitesands conceals not only a Roman port but also the early Christian community originally founded by St David, before it was moved inland to the valley of the Alun.

Scheduled monuments include:

- PE071 (promontory fort): community: St David's (partly in SCA15)
- PE093 (field system): community: St David's (partly in SCA15)
- PE012 (St Patrick's chapel): community: St David's

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

Graham Sutherland, the artist, painted pictures of the coves leading to St David's Head.

The beach was traditional embarkation point for Ireland, associated with the cult of St Patrick.

There is only one wreck recorded in the area- the Guiding Star. This iron hulled paddle tug acted as a pilot to larger vessels and was holed on Horse Rock in 1885 after towing a ship through Ramsey Sound. It was subsequently beached on the sands and can still be seen at low water during Spring tides.

Settlement is limited to a few farmsteads, cottages, isolated 20<sup>th</sup> century bungalows and houses. Kayaking, surfing, windsurfing and sea angling are all popular activities off Whitesands beach and angling also occurs off the beach at Porthmelgan. Sailing dinghies and jet-skis are also launched from the beach. Some wildlife boat trips launch from the beach to visit the nearby Ramsey Island Bird Sanctuary.

There is a slipway in the middle of this long beach which is popular for general beach activities. There is a car park behind the beach which suffers from overcrowding in the summer. There are several caravan and campsites around this area.

The Pembrokeshire Coast Path runs along the top of the cliff edge and dunes around the bay.

Fishing in the area comprises of lobster and crab potting and potential for light otter trawling. The area has previously been granted a Round 24 licence for oil and gas and future applications may be made.

#### **Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities**

The scale of the bay is large but with strong enclosure from St David's Head and the backcloth of Carn Llidi to the north and by the cliffs running to St John's Head along with Ramsey Island to the south. These landforms focus views out to sea towards the Bishops and Clerks rocks and the horizon beyond, and give interest and diversity to the view. The rough textures of the cliffs and rocks contrast with the large sweep of smooth gently sloping beach. The dunes provide a lower backcloth to the east with marram grass. The bay is exposed to westerly winds although the south westerlies are modified by Ramsey Island. The surf crashes on the beach making it an exciting and stimulating environment. This and the broad beach attract families and surfers alike and the area is very busy and animated in season during the day [and sometimes at night with events] reducing tranquillity, although this increases to the south and west. The bay offers superb views in and out. Detractors include the few isolated mid 20<sup>th</sup> century houses and bungalows in prominent locations and the caravan and camping sites.

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

The area contributes significantly towards leisure and recreational services in the form of marine recreation and beach including surfing, to natural heritage in the form of the mainly unspoilt coast and beach, and to cultural and spiritual services in respect of its national historic interest and features related to St David's as the 'great gateway'.

Forces for change									
Summary	Key forces for change								
	Special Qualities	Natural processes/ climate change	Visitor pressure	Marine use- commercial and fishing	Offshore energy	Development pressure	Land management changes	MOD use	
<p>Slow coastal erosion of rocky cliffs, more in bay. Some net longshore sediment drift. The shoreline management plan states ‘do nothing’ St David’s Head-Whitesands, and selectively hold the line/retreat in the Bay.</p> <p>As a honeypot the facilities and beach have to cope with large numbers of visitors.</p> <p>Walkers erode Coast Path and other footpaths.</p> <p>Car parking overflows in fields- visual impact.</p> <p>Congestion and wear on narrow local access road.</p> <p>Camping and caravan sites are noticeable and require strict control to be maintained.</p> <p>Conversions of cottages and farms to holiday homes.</p> <p>Coasteering is subject to increased scrutiny for habitat impact.</p> <p>Land management-intensification of use of fields can reduce biodiversity and affect landscape character.</p>	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 factors to be taken into account when assessing sensitivity to change								
<p>Steep indented coastline with cliffs and coves forming a natural coastal edge.</p> <p>The nature of the headlands either side frame views out to sea.</p> <p>The unspoilt views out to sea and across the bay to Ramsey Island.</p> <p>Simple, open character of the sandy bay focuses views across it making any development highly noticeable.</p> <p>Semi-natural heath/grassland on cliffs.</p> <p>Rural pastoral character of the hinterland and hill backcloth.</p> <p>Historic character of the old farmsteads and field boundaries/patterns.</p> <p>Historic significance of the features on St David’s Head and the bay.</p> <p>Coast Path is a receptor.</p> <p>Biodiversity, historic and landscape designations.</p> <p>Presence of occasional 20c dwellings/ structures.</p>									

Presence of car park, lifeguard station and facilities.

Presence of camping and caravan sites.

Presence of the golf course.