

# Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment

Commissioned by Exmoor National Park Authority

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Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset, TA22 9HL  
and at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)



*Enhancing the qualities that make Exmoor special*



# Contents

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1. Introduction.....	1
2. Evolution of the Exmoor Landscape.....	13
3. A : High Coastal Heaths.....	19
4. B : High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves.....	37
5. C : Low Farmed Coast and Marsh.....	53
6. D : Open Moorland.....	61
7. E : Farmed and Settled Vale .....	79
8. F : Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons.....	89
9. G : Incised Wooded Valleys.....	101
10.H : Plantation (with Heathland) Hills.....	115
11. I : Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes.....	123

Appendix 1: Sample Baseline Data Maps

Appendix 2: Moorland Fringe

*“For some, Exmoor is the sea and the distant views of Wales. Others believe that Exmoor is its eastern borders – spectacular tree-filled valleys and Dunkery’s purple heather. Others think that Tarr Steps and Winsford Hill are Exmoor. They are all quite right, of course, for Exmoor is all these things – and a thousand others, too.*

*Exmoor is a summer day at Three Combes’ Foot – the shade of beech tree and the noise of water. Exmoor is a gale out by Chapman Barrows, Exmoor is Dunster in August: crowded pavements, souvenirs – and St. George’s Church with its miraculous screen. Exmoor is ‘Doone Land’ – but it is southern Badgworthy, too, where desolate combes join in the heart of the moor to create that beautiful valley. Exmoor is a stag belling in October mists; it is peat-bog at Exe Head; it is barley in Porlock Vale; Hawkcombe; wild ponies galloping over the moor; deserted iron mines on the Barle; the Knight family tombs at Simonsbath; curlews calling over Wood Barrow; the weird Longstone; cream teas; coach tours; utter loneliness; wild grandeur; postcard prettiness; controversy; heart’s ease.”*

**S.H Burton (1984).**

# 1. Introduction

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## Exmoor National Park

- 1.1 Designated in 1954, Exmoor National Park contains some of the finest and most diverse landscapes in Britain.
- 1.2 Covering 692 square kilometres (267 square miles), Exmoor straddles the border of Devon (north) and Somerset (west). The National Park stretches from the outskirts of the North Devon coastal town of Combe Martin (in the west) to the small West Somerset village of Elworthy in the east. To the south, the town of Dulverton forms a gateway to the National Park and in the north the boundary of Exmoor is defined where the coastal cliffs abut the Bristol Channel. The location and geographic context of Exmoor is illustrated in **Figure 1**.
- 1.3 Although relatively small in size, Exmoor exhibits significant variety of landscape scene – dramatic coastal cliffs, windswept open heather and grass moorland, densely wooded river valleys, rolling farmed hills and undulating vale for example. In 1975, S H Burton wrote that *“Nowhere else in Britain can greater variety of scene be found than within the comparatively small territory of the Exmoor National Park”*. It has been noted that *“Exmoor’s uniqueness, Exmoor’s virtue, Exmoor’s peculiar charm, are more subtle and more difficult to identify, except that in her are blended the beauties of all the other national parks (except maybe, the Lake District and Snowdonia), yet with no characteristic to excess”* (Court, 1987)<sup>1</sup>. It is, perhaps, the great diversity of the landscape; its constantly changing scene, that forms the very essence of Exmoor’s character.
- 1.4 Exmoor National Park is small in extent and as such is fragile in relation to change – not least small cumulative issues that, collectively, can have a significant impact on the landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Court, Glyn (1987). Exmoor National Park (Countryside Commission Guide). Webb and Bower, Michael Joseph.

## **Background and Context for the Study**

- 1.5 The designation of Exmoor National Park has two statutory purposes:
- **To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and**
  - **To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public.**
- 1.6 In the light of the two key purposes, there is a clear need to explore and describe the special qualities that define particular areas or places – to have an explicit understanding of what is special about Exmoor’s landscapes. This will help to ensure that appropriate measures are taken forward for successful landscape policy and management to both safeguard a landscape (that includes some of the wildest and remote upland areas in southern England) as well as ensuring continued public involvement and intervention within it.
- 1.7 This report has been written with a broad audience in mind – aimed for example at Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) staff and Members, professional consultants working within Exmoor National Park, landowners, land managers, Landscape Architects, Land Agents, Architects, Planners, Local Authorities (crossing and bordering the National Park), Government Agencies, Environmental Trusts, charities and pressure groups, academics and students as well as interested members of the public.

### **Landscape Studies**

- 1.8 This landscape character assessment has been undertaken as part of a series of landscape-focussed studies for Exmoor National Park Authority and The Exmoor Society.
- 1.9 In 2004 the Exmoor Society appointed Land Use Consultants (LUC) to undertake an evaluation of the current state of Exmoor’ moorlands – the ‘Moorlands at a Crossroads’ study. During the study’s development, it became apparent that there was a need for Exmoor National Park to have an up-to-date Landscape

Character Assessment. This would help underpin and inform a whole host of landscape planning, management and design policies and strategies for the future. As a result, Exmoor National Park Authority commissioned LUC to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (2004). This was a short, fairly rapid study with the purpose of identifying and mapping boundaries of the different Landscape Character Types (accurate to 1: 25, 000) and providing a list of the key characteristics or component features and elements making up the different landscapes. The study also provided Indicative Landscape Character Areas with the intention that these be taken forward by Exmoor National Park Authority (for more detailed study) to refine and amend boundaries as appropriate.

1.10 Following the development of the Exmoor Landscape Working Group and the Moorland Initiative<sup>2</sup>, ENPA decided that the Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Land Use Consultants should be built upon with the purpose of developing detailed descriptions as well as landscape evaluations. This study is a result of the decision to expand the landscape character work in the National Park in order to:

- **Provide an important landscape framework that will pro-actively inform the development of a number of key policy areas and provide the basis for strategic planning;**
- **Enable better-informed decisions to be made on the future management of the landscape by informing the re-drafting of the National Park Management Plan;**
- **Assist the drafting of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy;**
- **Improve the understanding of the landscape resource available on Exmoor;**
- **Inform the revision of the Exmoor National Park Design Guide; and**

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<sup>2</sup> The Moorland Initiative is the umbrella term for a very wide range of projects, initiatives and actions focussed at safeguarding the future of Exmoor's Moorlands.

- **Provide the evidence base for developing landscape management guidance e.g. horse-related development.**

1.11 There are many other potential uses for the report including for example the development of landscape sensitivity and capacity studies. Such studies fall beyond the remit and resources available for this study but the descriptive material contained within this report will provide essential baseline information that can be taken forward for a range of studies/purposes in the future.

## **Landscape Character Assessment**

- 1.12 Landscape Character Assessment is a well-established tool for systematically, identifying, classifying and describing the landscape – recognising it as a continuous system that does not adhere to administrative boundaries. By identifying, features and elements of the landscape (and their combination and expression), the essence or special character of a particular place can be revealed, explored and understood.
- 1.13 Since the 1980s Landscape Character Assessment has increasingly been used to understand the landscape around us and to apply that understanding to suit a range of different purposes e.g. as a planning tool (policy and development control) and as a basis for the development of landscape management strategies or for landscape sensitivity and capacity studies for example.
- 1.14 Landscape Character Assessment can broadly be split into two main stages:
- **Characterisation** – an objective and relatively value-free process of landscape identification, mapping, classification and description; and
  - **Making Judgements** – developing and employing a robust methodology in order that professional judgements about the landscape can be made and which will then assist with decision-making.



- 1.15 Criteria used within an evaluation of the landscape are likely to have elements of subjectivity within them but the development of objective descriptions followed by a systematic process of evaluation helps to reduce subjectivity. Landscape Character Assessment– Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)<sup>3</sup> states that *“the process of characterisation should be an objective process in the main, while making judgements to inform decisions involves an element of subjectivity which can be clarified by using criteria agreed beforehand”*.
- 1.16 Landscape Character Assessment is now deeply embedded within the planning system – from the national to the local scale there exists a wide range of policies, statements and guidance documents that aim to conserve, protect, enhance and positively manage the character of the landscape. In 2006, the UK signed up to the European Council's European Landscape Convention – the first international convention for dealing directly with landscapes in terms of their protection, their development and sustainable management. The European Landscape Convention and the increased reference to landscape character within planning policy and guidance are clear indicators that landscape and landscape issues are rapidly moving up the political and environmental agenda.

## **Assessment Methodology**

- 1.17 This study follows the current, accepted method of Landscape Character Assessment as set out in Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland (2002). It has been prepared within the National framework provided by the Countryside Agency and English Nature's 'Joint Character Areas' and the Countryside Agency's 'National Landscape Typology' (**Figures 2 and 3**).
- 1.18 There have been three key stages to conducting the study – desk study, field survey and production of the report.

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<sup>3</sup> Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage

## Desk Study

- 1.19 Using the existing LUC Landscape Character Assessment as a baseline, along with a range of baseline data (including geology, soils, historic landscape assessment, hydrology and topography) the existing landscape type and indicative character area boundaries were reviewed and refined and Draft Landscape Character Areas were mapped for field survey purposes.
- 1.20 The Exmoor National Park Authority's Geographical Information System and digital aerial photography were used throughout the study as a source of baseline data and for the production of maps for report production. Examples of baseline data maps are provided in **Appendix 1 (Figures 5, 6 and 7)**.

**Table 1. Landscape Character Types and Character Areas**

**Landscape Character Types** are generic in nature, sharing broadly similar patterns and combinations of elements (physical as well as human) such as geology, soils, vegetation, settlement and field pattern in every area where they occur e.g. *Incised Wooded Valley* or *Open Moorland*.

**Landscape Character Areas** are the unique, individual geographic areas that represent/exhibit the characteristics of a particular landscape type. So, within Exmoor, two separate Character Areas belonging to the *Incised Wooded Valleys* Landscape Type are the '**Exe** *Incised Wooded Valley*' and the '**Avill** *Incised Wooded Valley*'.

## Field Survey

- 1.21 The field survey was undertaken using maps at 1:25,000. As well as a process for gathering more detailed information to inform the descriptions of landscape character, the field survey was geared towards gathering information on Key Issues or Visible Forces for Change to inform the Landscape Evaluation. Field survey allows perceptual and sensory elements of the landscape to be recorded – characteristics that cannot be measured through desk study alone. Degrees of remoteness and tranquillity were considered, based on the initial

Land Use Consultants field survey that used the following criteria:

- **Visual and aural influences** e.g. distance from settlement, modern communication and degree of accessibility;
- **Presence of construction or artefacts** e.g. contemporary built/engineered works.
- **Evidence of contemporary land uses** e.g. intensive farming, overgrazing, off road vehicle use.
- **Landform and degree of exposure** e.g. physical composition of the landscape and component factors which can engender different degrees of remoteness and tranquillity.
- **Extent of the landscape** e.g. covering sufficient area and providing a physical challenge to engender a sense of remoteness.

### **Classification, Description and Evaluation**

- 1.22 Following on from the desk study and field survey, the map of landscape types and character areas was produced and digitised, descriptions and evaluations of landscape character developed and reported.

### **Study Evaluation**

- 1.23 For each landscape type, the aim of the evaluation was to provide,:
- **An overall guiding landscape strategy** - to provide a basis for strategic landscape planning and management (as well as informing Local Development Framework policy and development control decisions); and
  - **A set of accompanying Landscape Guidelines** to suggest recommendations for managing future change, in line with the overall aim of the landscape strategy.
- 1.24 There is currently no one accepted methodology for evaluating landscape character. This evaluation has been based on an understanding of **Landscape Quality** – determined from an assessment of **Strength of Character** and

**Landscape Condition.** The evaluation has been based on professional judgement. It has not, at this stage, involved the views of stakeholders or been open to wider public consultation.

**Table 2. Landscape Quality, Strength of Character and Condition**

**Landscape Quality.** This is a judgement about the overall physical state of the landscape and is based upon the combination of the strength of landscape character and overall landscape condition (see below).

**Strength of Character:** an assessment of how the combination of landscape components (features, elements and characteristics) creates a distinctive sense of place. The process considers how distinctive and recognisable the pattern of elements is that make up a particular type of landscape; taking into account attractors and detractors in the landscape e.g. consistent use of local building materials and vernacular detailing or intrusive communication masts. It is also mindful of landscapes that may be empty of distinctive (positive) landscape features such that it is lacking character and local distinctiveness. It also considers expression or articulation of features and degree of fragmentation e.g. an historic pattern of hedgerow enclosure may have fallen into decline such that the landscape pattern is diluted and the strength of character weakened as a result. A three-point scale has been used for the purpose of making judgements – *weak, moderate* and *strong*.

**Landscape Condition:** judgements made by consideration of condition or intactness of landscape features, elements and characteristics within the landscape and how these combine to inform an impression of overall landscape condition. Again, a three point, scale has been used for the purpose of making judgements – *poor, moderate* and *good*.

1.25 Matrices are frequently used to help guide decision-making within landscape assessment work. To assist with making judgements of the Quality of Exmoor's

landscapes, the matrix below has been used. Linked to every judgement of landscape quality is an associated Landscape Strategy that can be used to guide landscape policy development and management on the ground – to conserve, enhance, restore or even create character.

**Table 3. Landscape Quality and Associated Landscape Strategy**

<b>Landscape Condition</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Moderate</b> <i>Enhance</i>	<b>Moderate – Good</b> <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>	<b>Good</b> <i>Conserve</i>
	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Poor – Moderate</b> <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	<b>Moderate</b> <i>Enhance</i>	<b>Moderate – Good</b> <i>Conserve and Enhance</i>
	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Poor</b> <i>Restore/Create</i>	<b>Poor – Moderate</b> <i>Enhance and Restore</i>	<b>Moderate</b> <i>Enhance</i>
		<b>Weak</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Strong</b>
		<b>Strength of Landscape Character</b>		

### Landscape Strategies

**Conserve:** where the landscape quality is good (due to good condition and strong character) and there should be an emphasis on protecting or safeguarding the key features and characteristics of the landscape as they are.

**Enhance:** emphasis should be to improve features that have fallen into decline. This may include improvements to landscape management practices and the introduction/removal of elements or features in order to strengthen character and/or improve perceived condition.

**Restore:** emphasis should be on repairing or re-establishing features that have been lost or are in a state of severe decline.

**Create:** where the landscape quality is poor (due to poor condition and weak character) and there is a need to form a new and different landscape for the benefit of people and the environment.

### Key Issues and Landscape Guidance

- 1.26 A list of **Key Issues** or visible forces for change has been identified for each landscape type. Where changes are unique to a particular Character Area, these are also noted. The purpose of identifying Key Issues is to recognise negative changes in the landscape (affecting both the landscape resource and visual amenity) and to develop a series of **Objectives** (based on those changes) for each landscape type. The aim is that these objectives work towards achieving the overall **Landscape Strategy** outlined for each landscape type.

### Landscape Character Types and Character Areas of Exmoor

- 1.27 The process of landscape characterisation has identified 9 separate Landscape Types and 26 Character Areas. These are outlined below and illustrated in **Figure 4**.

**Table 4. Landscape Character Types and Character Areas**

<b>Type A:</b>	<b>High Coastal Heaths</b>
A1:	Holdstone Down and Trentishoe
A2:	Valley of Rocks
A3:	The Foreland
A4:	North Hill
<b>Type B:</b>	<b>High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves</b>
B1:	Heddon's Mouth
B2:	Woody Bay
B3:	Lyn

B4: Culbone – Horner

B5: Bossington

B6: Culver Cliff

**Type C: Low Farmed Coast and Marsh**

C1: Porlock

**Type D: Open Moorland**

D1: Northern

D2: Southern

D3: Winsford Hill

D4: Haddon Hill

**Type E: Farmed and Settled Vale**

E1: Porlock – Dunster – Minehead

**Type F: Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons**

F1: Northern

F2: Southern

**Type G: Incised Wooded Valleys**

G1: Bray

G2: Mole

G3: Barle

G4: Exe

G5: Haddeo

G6: Avill

**Type H: Plantation (with heathland) Hills**

H1: Croydon and Grabbist

**Type I: Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes**

I1: The Brendons

## **Moorland Fringe**

- 1.28 In addition to the landscape character assessment, a further (secondary) part of the study brief was to consider and map areas of Moorland Fringe. Text and a map related to this additional piece of work can be found in **Appendix 2**.



## **2. Evolution of the Exmoor Landscape**

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### **Introduction**

- 2.1 Exmoor's landscape is the product of the multitude of physical and human influences that have, over vastly different time-scales, acted upon it. This chapter provides a synopsis of the key physical conditions and human influences that have shaped the Exmoor landscape we recognise and know today. These include the underlying geological characteristics, patterns of land use, ecological character, and the historic and more recent activities of humans.

### **Geology, Landform and Hydrology**

- 2.2 The underlying geology of Exmoor is almost exclusively Middle and Upper Devonian rocks – sandstones, slates and shales. The oldest and highest rocks occur at the coast in the north, dipping to younger rocks towards the south.
- 2.3 The landform of Exmoor has a significant influence on overall landscape character. Exmoor is the only upland in southern England that reaches the coast, where spectacular cliffs – the highest sea cliffs in England – plunge to the sea. The high central plateaux, typically 400 – 450m above sea level forms a large open, windswept central area, dominated by moorland vegetation.
- 2.4 The moorland is deeply incised and drained by fast flowing streams and rivers. To the south, the River Exe and the River Barle and to the north the Heddon, Lyn, East Lyn and Badgworthy Water. These river valleys gradually become more wooded as they descend, creating spectacular steep sided valleys and combes, blanketed in woodland. Surrounding the central moorland are lower commons – Withypool, Winsford Hill, Molland, and to the north the coastal heaths – including North Hill, Countisbury and Martinhoe.
- 2.5 To the east of Exmoor the landform becomes lower and softer in character, extending to the Brendon Hills and the low Porlock Vale where traditional mixed farming principally defines the landscape scene.

2.6 The dramatic and varied physical form of Exmoor's landscape has proven a popular source of inspiration for a number of poetic and literary works. Perhaps most famous of all is the history, legend and romance Exmoor's landscape conjured up in R.D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' was also famously written from a lonely Exmoor farmhouse located between Porlock and Lynton.

### **Land Cover and Land Use**

- 2.7 Before the impact of man, Exmoor like most of Britain, was a wooded landscape. About 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last glaciation, the ice sheet gradually moved north and the area was re-colonised - Scots pine, birch and hazel were followed by oak, elm, alder and lime.
- 2.8 By 4000BC the adoption of farming, as opposed to hunting, began to affect the Exmoor landscape as man gradually cleared the higher land. This Bronze Age clearance, coupled with heavy rainfall and leaching, led to the formation of peat and blanket bog across the upland plateau, which in turn favoured heathland plants. The upland heathy landscape we now see is the result of prehistoric clearance, and farming over thousands of years.
- 2.9 The character of the surrounding landscape has also been shaped by agriculture. Exmoor has a rich landscape of ancient hedgebanks and boundaries, farmsteads, mills, leats and gutter systems, sunken lanes, and lime kilns associated with its long agricultural heritage.
- 2.10 Exmoor is nationally important for its ancient oak woodlands. These wooded sites were probably too steep to farm with ease, but were intensively managed for charcoal and tanbark from medieval times. Up until the First World War, oak was coppiced on a regular cycle and the stunted, twisted outgrown coppice woodland we see across much of Exmoor is a relic of this management technique.

### **The Royal Forest and the Exmoor Estates**

- 2.11 Hunting has a long association with Exmoor. The central part of Exmoor was, until 1812, a Royal (hunting) Forest (forest meaning district where deer and other animals were reserved for the King). The culture surrounding hunting continues

to form an important part of country pursuits on Exmoor today. Game shooting is becoming an increasingly popular sport, particularly evident by the increase in planting of game cover crops.

- 2.12 In 1818, the wealthy Knight family, who had prospered as ironmasters in Shropshire and Worcestershire, purchased the Royal Forest. The Knights set about transforming the landscape through various methods of agricultural improvement (such as liming the acidic soil), the creation of roads, drainage of the moor and the building of farmhouses and a village at the heart of the Exmoor Estate. The Forest is now dominantly purple moorgrass and has a subtly different character to the landscape further east where heather still dominates.
- 2.13 As well as the Knight's estate, other estates had already helped to shape the landscape of Exmoor, notably the Luttrells at Dunster with their castle, carriage drives and surrounding grounds, but also Nettlecombe, Pixton and Combe Sydenham. The development of a series of other 19<sup>th</sup> century estates, including Holnicote, Ashley Combe, Glenthorne, Chargot, and Lee Abbey helped to shape the character of the landscape, with new woodlands, parkland features, estate cottages and unique estate details creating a notably designed landscape character on Exmoor.
- 2.14 The landscape, which had evolved relatively slowly over several thousands of years, was subject to more rapid change following the two World Wars. The drive for the production of timber and food from our own resources led to the agricultural improvement and ploughing of moorland and unimproved grassland and to the planting of large-scale conifer plantations. Ancient woodland was also cleared to make way for more productive conifer crops.

### **National Park Status**

- 2.15 In 1954 Exmoor was designated a National Park. The National Park Authority, and the Joint Committee that preceded it, have worked with landowners and others to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and to promote opportunities for the enjoyment and understanding of Exmoor's special qualities. This has played a key role in preventing large-scale intrusive development. There are relatively few

developments that detract from the landscape. There are few major roads, little derelict land or neglected buildings, few electricity pylons and no active quarries. There are no large caravan or camp sites, no holiday camps, and no theme parks. Exmoor remains one of the most tranquil areas in England.

## **Modern Day Landscape Change**

- 2.16 There are a number of pressures facing Exmoor's landscape today, many of which comes from small scale incremental change - elements such as energy crops, overhead wires, erosion, silage stacks, incongruous fences, game pens and crops, clutter associated with equestrian leisure, and suburban boundary treatments, garden features and inappropriate planting. Over time, these intrusive features can have a significant, cumulative impact on the wider landscape.
- 2.17 Changes in farming practice and in agricultural support (such as movements to area payments and away from headage payments) are leading to reduced grazing of the uplands with subsequent "scrubbing up" as gorse, bracken and young trees invade heather moorlands. On the farms themselves there has been a steady shift away from traditional agriculture – diversifying to other uses of the land such as:
- Horse exercising and grazing;
  - Game shooting (pheasant and partridge);
  - Hobby farming;
  - Deer farming;
  - Energy cropping; and
  - Woodland planting.
- 2.18 Despite these changes, the Exmoor landscape remains one of the most beautiful and characteristic parts of Britain and retains a remoteness and tranquillity increasingly rare in southern England.
- 2.19 It is intended that the trends or changes identified in this report are fed through to landowners and agencies (such as National Trust, Natural England and the Forestry Commission) that are actively involved in landscape conservation and management on the ground.



## A. High Coastal Heaths

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Strongly articulated landform – steep, rugged coastal cliffs give rise to inland areas of moorland plateaux and hills.



Rich semi-natural heathland (interspersed with gorse and bracken) defines the land cover.



Heavily used walking routes make linear tracks in the heather.



Some stretches of the cliffs defined by dramatic rocky outcrops and scree slopes.



The South West Coast Path makes this landscape popular with walkers and provides striking coastal views.

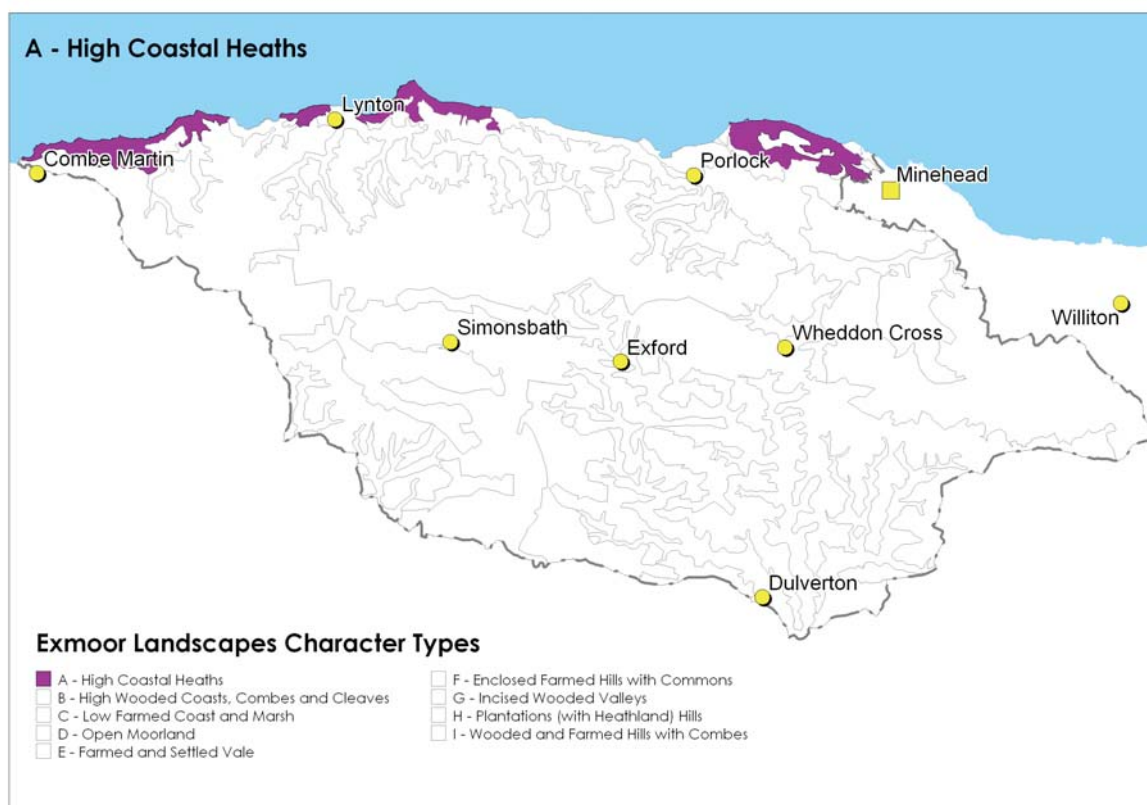


Gorse encroachment in places acts to enclose the landscape and restrict views.

### 3. A: High Coastal Heaths

#### Location and Boundaries

- 3.1 The dramatic, elevated, open and exposed landscape type defined as **High Coastal Heaths** occurs as a series of separate character areas aligning the Bristol Channel - marking the northern extent of the National Park.



#### Key Characteristics

- Open landscape of **rich semi-natural heathland** interspersed with gorse and bracken.
- **Strongly articulated landform, undulating plateaux, rounded moorland hills** and **steep, rugged coastal cliffs**.
- **Overriding sense of the sea with wide skies and distant views** across the adjacent Bristol Channel to Wales.
- Strong sense of **elevation and exposure** to the elements due to the steep cliffs fronting the sea.
- **Inaccessibility** of the cliffs creates a sense of **solitude**.



- **South West Coast Path** provides good pedestrian access to the slopes and cliffs and offers **far-reaching coastal views**.
- Located adjacent, or in close proximity, to areas of **significant population size**.
- **Elevated and open landscape** (due to lack of tree cover and other enclosing landscape features) providing **wide skies and distant views** across the Bristol Channel.

## Landscape Character TYPE Description

- 3.2 Covering a relatively small land area compared with other Landscape Types within Exmoor National Park, the *High Coastal Heaths* are nonetheless distinctive and dramatic.
- 3.3 With elevation ranging from 0 to 342m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD), this landscape type has a strongly articulated landform - steep and rugged hogs-back coastal cliffs (with coves and combes) that give rise to inland areas of gently undulating moorland plateau and hills. The coastal cliffs create an impressive coastline – the scalloped cliff face revealing the varied colours of the landscape’s underlying geology – purple, grey and green sandstone and reddish-brown mudstone of the Hangman Sandstone formation, supporting well-drained soils.
- 3.4 Rich semi-natural heather moorland defines the majority of the land cover, interspersed with gorse and bracken (bracken being dominant on the coastal slopes). The ecological value of this landscape type is reflected in the extensive areas of heathland designated as SSSI and SAC. The colour of the heather is one of the defining features of the landscape – the purple-covered hills often visible from considerable distance.
- 3.5 The challenging terrain of the coastal cliffs makes them largely inaccessible and as such they have remained, for the most part, free from modern agricultural practices and human intervention in general.



- 3.6 Elevation and a lack of tree cover or other enclosing features creates a strong sense of openness - wide skies and distant views across the Bristol Channel to the south coast of Wales; the physical and visual connection with the sea being fundamental to the character of the landscape. An impressive outlook is also offered inland – with striking views of the contrasting *High Wooded Coast*, *Combes and Cleaves* and the patchwork landscape of the *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

## **Landscape Character AREA Descriptions**

### **A1. Holdstone Down and Trentishoe**

- 3.7 This Character Area forms the northwestern coastal stretch of the National Park, extending from Great Burland Rocks in the east to Lester Cliff in the west where Exmoor's boundary ends at the coastal town of Combe Martin. This area of the High Coastal Heaths includes a significant stretch of Exmoor's coastline containing a series of deep cut cleaves, combes, waterfalls as well as the lower reaches and mouth of the River Heddon valley.
- 3.8 Inland the landscape is dominated by the smooth rounded heather moorland hills at Holdstone Down (349m AOD), Trentishoe Down (324m AOD) and Girt Down (318m AOD) – the large-scale landforms looming over their moorland foothills.



Rounded heather moorland hills of Holdstone Down, Trentishoe Down and Girt Down

- 3.9 A secondary road runs between Holdstone and Trentishoe Downs and is dotted with occasional car parks (small and informal in character) as well some residential properties of varied age and style – the Glass Box being a well-known local landmark. The buildings are strong points of human reference in an otherwise undeveloped landscape.



Residential properties are points of human reference in the landscape.

- 3.10 With the exception of the one road, there are no other vehicle access routes and as such, much of the landscape is inaccessible by car. With particular reference to the coastal slopes, the lack of vehicle access creates a sense of isolation and solitude.

- 3.11 This character area provides clear views to the farmed landscape surrounding the village of Trentishoe – sheep-grazed pastures delineated by stone walls and stone faced banks.



Views to enclosed farmland – improved pastures contained by stone walling.

## **A2. Valley of Rocks**

- 3.12 The much-visited Valley of Rocks occurs immediately west of the coastal holiday town of Lynton (and Lynmouth). Although exhibiting the characteristics of the High Coastal Heath landscape type, the Valley of Rocks also has a number of significant features that are unique to this area. For example, its valley landform, its dramatic rock formations and British native goats that graze the seemingly inaccessible slopes.



Valley landform

- 3.13 Once believed to form an exit route to sea for the River Lyn, the Valley of Rocks is now dry. This is a landscape of spectacular views – the coast, the prominent rocks (Castle Rock for example forming a striking landmark as you look down the valley), the steep heathy valley slides and scree slopes. This also appears to be a landscape of two halves – the rugged, wilder steep sided slopes and coastal cliffs contrasting sharply with the flatter, lower valley floor that has seen much human influence and change.



Castle Rock and heather-covered slopes.

- 3.14 On entering the Valley along the road from Lynton the landscape is influenced by human activity and has a very different (tamed) character compared with the less accessible cleaves, rock outcrops and coastal slopes and cliffs. The valley floor houses a cricket pitch, a picnic area, a car park and a café – together evoking a sense of gentle, organised recreation which in many ways seems at odds with the challenging, rugged, windswept, exposed character of the valley sides, outcropping rocks, slopes and cliffs.



Tamed valley floor contrasts with the rugged outcropping rocks.

### **A3. The Foreland**

- 3.15 The Foreland is centrally located along Exmoor's northern coastal edge. Extending immediately east from the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape of Lynton and Lynmouth, this Character Area offers some of the National Park's most dramatic coastal scenery. Here the rugged, concave coastline sweeps from east and west, culminating at

Foreland Point, the most northerly point on Exmoor to abut the Bristol Channel - indicated by its lighthouse.



Heather-covered hills stretch towards the coast at Foreland Point.

3.16 Inland views are no less inspiring – a panoramic scene of deeply incised wooded combes, the patchwork landscape of the *Enclosed Farm Hills with Commons* and the contrasting open and wild landscape of the *Open Moorland*.



Views across adjacent *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons* towards the *Open Moorland*.

3.17 With the coast road cutting through the area, running between coastal towns of Porlock and Lynton and Lynmouth, human influence in the landscape is apparent. Road noise, road signs, car parking areas, and views of the populated coastal towns combine to create a landscape that is clearly influenced by humans. There has been significant loss of heathland (to pasture) along the A39 corridor.





View along the coast to Lynmouth.

- 3.18 Away from the main road much of the landscape has retained a sense of tranquillity – becoming increasingly remote towards the coastal cliffs.

#### **A4. North Hill**

- 3.19 This is the most easterly Character Area of the *High Coastal Heaths* landscape type – occurring between the two *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscapes that surround the small village of Bossington in the west and the large holiday town of Minehead in the east.



View through Wood Combe and Bratton Wood to the western edge of Minehead.

- 3.20 There is one road (Hill Road) providing vehicle access to this landscape – a no through road extending up from the Higher Town area of Minehead and terminating at a car park just north of the Allerford Plantation. From here, there are dramatic panoramic views both coastal and inland. There are a number of

other key viewing points – Bossington Hill for example, providing views across the *Porlock's Low Farmed Coast and Marsh*, and Bratton Ball, offering views into the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape to the *Porlock – Dunster – Minehead Farmed and Settled Vale* below.

- 3.21 Previously used as a military training ground, this Character Area is now a much-visited and much-used recreation in part due to its close proximity to and easy access from Minehead. Car parking areas, a camp site, interpretation boards, finger signposts and benches combine in the landscape to create a strong sense of management and human influence; evoking a 'country park' character more evident than in the other *High Coastal Heaths* landscapes.



North Hill is popular with walkers – many using the South West Coast Path.

- 3.22 The majority of the land cover is characterised by heather moorland (although with significant tracts of bracken and gorse) with grazing Exmoor ponies often in view. Gorse encroachment is particularly evident along the roadside between North Hill and Bossington Hill. To the north of Selworthy Beacon, the heaths give way to an area of very different character (*Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*) landscape type. Here, large fields of improved pasture are divided by post and wire and post and rail fencing – grazed by cattle and sheep.



Exmoor ponies roam free over the heath.

- 3.23 Unlike the other character areas, the South West Coast Path is set further inland so access to the coast is limited.

## Landscape TYPE Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 3.24 With a dramatic topography and aesthetic land cover of heather moor, the Coastal Heaths landscape is highly distinctive and of **strong** character overall. In addition to its intrinsic characteristics and qualities, much of landscape's character is borrowed or determined from its surroundings – the coastline and seascape to the north contrasting with the far reaching inland views to the south. Because of its coastal boundary, there is a strong sense of the Heaths defining the edge or limit of the National Park. With this is an awareness of the special juxtaposition of heather moor meeting sea – the purple-coloured, strongly articulated landform giving way to a rugged coastline and wide-open skies.

### Landscape Condition

- 3.25 The condition of the Coastal Heaths is judged to be **moderate**. There are number of factors (recreational, agricultural, and infrastructure for example) that are affecting the state of repair, or degree of intactness, of this landscape type. Those judged to be endemic to the landscape as a whole are noted below; recognised as key issues or 'visible forces for change'. There are other issues affecting parts or particular areas of this landscape but which are not



common across the entire type. These are noted separately as part of the Character Area Evaluation.

## Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the High Coastal Heaths is to **Conserve** and **Enhance** landscape character. It is essential to conserve the tranquil (remote in parts) nature of the landscape – the sense of exposure and vulnerability to the elements that makes the coastal heaths an exhilarating and inspiring place to be. There is a danger that further incremental inclusion of human elements in the landscape (such as benches, speed restrictions, and parking provision) will threaten to tame or dumb-down the essentially rugged and wild character of this coastal landscape.

The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies. Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
<b>Key Issues:</b>		
<b>Loss of the simple, open purple hills (often visible from considerable distance) due to the encroachment of bracken and gorse and some broadleaved woodland species.</b>	<b>Continuous tracts of open heath land without significant areas of bracken or gorse.</b>	<b>A4. North Hill A1. Holdstone Down and Trentishoe</b>

<p>Loss of sense of openness/ expanse as well as opportunities for viewing the landscape due to encroachment of gorse along the roadsides – changing the sense of scale by enclosing and channelling views.</p>	<p><i>Create more open views from roads through removal of roadside gorse (paying particular attention to areas offering finest views) in order to improve visibility across the heath land and improve visual connection with inland areas of Open Moorland.</i></p>	<p><b>A4. North Hill</b></p>
<p>Threats to tranquillity due to provision of facilities – car parking, interpretation boards, signs and benches and road infrastructure. These evoke a sense of management – taming the landscape and creating a ‘country park’ character.</p>	<p><i>Remove/rationalise facilities (where deemed excessive or unnecessary) in order to maintain the essentially rugged and wild character of much of this coastal landscape.</i></p>	<p><b>A2. Valley of Rocks</b> <b>A4. North Hill</b></p>
<p><b>Secondary Issues:</b></p>		
<p>Poor quality views into some areas of adjacent farmland due to management of boundary features, intensive management of grassland, inappropriate siting of large silage bag stacks and farm litter/waste.</p>	<p><i>Work with landowners to improve/ enhance views into the adjacent farmed areas.</i></p>	<p>A1. Trentishoe and Holdstone Down A3. The Foreland</p>
<p>Erosion of verges and informal enlargement of car parking areas threatening the heath land cover.</p>	<p><i>Prevent further expansion of car parking areas through careful design and restore areas that have already been damaged by vehicles.</i></p>	<p>A3. The Foreland A4. North Hill</p>

<p>Periodic and temporary decline in visual amenity/landscape quality due to burning of scrub (charred stumps of burnt trees and gorse).</p>	<p><i>Reduce the visual impact of burning scrub in most heavily visited areas/those areas with greatest visual amenity by cutting charred leggy material.</i></p>	<p>A4. North Hill</p>
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## Landscape Character AREA Evaluations

### **A1. Trentishoe – Holdstone Down**

- 3.26 Bracken encroachment, threatening heather moorland, is evident within this Character area – particularly on the slopes ascending towards the coast.



Bracken encroaching heather moor.

- 3.27 Residential properties occurring on the foothills between Holdstone Down and Trentishoe are an overt human influence in the landscape. In addition the buildings and post and rail fencing combined with tree and shrub planting at the property boundaries bring a sense of enclosure and domestication to this essentially simple, open and large scale landscape. These elements create an awkward visual relationship and detract from the setting of the hills. Further development within this landscape should therefore be avoided.



Domestic boundaries juxtapose the open areas of heather moor.

3.28 Another key concern is the juxtaposition of this heathland landscape with the adjacent fringe farmland. Unsympathetic management techniques within the farmland is reducing the visual amenity of this area of the *High Coastal Heaths* e.g. decline of stone faced banks - gaps being plugged with post and wire fencing, post and rail fencing, corrugated metal roofing panels, pallets etc and non-removal of old silage bags.



Declining condition of stone walls.

3.29 Footpath use has led to erosion of the heather – forming strong linear tracks in the landscape.



Strong linear tracks in the heather.

## **A2. The Foreland**

- 3.30 The principal threat to The Foreland is the A39 and its influence on tranquillity. The busy nature of this main coastal route brings numerous associated issues. Prominent road-marked instructions for drivers have recently been introduced. These are eye-catching elements that urbanise the road; reinforcing its presence and influence in the landscape. It is preferable, in landscape and visual terms, for the road to have as little visual intrusion as possible.



Prominent road markings on the A39 – urbanising the road.

- 3.31 The car parking area adjacent to Barna Barrow is suffering from erosion – deeply pitted in places and evoking overuse. The potential cumulative effects of vertical elements on the skyline are also of concern – the weather station with its mast at Butter Hill is a prominent landmark feature on its own but the influence of additional vertical features within adjacent landscapes should be taken into account. A recent small-scale wind turbine at Yenworthy is an

example of how incremental change within surrounding areas could affect the setting to the heaths and how additional structures can change the character of the skyline.



Consideration will need to be given to the effects of vertical elements on the sensitive, open skyline.

### **A3. Valley of Rocks**

3.32 As noted in the description of this landscape, the Valley of Rocks has seen considerable human intervention in the lowest part of the valley and this forms the 'gateway' into the landscape along the road from Lynton. Although at present this tamed recreational area does not dominate above the spectacle of the drama of the rocks and coast, there is a danger that without careful management, these foreground elements (car park, café, cricket ground, picnic area, toilets etc) could become visual detractors – removing attention from the real feature and spectacle of the natural landscape.

3.33 The road is currently of a secondary nature – with minimal signage and



The road does not dominate the landscape.

markings. It is imperative that this remains the case.



#### **A4. North Hill**

- 3.34 A key issue on North Hill is the encroachment of gorse and young trees onto areas of heather moorland. Gorse along Hill Road is, for example, reaching heights of 3 metres in places - significantly enclosing the landscape, restricting views and reducing the landscape scale.



Gorse and young trees are well established on North Hill.

- 3.35 Visitor pressure is more evident in this character area than the others of the same landscape type. In addition to people-presence (which reduces levels of tranquillity), associated facilities supporting visitor recreation have a marked influence on the landscape - signage (including interpretation boards), benches, car parking areas are, on their own, relatively minor additions to the landscape but in combination have a notable presence. Additional elements such as these could continue to erode the very essence of the landscape – its simplicity, peacefulness and its stark contrast with the urban environment of the neighbouring town of Minehead - that should be retained.



Cumulative presence of simple facilities in the landscape can heighten awareness of human intervention on the heaths.

## B. High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves

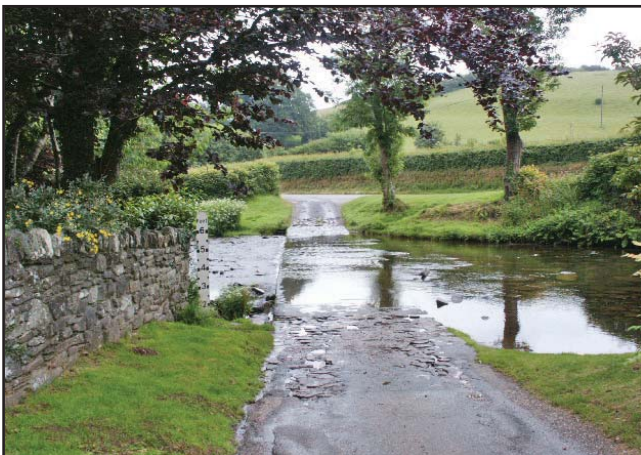
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Clear views of the wooded coastal slopes and sheltered bays below.



Villages nestle at the base of the steep wooded valley sides.



Fords and stone bridges form crossings over the rivers.



Rivers, streams and brooks wind their way northwards to the coast.



The heavily wooded combe valleys offer a striking landscape scene.



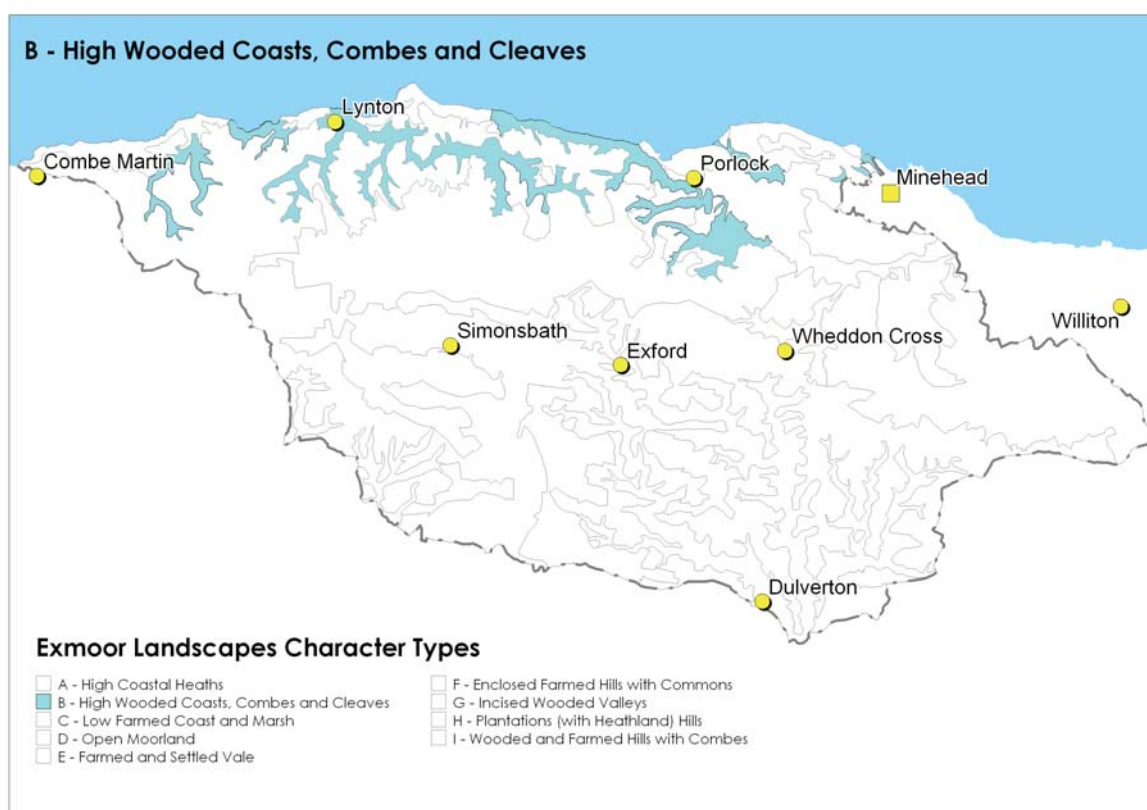
Wooded slopes are prominent backdrops to villages and hamlets.



## 4. B: High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves

### Location and Boundaries

- 4.1 There are six character areas of the **High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves** landscape type. The character areas occur as a series of clearly defined combe valleys that extend down from the *Open Moorland* as springs turn to streams and rivers that meander and widen towards the Bristol Channel. Where the watercourses meet the sea, the wooded valley sides give way to steep wooded slopes that extend along the coast; forming densely wooded cliff tops, cleaves and woody bays.



### Key Characteristics

- Generally occurring between 0 and 300m AOD, this is a landscape of **dramatic landform character** with steep **convoluted coastal slopes** and **deeply-incised narrow valleys and combes**.
- Dominated by tree cover with **continuous tracts of predominantly**

**deciduous woodland** (much of which is Ancient) clothing the steeply sloping valley sides and coast.

- Underlain by a **solid geology of Lynton Slates** (grey or dark grey silty slates or siltstones and grey sandstones) with drift valley head deposits and alluvium.
- **Series of meandering rivers and streams** (some boulder-strewn).
- **Small-scale field pattern, interspersing the woodland**, reflecting medieval enclosure of the landscape (although some boundaries have been modified from the 17th century onwards).
- **Farmland typically characterised by pasture**, with sheep, horses and cattle grazing.
- **Primary and secondary roads provide vehicle access** (and predominantly follow the course of the waters) but many areas are only accessible by foot.
- **Varied settlement size and character** from linear riverside hamlets to coastal towns.
- Away from the larger coastal villages and sections of busy road, the landscape has **an overriding tranquil character** (remote in parts).

## **Landscape Character TYPE Description**

4.2 The **High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves** landscape type is a visually striking landscape. Although character areas vary in size, the overall landscape type is defined by strongly articulated landform of deeply incised narrow combe valleys and steep coastal slopes, knitted together by the consistency of the land cover - dense, predominantly deciduous, woodland. Rivers (with some tumbling waterfalls) wind their way through the deeply wooded valleys to the sea.

4.3 The rivers, streams and brooks that wind their way, northwards, to the coast are often strewn with boulders and are lined and enclosed by the wooded combes. These deep, wooded, sinuous corridors form dark, dramatic patterns

in the landscape, and offer breathtaking scenery, particularly from the surrounding areas of *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

- 4.4 Where watercourses meet the sea, and the combes converge with the coastline, the woodland cover extends out from the valleys to cloak large areas of the steep coastal slopes, forming the backdrop to rocky coastal cliffs.
- 4.5 The landscape is underlain by a solid geology of Lynton Slates (grey or dark grey silty slates or siltstones and grey sandstones) with drift valley head deposits and alluvium. The soils are defined as typical brown earths – well drained coarse loamy soils.
- 4.6 Although woodland accounts for the vast majority of the land cover, there are some farmed areas defined by a small-scale field pattern, enclosing pasture with sheep, horses and cattle grazing. Small-scale free-range poultry farming is also evident.
- 4.7 The majority of the combe valleys are accessible by roads and are well served by public footpaths. Conversely, the wooded coast is much less accessible - although crossed by a number of footpaths there is extremely limited vehicular access. As such there is a greater sense of remoteness and detachment from human activity.
- 4.8 People presence within the landscape is varied but as so much of the wooded combes offer such inspiring landscape scene, this landscape is very popular with both tourists and day visitors. With the exception of the coastal towns of Lynton and Lynmouth, settlement is limited to hamlets (of predominantly stone and slate construction) that align the course of the water or occur at fords or crossing points.

## Landscape Character AREA Descriptions

### **B1. Heddon's Mouth**

- 4.9 The most westerly of the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type, this character area comprises two watercourses (and thus two valley systems) – a tributary of the River Heddon and the River Heddon itself. There are a number of springs and minor streams that run into the main watercourses.
- 4.10 The tributary converges with the River Heddon at the foot of Heddon's Mouth Wood and here, the Hunters Inn, a car parking area and National Trust visitor centre/shop combine to form a focal point for visitor activity. Settlement is limited to the occasional farm and cottage.



Hunter's Inn and National Trust Visitor Centre.

- 4.11 The sloping valley sides of the River Heddon are densely covered with deciduous woodland. The tributary valley has a more mixed land use character comprising woodland and farmland (predominantly pasture within small, irregular fields). Much of the woodland is owned and managed by the National Trust and is nationally important – forming part of the West Exmoor Coast and Woods SSSI.
- 4.12 Unlike the other Character Areas, this landscape does not extend up to the coast. Instead, at Heddon's Mouth Cleave, woodland merges into the heathland of the *Holdstone and Trentishoe High Coastal Heaths* that in turn extends to the coast at Heddon's Mouth Beach.

4.13 Although served by a secondary road, many parts of this character area are only accessible on foot.

## **B2. Woody Bay**

4.14 The heavily wooded character area of Woody Bay extends from West Woody Bay Wood to Cuddy Cleave and Six Acre Woods. Much of the focus of this landscape is the wooded slopes that extend to the cliff shore but this landscape starts further south, as three small stream valleys that run towards (and merge before meeting) the coast. These streams open out into two scalloped bays – Woody Bay and Lee Bay – breathtaking views of which are offered along the coastal road and footpaths.



Lee Bay and Woody Bay.

4.15 The South West Coast Path runs the full length of the area (east to west) and there are a number of other footpaths and bridleways in the combes. Martinhoe Manor and Woody Bay Hotel are large buildings in the landscape.

4.16 The deciduous woodland of Woody Bay forms part of the SSSI designated West Exmoor Coast and Woods.

## **B3. Lyn**

4.17 One of the largest character areas of the *High Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type, The Lyn is centred around the East Lyn and West Lyn rivers, their

journey to the coast and their convergence at the densely wooded gorge where the towns of Lynton and Lynmouth lie.



Densely wooded East Lyn valley at Lynmouth.

- 4.18 There are a number of tributary combe valleys that run into the Lyn Rivers and form part of a relatively wide river catchment area. These valleys include continuously wooded combes such as that surrounding Hoar oak Water and valleys with a more varied land use and land cover such as The Doone Valley, which follows the course of Oare (and Badgworthy) waters and is both wooded and farmed. This valley, clothed in the history, legend and romance of R. D. Blackmore's 'Lorna Doone', is much visited and there is a strong tourist character in parts of the landscape due to the presence of camp sites, parking areas, a tea room and gift shop.
- 4.19 The Doone Valley has boulder-strewn waters, outcropping areas of heathland on steeper slopes, stone walls and stone bridges and as such has something of the feel of a moorland valley. Due to the amount of woodland and the enclosed fields (predominantly for sheep grazing) the moorland connection is not always obvious but nonetheless a 'moorland fringe' character is evident in parts.



Tourism in the Doone Valley.

- 4.20 The Doone Valley and the other tributary valleys and combes contain small-scale dispersed settlements – hamlets and collections of dwellings typically having a linear form as they line the courses of the water e.g. Brendon, Rockford and Barbrook. Grey sandstone, white painted stone and slate are the principal building materials of the traditional cottages, farms and farm buildings.
- 4.21 Where the waters of Hoarook meet the East Lyn River (at Watersmeet), there are dramatic waterfalls and this is a popular area with visitors, and is well served by a variety of footpaths.
- 4.22 The valleys of the East and West Lyn Rivers are very densely wooded and contain the A39 and the B3234 roads that follow the watercourses, ascending and descending over very steep gradients. These roads are often busy as people converge on the coastal towns of Lynton and Lynmouth - referred to as Little Switzerland by the Victorians. The town of Lynton (with its strong Victorian architectural influences) sits above, and is connected by a road and Cliff Railway, to the harbour side town of Lynmouth. Lynmouth sits at the base of Glen Lyn Gorge with traditional cottages (and hotels) that “tumble” down the gorge sides to the quay.

#### **B4. Culbone - Horner**

- 4.23 This is the largest of the six character areas and stretches from Glenthorne Plantation in the west, defining the coastal slopes that reach almost as far as Gore Point. Here, the wooded slopes extend inland to form the backdrop to



Porlock Weir, West Porlock and Porlock where the landscape splits into the two wooded valley systems of Hawkcombe and Horner Water.

- 4.24 Horner Wood sits immediately adjacent to the *Open Moorland* of Dunkery Hill and forms part of the Dunkery and Horner Wood National Nature Reserve. Horner Wood has more than 1000 ancient trees. A parking area at Webber's Post provides stunning views across the woodland, adjacent *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.



View from Webber's Post.

- 4.25 The hamlet of Horner with its packhorse bridge nestles at the foot of the woodland and forms part of the *Farmed and Settled Vale* landscape type.
- 4.26 Hawkcombe comprises a whole series of much smaller combes (e.g. Shillett Combe, Berry Castle Combe) with their own spring fed streams running off the *Open Moorland* and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*. Hawkcombe has particularly good public footpath provision and offers excellent connectivity between the moorland, Porlock and the coast.
- 4.27 Some secondary roads serve the landscape but vehicular access is limited. A toll roads winds its way through the wooded combes west of Porlock and offers a peaceful journey through a fern clad valley with small streams tumbling over rocky streambeds. As with many parts of this landscape type, there is an overriding sense of enclosure due to the enveloping valley sides and the density and darkness of the tree cover.





Strong sense of enclosure due to landform and density of tree cover.

- 4.28 West of Porlock Weir, the landscape is focussed on the coast with Worthy Wood, Yearnor Wood and Culbone Wood, Embelle Wood and Yenworthy Wood forming a continuous woodland system, completely covering the combes and slopes that meet the cliff line and backshore of the adjacent beach.

### **B5. Bossington**

- 4.29 One of the smallest character areas, Bossington comprises woodland (predominantly deciduous with some coniferous planting) covering the interconnected combes of Church Combe, Lynch Combe, Allerford Combe, Holnicote Combe and Selworthy Combe. Some of the combes are dry whilst others are fed from water running off the *North Hill High Coastal Heaths*.
- 4.30 At the base of the woodland in the east is the village of Selworthy with its



Selworthy Church stands prominent against the woodland.

prominent, limewashed church. Here, clear and extensive views across the vale below make this a popular stopping and viewing spot.

- 4.31 The wooded combes are served by a number of footpaths. Some connect with the parking area in the village of Bossington (in the *Farmed and Settled Vale*) and offer a steep ascent to Bossington Hill beyond. These are well-used routes, some leading to Bury Castle – a well-preserved Iron Age enclosure situated within the woodland.



Numerous footpaths cut through the woodland.

- 4.32 Although becoming much less dense, the woodland does extend off the steeper slopes to form a woodland strip, aligning the stream that runs through Bossington and on through the *Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* to the sea.

### **B6. Culver Cliff**

- 4.33 This is the most easterly and the smallest of the character areas belonging to the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type. It characterises the coastal slopes that extend northwest from the Higher Town area of Minehead. The area falling within the National Park boundary forms part of a larger wooded coastal landscape that offers a striking backdrop to Minehead Harbour, promenade and the recreational area of greenspace at its foot. This character area also includes the inland areas of Moor Wood and Bratton Wood that surround Wood Combe and Bratton Wood respectively.



Wooded slopes form a prominent setting to Minehead.

- 4.34 Although significantly smaller than the other character areas, this landscape provides a strong wooded context and setting to Minehead.

## Landscape TYPE Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 4.35 The *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type is judged to have **strong** landscape character overall. The continuous woodland systems, the dramatic landform, views into the dark, deep valleys from higher ground, picturesque watercourses and the steep wooded coastal slopes create a very recognisable pattern of elements and a consistent and strong landscape character.

### Landscape Condition

- 4.36 There is some degree of variation but, overall, the landscape is judged to be in **good** condition. There are some issues affecting the condition of the woodland – such as rhododendron encroachment. A declining hedgerow condition, in farmed areas, is evident in some parts.

### Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the ***High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*** is to **conserve** the many features of the landscape that combine to create a high quality landscape. The woodland is fundamental to the character of the landscape as well as to the wider landscape scene of Exmoor. So, conserving its extent, density and variety is imperative.

Internal views of the landscape are important, as are views into the landscape from adjacent areas of higher ground. It is important therefore that the quality and variety of viewing opportunities into (and within) the landscape are retained. There are a number of areas where a certain degree of remoteness can still be experienced and it is important to ensure these are protected in the light of visitor pressure.

The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.

Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

<b>Landscape Issues</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Priority Areas</b>
<b>Key Issues:</b>		
<b>Loss of natural/semi-natural character of woodland (as well as views into and through woodland areas) due to rhododendron encroachment.</b>	<b>Manage levels of encroachment to prevent mono-species coverage of the ground flora and under storey.</b>	<b>B2. Woody Bay</b>
<b>Secondary Issues:</b>		
Threats to remoteness and tranquillity due to visitor numbers and associated facilities.	Ensure that any additional development/infrastructure does not intensify the degree of human influence/people-presence in the landscape.	B1. Heddon's Mouth B3. Lyn
Weakening landscape	Strengthen the landscape pattern	B3. Lyn (Doone

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
<p>pattern in farmed areas due to declining condition of field boundaries – hedges and stonewalls.</p>	<p><i>by encouraging boundary management techniques using traditional (local) methods and materials.</i></p>	<p>Valley)</p>

### **B1. Heddon's Mouth**

- 4.37 There is a need to ensure provision of facilities – car parking, toilet block etc - at the National Trust visitor centre, remains low-key and of informal design so as not dominate in the landscape.

### **B2. Woody Bay**

- 4.38 Rhododendron encroachment is an issue at Woody Bay and there is also a need to safeguard clear views across the bays and coastline (from the coastal road) through appropriate hedgerow management.

### **B3. Lyn**

- 4.39 Key visible forces for change within the Lyn include the scrubbing up of the steeper (farmed) valley sides, hedgerow sections falling into decline and being plugged with post and wire fencing (diluting the field pattern). Stone walls (particularly in the Doone Valley) are also degraded in places.



Scrubbing up on the steeper valley sides.

- 4.40 There is a general need to ensure visitor pressure in this area is managed so that facilities and infrastructure do not detract from the simple, uncluttered character of the landscape.

#### **B4. Culbone - Horner**

- 4.41 Much of this wooded landscape is difficult to access and as such there are a number of remote areas that should remain free from obvious human influence.

#### **B5. Bossington**

- 4.42 This area is popular with visitors. Its easy access from parking areas at the top of the hill (within the *North Hill High Coastal Heaths* landscape type) and the car parking area at Bossington (within the *Farmed and Settled Vale* landscape type) makes it a popular choice with walkers. There is a need to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities provided for visitors to the area (signage and seating for example) remain unobtrusive. It is important to protect the archaeological feature and setting of Bury Castle and to ensure views to Selworthy church from the adjacent vale remain clear and uninhibited.

#### **B6. Culver Cliff**

- 4.43 This small character area abuts a large coastal town and offers good footpath access through the woodland and on to the *High Coastal Heaths* landscape of North Hill. As with character area B5, there is a need to ensure that the infrastructure and facilities provided for visitors to the area (signage and seating for example) remain unobtrusive so as to safeguard the simple, small-scale nature of the landscape.





## C. Low Farmed Coast and Marsh



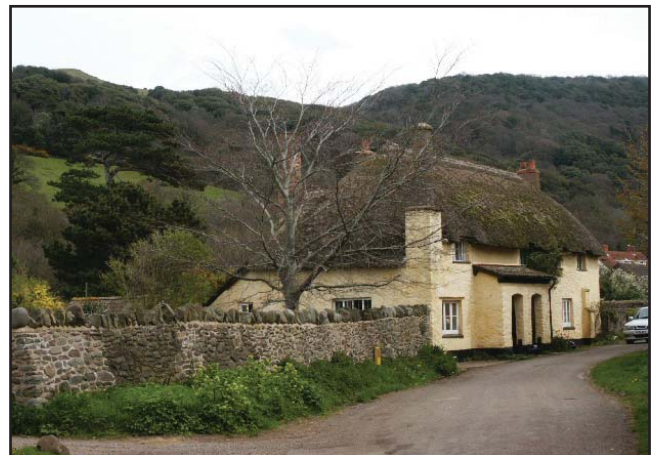
Bossington Hill frames the enclosed farmland and the open, treeless saltmarshes.



Limekilns and World War II pill boxes are landmark features where the marshes meet the shingle ridge of Bossington Beach.



Locally distinctive hedgebanks – pebble-faced using material from the adjacent beach.



Pebble walls and rounded chimney stacks on thatched cottages form a strong sense of place at Bossington.



Views across the farmed landscape (pasture and arable) to the village of Porlock – the High Wooded Coast and Combes landscape forming a striking backdrop.



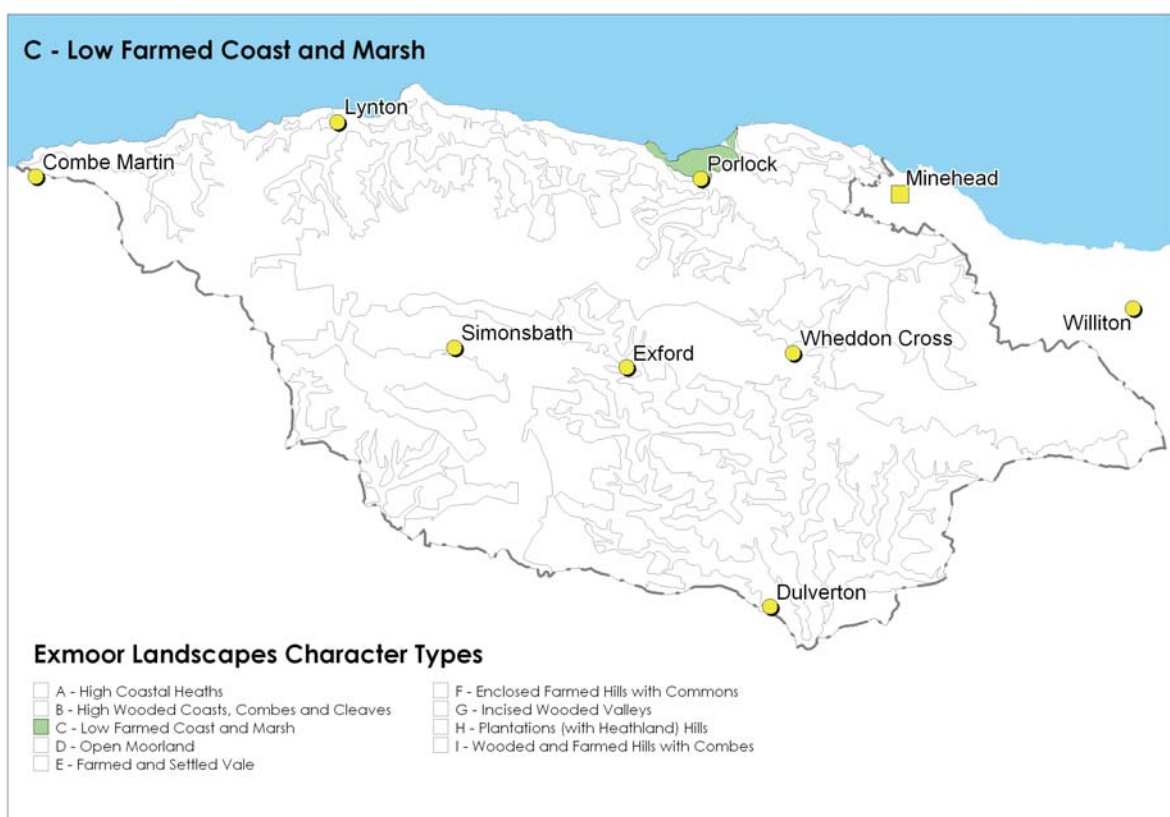
Hurlstone Point forms a strong natural container on the east side of Porlock Bay.



## 5. C: Low Farmed Coast and Marsh

### Location and Boundaries

- 5.1 There is just one character area (Porlock - Bossington) belonging to the **Low Farmed Coast and Marsh** landscape type. The area occurs within the northeast of the National Park. Located at the heads of the *Porlock- Dunster - Minehead Farmed and Settled Vale*, and abutting the pronounced landforms of Bossington Hill and Worthy Wood, the *Porlock – Bossington Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* forms a broad arc of land that fronts and opens out onto Bossington Beach, Porlock Beach and Porlock Bay.



### Key Characteristics

- Simple land cover of **open, treeless salt marshes giving way further inland to enclosed farmland** of improved pastures and some cereal cropping.
- **Strong influence of the sea due** to proximity to, and views across, **Porlock Bay** (from the shingle ridge).

- Separated from Porlock and Bossington beaches by a shingle ridge (Porlock Ridge). The ridge has been breached, resulting in a change from freshwater to saltwater marsh behind.
- **Striking flat terrain** (occurring at 5-15m AOD) contrasting with enclosing landforms of the adjacent wooded slopes, coastal heaths and vale.
- Surface geology defined by **drift river deposits, salt marsh deposits** (mainly clay) and a mix of silt, sand, and clay with rock fragments.
- **Farmland defined by small fields** divided by **pebble faced hedgebanks**.
- Prominent landmark features in the form of an old **limekiln and World War II pillboxes**.
- **Settlement concentrated at Porlock Weir** and the picturesque village of **Bossington** with its **rounded chimneystacks, thatched roofs, lime-washed and stone walls**.
- **The landscape is not remote but is tranquil**. Tranquillity does however reduce in high season when visitor numbers increase.

## Landscape Character Description

- 5.2 The landscape of *Porlock – Bossington Low Farmed Coast and Marsh*, is a low-lying, strikingly flat arc of land occurring between 5 and 15m AOD. The landscape looks out over Porlock Bay and is enclosed by the prominent landforms and wooded slopes of Bossington Hill to the east and Worthy Wood to the west. The coastal promontory of Hurlestone Point forms a strong container and lends significant character to the *Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* landscape. The higher ground combined with the sweep of settlement at the vale edge (West Porlock, Porlock and Bossington) forms a relatively marked transition to the adjoining *Farmed and Settled Vale*.



Flat, open landscape contained by Bossington Hill and Hurlestone Point.

- 5.3 The landscape can be split into two distinct parts – the area of agricultural land to the south and the area of open marsh to the north (abutting Porlock shingle ridge). These two areas create a strong visual contrast – the muted hues of the marsh juxtaposing with the bright green pastures of the agricultural land.
- 5.4 This is a landscape undergoing considerable natural change. The shingle ridge (Porlock Ridge) at the base of Bossington Beach, has been breached by the sea. As a result, what was once freshwater marsh on the land immediately behind has been inundated with saltwater.
- 5.5 The marshes are largely absent of vertical elements with visual interest and very much concentrated on the horizontal plane. Porlock ridge and saltmarsh is designated as SSSI, being nationally important for its coastal geomorphology and coastal habitats particularly the saltmarsh and herb-rich vegetated shingle. Lengths of fencing have been added to the edge of the saltmarsh area to direct walkers away from sites of ground nesting birds.
- 5.6 The area of farmland is characterised in the east by anciently enclosed land (modified between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) and by recently enclosed land (18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century) in the west. Although exhibiting different periods of enclosure, the field pattern is of regular, geometric form. Pasture (sheep, some cattle and horses) principally defines the agricultural land but there are some fields containing cereal crops. Oil seed rape in the landscape creates a dramatic flush of colour and is visually prominent when looking into the

landscape from surrounding areas of higher ground. Mixed hedgerow banks, in varying states of repair, demarcate the fields. The hedge banks are locally distinctive, faced with large pebbles from the shores of Porlock Bay.

- 5.7 The *Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* landscape is underlain by a solid geology of mudstone and sandstone but is predominantly defined by surface drift river terrace deposits, salt marsh deposits (mainly clay) and a mixture of silt, sand and clay with rock fragments. The surface geology of the farmed area is overlain by loamy soils with slowly permeable subsoils that are deep, stoneless and “clayey”.
- 5.8 At the base of Bossington Beach and forming prominent landmark features are a series of ruins – a limekiln (a relic from when lime was brought by boat and kiln-heated for farming use) and defendable pillboxes built during the Second World War.
- 5.9 The picturesque village of Bossington has a quaint character. With the majority of dwellings owned by the National Trust (the village forming part of the Holnicote Estate) there is a consistent traditional (and local) vernacular style – houses and agricultural buildings of exposed stone, lime-washed walls and thatched roofs with characteristically round pillars and chimneys. As with the local hedge banks, wall coping stones are often formed from large beach pebbles.



Large pebbles from Bossington beach used as a building material.

- 5.10 Porlock Weir is the other settled area within this landscape and has a notably different character to Bossington. Set at the foot of Worthy Wood and at the back of Porlock Beach, Porlock Weir with its pub, restaurant, gift shops, harbour area and large car park, has a busier 'visitor-orientated' feel and this is particularly true during the holiday season.
- 5.11 This is not a remote landscape but is nonetheless tranquil in many areas. In the case of the saltmarsh, an untamed, natural character pervades.

## Landscape Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 5.12 The strikingly flat landform, the simple contrast of saltmarsh and surrounding farmland and the influence of coastal views and dramatic enclosing hills, combine to create a landscape of **strong** character overall. The open character of the landscape is to some extent interrupted by post and rail fencing.



Fencing interrupts the open character of the landscape.

### Landscape Condition

- 5.13 The condition of the *Low Farmed Coast and Marsh* is judged to be **moderate** and there is a sense that landscape condition is declining. The principal area of concern is the hedgerow boundaries - appearing denuded and gappy in a number of areas.



Recently planted hedgerow sections.

- 5.14 Some new hedgerow sections have been planted. However, hedgerows closest to the salt marsh do appear particularly weak, probably due to the changing physical state of the adjacent area (from freshwater to saltwater marsh). Small-scale littering in places reduces the overall visual quality of the landscape.

### Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the **Low Farmed Coast and Marsh** landscape type is to **conserve** the many features that combine to create such strength of character – the important saltwater landscape, the local vernacular of Bossington and Porlock Weir, the uninterrupted views to surrounding areas of higher ground for example. There is however a real need to **enhance** the landscape by developing a landscape management strategy in line with the changing physical state of the landscape (from freshwater to saltwater marsh).

The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.

Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.



Landscape Issues	Objectives
<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<p><b>Decline in visual quality and weakening of landscape pattern. This is due to the loss and denudation of trees and hedgerows as a result of the natural transition from freshwater to saltwater marsh.</b></p>	<p><i>Strengthen the landscape appropriate to the changing physical conditions of the landscape. Implement a management strategy that considers the future character of the saltmarsh area given its changing physical state.</i></p>
<b>Secondary Issues:</b>	
<p>Small scale littering, reducing visual amenity and quality of the area.</p>	<p><i>Work with education officers to heighten awareness of negative impact of litter on the landscape – working towards a litter-free landscape.</i></p>
<p>Interruption of the simple, open character of the salt marsh landscape due to post and rail fencing (diverting footpaths away from ground nesting bird sites).</p>	<p><i>To keep the saltmarsh area as open as possible – working with landowners to consider the use of more visually sympathetic boundaries.</i></p>

## D. Open Moorland

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Heather-covered hills and ridges provide a dramatic landscape scene.



Deeply carved moorland valleys offer surprise views.



Smooth horizons, large skies and simple land cover define the grass moorland areas.



Striking landscape contrast between the muted hues of heather moor and bright green of adjacent improved pastures.



A simple fence line can be a prominent feature on the open moor.



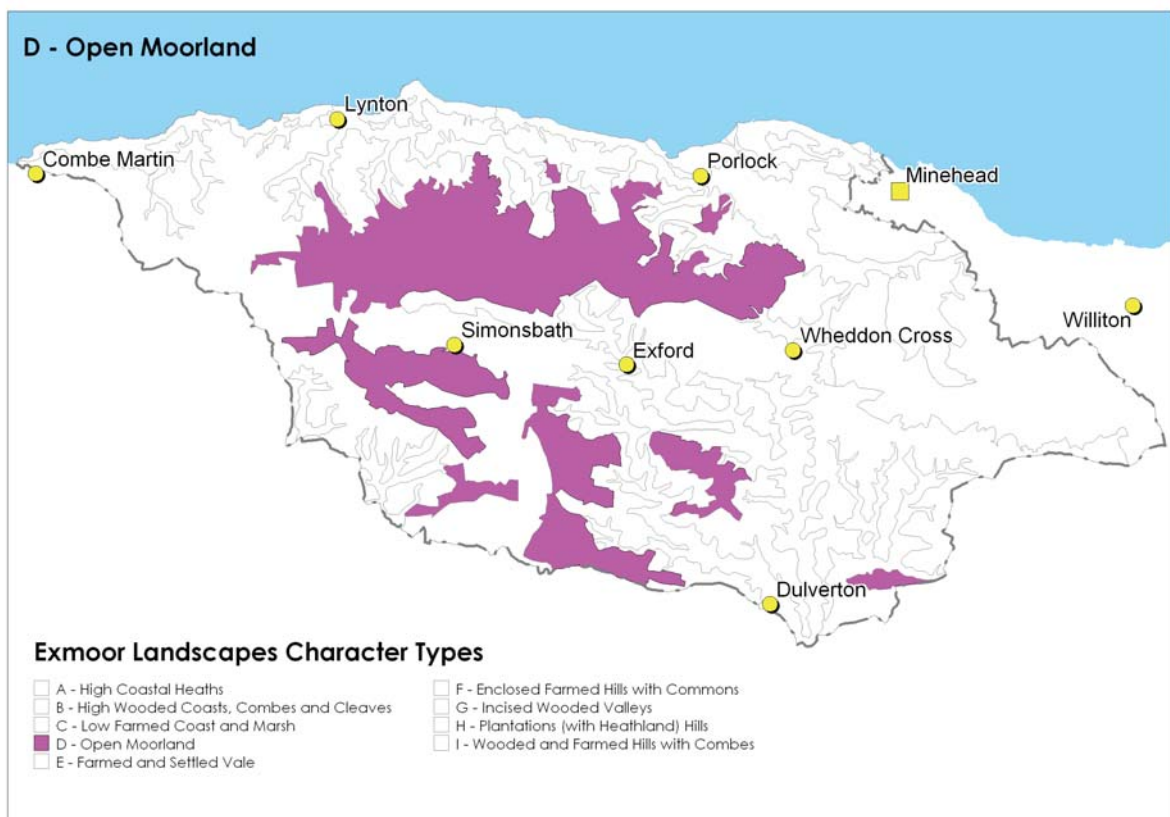
Loss of heather moorland due to encroachment of bracken and gorse.



## 6. D: Open Moorland

### Location and Boundaries

- 6.1 The windswept, exposed and open landscape of Exmoor's *Open Moorland* occurs within four areas – two significant in size and two much smaller. Although fragmented, the main sweep of *Open Moorland* stretches, east to west, from the foothills of Dunkery Beacon to Butter Hill. From here, it wraps around to the southeast as far as East Anstey Common. There are also two smaller outlying *Open Moorland* areas: Winsford Hill and Haddon Hill. The *Open Moorland* is bordered by a number of different landscapes but is for the most part met by the vast sweep of the *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.



### Key Characteristics

- Open, upland landscape defined by vast areas of **heather and grass moorland with significant areas of bracken and gorse.**
- A **large-scale landform** of broad, gently undulating plateaux and rounded hills that loom over the adjacent, lower lying landscapes.

- Cut by distinctive, **deeply carved moorland valleys** (both wet and dry) – the streams issuing from a large number of **moorland springs**.
- Elevation ranging from 245m to 520m AOD. Highest areas offer long **views across the varied landscapes of the National Park** as well as out to sea.
- Underlain by geology of **sandstone, slates and siltstones** with some higher areas capped with **peat**.
- **A rich ecological resource** – much of the moorland designated as SSSI.
- **Land use characterised by open, rough grazing** – predominantly sheep, Exmoor ponies and cattle.
- **Generally absence of settlement** with the exception of individual farms.
- Minimal built development, limited vehicle access or other visible human artefacts make for a **tranquil landscape with some areas evoking a wild and remote character**.

## Landscape Character TYPE Description

- 6.2 Although just one of the many landscapes that make up the National Park, the *Open Moorland* is perhaps the landscape most recognised (by visitors and residents alike) as quintessential to Exmoor's character. It is a powerful, inspiring landscape – of large scale expanse, elevation, and exposure.
- 6.3 A relatively simple land cover - purple heather and grass moor - defines the *Open Moorland*. Although bringing variations in colour, texture and movement, the heather and grass nonetheless form part of the same *Open Moorland* landscape type – knitted together by the smooth horizons, large skies, panoramic views and vast landform scale.
- 6.4 Although sheep, Exmoor ponies and cattle continue to graze the moor, there are many areas where gorse, scrub and bracken have taken hold. As with the

*Coastal Heaths*, taller vegetation on the *Open Moorland* is enclosing and limiting views - reducing the sense of scale. This is particularly true where young trees have established.



Cattle grazing the open moor.

- 6.5 The continuity of *Open Moorland* is cut by a series of valleys that make for dramatic scenery – steeply sided, often-narrow channels marking the course of the gently meandering streams (issuing from moorland springs) that are flanked by boggy ground and valley mires.
- 6.6 The *Open Moorland* has an almost seamless character – with few obvious interruptions. There are some old hedge banks in places - now lined with post and wire fencing – but these are subtle and often only apparent at close proximity. Some overgrown beech hedge banks are visible on the skyline.
- 6.7 Perceptions or experiences of the *Open Moorland* vary considerably with the weather conditions – in wind, rain and fog the landscape can appear physically challenging, hostile and even threatening. Conversely, on a clear, sunny day the *Open Moorland* has a safer, hospitable character. The moors are popular with walkers, horse riders and cyclists alike. Well-used, informal car parks align the few roads cutting across the *Open Moorland*.
- 6.8 There is very limited built development, infrastructure or modern human artefacts on the *Open Moorland* and a strong sense of tranquillity has generally been retained. Typically, the *Open Moorland* provides outward views to a

range of landscape types – lending varied character to the moor. There are however some (limited) areas where the only view is one of *Moorland expanse*; stretching out as far as the eye can see. These areas are the most remote - some of the few remaining places on Exmoor where a sense of wildness and solitude can truly be experienced.

## Landscape Character AREA Descriptions

### ***D1. Northern Moorland***

- 6.9 Forming the largest area of moorland on Exmoor, this Character Area extends from the foothills of Dunkery Hill in the east to Butter Hill in the West and is a continuous band of moorland – uninterrupted by landscapes of different character.



Continuous band of open moorland.

- 6.10 Fundamental to this Character Area are the number of deeply incised moorland valleys – cut where the spring line streams run off hills to meet with the rivers of the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*. Hoar oak Water and Badgworthy Water, for example, meander through the Moorland en route to the East Lyn River – finding their way to the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth.
- 6.11 Defining the east of the Character Area, the heather-covered Dunkery Beacon forms the highest point on Exmoor – the summit of the National Park – and acts as a prominent landmark and point of reference. With a secondary road running over Dunkery Hill, Dunkery Beacon is a much-visited viewpoint; offering

extensive (and varied) coastal and inland views e.g. across Dunkery and Horner Wood to Porlock Bay and across the *Plantation Hills* to Dunster.

- 6.12 Although open access land, this area of Moorland is also well served by recreational routes. The Macmillan Way West cuts across Dunkery Hill and Beacon and along the spine of the moorland ridge, veering northwards into Doone Country – the culturally significant landscape expressed in R.D. Blackmore’s famous novel – *Lorna Doone*. The Tarka Trail and Two Moors Way also cross the area of grass moorland known as The Chains.



View across Pinkery Pond to the grass moorland of The Chains.

- 6.13 The high plateau of The Chains and the middle moor (from Badgworthy to Alderman’s Barrow) are two of the few areas from which extensive stretches of uninterrupted moorland can be viewed.

## **D2. Southern Moorland**

- 6.14 The *Southern Open Moorland* is the second largest character area of the *Open Moorland* landscape type. Occurring within the southern half of the National Park, this character area has a greater sense of fragmentation than the *Northern Open Moorland*. This is due to improvement of moorland to form an enclosed farmed landscape (the *Farmed and Settled Hills* landscape type). An example is a farmed area that sits as an island between Long Holcombe and Burcombe (to the west of the Barle Valley) breaking up the continuity of the moor.

- 6.15 The *Southern Open Moorland* is defined by two distinct areas of open moor – separated from one another by a strip of land characterised by *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons* and by areas of moorland fringe. The landscape comprises a series of rounded summits or hills (e.g. Withypool and Brightworthy Barrows), ridges (e.g. Molland to East and West Anstey) and combes (e.g. Squallacombe, Long Holcombe). The combes are significant in number – branching off the river valleys that cut through the moorland, the largest of which is the River Barle, defining much of the area's northern boundary.
- 6.16 The *Southern Open Moorland* is unsettled but the village of Withypool (within the adjacent *Incised Wooded Valley* landscape type) has a marked influence on the character of the moorland with housing development extending onto the foothills of Withypool Hill.



Housing at the foot of Withypool Hill.

- 6.17 There are a number of secondary roads that provide access to the Southern Moorland. The Ridge Road, for example, that cuts across Molland, West Anstey and East Anstey Commons provides clear views into the contrasting, enclosed pattern of farmland to the south (beyond the National Park boundary). There are sections of the road that are lined with gorse and where views are restricted.

### **D3. Winsford Hill**

- 6.18 Winsford Hill is one of the smaller areas of heather *Open Moorland* and comprises a series of hills along a ridge – Winsford Hill, Draydon Knapp, South Hill



and Varle Hill. Although lying relatively close to the much larger Southern Moorland block, this landscape sits as a detached moorland area, immediately surrounded by *Incised Wooded Valleys* (of the River Barle and River Exe) and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

- 6.19 The B3223 cuts northwest to southeast through the landscape; forming a clear line across the moor's ridge with the land falling away either side. Cattle grids at either end of the B3223 - Comer's Gate and Mounsey Hill Gate define entrances to the moorland and a clear sense of arrival. The location and elevation of the road provides views into the contrasting farmed and wooded valley landscapes. Views are also possible of other areas of *Open Moorland* (views to Withypool Hill in the west and to Dunkery in the northeast for example). So, although this moorland is physically detached, there is nonetheless a visual connection with a wider *Open Moorland* landscape.



Winsford Hill – clear views to surrounding farmland and beyond.

- 6.20 Views offered along the road make it a popular stopping point for cars. Close to the highest point on the moor (Winsford Hill) a large car parking area is provided.
- 6.21 Although views from the road are a key feature, they have been inhibited by scrub encroachment on the roadside – forming channelled views in places. The moorland is grazed (by Exmoor ponies, cattle and sheep) but scrub encroachment is notable with bracken, gorse and young trees covering a



considerable area.



Scrub and bracken encroachment

- 6.22 Although the moorland is open and for the most part uninterrupted, there are some overgrown beech hedgerows. A recent introduction to the landscape which contrasts with the open, smooth lines of the moorland are the game crops located on Ashway Side/Varle Hill.

#### **D4. Haddon Hill**



Views across heather moorland at Haddon Hill.

- 6.23 Haddon Hill is by far the smallest area of *Open Moorland*. Located a few miles east of Dulverton, Haddon Hill sits towards the southernmost point of the National Park. This small heather moorland pocket occurs immediately south of both the River Haddeo and Wimbleball Lake and offers elevated views (particularly from Hadborough – the highest point on the hill) over the *Haddeo Incised Wooded Valley* and to the open waters of Wimbleball Lake.



Clear views over Wimbleball Lake to the farmland beyond.

6.24 Haddon is a popular area of moorland, especially with dog walkers. The adjacent car park (with toilets and interpretation board) is often in use and, perhaps because of the smaller size and ease of access from Dulverton, Haddon seems noticeably busier than the other areas of moor. As well as the popularity of the moor, the views across to settlements, to Wimbleball Lake (popular for sailing, fishing, windsurfing etc) and to a number of farms and houses increases the awareness of people-presence and human activity in and around the landscape. As a consequence, this moorland area does not share the same sense of remoteness found in some areas of the larger moorland tracts.



Haddon Hill is a popular area with walkers.

6.25 The Hadborough Plantation, part of which has recently been cleared for heathland restoration, borders Haddon Hill. This area of coniferous plantation forms a solid boundary to the south and adds a sense of containment and shelter.

- 6.26 Although a distinct moorland landscape, Haddon Hill borrows much of its character from the surrounding farmland landscapes – the strong patterns of enclosure and bright green hues of the improved pasture contrasting with the muted colours and openness of the moor.



Improved enclosed pastures and dark woodland contrast with the open character and muted hues of the moorland.

- 6.27 Exmoor ponies graze freely on the hill and are well recognised as an intrinsic feature of this area of moorland.

## Landscape TYPE Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 6.28 This is a landscape of **strong** character – the *Open Moorland* being a very recognisable, perhaps unmistakable landscape – synonymous with Exmoor. The large scale landform, the smooth skylines, the vastness of view, the sense of tranquillity and (in places) remoteness, and the simplicity of landcover (from heather to grass moor) combine to create an inspiring and challenging landscape. Grazing cattle, sheep (including Exmoor Horn) and Exmoor ponies play a key role in defining the *Open Moorland* and are, in many ways, as intrinsic to the landscape as its physical characteristics.

6.29 Bracken and gorse encroachment and young tree establishment are undoubtedly affecting the intactness of the moorland and as such are threatening the strength of landscape character.

### **Landscape Condition**

6.30 The condition of the *Open Moorland* is varied from **moderate** to **good**. As with the Coastal Heaths landscape type, there are number of factors (recreation, agriculture, and infrastructure for example) that are affecting the state of repair, or degree of intactness, of the *Open Moorland*. Those judged to be endemic to the landscape as a whole are noted below, recognised as key issues or 'visible forces for change'. There are of course other issues that are affecting parts or particular areas of this landscape but which are not common across the entire type. These are noted separately as part of the Character Area Evaluation.

### **Landscape Strategy**

The overall strategy for the *Open Moorland* is to **Conserve and Enhance** landscape character. It is essential to conserve the open and simple visual character of the *Open Moorland* and to enhance that same character within those areas where views have been impinged and where the enclosing nature of scrub encroachment has reduced the overall sense of scale. As with the High Coastal Heaths landscape, there is a danger that further incremental inclusion of human elements in the landscape (e.g. interpretation boards, parking provision) will threaten to reduce the remote and wild character still enjoyed on some parts of the moor.

*The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.*

*Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance)*

appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
<b>Key Issues:</b>		
Decline in landscape condition/agricultural improvement, leading to the conversion of Open Moorland to areas of 'moorland fringe' character.	<i>Conserve and enhance existing moorland areas and restore (where feasible) moorland fringe areas back to Open Moorland.</i>	<b>D1. Northern Moorland</b> <b>D2. Southern Moorland</b>
Loss of the simple, open purple hills (often visible from considerable distance) due to the encroachment of bracken and gorse and some broadleaved woodland species.	<i>Conserve, enhance and restore continuous tracts of open heather moor without significant areas of bracken or gorse.</i>	<b>D3. Winsford Hill</b> <b>D4. Haddon Hill</b>
Loss of sense of openness/ expanse as well as opportunities for viewing the landscape due to encroachment of gorse along the roadsides – changing the sense of scale by enclosing and channelling views.	<i>Create more open views from roads through removal of roadside gorse (paying particular attention to areas offering finest views) in order to improve visibility across the heath land and improve visual connection with the other heather moorland areas of the High Coastal Heaths.</i>	<b>D2. Southern Moorland</b> <i>(particularly West Anstey ridge road and Withypool Common).</i> <b>D3. Winsford Hill</b>
<b>Secondary Issues:</b>		
Threats to tranquillity and remoteness and the simple, open, essentially wild and rugged character of the moorland due to the provision of facilities such as car parking and toilets and small scale, incremental inclusion of human elements in the	Conserve overall sense of tranquillity and the few surviving areas of truly remote landscape within the National Park – those that retain a feeling of being removed from modern day human activity.	<b>D3. Winsford Hill</b> <b>D4. Haddon Hill</b> <b>D1. Northern Moorland</b> <i>(although there are very few human elements within this landscape, parts of the landscape are</i>

landscape such as signs and interpretation boards.		<i>some of the most remote within the National Park. As such, it is much more sensitive to any further introduction of features).</i>
Poor quality views into some areas of adjacent farmland due to management of boundary features, intensive management of grassland, inappropriate positioning of large silage bag stacks and farm litter/waste.	<i>Work with landowners to improve/enhance views into the adjacent farmed areas.</i>	D1. Northern Moorland D2. Southern Moorland (looking south and north respectively into the areas of farmland between Challacombe and Simonsbath).
Erosion of verges and informal enlargement of car parking areas threatening the heath land cover.	<i>Prevent further expansion of car parking areas through careful design and restore areas that have been damaged by vehicle erosion.</i>	D1. Northern Moorland D2. Southern Moorland D3. Winsford Hill
Footpath erosion – forming strong linear (often wide) tracks through the heather moorland.	<i>Reduce the visual impact of footpath scarring in the landscape.</i>	All areas.

## Landscape Character AREA Evaluations

### **D1. Exmoor Forest - Dunkery**

- 6.31 There is evidence of scrub and bracken encroachment of heather moorland within this landscape – even in ‘key’ areas such as the foothills of Dunkery. In terms of obvious human intervention in the landscape, there seem to be few visual indicators for change. As such the rate of change within this moorland area appears relatively static. This is true when compared with other Moorland landscapes as well as different landscape types within the National Park.

- 6.32 This area of moorland is the most extensive, uninterrupted tract within Exmoor and contains some of the few surviving areas where a true sense of remoteness can still be felt. As such, even the smallest changes or additions can make a significant difference to the character of the landscape as well as to our experiences of it. This is well illustrated where a minor wooden finger post sign, offering directions to the B3358 road, has been situated within an area of The Chains. Although not overtly intrusive, the sign nonetheless heightens the awareness of proximity to modern infrastructure, thus diluting the rare quality of landscape remoteness. Further additions such as these within the remotest areas of the moor will have a detrimental impact on key attributes of wildness and solitude for example.
- 6.33 A small, but locally significant, feature in the landscape is that of the wind turbine at the Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre. Any further addition of similar vertical (moving) elements such as the turbine is likely to result in cluttering – interrupting the smooth and simple nature of the skyline.

## **D2. Southern Moorland**

- 6.34 Similar threats to moorland character are found within the *Southern Open Moorland* – in terms of bracken, gorse and young tree encroachment. This is very noticeable within the moorland valleys, particularly that of the River Barle.
- 6.35 Another force for landscape change within the *Southern Open Moorland*, which is not readily seen on other areas belonging to this landscape type, is that of development encroachment. This is a particular issue where settlement extension to the south of the village of Withypool has stretched up and onto the foothill of Withypool Hill. Post war housing (some very recent) has acted to detract from the setting of this area of moorland by impinging on the views of open moorland from the village. The cumulative effect of posts carrying overhead wires in and around the Withypool area also detracts from the smooth lines and simplicity of the moorland landscape.



6.36 The other noticeable threat to moorland character here is that of degradation and semi-improvement of moorland edge areas. There is a sense that these moorland fringes are eating into the moorland and fragmenting it further. This is true for example of the area around Squallacombe.

### **D3. Winsford Hill**

6.37 At Winsford Hill, the greatest threat to landscape resource and character comes from scrub encroachment. There are significant areas of land that are covered with gorse and bracken as well as deciduous trees such as hawthorn. This is very evident on the lower slopes and along the B3223 that crosses the moorland – restricting views and the sense of openness. On entering the moorland at South Hill, the sense of arrival onto moorland is stifled by the encroaching vegetation.

6.38 The cumulative impact of road signage within this area of moorland should be monitored – although small-scale features, the signs nonetheless act as visual detractors in the landscape. Erosion of moorland at the roadside is evident in places where cars are being parked for people to enjoy the views across the Barle Valley and beyond to Withypool Hill for example.

### **D4. Haddon Hill**

6.39 There are a number of features at Haddon Hill, which when viewed collectively, are judged to be a force for change in the landscape. As with some areas of the *Coastal Heaths* landscape type, Haddon Hill has seen the typically wild character of moorland become tamed or restrained e.g. through the introduction of a car park area (surrounding a central area of improved grassland), an interpretation board and a toilet block. A property adjacent to the car park has a small-scale wind turbine. It is this collection of items within this small moorland area that has had the effect of creating a more comfortable (tamed) landscape – one that is distinctly less wild and challenging. The addition of further features or enhancement and improvement of the car-parking areas needs to be monitored to ensure the

essence of the landscape – the moor – remains the main focus on both arrival at and departure from the landscape.

- 6.40 Haddon Hill is very popular with walkers (especially dog walkers) and this is evident through significant footpath erosion (and widening) resulting in the loss of some heather moorland. As with other character areas, bracken and gorse are scrubbing up the landscape – limiting and/or interrupting viewing opportunities. Rhododendron encroachment is also a visible force for change.



## E. Farmed and Settled Vale



Extensive views across the well-treed vale to the coast at Porlock Bay.



Sheep graze the undulating, rounded hills of the high vale. The hedgebanks and hedgerow trees form a strong landscape pattern.



Strong influence of Dunkery Hill looming over the vale.



Historic high street at Dunster – the castle forming a gateway to the vale at the eastern end.



Streams and rivers cut across the vale to the coast.

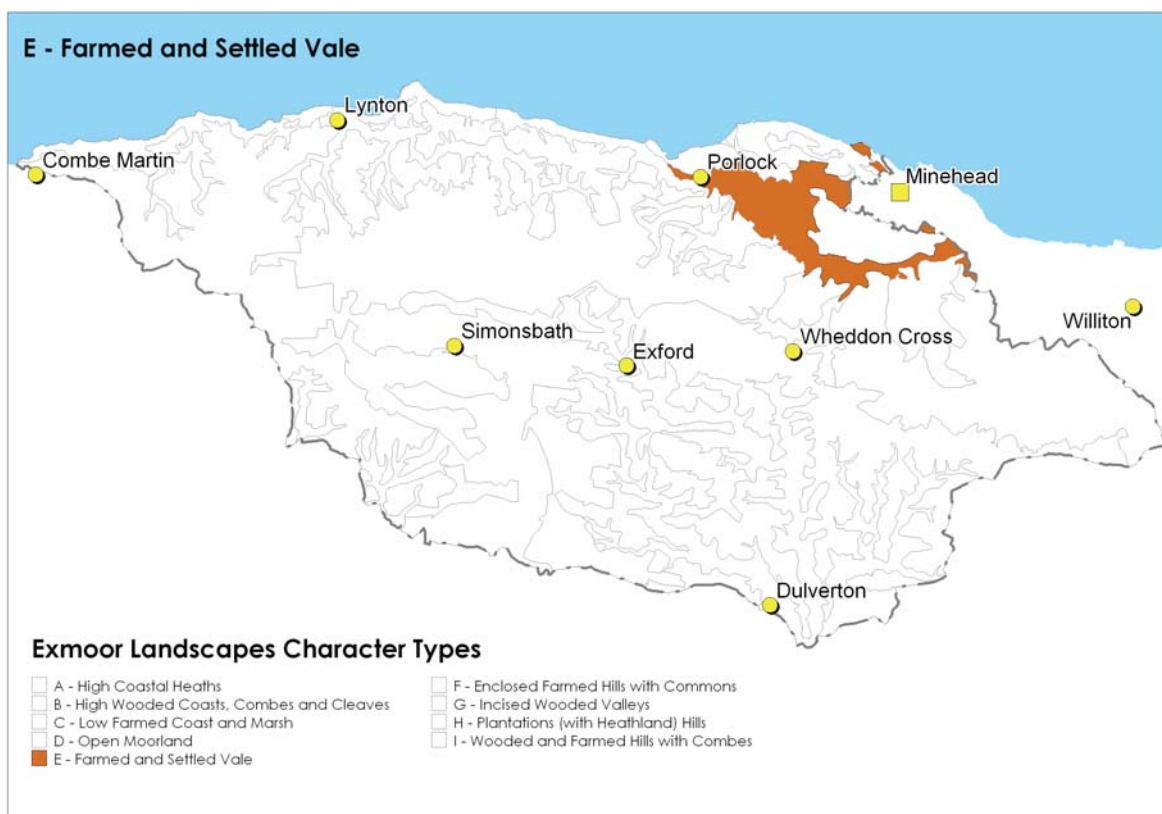


Horsiculture is prevalent on the flood plain. The surrounding wooded slopes offer a strong sense of enclosure.

## 7. E: Farmed and Settled Vale

### Location and Boundaries

7.1 There is just one Character Area (**Porlock-Dunster**) belonging to the *Farmed and Settled Vale* Landscape Type. This area occurs within the northeast of the National Park. It stretches to the southeast from the town of Porlock - branching to the north and south of The *Plantation (with Heathland) Hills*. From the east of Selworthy, the vale extends from Combeshead into Bratton and then on to the coastal town of Minehead (moving beyond the National Park boundary). To the south of the Plantation (with Heathland) Hills, the vale stretches east of Wooten Courtenay, encompassing and terminating at the ancient wool town of Dunster. Here, the vale landscape merges and changes into the distinctly open, flat and low coastal landscape that flanks Blue Anchor Bay.



### Key Characteristics

- A medium scale landscape, with a **variable landform (flat floodplain to undulating high vale with occasional small hills or hummocks).**

- The **alluvial flood-plain deposits of streams and rivers** crossing the vale **define much of the surface geology.**
- **Agriculture is a mix of arable and pasture grazed by sheep and cattle.** **Horse grazing and exercising** are particularly evident in the floodplain areas.
- **Fields are bounded by hedge banks (often high)** -predominantly field maple and wych elm - and hedgerow trees (oak, sycamore and ash), **creating a distinct sense of enclosure.**
- **Well-treed character** – in part borrowed from the wooded slopes of surrounding hills but also due to the presence of small copses and clumps, scattered trees and overgrown hedges.
- **Strong visual connection with the surrounding landscapes that enclose the vale** such as the *Open Moorland and Plantation (with heathland) Hills.*
- **Main settlements are Porlock and Dunster** – Dunster Castle being a prominent landmark building.

## Landscape Description

7.2 The *Porlock – Dunster Farmed and Settled Vale* occurs between 20m AOD and 250m AOD and is a low-lying flat to undulating landscape, carved out by rivers and streams and contained by an interconnected series of surrounding hills. The vale can be broken down into three distinct parts – the vale 'floodplain', the 'low' vale and the 'high' vale. These three areas clearly express the elevation and topographic range of the vale landscape.

7.3 The floodplain comprises the flattest and lowest parts of the vale - those areas that immediately flank and extend out from the rivers and main streams crossing through the landscape e.g. River Avill and Horner Water. The floodplain is defined by drift geology of river and stream alluvium deposits (loam with basal gravels). The lowest areas occur around the town of Dunster and between Porlock and Bossington - the western and eastern extents of the Vale - where



the fresh water rivers and streams are nearing the sea and the Vale is making its transition to the adjacent, flatter and lower lying coastal landscapes.



Floodplain pastures.

- 7.4 The contrasting areas of high ground – or high vale – occur at the vale edges; forming the foothills to the distinctly more elevated and pronounced surrounding landscapes of *The Plantation (with heathland) Hills*, the *High Wooded Coast*, *Combes and Cleaves* and the *Open Moorland*.
- 7.5 The high vale is predominantly defined by an underlying geology of reddish brown mudstone with some sandstone (Mercia Mudstone Group) and by a distinct area made up of the Luccombe Breccia Formation<sup>4</sup> - the latter characterising the surface geology around Luccombe and Huntscott. Here, there is a small series of interconnected rounded hills or knolls forming a distinctive, albeit very localised, landform character. Where the high vale forms the foothills to Selworthy, there is an area of Blue Lias Formation (grey mudstone and shale with fine limestones).

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<sup>4</sup> An ancient gravel mainly made up of small pieces of sandstone and slate.





Local landform variation at Luccombe.

- 7.6 The area of low vale defines the land between the floodplain and the high vale. This is a transitional area that is neither as flat nor as undulating as the land on either side. River terrace deposits (mainly gravel) predominantly underlie the low vale.
- 7.7 The underlying geology of the *Farmed and Settled Vale* gives rise to reddish, loamy, well-drained soils that support a mixed agricultural land use - pasture, dairying, stock rearing, cereals and root crops. Sheep, cattle and horses graze the vale with pasture dominant in both the high vale and floodplain areas - horse grazing being particularly prevalent on the floodplain. The low vale sees the greatest concentration of arable farming where crops are removed from the risk of flooding but the land is suited to mechanised cultivation (unlike the steeper and more undulating ground of the high vale).
- 7.8 Fields are small to medium in size and of an irregular/organic form. This reflects the ancient enclosure of much of the vale. Fields are smaller where the vale narrows – between Wootton Courtenay and Dunster. Where the floodplain is wider and the land flatter, field size increases. The fields are predominantly bounded by hedgebanks (comprising field maple and wych elm) interspersed with hedgerow trees (predominantly oak, ash and sycamore). More recent forms of enclosure are evident on the floodplain where post and rails and post and wire fencing divide the flat landscape into separate areas of grazing. Post and wire fencing is also lining a number of riverbanks.



Small to medium size fields of irregular shape.

- 7.9 There a number of woodland blocks dotted through the vale – the largest concentrated in the area between the settlements of Selworthy, Horner, Allerford and West Luccombe. The areas of woodland combined with the hedgerow trees (and some in-field trees) make for a well-treed landscape character and bring texture, colour variation to the Vale. Although some orchards survive, the loss of many fruit trees (and hedgerow elms) has resulted in a more open landscape character.
- 7.10 The main settlements are the villages of Porlock and Dunster. Dunster, famous for its prominent castle and dramatic wooded setting, once thrived as a wool market and the old Yarn Market remains the high street's landmark feature. Dunster is characterised by a range of traditional buildings mainly dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries – including tile-hung facades, thatched cottages and large Georgian houses with slate roofs. Porlock, like Dunster, is a traditional Exmoor village but unlike Dunster has seen the development of modern properties extending out from its historic core. The northwestern edge of Porlock abuts the Low Farmed Coast and Marsh landscape and has open views across Bossington Beach to Porlock Bay.



The Yarn Market at Dunster.

- 7.11 The National Trust's Holnicote Estate (covering 12,500 acres of Exmoor National Park) extends into the Vale with the estates cottages and farms grouped in and around Selworthy, Allerford, Bossington, Horner and Luccombe.
- 7.12 Although having a distinct and recognisable character in its own right, the vale is nonetheless greatly influenced by the character of the surrounding landscapes that emphasise the overall sense of place and provide dramatic context – the looming, simple skyline of Dunkery Hill and Beacon, the dark and dense woodland of Croydon Hill and Horner Wood for example.
- 7.13 Views are varied and interesting within the vale. The vale allows for impressive, long distance internal views and beyond to the Bristol Channel as well as across the aforementioned surrounding landscapes. The presence of, and views to, landmark buildings make a significant contribution to character - buildings such as Dunster Castle, which forms a prominent gateway, and the white lime washed All Saints Church at Selworthy, which stands prominent against its heavily wooded backdrop.

## **Landscape Evaluation**

### **Strength of Landscape Character**

- 7.14 Although when viewed individually elements and features making up the vale may be relatively subtle in character, it is the combination and interplay of

these elements and features that gives this landscape a strong sense of place and a recognisable and **strong** character overall. The flat to undulating landform (with localised hillocks), the strong hedgerow network and repeated field patterning, small woods, the picturesque villages of Porlock and Dunster and the backdrop of the dramatic wooded and moorland hills combine to create a distinct landscape scene. The strength of character of the vale is perhaps best appreciated from beyond its own boundaries - in views offered from adjacent, elevated landscapes such as from the edge of Tivington Plantation or across from Selworthy Church. In places, the decline and inconsistent management of some features, such as hedgerow sections, is threatening to dilute the integrity and intactness of the landscape pattern and, if this continues, will weaken the character and visual integrity of the landscape as a whole.

### **Landscape Condition**

- 7.15 The condition of the Farmed and Settled Vale is varied – ranging from **good** to **moderate**. Visual clues to declining landscape condition appear more prevalent on the floodplain than on the low or high vale areas and are largely related to field boundaries. As noted above hedgerows are declining; appearing thin and gappy in places. In some instances, planting of new hedgerow sections has taken place but more commonly post and wire fencing has been used to stock-proof the gaps – leaving visually permeable breaks. In addition to gappy hedges, the erection of new field boundaries (post and wire and post and rail) is beginning to culminate in cluttering of the floodplain. Previously uninterrupted areas of pasture and meadow flanking watercourses are now often characterised by visually prominent sub-divisions – where areas are sectioned off for horse grazing and exercising. This sub-division of land has led to some areas of overgrazing – the floodplain appearing bare and parched in some places.
- 7.16 This is a managed, working agricultural landscape and with much of the vale forming part of the National Trust's Holnicote Estate, the landscape is largely

well managed -landscape condition overall is judged to be good.



Gappy hedgerows are not uncommon in the vale.

## Landscape Strategy

Overall, management of this landscape should endeavour to **conserve** the diversity of landscape features and their combination in order to safeguard the distinctive landscape patterning and visual unity. There is significant opportunity to **enhance** or improve the expression of some landscape features where their condition is in decline – particularly hedgerows. It is essential that the strong interface of the vale with the surrounding hills is conserved and that the vale is protected from the introduction of incongruous features that would threaten the visual character and quality of views enjoyed internally and from surrounding landscapes on higher ground.

*The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.*

*Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.*

Landscape Issues	Objectives
<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<p>Interruption of the open floodplain pastures (due to field subdivision) with post and rail fencing, post and wire fencing, and metal staking and taping (typically for horse and pony grazing and exercising leading to a somewhat bitty, fragmented landscape in places).</p>	<p><i>Maintain existing areas of open floodplain and work with landowners to encourage removal/rationalisation of fenced areas on the floodplain.</i></p>
<p>Erection of post and wire fencing along river and stream banks has diluted the natural sense of connection and interrelationship between water bodies, riverbanks and flanking meadows and pastures.</p>	<p><i>Conserve open riverbanks and encourage removal of fencing along watercourses. Particular attention should be given fencing lengths that align public footpaths e.g. where recreational enjoyment of the river is being inhibited.</i></p>
<p>Diluting landscape pattern due to the decline of hedgerows (being thin and gappy in places) particularly on the lowest (floodplain area) of the vale.</p>	<p><i>Promote and encourage active (traditional) management of hedgerow boundaries to strengthen the landscape pattern. Reinstate hedgerow sections that have been lost and consider opportunities for hedgerow tree planting in areas with less tree cover.</i></p>
<p>Potential for energy cropping (miscanthus and short rotation coppice).</p>	<p>Undertake targeted capacity and sensitivity study to understand impact on the landscape.</p>



## F. Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons

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Strong pattern of enclosure (predominantly beech hedges) as viewed from an area of Open Moorland.



Beech hedges along roads restrict as well as channel views.



The landscape opens up to areas of commons where post and rail fencing defines the field boundaries.



In places, unmanaged beech hedges form distinctive, gappy tree lines.



Clear views are possible of the Incised Wooded Valleys that cut through the landscape.



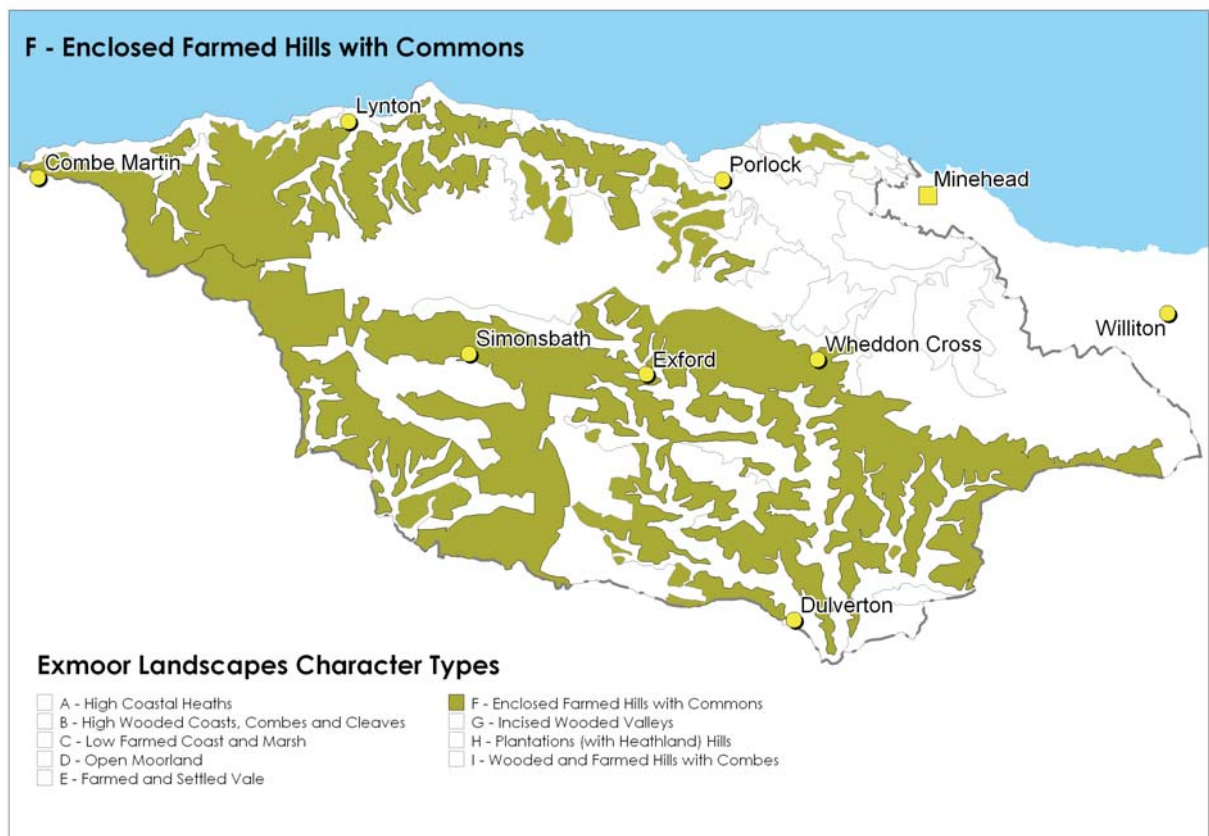
Silage bags on the roadside are a common sight.



## 8. F: Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons

### Location and Boundaries

- 8.1 There are two character areas belonging to the **Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons** landscape type. This landscape type extends to the north, south, east and west - covering vast areas of the National Park - but can be broadly separated into Northern and Southern character areas. The northern area wraps around the Northern area of *Open Moorland* (Dunkery to Butter Hill), extending up to a number of the *High Coastal Heaths* landscapes and intersected by the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type. The southern, and larger area occurs to the south of the Northern Moorland block, interspersing the other *Open Moorland* character areas and surrounding all of the *Incised Wooded River Valleys*.



## Key Characteristics

- A medium scale landscape defined by **broad rolling terrain (of hills and ridges)**.
- Land cover defined by **permanent pasture enclosed by beech hedge banks. Areas of open commons occur** with fields demarcated by post and wire fencing.
- **Elevation range of approximately 250m to 450m AOD.**
- Defined by an **underlying geology of mudstones, sandstone and slates giving rise to fine loamy/silty well-drained soils.**
- **Agricultural land use defined by pasture – sheep are prevalent** but cattle and horses are also present. There are some areas of arable land but these are very much the exception.
- **Strong influence of adjacent landscapes** of *Open Moorland, Incised Wooded Valleys* and *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*.
- **Irregular pattern of enclosure of medium-sized fields divided during the 18th to 21st centuries** and defined by prominent beech hedge banks on highest ground and mixed species hedges on lower slopes.
- **Fields become noticeably smaller towards the adjacent valleys.**
- Where hedge banks are degraded, **post and wire fencing has frequently been used to replace sections.**
- **Narrow rural lanes and tracks flanked by tall beech hedges create a strong sense of enclosure**, restricting views and contrasting markedly with the adjacent areas of Unenclosed Moorland.
- Villages and hamlets are, for the most part, located within the adjacent valley landscapes.

## Landscape Character TYPE Description

- 8.2 This is an expansive landscape – covering a larger area of the National Park than any other landscape type. As such, it is a very familiar landscape scene on Exmoor.

- 8.3 With elevation ranging between 250m and 450m AOD, the landscape occurs over a series of broad, rounded hills and ridges that form an area of transition between the lower-lying *Incised Wooded Valleys* and the combes (of the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves* landscape type) and the upland areas of the *Open Moorland*.
- 8.4 The landscape is predominantly defined by small to medium sized fields with an agricultural land use dominated by pasture. There are some areas of arable cropping on the lower, shallower slopes and cattle and horses do graze the land. However, the overriding character is of the hills and ridges peppered with grazing sheep. Characteristic field gutter systems are seen within this landscape.
- 8.5 The hedgerow network dominates views both internally and from surrounding areas. On the lower slopes mixed species hedges occur creating an irregular and smaller-scale field pattern. Fields on higher ground are more geometric in shape and are bounded by (sometimes) stone-faced beech hedgebanks. These fields reflect a pattern of later, more regular enclosure (associated with the beech hedges) dating to the 1800s. At this time, when the Knight family of Worcestershire bought a large proportion of the Exmoor Forest and set about taming and reclaiming the landscape for agriculture. By draining and liming the peaty, acid soils, burning rough grass and planting miles of beech hedges (to act as wind breaks), the Knights and other wealthy landowners converted the moorland and improved grasslands, defining much of the land cover pattern recognisable today.
- 8.6 The beech hedges are the defining characteristic of the landscape and tend to be fairly tall, particularly along roadsides - due a long laying cycle (at least 15-20 years) or having received little management. This has the effect of limiting views and creating a notable sense of enclosure. Conversely, the areas of commons that occur sporadically are open and more exposed.



Open and exposed character of the commons and their skylines.

- 8.7 Beech hedges usually surround the areas of “commons” but the individual fields are usually bounded by post and wire fencing. These areas of commons tend to be located on higher ground and have a less textured, simpler landscape character. Some unmanaged old beech hedge banks remain and these form distinctive gappy tree lines that are eye-catching features.
- 8.8 Geologically, the landscape type is underlain by mudstones, sandstones and slates above which are well-drained fine loamy/silty soils associated with pasture (dairy and stock rearing). Sheep are dominant on the hills and commons.
- 8.9 Settlement is concentrated within the adjacent valleys and combes – dispersed stone farms and cottages with slate roofs typify the limited built development within the landscape. These buildings are generally sited away from areas of highest ground, being more typically found in folds at the edge of the intersecting valleys.
- 8.10 This is an enclosed, tamed landscape and as such does not share the same wild and remote qualities of the adjacent *Open Moorland*. Due to lack of settlement concentration and limited intrusion of main roads, the enclosed farmland does have a peaceful, tranquil character in many parts.

- 8.11 Outcropping areas of gorse – particularly at field boundaries - provide visual clues as to the underlying physical character of the landscape and its dramatic transformation from moorland heath to agricultural land.



Outcropping areas of gorse are not uncommon at field and roadside boundaries.

## Landscape Character AREAS

### ***F1. Northern Area***

- 8.12 Although extensive, the northern area is the smallest of the two character area, stretching from Porlock Hill in the east to the National Park boundary at Combe Martin in the west. The area's northern boundary is met by the various character areas of the '*High Coastal Heaths*' and '*High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*' landscape types. The wooded combes extend south into the landscape breaking up the hills – the densely wooded steep valley sides providing dramatic, surprise views. The southern boundary of the area is almost entirely met by the Northern *Open Moorland* block.



Looking south from Kipscombe Hill to Withycombe Ridge.

- 8.13 Although the vast majority of field boundaries are defined by beech hedge banks, there are some localised areas of dry stonewall boundaries that add localised character variation e.g. at Trentishoe and Countisbury Common.
- 8.14 One of the key factors distinguishing this Northern block from the Southern character area is the proximity to Exmoor's northern coastline – some areas of high ground providing views along the coast and out to sea.
- 8.15 The A39 passes through this landscape from Porlock Hill to Countisbury. This does have an influence on noise levels and degree of landscape tranquillity. With the exception of village of Parracombe, settlement is characterised by scattered farms and cottages.

## **F2. Southern Area**

- 8.16 The Southern area covers a large area of land – stretching from just outside the village of Elworthy in the east, to the A39 at Blackmoor Gate in the west. Along with a number of *Incised Wooded Valleys*, this character area defines much of the Exmoor National Park's southern boundary. To the north, this landscape is met by the Northern area of *Open Moorland* and is also bordered by each of the other *Open Moorland* character areas (Southern Moorland, Winsford Hill and Haddon Hill).



Enclosed farmland abutting Winsford Hill at The Punchbowl (west of Winsford).

- 8.17 As with the Northern area there are a number of “commons” including Fyldon Common and Treborough Common. Treborough Common is one of the few places to offer coastal views – across the Brendon Hills towards the Bristol Channel. The notable transition to the adjacent landscape of the *Brendon Hills* is recognised by a number of key characteristic changes including mixed species hedge banks, an increase in woodland cover and a strongly articulated landform.
- 8.18 Clear views into *Incised Wooded Valleys* have a significant influence on overall landscape character.



Strong visual connectivity with adjacent wooded valleys.

## Landscape TYPE Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 8.19 Strength of Landscape Character is deemed to be **moderate** overall. The distinguishing feature of the landscape is its banked beech hedgerows and these are in decline in a number of areas leading to the fragmentation of the landscape pattern.





Beech hedge banks are falling into decline and are being replaced with post and wire fencing – threatening the landscape pattern and visual amenity.

### Landscape Condition

8.20 The condition of the landscape type is varied (from poor in some areas to good in others) but overall, is judged to be **moderate**. Hedgerow and historic beech windbreaks have fallen into decline and their varied (often poor) boundary management reduces overall visual amenity. Lay-bys and pull-ins along the roadsides are suffering from small-scale littering.



Small-scale litter and old silage bags along the roadsides.

### Landscape Strategy

The moderate strength of character and moderate condition requires a landscape strategy that will aim to **enhance** the overall landscape e.g. through improved hedgerow management in the landscape and by restoring sections of beech hedge banks. This would significantly strengthen the pattern of the landscape and improve overall landscape quality.

The following table highlights the **Key Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.

Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives
<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<p><b>Weakened landscape pattern in places, due to varied management and decline of beech hedge banks.</b></p>	<p><b>Reinstate hedgerow sections that have been lost, protect some of the old gappy beech lines that are eye-catching landscape features and promote and encourage active (traditional) management of beech hedge bank boundaries to strengthen the landscape pattern.</b></p>
<p><b>The erection of prominent vertical elements in the adjacent landscape. Although sited outside the National Park boundary these have a notable influence on local skylines as well as wider views. Radio station masts at Brendon Hills Farm and a wireless station at Elworthy Barrows are examples of large, prominent masts with latticed towers that vary in shape and structure and have a cluttering effect above the tree line.</b></p>	<p><b>Prevent positioning of prominent vertical features that would have an adverse effect on landscape character. There is a need to work with neighbouring planning authorities to ensure tighter control (through a consistent, cross-boundary, pro-active approach) over location of prominent vertical elements such as communication masts and wind turbines.</b></p>

<b>Secondary Issues:</b>	
Erection of large agricultural sheds/buildings that do not reflect local building style or materials and which do not enhance the sense of place.	<i>Ensure agricultural buildings (in line with residential and other buildings) are constructed of local materials to reinforce local distinctiveness on Exmoor.</i>
Littering of lay-bys and non-clearance of old silage bags and other farm waste along roadsides.	<i>Work with landowners to encourage more visually sensitive storage/disposal of waste material.</i>
Potential for energy cropping (miscanthus and short rotation coppice).	Undertake targeted capacity and sensitivity study to understand impact on the landscape.

### **Landscape Character AREA Evaluation**

- 8.21 The issues affecting this landscape type are relatively consistent across both character areas (F1 and F2). Therefore the Key Issues highlighted above relate to both the northern and southern *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.
- 8.22 The only exception is the decline of localised areas of dry stonewalling where gaps are being plugged by a variety of materials including unsightly corrugated metal panels. This is occurring within the Northern Area (F1), in the landscape surrounding Martinhoe. Here, there is a need to conserve, enhance and even restore some areas of stone walling to ensure it survives as a locally distinctive boundary feature.





## G. Incised Wooded Valleys



Wooded valleys form dark green fingers that push through surrounding landscapes.



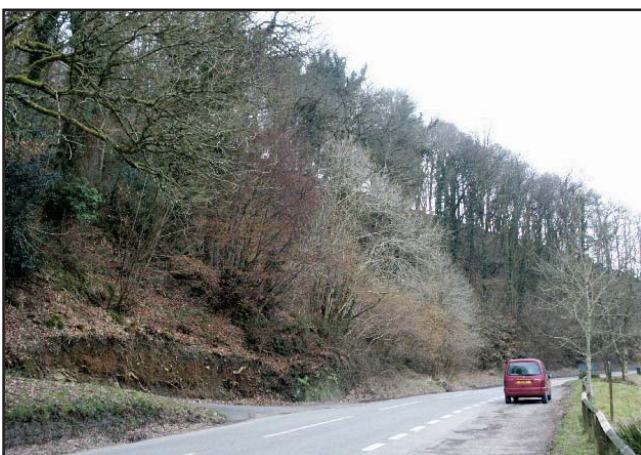
Flat, improved pastures define much of the floodplain landscape – clearly enveloped by steep wooded valley sides.



Rhododendron is a common sight in the river valleys.



Ancient Clapper Bridge crossing at Tarr Steps is an example of numerous archaeological features in the landscape.



Primary and secondary roads follow the course of the rivers on the floodplain.

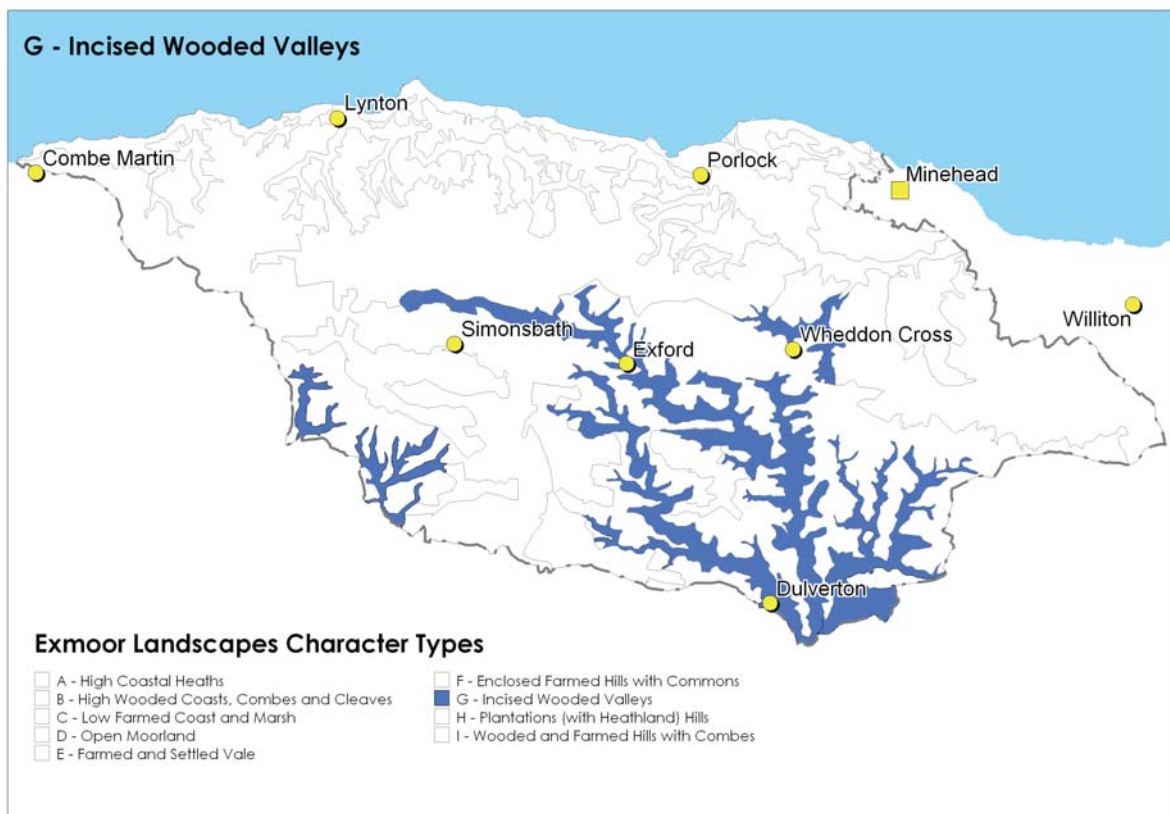


Stone bridges and fords are associated with small-scale settlement clusters.

## 9. G: Incised Wooded Valleys

### Location and Boundaries

- 9.1 There are six character areas belonging to this landscape type and, with the exception of one, they all occur within the southern half of the National Park. Extending into the National Park from its southern boundary, this landscape type encompasses the tributaries and main courses of a number of rivers - Bray, Mole, Barle, Exe, Haddeo and Avill - and intersperses the surrounding areas of *Enclosed Farmland* and *Open Moorland*.



### Key Characteristics

- With a general elevation range of between **150 and 350m AOD**, the **landform of the valleys is dramatic**, with steep-sloping sides and relatively narrow but open valley floors.
- **Underlain by slate, sandstone and siltstone** with drift deposits of alluvium along the course of the rivers.
- **The valley sides are cloaked in woodland** – mixed, deciduous and coniferous. There is considerable **Ancient Woodland** coverage.



- Although there is an **impression of continuous tree cover**, the wooded valley sides are interspersed with **pockets of pasture**.
- **The rivers are often fast flowing with large deposited boulders** forming stepping-stones across the water.
- **The valley bottoms are lush** with riparian vegetation flanking the rivers and ferns typifying woodland and woodland edge flora.
- **The floodplains are distinctly pastoral** with grazing horses and cattle a common sight on the riverbanks.
- **Greatly influenced by a culture of hunting and shooting** – pheasant, partridges and red deer are often seen.
- The woodland cover and enveloping sides of the valleys forges a **dark and enclosing landscape character**.
- **Settlement is small –scale and picturesque**. Villages are typically nucleated and nestled in the shelter of the valley bottoms.
- Villages have a strong relationship with the river – generally **centred around fords and stone-bridge crossing points**.
- **Buildings are of a traditional style** and consistently characterised by **stone, render, slate and thatch**.
- **Secondary and primary** roads typically occur in the valley bottoms, following the course of the rivers.
- **Tranquillity is variable** depending on proximity to the valley roads.
- The enclosing landform and degree of woodland **shelters the landscape from the elements**.

## Landscape TYPE Description

- 9.2 With a general elevation range of between 150m and 350m AOD, this is a highly distinctive landscape characterised by deep, heavily wooded valleys - distinctive dark green fingers that push through the surrounding areas of farmland and moorland.
- 9.3 Woodland defines much of the land cover – predominantly deciduous woodland interspersed with mixed and coniferous areas. There is a considerable amount of Ancient Woodland coverage. Combined with the woodland, the deeply incising valley landform creates a marked sense of enclosure and a shaded, dark landscape character. The woodland cover offers significant opportunities for rearing and shooting game birds. Game



feeding bins and release pens are not an uncommon sight and provide visual references to this increasingly popular sport.

- 9.4 Although there is an impression of continuous woodland cover, there are significant areas of farmland – both on the river floodplain and sloping valley sides. The farmland is defined by small-scale irregular field units given over for pasture. Characteristic field gutter systems are seen on the valley sides. Sheep, cattle and horses graze in the valley with the latter two more common on the floodplain pastures.
- 9.5 The valley floodplains offer a change in landscape scene from the wooded valley sides – the flat, open and smooth pastures leading to riparian trees aligning and identifying the course of the water. The rivers are often fast flowing and littered with large boulders that form stepping-stones across the water. Stone bridges and fords allow road crossings over the rivers and are typically associated with clusters of settlement.
- 9.6 Settlement is characterised by villages and hamlets close to the main river, with farms and some individual properties dispersed throughout the valley sides – often along the spring lines of streams running towards the river. Secondary and primary roads occur at the valley bottoms – following the course of the water.
- 9.7 The degree of tranquillity in the landscape is greatly influenced by the amount of traffic, at any given time, using the valley roads.

## **G1. Bray**

- 9.8 The smallest of the Incised Wooded Valleys, this valley forms part of the much bigger valley system of the River Bray that occurs just outside the National Park boundary. The landscape is heavily wooded with significant tracts of deciduous woodland (e.g. East Down Wood) and coniferous woodland (e.g. Sherracombe Wood). There are areas of small-scale farmland but these are secondary to the wooded character of the landscape. With the exception of

two rural roads (Muxworthy Lane and Whitefield Lane) there are no other transport routes through the landscape. The recreational route of the Macmillan Way West crosses the valley between Whitefield and Holewater. The landscape is unsettled with the exception of farms at Whitefield and Muxworthy both on the boundary of the area at the edge of valley.

## **G2. Mole**

- 9.9 Centred on the River Mole, this is another small character area belonging to the *Incised Wooded Valleys*. Unlike the tributary valley of the River Bray (G1), this area has a greater mix of woodland and farmland. The woodland is predominantly defined by coniferous plantations - at Buttery Wood and Long Wood. The latter stretches along the entire southern valley side from Shortacombe to Heasley Mill. The farmland is characterised by small, irregular field units given over to pasture. Some of the upper reaches of the combes have a scrubby character such as Span Bottom and Lydicombe Bottom.



Heasley Mill

- 9.10 The tiny village of Heasley Mill occurs just inside the National Park boundary and consists of a number of stone and white rendered properties with slate roofs. Surrounding Heasley Mill are a number of disused mines and shafts – relics of the copper and iron mining industry of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## **G3. Barle**

- 9.11 One of the largest character areas of this landscape type, the *River Barle Incised Wooded Valley* stretches from Pixton Park (south of Dulverton), to

Landacre Bridge and the upper reaches of Pennycombe water – both northwest of the village of Withypool.



The River Barle

9.12 The River Barle has a natural character having seen very little intervention from pollution, water abstraction or engineering. Its nature conservation value is wide-ranging and includes including important aquatic and floodplain flora, invertebrates, fish (salmon spawning ground), birds (nesting and feeding habitat for Kingfishers) and mammals (otters being recorded). This is recognised by its national (SSSI) designation.

9.13 The woodland is relatively continuous north of Dulverton but becomes less dense further upstream – broken by farmland. This is especially true of the small combes around the tributary streams that feed into the main watercourse. Small-scale, irregular fields (typically grazed by sheep) define the farmland. The bulk of the woodland comprises deciduous, native species (much Ancient Woodland) but there are some areas of coniferous woodland e.g. Shircombe Slade and New Invention Wood.

9.14 This valley has many visible historic and archaeological landscape features including the Iron Age enclosures of Mounsey Castle and Brewer's Castle and the old river crossings at Landacre and Tarr Steps. Landacre Bridge and Tarr Steps are much-visited beauty spots but the Barle Valley as a whole is popular with visitors - being well served by public rights of way, including the Two Moors Way.

- 9.15 The Barle Valley has limited vehicular access. Aside from the collection of secondary roads at Dulverton, there are only a few places where roads cross the valley. There is no continuous stretch of road that follows the course of the river, as is found in other areas of this landscape type e.g. River Exe.
- 9.16 The town of Dulverton sits at the southern end of the valley. Often referred to as the southern gateway to Exmoor, Dulverton sits adjacent to the Barle Floodplain and is characterised by small-scale shops, pubs and tearooms at its centre with numerous traditional stone and rendered properties (predominantly Victorian) aligning the roads leaving the town - the B3222 and B3223. Towards the outskirts of the town, post-war housing defines much of the approach to Dulverton along the B3222. To the south of Dulverton lies Pixton park – a substantial Georgian country residence surrounded by wooded parkland.
- 9.17 With its picturesque six arch stone bridge crossing the Barle, Withypool is the other settled area within the valley. Located at the foot of the *Open Moorland* of Withypool Common, the village of Withypool consists of traditional and post-war housing strewn along the roadside. Settlement is characterised by scattered farms located on the upper valley sides often in the combes of tributary streams.

#### **G4. Exe**

- 9.18 The River Exe is the largest of the *Incised Wooded Valleys*. It starts as spring fed streams and waters running off the adjacent *Open Moorland* and continues in a south-westerly direction winding its way through the villages of Exford and Winsford, converging with the River Quarme and continuing south, through Exton and Bridgetown before meeting the River Barle, southeast of Dulverton.
- 9.19 As with the River Barle, the Exe is more wooded to the south where there are larger and more continuous tracts of tree cover. Towards the north of the valley, closer to the higher ground of *the Open Moorland*, there is a greater

proportion of land given over to farming - pasture, contained within small hedge-banked fields. The woodland is predominantly deciduous with some areas of coniferous plantation.

9.20 The busy A396 follows the course of the River Exe as far as Exton and then the River Quarme. The road route through the valley offers a number of viewing opportunities – through the hanging woodland on the valley sides, across the open floodplain and down into the fast-flowing river for example. The road is separated from the adjacent floodplain pastures by both stonewalls and metal railings fed through concrete posts. A number of secondary roads feed off the A396 and rise at acute angles up the steep valley sides.

9.21 There are four small-scale settlements within the Exe valley, all of which take their name from the river or aspects of the river – Exford, Winsford, Exton and Bridgetown. The villages of Exford and Winsford are the largest. Exford is traditionally associated with a culture of hunting, shooting and fishing. Its houses, shops and hotels are centred on a large village green. Winsford is where the Winn Brook meets the River Exe and is a popular location for tourists and day visitors with its tea room, pub and picture-postcard scenery. Stone (exposed, painted and rendered) and slate are the most common building materials.



Dropping down to Exford on the B3224.

## **G5. Haddeo**

- 9.22 The *River Haddeo Incised Wooded Valley* is unique in that it is the only valley containing a large open water body – Wimbleball Lake. The valley consists of three tributary valleys extending down from the surrounding Enclosed Farmland to merge with the River Haddeo in the south. The tributary valleys include the River Pulham, which passes the village of Brompton Regis and continues to Hartford where it joins the Haddeo.



Wimbleball Lake.

- 9.23 The Haddeo valley extends as far south as the National Park's boundary (southeast of Dulverton). It is just beyond this boundary that the river meets with the River Exe (north of Exebridge). Much of the valley surrounding the River Haddeo is heavily wooded (Haddon Wood and Storridge Wood) but this dramatically opens up to the east of Hartford where the river has been dammed to form Wimbleball Lake reservoir. Wimbleball Lake is a much-used resource for sailing, fishing, camping, bird watching and walking. From Haddon Hill *Open Moorland* to the south, clear views can be gained of Wimbleball Lake and the wider Haddeo valley system.
- 9.24 Woodland cover reduces significantly towards the upper reaches of the valley but those areas that are wooded combine with the valley landform to create a clear distinction from the adjacent *Enclosed Farmland*.

9.25 Settlement within the landscape is limited to the village of Brompton Regis and the hamlets of Bury, Venn, Upton and Withiel Florey. There are a number of farms occurring at the edge of the valley.

## **G6. Avill**

9.26 The River Avill is the only one of this landscape type to run from the south towards the north of the National Park. It is located north of the River Exe – separated from this other river system by the *Enclosed Farmed Hills* in the Wheddon Cross area. This character area is small with two watercourses and valley systems merging before continuing as one towards the *Porlock – Dunster – Minehead Farmed and Settled Vale*.

9.27 The valley in the west starts at Dunkery Gate (immediately adjacent to the *Open Moorland* of Dunkery Hill). The southern side of the valley is largely covered with deciduous woodland and the A396 cuts along the valley side at Cutcombe Hill. The greatest proportion of land on the northern valley side is however given over to farming – predominantly pasture. The main watercourse is fed by a number of streams with their own small combe valleys that are typically the location of individual farms.

9.28 The valley running from the south is predominantly defined by tree cover in the form of coniferous plantations e.g. Hartcleeve and Highley Plantations at the edge of Lype Hill and Common. The watercourse of this valley extends northwards where it meets with the River Avill (and the western valley) at Steart. From Steart the floodplain widens, the western valley side is open and farmed whilst to the east it is characterised by deciduous woodland. Both the A396 and a minor road (Drapers Way) follow the course of the River Avill before the valley widens to merge with the markedly more open and less wooded landscape of the *Farmed and Settled Vale*.



## Landscape TYPE Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

- 9.29 Strength of Landscape Character is deemed to be **high** overall. These river valleys offer dramatic landforms, picturesque floodplains, dense woodland and fast-flowing scenic rivers that combine to evoke a very definite sense of place and strong contrast in character to surrounding areas of farmland and moor.

### Landscape Condition

- 9.30 There some elements of the landscape judged to be in moderate condition but overall, condition is judged to be good. There are some negative conditional elements (shown in the table below) but overall there is an impression of a landscape with many features and elements in-tact and well managed.

### Landscape Strategy

The overall landscape strategy should be to **conserve** landscape character – the intimate, wooded, sheltered valleys and natural river systems. There are some opportunities for landscape **enhancement** e.g. rhododendron removal, prevention of road urbanisation, removal of fencing along riverbanks and repair of post and rail fencing along roads. Such implemented change would simplify the landscape, improve the overall state of repair/intactness thereby improving landscape quality.

*The following table highlights the **Key Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.*

*Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance)*

appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
<b>Key Issues:</b>		
Loss of natural/semi-natural character of woodland (as well as views into and through woodland areas) due to rhododendron encroachment.	<i>Manage levels of encroachment to prevent mono-species coverage of the ground flora and under storey.</i>	G3. River Barle G4. River Exe
Erection of post and wire fencing along river and stream banks has diluted the natural sense of connection and interrelationship between rivers, riverbanks and flanking meadows and pastures.	<i>Conserve open riverbanks and encourage removal of fencing along watercourses. Particular attention should be given to lengths of fencing that align public footpaths e.g. where recreational enjoyment of the river is being inhibited.</i>	G4. River Exe
Urbanisation of main road corridors through the valleys due to highway signage, kerbing and road markings.	<i>Work closely with the Highways Authority to seek more visually sympathetic/subtle road safety solutions.</i>	G4. River Exe
<b>Secondary Issues:</b>		
Cumulative impact of infrastructure associated with game shoots – pens and feeders are frequently seen, are often conspicuous (brightly coloured feeders) and detract from overall visual amenity.	<i>Minimise the impact of game shooting in the landscape to ensure a less interrupted, smoother landscape scene. Encourage landowners to position feeders and pens in less visually sensitive areas.</i>	G3. River Barle G4. River Exe G5. River Haddeo

## Landscape Character AREA Evaluation

### **G1. Bray and G2. Mole**

- 9.31 A key issue affecting both the valleys of the Bray and Mole are areas scrubbing up close to the springs in the upper combes. This is creating an almost moorland fringe character in places. Some areas of floodplain pasture, appear under grazed.

### **G3. Barle**

- 9.32 Perhaps the area of greatest concern within the River Barle is the landscape surrounding Tarr Steps. Here, due to the popularity of the area with visitors, a car park, toilet block, and new footpath (with signage) has been added to the landscape. Such additions act to formalise or 'tame' the valley by increasing the human footprint or presence in the landscape. With such change comes the threat of creating a 'visitor attraction' character that can undermine the simplicity and natural qualities of the landscape scene.



New visitor facilities at Tarr Steps

### **G4. Exe**

- 9.33 The A396 has a strong influence on this landscape and it is important to monitor the changes to, and additions of, signage and road markings along this route. This will be important to ensure the influence or dominance of the road is not heightened, such that it detracts from the rural character of the valley.



It is important to prevent urbanisation of the A396

- 9.34 Visual cluttering in this river valley is also important. The erection of numerous fences along the Exe riverbank has interrupted the seamless visual connection between river and adjacent meadow pasture. In addition, game bird rearing and release pens could accumulate to a level where they become visually obtrusive. It is these small-scale, incremental changes in the valley that can reduce the visual amenity and landscape quality and detract from the enjoyment of visitors and users.

## **G5. Haddeo**

- 9.35 Recreational pressure, due to the presence of Wimbleball Lake, is perhaps the main force for change within this landscape character area. It is important to ensure that the amenities required to facilitate public enjoyment do not detract from the visual amenity or scenic quality of the area. This is particularly important due to the proximity of visibility from the popular *Open Moorland* area of Haddon Hill. As the valley landform at Wimbleball Lake is very subtle and unwooded, it is more exposed, visually, than other character areas.

## **G6. Avill**

- 9.36 As there are two roads running alongside the river within this relatively small character area, there is a need to ensure that, as with the Exe Valley, the roads do not further encroach on the landscape as a result of highway improvement or change.



## H. Plantations (with heathland) Hills

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Interconnected hills (balls) and ridges covered by dense, coniferous plantations and some mixed woodland.



Far reaching views from Bat's Castle across the Farmed and Settled Vale to the Open Moorland at Dunkery.



Surviving pockets, and some newly restored, heathland form clearings in the woodland and offer greater nature conservation value.



Views to Dunster and beyond to the low coastal landscapes at Minehead and Blue Anchor.



Coniferous trees often breach skylines and restrict views and sense of connection with the wider areas of heather moorland.

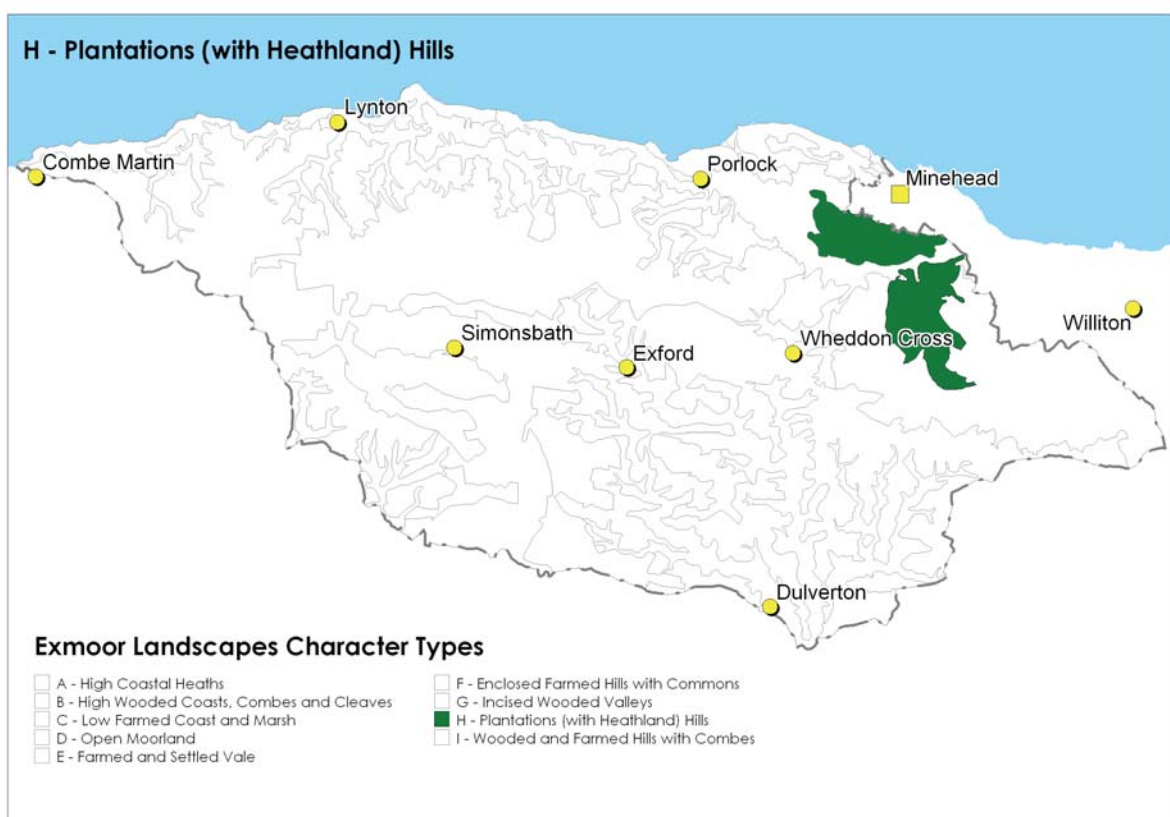


Stone walls and a ha-ha are visual references to the historic Deer Park.

## 10. H: Plantation (with Heathland) Hills

### Location and Boundaries

- 10.1 There is just one Character Area (*Croydon Hill – Wootton Ridge*) belonging to the Plantation (with Heathland) Hills Landscape Type. This area occurs close to the eastern/north-eastern boundary of the National Park, stretching east to west immediately south of the coastal town of Minehead across to Dunster. At Dunster, the hills are broken by the vale landscape surrounding the River Avill and at this point they extend south before terminating near to the village of Luxborough in the Brendon Hills.



### Key Characteristics of the Landscape Type

- **Series of interconnected hills (balls) and ridges at an elevation of 150m – 380m AOD** – moderate to high altitude within Exmoor.
- **Predominantly underlain by Hangman Stone Formation** - fine to medium-grained sandstone and reddish-brown mudstone.



- **Covered by dense, managed coniferous plantations and some mixed woodland.**
- **Some surviving pockets of heathland** (although under pressure from encroachment) and some areas of newly restored heathland.
- **Highly restricted views generally, due to density of tree cover**, although surviving open areas offer inland and coastal views.
- **Tranquil landscape character** – remote in places although human influence evident due to way-marked recreational routes and timber management tracks.

## Landscape Character Description

- 10.2 With an elevation range of between 150m- 380 m AOD, the *Plantation (with Heathland) Hills* landscape of Croydon Hill – Wootton Ridge sits at moderate – high altitude within the context of Exmoor. This is a visually striking landscape of dramatic convex hills that sits proud and pronounced from the adjacent landscape of the *Farmed and Settled Vale*.
- 10.3 Formerly an area of heather moor, the hills (balls) and ridges (cut by a number of combes) are now cloaked by an interconnected series of managed coniferous plantations (and some mixed woodland), making for a conspicuous landscape – the dense, dark green forest forming a strong contrast with surrounding areas in terms of colour, texture and landscape pattern. The conifers are eye-catching but incongruous when viewed as part of the more typical Exmoor landscape scene of gently rolling hills, open tops and winding broadleaved river valleys. There are some important areas of broadleaved woodland – Withycombe Scruffets to Hats Wood, Halse Wood and Whits Wood for example - thought to be ancient semi-natural woodland.
- 10.4 Some areas of heathland survive, such as at Black Hill and there is an ongoing heathland restoration project at Wootton Ridge. Heather can also often be seen aligning the verges of the few roads that cut through the trees as well as

at plantation edges. There are visual clues in the landscape as to its former character – heathy commons bounded by stone faced banks – and these can be found within the plantations.

- 10.5 Due to the felling of coniferous trees, Wootton Ridge has become significantly more open in character, and this has allowed for wider views; the majority of the plantation hills having highly restricted views due to the density of the tree cover. Both Black Hill and Wootton Ridge offer views across to Dunkery Hill and Beacon. These views make it easy to imagine the *Plantation Hills* covered by heather moor and forming part of a much larger northern moorland block within the park. As well as views to Dunkery, the open tracts provide other viewing experiences – along the vale to Dunster, across to Minehead and the Bristol Channel.
- 10.6 Although areas of heather moor still exist on the hills, there is a strong sense of a battle to compete with the plantations, with the added threat of bracken, gorse and self-seeding deciduous trees, which are all acting to further enclose the few surviving open areas that break up the uniformity of the plantations.
- 10.7 As noted there are only a few vehicular roads through the forest. The lack of vehicles, and their movement in the landscape, makes for a very tranquil character. Some parts of the landscape feel remote although this is reduced by presence of way-marked footpaths and bridleways, picnic sites, interpretation boards, and access tracks that cut through the plantations to allow for forestry management. These elements afford a sense of human activity and influence in the hills. It is along these rides and tracks that the vastness of the plantation can be fully appreciated.
- 10.8 On the lower slopes, there are some areas of agricultural land – predominantly pasture although other land uses are evident, such as free-range chicken farming, where portable sheds are visually prominent. Where tributaries of the River Avill cut through the hills, there are small surviving pockets of pasture (and

seasonally wet meadow) although these would appear to be under grazed in places.

- 10.9 There are a number of archaeological sites e.g. Bat's Castle and Gallox Hill. Dunster Deer Park provides clues to historic land uses as do the numerous stone banks, indicating old-field boundaries.
- 10.10 Dunster Castle and Periton Park evoke parkland and former estate character in places.

## **Landscape Evaluation**

### **Strength of Landscape Character**

- 10.11 Strength of Landscape Character is deemed to be moderate – strong. The prominence of the hills and ridges and the extent and uniformity of the plantations make for a landscape of very distinctive character, with a strong sense of place. The strength of character is however reduced to some degree by the sense of transition or state of flux in the landscape. This is emphasised by the loss of heathland where scrubbing up and bracken encroachment is occurring and where there are attempts at heathland restoration. As well as affecting the condition of the landscape (see below), this change makes for uncertainty in terms of present and future character – is it to be a wooded landscape or a heathland landscape or will there be significant tracts of both?

### **Landscape Condition**

- 10.12 The condition of the *Plantation (with Heathland) Hills* is judged to be moderate/declining. This is mainly due to the sense of heathland loss or reduction where scrubbing up, presence of young trees and the encroachment of bracken are occurring. Recently felled areas of coniferous plantation (for heathland restoration) evoke a poorly managed landscape but this is likely to be a temporary impact providing restoration management techniques are successful. There are a number of surviving historic features – such as the stone walls of the ha ha of the Dunster Deer Park, which would appear to be falling

into decline.

## Landscape Strategy

There are three strategies that should be aimed at the Plantation (with Heathland) Hills landscape – **restoration, enhancement and conservation**. Providing appropriate, successful management techniques can be employed, further restoration and enhancement of heathland areas will create greater landscape diversity and offer more of a balanced mix of both wooded and non wooded areas – a true heathland-woodland mosaic. This will, in turn, bring greater visual amenity in the form of wider views and, with that, appreciation of connectivity to surrounding inland and coastal landscapes. Importantly, a greater sense of connection with nearby moorland area (at Dunkery) will be realised – enhancing the presence of moorland on Exmoor. Conservation of a number of landscape features is also important – existing view lines such as that from Black Hill to Dunster and on to the coast is an example as is the sense of calm and tranquillity due to the lack of vehicular and other noise intrusions. Every effort should be made to conserve and enhance surviving historic features and where these have eroded, opportunities for restoration should be explored e.g. medieval deer hunting park landscape which provides important references to previous land uses (ha-ha) as well as historic and cultural depth

The following table highlights the **Key Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.

Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives
<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<b>Loss of texture and colour of heath land areas due to encroachment of bracken</b>	<b>Continue with existing heath land restoration schemes to reinstate and extend</b>

<b>and gorse, coniferous and deciduous woodland species.</b>	<i>areas of heath land cover – working, with forestry interests, towards a woodland-heath land mosaic for greater visual diversity.</i>
<b>Loss of views and reduced quality and extent of surviving views from heath land areas due to intervening encroaching vegetation such as gorse and coniferous trees that protrude above ridgelines.</b>	<i>Restore open views from heath land areas through selected felling of conifers breaching ridgelines (blocking views) and removal of gorse. This will improve visibility across the heath land and improve visual connection with other heath land areas e.g. views across to Dunkery.</i>
<b>Threats to the setting of archaeological features in the landscape due to woodland and scrub encroachment.</b>	<i>Manage bracken and gorse encroachment and employ selective tree felling to restore/create open settings to important archaeological features and sites.</i>
<b>Secondary Issues:</b>	
Lack of management (lack of grazing) of surviving pockets of pasture aligning tributary streams – probably as a result of poor access.	<i>Encourage traditional grazing of the floodplain area - conserving and enhancing flanking meadows and pastures.</i>
Poor visual amenity in areas of ongoing heath land restoration due to burning and cutting (scorched stumps and damaged ground).	<i>Where possible and appropriate, identify future heath land restoration sites where there would be least adverse visual impact.</i>
Diluted expression of historic landscape features e.g. decline of surviving stone faced banks within the plantations.	<i>Reinforce the historic landscape grain through a process of restoration and enhancement.</i>





## I. Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes

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Entrance to the National Park at Elworthy Cross offers clear views over the well-wooded hills and farmland.



Coniferous and deciduous woodland drapes over the hilltops. Farms and settlements nestle in the foothills.



Hamlets and small villages are strung along the well-treed intimate valley floors.



The linear and geometric lines of game crops are often at odds with the rounded topography and organic forms in the landscape.



Game feeders (often brightly coloured) are seen throughout the landscape.

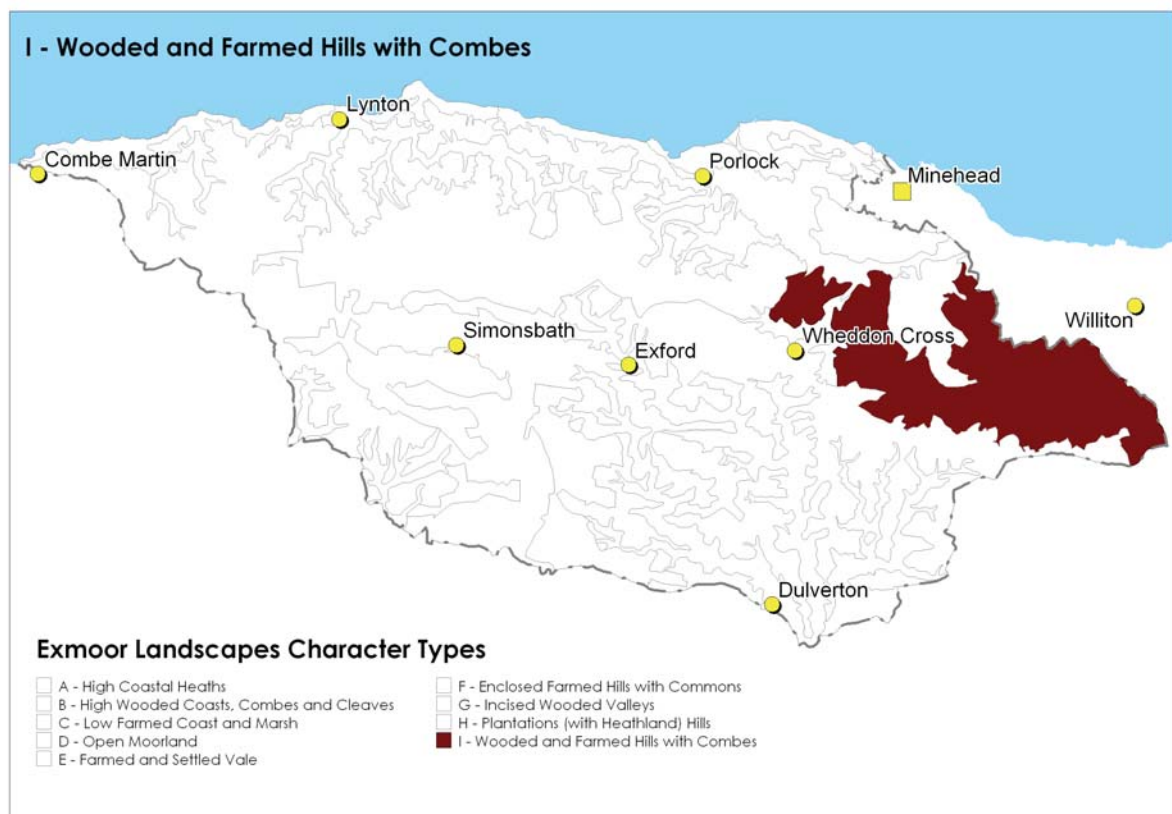


High open hills provide clear views to the Bristol Channel and to prominent vertical features sited not far from the National Park boundary.

## 11. I: Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes

### Location and Boundaries

- 11.1 There is just one character area of the **Wooded Hills and Farmed Hills with Combes** landscape type. This area occurs in the eastern half of the National Park – defining the eastern boundary between Carhampton and Elworthy and extending west to form the foothills of Dunkery Hill. Although for the most part uninterrupted, the *Wooded and Farmed Hills and Combes* landscape is intersected in the northwest of the area by the *River Avill Incised Wooded Valley*. Due to its location on the eastern boundary of the National Park, and its series of elevated hills, this landscape offers clear views beyond the National Park into West Somerset and across the Bristol Channel to Wales.



### Key Characteristics

- Elevation ranging from **100m AOD to almost 400m AOD** with a strongly articulated rounded landform.
- **Low-lying narrow combe valley floors** meet **steep valley sides** that give rise to a series of **interconnected rounded hills**.

- Open hilltops offer **extensive coastal and inland panoramas**.
- The landscape has **significant woodland cover**– deciduous, coniferous and mixed – ranging from geometric plantations to sinuous swathes.
- **Geological strata of slate, siltstones and sandstones** predominantly underlie this landscape but there are localised areas of limestone in the river valleys.
- The rolling hillsides reveal a **clear pattern of field enclosure**.
- **Fields are medium-sized and delineated by banked, mixed hedges**.
- The secondary roads and rural lanes connect the **linear hamlets and small villages dispersed throughout the area** – Luxborough, Treborough, Roadwater and Monksilver for example that nestle in the valley bottoms.
- **Parkland character** due to the Grade II listed Parks and Gardens surrounding **Nettlecombe Court and Deer Park**.

## Landscape Character Description

- 11.2 Perhaps the most striking feature of the Wooded Hills and Combes landscape type is its landform. With elevation ranging from 100m AOD to almost 400m AOD, low-lying narrow combe valley floors, meet steep valley sides that give rise to a series of interconnected rounded hills. This significant elevation range and associated landform variation creates a changing sense of enclosure and a series of unravelling, surprise views from dark, well-wooded combes to open hilltops that offer extensive coastal and inland panoramas – across the Quantock Hills AONB for example.
- 11.3 The landscape has significant woodland cover – deciduous, coniferous and mixed. The pattern and size of woodland is varied, ranging from small irregular broadleaf and mixed woodland swathes within the combes to large geometric coniferous blocks that drape over the hilltops. The largest areas of coniferous plantation are located close to and along the southern boundary – Kennisham Hill, Langham Hill, Parson's Close and Hazery Plantations for example. Although significantly smaller in size (and therefore forming a key feature of this



landscape type) these plantation areas nonetheless have a strong visual connectivity with the Plantation Hills landscape type that lies to the north.

- 11.4 The rolling hillsides reveal a clear pattern of field enclosure. Fields are medium-sized and generally delineated by banked, mixed hedges (particularly on lower ground). Beech hedges occur on the higher slopes e.g. in the south of the area where the landscape merges with the Enclosed Farmed Hills. Hedgerow trees make an important contribution to the overall well-treed character of the landscape – mature beech and oak standards are eye-catching features. Characteristic field gutter systems are seen within this landscape.
- 11.5 The land use is principally defined by agriculture – predominantly improved pasture but interspersed with arable (cereal and root). Recreation in the form of game shooting also has a marked influence on landscape character. The presence and continued planting of game crops create distinctive linear and geometric shapes that, in places, have an awkward interface with the very organic, rounded shapes of the landform.
- 11.6 The mix of green improved pastures, strong red soils of ploughed fields, dark green of woodland blocks and views of the sea makes for a very colourful and highly textured landscape with significant variety of scene.
- 11.7 A geological stratum of slate, siltstones and sandstones predominantly underlie this landscape but there are localised areas of limestone in the river valleys. The underlying geology gives rise to well-drained fine loamy or fine silty soils.



Lime kiln and disused quarries at Treborough.

- 11.8 At the hamlet of Nettlecombe, there is a distinct parkland character due to the presence of Nettlecombe Court and Deer park. The 16<sup>th</sup> century red sandstone former manor house of Nettlecombe Court (Grade 1 listed) is surrounded by Grade II listed Parks and Gardens. According to the Parks and Garden Register, it is a 'late 18<sup>th</sup> century park, incorporating extensive 16/17<sup>th</sup> century deer parks and wood pasture, around a country house'.
- 11.9 An extract from 'J C Loudon, In search of English Gardens: The Travels of John Claudius Loudon and his wife Jane' (National Trust Publications 1990 pp226-8), provides a strong description of the landscape surrounding Nettlecombe and of the wider character area of the *Brendon Hills Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes*: "*we were astonished and delighted with the view from the windows of the house, looking up the steep sides of the rounded hills that rose on every side, and which were mostly crowned with old oak woods. Rounded hills covered with grass to the top, with winding valleys having sloping sides; the valleys more or less wide, and the sides of hills differing in degrees to steepness; occasionally with water in the bottom in the form of a stream or brook...*".
- 11.10 There are no major roads crossing through the landscape although the B3190, running from Raleigh's Cross towards Watchet, supports relatively heavy traffic flow at times. The secondary roads and rural lanes defining the road network typically follow the course of the waters and small-scale valleys. These roads connect the numerous hamlets and small villages that are dispersed throughout the area – Luxborough, Treborough, Roadwater and Monksilver for example. These settlements are nestled in the combe bottoms and are both linear (following the course of the waters) such as Roadwater and in some instances nucleated at heads of the river valleys. Use of building materials reflects the underlying geology with exposed red sandstone, pink and white painted stone and render, and slate roofs reflects the local geology and provides a locally distinctive village character. In recent housing development, such as at Luxborough, traditional building materials have been used in an attempt to strengthen character and sense of place.



Modern housing at Luxborough (using locally distinctive slate and red sandstone).

## Landscape Evaluation

### Strength of Landscape Character

11.11 The Brendon Hills landscape is highly distinctive and of **strong** landscape character overall. A defining feature is the landform – the steep slopes, rounded summits and enclosed combe valleys offering inspiring change of scene yet having a seamless quality that unifies the landscape. Woodland cover also plays a key role in defining the character of the landscape – coniferous blocks on high ground and enclosing broadleaf woodland in the combes respectively, provide distinctive wooded skylines and enclosed, leafy valley sides and floors. Some features of the landscape have the potential to weaken landscape character – the straight, blunt lines of game crops threaten the rounded, sinuous, organic form of the landscape for example. Infrastructure associated with the game shoots is also having a cumulative impact – pens and feeders are frequently seen elements in the landscape, which are often conspicuous (brightly coloured feeders). The erection of prominent vertical elements in the landscape surrounding the National Park, are also having an influence on local skylines as well as wider views - radio station masts at Brendon Hills Farm and a wireless station at Elworthy Barrows are prominent masts with latticed towers.

## Landscape Condition

- 11.12 The condition of the *Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes* is judged to be **moderate**. As with many landscapes in the National Park, boundaries are in decline in places. This is true of some hedgerow sections and also of some iron estate railings surrounding Nettlecombe Court – key references to the estate and parkland influence on the landscape.



Declining estate railing at Nettlecombe.

## Landscape Strategy

There are three strategies that should be aimed at the Plantation Hills landscape – **restoration, enhancement and conservation**. Providing appropriate, successful management techniques can be employed, further restoration and enhancement of heathland areas will create greater landscape diversity and offer more of a balanced mix of both wooded and non wooded areas – a true heathland-woodland mosaic. This will, in turn, bring greater visual amenity in the form of wider views and, with that, appreciation of connectivity to surrounding inland and coastal landscapes. Importantly, a greater sense of connection with nearby moorland area (at Dunkery) will be realised – enhancing the presence of moorland on Exmoor. Conservation of a number of landscape features is also important – existing view lines such as that from Black Hill to Dunster and on to the coast is an example as is the sense of calm and tranquillity due to the lack of vehicular and other noise intrusions. Every effort should be made to conserve and enhance surviving historic features and where these have eroded, opportunities for restoration should be explored e.g. medieval deer hunting park landscape which provides important references to previous land uses (ha-ha) as well as historic and cultural depth.



The following table highlights the **Key Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.

Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance) appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives
<b>Key Issues:</b>	
<p>The straight edges and blunt lines of game crops threaten to dilute the rounded, sinuous, organic form of the landscape.</p>	<p>Conserve the organic, rounded shapes of the landscape – working with landowners to encourage more sensitive design of game crop planting e.g. responding to landform and field shape. Encourage game crop planting in less visually sensitive areas – away from the upper slopes and rounded hilltops.</p>
<p>Cumulative impact of infrastructure associated with the game shoots – pens and feeders are frequently seen, are often conspicuous (brightly coloured feeders) and detract from overall visual amenity.</p>	<p>Minimise the impact of game shooting in the landscape to ensure a less interrupted, smoother landscape scene. Encourage landowners to position feeders and pens in less visually sensitive areas.</p>
<p>The erection of prominent vertical elements in the adjacent landscape. Although sited outside the National Park boundary these are having a notable influence on local skylines as well as wider views. Radio station masts at</p>	<p>Protect sensitive skylines and the integrity of views by preventing the positioning of prominent vertical features that would have an adverse effect on landscape character. There is a need to work with neighbouring planning authorities to ensure tighter control</p>

<p><b>Brendon Hills Farm and a wireless station at Elworthy Barrows are examples of large, prominent masts with latticed towers that vary in shape and structure and have a cluttering effect above the treeline.</b></p>	<p><i>(through a consistent, cross-boundary, proactive approach) over location of prominent vertical elements such as communication masts and wind turbines.</i></p>
<p><b>Secondary Issues:</b></p>	
<p>Decline of estate railings surrounding the historic, designed landscape of Nettlecombe Court.</p>	<p><i>Maintain the historic estate and parkland influences in the landscape by conserving and repairing estate railings and other small scale features that offer references to historic landscape character.</i></p>
<p>Potential for energy cropping (miscanthus and short rotation coppice).</p>	<p>Undertake targeted capacity and sensitivity study to understand impact on the landscape.</p>