

Draft

Management of North Bull Island Nature Reserve



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Introduction

North Bull Island Nature Reserve is a coastal sand spit located in Dublin Bay. It is managed as a public park by Dublin City Council, it has several nature conservation designations for the habitats and species it supports, it is designated as a special amenity area for its aesthetic and recreational value, and it is an integral part of the Dublin Bay Biosphere.



Dublin City Council's vision for North Bull Island, and the aim of this Management Plan, is to conserve the environmental qualities and scientific importance of the Island, while balancing its amenity and recreational potential for the benefit of the local community and visitors.

This Management Plan supersedes 'A Management Plan for North Bull Island, 2009'. It is set out in four parts.

Part A sets out a brief description of North Bull Island, its environmental qualities and scientific importance, and its use by the local community and visitors.

Part B sets out the principal designations governing the management of North Bull Island, and their respective objectives.

Part C sets out the policies by which Dublin City Council manage North Bull Island on a daily basis.

Part D sets out actions deemed necessary to safeguard the Island's environmental qualities and scientific importance, and to facilitate the sustainable use of the Island for amenity and recreation.

This Management Plan has been informed by:

- Flora and vegetation survey of North Bull Island 2017-2019
- An assessment of the effects of recreational and other activities on the waterbirds using the Bull Island saltmarsh 2018-2020
- An assessment of the effects of kitesurfing and other activities on the waterbirds using Dollymount Strand 2017-2018
- Disturbance of grey and harbour seals on North Bull Island 2018 and Dublin Bay Seal Survey 2018
- North Bull Island hare survey 2016
- Marsh fritillary survey of North Bull Island 2017
- Evaluation of the Status of Native Herpetofauna on North Bull Island 2014-2016
- North Bull Island dog tracking project 2018
- Managing the Impact of dogs and dog walkers on the biodiversity of North Bull Island 2017
- Dublin Bay Birds Project (ongoing)
- Conservation Objectives: North Dublin Bay SAC, 2013
- Conservation Objectives: North Bull Island SPA, 2015
- Dublin Bay Biosphere Biodiversity Conservation and Research Strategy, 2016
- Dublin City Biodiversity Action Plan, 2015
- A Management Plan for North Bull Island, 2009
- Consultation with local community groups, statutory agencies and environmental NGO's



Part A: Brief Description of North Bull Island Nature Reserve

Set out below is a brief overview of the environmental qualities and scientific importance of North Bull Island, and its use by the local community and visitors. It does not, however, reproduce the extensive detailed information, which is available in several sources elsewhere.

North Bull Island is nestled along the northern edge of Dublin Bay. It is a low-lying sandy spit, with Dollymount Strand on the seaward side of the Island, and salt marsh fringing its mainland side. Between the Island and the mainland are intertidal mud and sandflats. The Island is connected to the mainland by Causeway Road and the Wooden Bridge.

The location of North Bull Island in such close proximity to Dublin City Centre makes it an important public amenity. The Island is used daily by local residents, walkers, bathers, 5th Port scouts, kite-surfers, beachgoers, bird-watchers, nature enthusiasts and many others. There are also two golf courses located on the Island, St Anne's Golf Club and the Royal Dublin Golf Club.

There is a long history of community engagement on the Island, with the local community spearheading many of the Island's current designations. In addition, the proximity of the Island to schools and universities make it an important outdoor classroom and study site.



The Island supports nine habitats (see Part B below) and a range of species protected under the EU Habitats Directive, including Petalwort (a species of liverwort), Marsh Fritillary Butterfly, two species of seal (Harbour and Grey), and at least three species of bat (Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, and Leisler's). In addition, the Island supports three bryophyte (moss) species, (*Bryum intermedium*, *Bryum uliginosum*, and *Bryum warneum*) and one species of plant, Lesser Centaury, which are legally-protected under the Flora Protection Order.

The Island also supports a range of overwintering wildfowl and wading birds protected under the EU Birds Directive (see Part B below). Three species regularly occur in internationally important numbers (Light-bellied Brent Goose, Black-tailed Godwit and Bar-tailed Godwit), and fourteen species regularly occur in nationally important numbers (Shelduck, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Golden Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone and Black-headed Gull). The Island also supports significant numbers of birds during the summer.

Hydrology plays a significant role in the ecology of the Island, particularly with regard to the Humid Dune Slacks. The Island has a lens of fresh groundwater that develops immediately below the ground surface and extends many metres below the surface. It is dynamic and discharges around the margins of the island. The two golf clubs on the Island extract fresh groundwater for irrigation purposes.



Part B: Designations on North Bull Island

North Bull Island is one of the most intensively designated areas in Ireland, which is a reflection of its importance to both nature conservation and to society.

While not continuously in conflict, the objectives of these designations do result in zones of conflict with regard to the management of the Island. At certain times of the year, and/or at certain locations on the Island, and/or at certain activity levels, the Island's recreational and amenity objectives can conflict with its nature conservation objectives.

The aim of this management plan is to continuously strive for a balance which conserves the environmental qualities and scientific importance of North Bull Island, while facilitating its amenity and recreational potential for the benefit of the local community and visitors.

The principal designations governing the management of North Bull Island are set out below.

Special Area of Conservation – North Dublin Bay SAC

The objective of this designation is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition, as defined by a list of attributes and targets, of the following habitats and species:

Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; Annual vegetation of drift lines; *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand; Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*); Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*); Embryonic shifting dunes; Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (white dunes); Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes); Humid dune slacks; Petalwort (*Petalophyllum ralfsii*).

Special Protection Area – North Bull Island SPA

The objective of this designation is to maintain the favourable conservation condition, as defined by a list of attributes and targets, of the following species and habitats:

Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*); Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*); Teal (*Anas crecca*); Pintail (*Anas acuta*); Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*); Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*); Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*); Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*); Knot (*Calidris canutus*); Sanderling (*Calidris alba*); Dunlin (*Calidris alpina alpina*); Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*); Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*); Curlew (*Numenius arquata*); Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*); Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*); Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*); Wetlands

Special Amenity Area – North Bull Island SAAO

The objective of this designation is to maintain North Bull Island’s scenic and other amenities, including recreational utility, having regard to the open character of the area, and its position in relation to centres of population, and industrial and commercial development.

UNESCO Biosphere – Dublin Bay Biosphere

The objectives of this designation are to promote a balance between people and nature through promoting the protection of landscapes, habitats, wildlife and cultural values (Conservation); supporting education and research, for a better understanding of nature and global issues (Learning); and fostering a sustainable economy and society for people living and working in the area (Development).

Nature Reserve – North Bull Island

The objective of this designation is to manage North Bull Island in such a way as to ensure the conservation of the dune grassland ecosystem and the marine ecosystem which it constitutes.

Ramsar Site – North Bull Island Ramsar Site

The objective of this designation is to maintain the ecological character of North Bull Island as a wetland of international importance, and to retain its essential functions and values as a wetland for future generations.

Wildfowl Sanctuary – North Bull Island

The objective of this designation is to exclude North Bull Island from the ‘Open Season Order’ so that game birds can rest and feed undisturbed.

Open Space – Dublin City Council Bye-Laws

The objectives of this designation are to ensure that North Bull Island and its facilities are used to the maximum extent, in safety and comfort; to protect North Bull Island as a public amenity; and to ensure as much enjoyment as is possible for North Bull Island visitors.

Part C: Policies by which Dublin City Council manages North Bull Island on a daily basis

Designations

1. To manage North Bull Island in line with the requirements obligated by its designations as set out in Part B above.
2. Unless otherwise stated below, the policies and procedures relating to public parks in Dublin City (Dublin City Parks Strategy 2019-2022 and any future iteration) will apply to all parts of the Causeway and Island.

Nature Conservation

Harbour Seals and Grey Seals use the northern tip of Bull Island for breeding and resting. They are highly sensitive to disturbance from people and dogs. Ringed Plover and Terns breed on the shelly/shingle beach material at the northern tip of the Island. Nests are typically well camouflaged, and are therefore easily trodden on or disturbed. The northern tip of the Island is also a favoured feeding area for species such as the Curlew, and is regularly used by large concentrations of waterbirds for roosting at high tide.

3. To manage the northern tip of North Bull Island as a refuge for wildlife and prohibit public access from the area all year round (see map in Appendix 1). To produce and maintain signage relating to same.

The intertidal 'lagoons' and saltmarshes are used by birds all year round, with the greatest numbers of birds occurring during the winter period. Birds are spread out across both habitats during low tide, but as the tide rises, the birds retreat to the saltmarsh to roost. The birds are accustomed to traffic and pedestrians using Causeway Road and footpath, but are particularly sensitive to people and dogs walking along the salt-marsh edge.

Ground-nesting birds, such as skylarks, stonechats and meadow pipits, breed throughout the sand dunes during summer. Unleashed dogs roaming beyond the existing trails can disturb these species.

4. To protect important bird areas (for nesting, roosting and feeding) on the Island by:
 - a. Prohibiting public access to the areas between the golf courses and the salt marsh year round and maintaining signage relating to same (see map in Appendix 1).

- b. Prohibiting dogs from being unleashed on any part of the dune system or the northern section of the beach and maintaining signage relating to same (see map in Appendix 1).
 - c. Including provisions for responsible behaviour towards wildlife into recreational codes of practice and signage.
5. To maintain the structure and conservation value of the sand dune system by re-planting marram grass where dunes are under threat from over-use or erosion.
 6. To control invasive species on North Bull Island, and to prevent new invasive species from becoming established on the Island.
 7. To prohibit unlicensed introduction or removal of any species, or part thereof, (e.g. seeds) to or from North Bull Island.

Recreation and Amenity

In 2018, a dog-tracking project demonstrated that dogs covered more area when exercised on the beach, as opposed to the sand dunes or along the saltmarsh.

8. Unleashed dogs will be allowed on the southern part of the beach, from the Causeway to the Wooden Bridge outside of the bathing season (see map in Appendix 1).
9. Dog walkers will be required to clean up after their dogs and dispose of dog foul in an appropriate manner.
10. To allow recreational activity on the sand dune system where such activity does not have a significant negative impact on the ecosystem.
11. To allow recreational activity on designated parts of the beach where an agreement has been reached between Dublin City Council and the relevant representative bodies.
12. The launching of personal power-crafts from the beach area will not be permitted.
13. Any activity which is likely to have a significant negative impact on bird feeding or roosting grounds will not be permitted.

14. The use of motorised vehicles (e.g. scramblers), drones, land-yachts, or horses are not permitted on the Island.
15. To provide a lifeguard service on Dollymount Beach during the bathing season and to ensure the service is adequately trained and equipped for rescue operations.
16. To prohibit camping on any part of the Causeway or the Island.
17. To maintain the bathing shelters at the Bull Wall to an acceptable condition.

Litter and Environmental Management

18. To manage the beach area in line with the criteria and standards set out by the Blue Flag certification.
19. To provide adequate resources to maintain the Island, including Dollymount Beach, in a litter free condition.
20. Temporary free-standing, large capacity litter-bins will be provided on the beach from Spring to Autumn to cater for increased beach use. Each bin will be accompanied by messaging that reinforces the ethos of the Nature Reserve, and visitors will be encouraged to take their litter home with them
21. There will be no increase in litter-bin provision elsewhere on the Causeway or the Island.
22. To undertake manual beach cleaning everyday throughout the year, and mechanical beach cleaning (surf rake) everyday throughout the bathing season.
23. To safeguard ecological communities, mechanical beach cleaning is restricted to the area below the embryonic dunes and above the strandline. Manual cleaning only outside of this area.

Ectocarpus is a seaweed, which regularly washes up on Dollymount Strand, and emits an unpleasant odour (similar to raw sewage) as it decays.

24. To address concerns over its odour, Ectocarpus will be collected, piled to let it drain and dry, and deposited in appropriate locations to rehabilitate dune blow out areas and to encourage new dune formation.
25. Dumping of any form is not permitted on the Causeway or the Island. Fly-tipping, burned out cars, etc. will be removed as a matter of priority.

26. To remove and dispose of dead animals (e.g. seals and cetaceans), etc. as a matter of priority. Where deemed appropriate and necessary by the Island manager, a post-mortem will be undertaken.
27. The provision of formal nature trails throughout the sand-dune system will not be permitted to prevent erosion and destruction of the habitat.
28. Picnic tables will be maintained to an acceptable standard, and replaced where necessary.
29. The removal of sand from the beach or Island is not permitted. Wind-blown sand which accumulates on access roads will be re-deposited on the beach.

Car Parking and Vehicular Access

Vehicular access to Dollymount Strand from Causeway Road was restricted in 2015 due to public safety concerns on the advice of An Garda Síochána. In response, the existing car-parking layout on Causeway Road was redesigned to facilitate closer access to the beach. Feedback from beach-goers in relation to vehicular restrictions has been largely positive.

30. To implement the approved vehicular parking system on Causeway Road.
31. To maintain the current restrictions on beach access for vehicles.
32. There will be no new means of access permitted from the mainland to the Island.

Since the construction of the Causeway Road, there have been ongoing concerns expressed about its impact to ecology and sedimentation, and requests to breach the causeway. However, several dedicated studies have concluded that there is no ecological imperative to do so.

33. The Causeway Road will not be breached in the absence of evidence indicating a scientific prerogative to do so.

Education and Visitor Engagement

34. To co-ordinate and resource the North Bull Island Volunteer Programme.
35. To facilitate continuing research into the ecology of North Bull Island and make research results available in the Interpretive Centre.

36. To facilitate volunteer and community groups, such as the Bull Island Action Group and 5th Port Scouts, who are engaged in education, conservation, and/or litter clean-up activities.

Part D: Actions to safeguard the Island's environmental qualities and scientific importance, while facilitating the sustainable use of the Island for amenity and recreation

Individual Actions may be subject to planning permission, permits or other consents. These will be assessed under the relevant legislation and procedures prior to implementation.

1. To establish an Advisory Committee with local stakeholders to guide the implementation of this Management Plan.
2. To implement a long-term monitoring programme which will inform and steer the management of nature conservation – recreation/amenity conflicts on North Bull Island
3. To progress the design and planning process to provide an accessible Discovery Centre for education, interpretation and research to support the nature conservation objectives of North Bull Island and the UNESCO Biosphere designation.
4. To implement a branding and communications strategy for North Bull Island that reinforces its role as a nature reserve.
5. To replace existing signage in line with the branding and communications strategy, which reinforces the management of North Bull Island as set out in Part C above.
6. To provide recreational/ amenity facilities where such facilities contribute to overall visitor management of North Bull Island.
7. To develop and implement an education strategy for a range of groups currently using the Island (e.g. dog walkers and kite-surfers).
8. To provide additional picnic tables at appropriate locations.
9. Prepare and publish a Flora for North Bull Island.
10. Implement appropriate actions as part of the Dublin City Biodiversity Action Plan and relevant strategies of the Dublin Bay Biosphere Partnership.