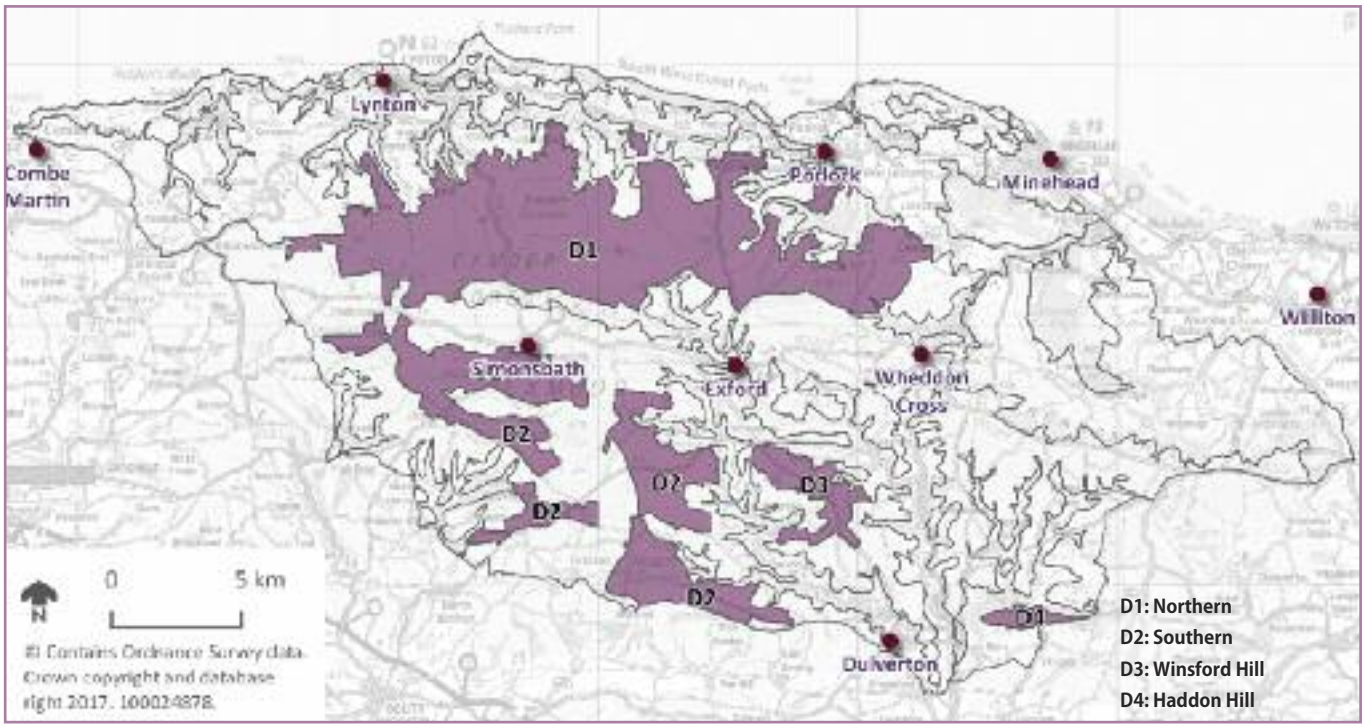
Landscape Character Type D: **Open Moorland**

Brendon Common from Two Gates

Summary Description

This Landscape Character Type (LCT) comprises the open, exposed landscape of Exmoor's inland heather and grass moorland, and is predominantly located in the central part of the National Park. An uninterrupted sweep of moorland extends from the foothills of Dunkery Beacon in the east to Challacombe Common in the west. To the south, there are several areas of more fragmented moorland between Shoulsbarrow Common and East Anstey Common. There are also two smaller outlying Open Moorland areas to the east at Winsford Hill and Haddon Hill. In total there are four distinct Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within the LCT. 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 LCT. Settlement within the Open Moorland LCT is limited to very occasional scattered farms. Although it is crossed by some roads, much of the LCT is inaccessible by vehicle.

Mostly a former royal hunting forest, the Open Moorland is a powerful, inspiring landscape - of large scale, expanse, elevation and exposure - which is recognised by locals and visitors alike as integral to Exmoor's character. Its distinctive, smooth skylines form the backdrop to views throughout the National Park. Views within the Open Moorland are panoramic with simple level horizons and big expansive skies. The land cover of heather and grassland cover provide variations in colour, texture and movement. This is also a landscape of great antiquity, containing a rich and perceivable tapestry of history from early prehistoric times to the present day.



Key Characteristics of the Open Moorland

- Underlying geology comprising broad east-west bands of sandstones, slates and siltstones, with some higher areas capped with peat.
- 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), with gently meandering streams of varied character issuing from a large number of moorland springs.
- Land cover of heather and grass moor, used as rough grazing by Exmoor ponies, sheep and cattle.
- A rich ecological resource comprising a mosaic of semi-natural moorland habitats, including blanket bog, heath and grassland, as well as patches of bracken, gorse and scrub.
- Trees limited to lines of beech, isolated streamside trees, occasional stands of conifers and tree clumps in the combes.
- An absence of settlement, with a few isolated farms on the peripheries.
- A predominantly open landscape, with occasional stone walls, overgrown beech hedges or post and wire fences. Relict features of past activities include drains, canals and sheep stells.
- A rich diversity of prehistoric sites, including stone settings which appear to be unique to Exmoor.
- A landscape with a long association with hunting and grazing from its origins as a royal forest, which continues today.
- Outstanding panoramic views over the open moorland and beyond. The distinctive smooth horizons of the open moorland also form backdrops to views throughout the National Park.
- Distinctive seasonal colour and texture e.g. purple heather and golden molinia.
- An exposed, expansive, windswept landscape which offers a high degree of tranquillity and remoteness, and an extremely strong sense of place.
- Cultural associations with artists and writers, including Alfred Munnings and R. D. Blackmore.

Natural Landscape Features

This LCT occupies the highest land within the National Park, with Dunkery Beacon the highest point. The broad east-west ridge, which runs between Dunkery Beacon in the east and The Chains in the west, forms the watershed which divides the land draining north to the Bristol Channel from the land draining south into the Exe and Taw. The landform is relatively simple, and comprises a series of rolling plateaux and ridges, cut by occasional steep-sided valleys. The ridges form the distinctive smooth, convex, gently rolling skyline which is so characteristic of Exmoor. The Open Moorland also contains a number of Exmoor's distinctive geomorphological features, including The Punchbowl on Winsford Hill and peri-glacial formations such as Alse Barrow, Flexbarrow, Kingsland Goyle, Long Chains Combe and Woodbarrow Hangings.

Many springs rise on the Open Moorland, feeding streams which gently meander through steep-sided valleys. From medieval times until the 1960s, the natural drainage processes on the moor were modified to improve the land for agriculture. This process is now being reversed through the 'Exmoor Mires Project' which facilitates the blocking of moorland drains in an attempt to recreate wet peat habitats and improve the Open Moorland's water storage capacity.

The Open Moorland contains extensive areas of habitats which are nationally and internationally designated, and which support a very wide variety of species of plants, insects, birds and butterflies. These habitats include heather moorland (for example Dunkery Beacon) and grass moor (for example The Chains). There are also smaller areas of blanket bog and valley mire habitats. Due to changes in grazing patterns and moorland management practices, there are some areas of Open Moorland where bracken and scrub is encroaching on heath and grassland habitats. Tree cover is relatively sparse. It includes occasional lines of distinctive wind-sculpted beech trees along banks, as well as stands of hawthorn such as at Farley Water. Other mixed native species occur in ribbons such as at Dunkery, or clothe the slopes as at Badgworthy Water. There are occasional clumps of willow and alder alongside streams and in the combes. There are also occasional copses and shelter belts of non-native conifers planted in the twentieth century.

Larger animals living on the moors include sheep, cattle, iconic Exmoor ponies and red deer. There are about 3000 red deer on Exmoor, living in moorland and farmland, and using woodlands for cover. Field sports remain a popular pastime and are an important element of local culture and economy.

Flexbarrow, in the upper Barle valley

Sphagnum moss vegetation, The Chains

Ponies grazing on heather moor, Brendan Common

Grass moor and wind-sculpted beech tree, The Chains

Designated Nature Conservation Sites

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Exmoor Heaths (D1, D2, D3, D4)
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	North Exmoor (D1, D2); River Lyn (D1); South Exmoor (D2, D3, D4)
County / Local Wildlife Site (C/LWS)	Numerous sites in all LCAs, often located on fringes of LCT, including farmland, grassland and wetland sites

National Nature Reserve (NNR)	Dunkery and Horner Wood (D1)
Local Geological Site (LGS)	Pinkworthy (D1); Upper Willingford Gully (D2); River Barle at Sherdon (D2); Wheal Eliza Mine (D2); Cow Castle (D2); Cornham Ford (D2); Roman Lode Gully (D2)
Biosphere Reserve	North Devon Biosphere Reserve Transition Zone (D1, D2)

Historic Landscape Features and the Built Environment

The moderate level of agricultural improvement within this landscape has enabled the survival of a wealth of archaeological sites covering several thousand years. There are concentrations of Scheduled Monuments within this LCT, and also several Principal Archaeological Landscapes. The vast majority of the Open Moorland is rough grazing land, with the current enclosure pattern (or lack thereof) dating from the early medieval period or earlier. A network of tracks cross the moor, some of which may be very ancient in origin. Several such tracks meet at Alderman's Barrow.

This LCT contains the greatest assemblage of prehistoric landscapes within the National Park. One of the earliest known sites (thought to be Mesolithic) is at Hawkcombe Head, where over 10,000 pieces of flint flakes from tool-making have been discovered. There are numerous sites thought to date to the late Neolithic to Middle Bronze Age within the Open Moorland, including a stone circle on Porlock Allotment, standing stones, stone rows, cairns (both funerary and resulting from field clearance), stone settings in various formations, clusters of barrows and remnants of field systems. There is also a possible Neolithic enclosure at Chapman Barrows.

By the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, a large part of Exmoor was a royal hunting forest, uninhabited and subject to Forest law. The area covered by the Forest gradually reduced in size, until by 1400 it was equivalent to today's parish of Exmoor. The boundary of the royal forest often

followed earlier features, such as barrows, but otherwise has left few traces in the landscape. However, there are visible remains of some medieval farmsteads and their surrounding field systems which were subsequently abandoned, such as Badgworthy. Following their purchase of the Forest between 1818-1820, the Knight family and their tenants continued to graze livestock on the open moor, and some features from this era are still visible, such as their estate wall, and sheepfolds. Their attempts to make the open moor into productive farmland also had a big impact on the landscape, particularly the extensive drainage schemes, which have left their visible mark as networks of shallow ditches and gullies. There are very few buildings within the Open Moorland, although there are some farms (including Knight farms) on the peripheries, located within adjoining LCTs. The ruins of Larkbarrow Farm are within the Open Moorland.

Surrounding the Royal Forest were the common lands of the parishes which frame the moor. Commoners from these parishes had a complicated system of rights to use the common land, which included grazing animals, cutting peat for domestic fuel, and cutting vegetation for use as animal fodder and bedding. Commons were often marked by straight, stone-faced hedgebanks which can still be seen, often now patched with post-and-wire fencing, and topped with gnarled and wind-sculpted beech trees. There are extensive ridge and furrow earthworks, particularly on the southern commons (D2) and Winsford Hill (D3), suggesting that they were ploughed for crops in medieval times.

Traces survive of industrial processes on the Open Moorland, including shafts and spoil tips from post-medieval copper and iron mines, and earthworks of the unfinished Simonsbath-Porlock railway. World War Two saw damage to some archaeology, as large parts of the area were used for training purposes. Protected sites were marked with metal 'antiquity stars' on poles. Other sites such as Larkbarrow Farm were used as targets and almost completely destroyed.

Alderman's Barrow, with antiquity star

Stone circle, Porlock Allotment

Hoaroak deserted medieval farm and field system © Historic England Archive

Designated Cultural Heritage Sites

Scheduled Monuments	Numerous, including prehistoric barrows and cairns (D1, D2, D3); stone settings and rows (D1, D2); stone circles (D1, D2); Iron-Age sites (D1, D2); inscribed stone (D2); deserted medieval farms and field systems (D1, D2); mining sites (D2)
Principal Archaeological Landscapes	*Relict Prehistoric Landscapes*: Lanacombe (D1); Furzehill (D1); Chapman Barrows & Woodbarrow Complex (D1); Badgworthy Hill (D1); Trout Hill & Pinford (D1); Great Hill & Honeycombe Hill (D1); Porlock Allotment (D1); Hawkcombe Head (D1); Alderman's Barrow & Madacombe (D1); Codsend & Dunkery (D1); Robin & Joaney How (D1); Mansley Combe (D1); Larkbarrow & Tom's Hill (D1); Brockwell Pits (D1); Kitnor Heath (D1);Shoulsbury (D2); Setta Barrow, Five Barrows & Two Barrows (D2); Cow Castle (D2). *Medieval Farming systems*: Radworthy (D1); Badgworthy (D1); Mansley Combe (D1); Pickedstones (D2); Molland Moor (D2); Winsford Hill (D3); *Parliamentary enclosure/ reclamation/ mining*: Larkbarrow & Tom's Hill (D1); Burcombe (D2); Wheal Eliza (D2). *Military Training*: Brendon Common (D1). *Palaeo-environmental:* Trout Hill & Pinford (D1); Great Hill & Honeycombe Hill (D1); Alderman's Barrow & Madacombe (D1); Larkbarrow & Tom's Hill (D1); Setta Barrow, Five Barrows & Two Barrows (D2); Molland Moor (D2)

Landscape Perceptions and Cultural Associations

Perceptual qualities of the landscape

Exmoor's Open Moorlands have an extraordinarily large scale and openness, and (away from roads) have levels of tranquillity, remoteness and wildness which are rarely experienced in southern England. The sounds of insects and skylarks are part of the character of the moors, and add to the rich experience, which touches all senses and creates a feeling of spiritual enrichment.

This is an expansive, elevated, windswept landscape which can exhilarate and inspire, as well as creating a rare sense of unrestrained freedom. It also has an almost seamless character, with few obvious interruptions. There are some old hedge banks in places, but these are subtle and often only apparent in close proximity. Some overgrown beech hedge banks are visible on the skylines. This landscape is very popular with walkers, and a number of footpaths, bridleways and long-distance routes, including the Macmillan Way West, Tarka Trail and Two Moors Way cross the Open Moorland. The roads which cross the moor are also popular for recreational drives and contain numerous informal parking areas where motorists can pause and enjoy the views.

Parts of the moor, particularly where there are traces of former habitation such as at Badgworthy, Larkbarrow and Hoaroak, have an evocative feel, as homes gradually revert to moorland. There is also a strong connection with the prehistoric landscape features, which can be appreciated in a wider context, and with few distractions.

Weather conditions have a profound effect on the qualities of the landscape. When cloud is low the Open Moorland can feel hostile and threatening, with a heightened sense of challenge and danger. Seasonal changes are also profound, with the summer colours of the purple heather and yellow gorse particularly vivid, and the winter colours a breathtaking array of coppers and golds. The varying land cover of heather, grass, bracken, gorse and scrub also creates different patterns, textures and sounds in the landscape, with Molinia appearing to 'ripple' and to sigh in the wind. The area has exceptionally dark night skies with little light pollution, and is now an international dark sky reserve with outstanding opportunities for star-gazing.

The '*Exmoor Landscape Perceptions Study*' identified a wide range of descriptions of the Open Moorland, including *beautiful, colourful, spacious, wild, sense of space, rolling, remote, purple hues, picturesque, unpolluted, mindblowing, exhilarating, tranquil, clear, calm, vast* and *awe-inspiring*. Emotional responses to the landscape included *relaxed, free, uplifted, inspired, glad, invigorated, awed, close to the sky, expectant, motivated* and *connected to the earth*.

Heather in flower on Dunkery Beacon

Key views, viewpoints and landmarks

The smooth, uncluttered, rolling horizons are fundamental to views of the Open Moorland creating gently level unbroken horizons that emphasise the scale of the landscape. They form a backdrop to many views within the National Park, and are a key part of Exmoor's character. For example, the distinctive silhouette of Dunkery Beacon and its cairn are a feature in views from a large area, and as a landmark contribute to both orientation and sense of place. Similarly, the rounded form of Haddon Hill is a prominent feature in the south-east of the National Park. The Open Moorland of Molland Common and East and Anstey Common forms the northern horizon in views from outside the National Park boundary, where its openness and simplicity contrasts with the small-scale enclosed landscape below.

The panoramic views from the Open Moorland typically take in a number of surrounding landscape types, including farmland, woodland and coast. Often these are long views which extend beyond the National Park boundary. However, there are some areas where the only view is one of moorland expanse, stretching as far as the eye can see. These areas often have the greatest sense of remoteness and solitude.

Dunkery Beacon from Bratton Ball

View south-west out of the National Park from Anstey Common. Dartmoor is on the horizon.

Cultural Associations

Exmoor's Open Moorland has inspired writers and artists for centuries, although it is interesting to note that this has not always been the case. In his book A Tour through the *Whole Islands of Great Britain* (1660), Daniel Defoe wrote:

> *Leaving the coast, we came, in our going southward, to the great river Exe or Isca, which rises in the hills on this north side of the county; the country it rises in, is called Exmore, Camden calls it a filthy, barren ground, and, indeed so it is...*

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw an increasing appreciation of wild landscapes, and in Lorna Doone, R.D. Blackmore did a great deal to raise public awareness and appreciation of Exmoor and its unique landscapes. The remarkably well-preserved medieval settlement at Badgworthy Water inspired Doone Village.

> *For she stood at the head of a deep green valley, carved from out the mountains in a perfect oval, with a fence of sheer rock standing round it, eighty feet or a hundred high; from whose brink black wooded hills swept up to the sky-line. By her side a little river glided out from underground with a soft dark babble, unawares of daylight; then growing brighter, lapsed away, and fell into the valley. There, as it ran down the meadow, alders*

stood on either marge, and grass was blading out upon it, and yellow tufts of rushes gathered, looking at the hurry. But further down, on either bank, were covered houses, built of stone, square and roughly cornered, set as if the brook were meant to be the street between them...

From *Lorna Doone*, Chapter 4 by R.D. Blackmore

The Novel 'Tarka the Otter' by Henry Williamson (1927) also contains evocative descriptions of Exmoor's Open Moorlands:

When the bees' feet shake the bells of the heather, and the ruddy strings of the sap-stealing dodder are twined about the green spikes of the furze, it is summertime on the commons. Exmoor is the high country of the winds...

From *Tarka the Otter,* Ch. 14, by Henry Williamson.

Numerous artists have attempted to capture the landscape and atmosphere of the Open Moorland, including Alfred Munnings, Cecil Aldin and Frederick Widgery. Many artists have also portrayed the hunting and riding scenes for which Exmoor is so well-known.

Lady Munnings riding a Grey Hunter, side saddle, with her dogs on Exmoor, 1924. Alfred Munnings

Natural Assets and Ecosystem Services

The extensive areas of peat found within the Open Moorland LCT are a significant Natural Capital Asset both within and beyond Exmoor, and the LCT is an important provider of public goods. Healthy peat provides a number of important ecosystem services, including sequestration (storage) of carbon thereby preventing its release into the atmosphere and helping to reduce rates of climate change. The peat also stores water and regulates water flow; rainwater is soaked up by the peat, which acts like a giant sponge. This slows down the rate that water runs into streams and rivers, helping to ameliorate flooding downstream. Re-wetting projects are currently underway that involve the blocking of historic artificial drains on the moor, and aim to facilitate water storage. The small reservoir at Pinkery Pond also has a water storage function. Water storage and regulation of water flows is an important tool in mitigating the effects of climate change, particularly if rainfall and storm events increase. Healthy peat is important for biodiversity, supporting a wide variety of plant, insect, animal and bird species.

This LCT plays an important role in delivering a number of cultural ecosystem services. The extensive areas of access land within this LCT, along with the network of paths, roads and long distance routes, provide an important recreational resource and many health benefits. They enable people to visit and enjoy this spectacular landscape, and to benefit from levels of tranquillity, remoteness and dark night skies which are rarely experienced in southern England. The distinctive landscapes of this LCT are important for people's sense of place and its rich archaeology provides a sense of history and opportunities for learning.

Historically, the Open Moorland has provided additional ecosystem services through the traditional commoners' rights, as described above. Common land would have provided peat for fuel, heather and gorse for animal fodder, and bracken for animal bedding. Gorse was also traditionally used as fuel for cooking, because it burns at high temperatures.

Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) within this LCT

Within the Open Moorland LCT, there are four distinctive LCAs, each with a unique 'sense of place'. Some also have distinctive landscape characteristics, which are included in the following descriptions. Any LCA-specific management or planning recommendations are identified within the recommendations at the end of this LCT profile.

Left: Sunrise, Ridge Road by Pauline Pearce. The scene is on Molland Common, close to the southern boundary of the National Park

LCA D1: Northern Moorland

Looking East above Madacombe

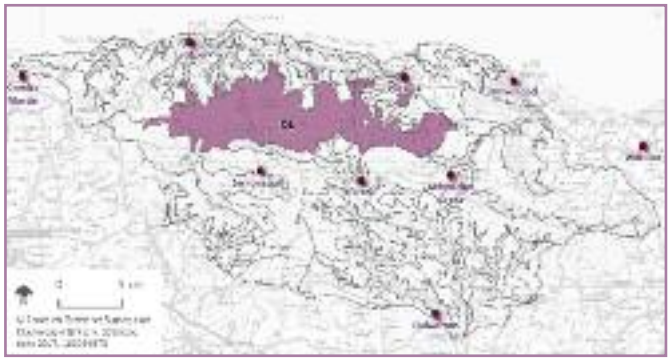
Description

Forming the largest area of moorland on Exmoor, this LCA extends from the foothills of Dunkery Beacon in the east to Homer Common in the west. It is a continuous tract of moorland, uninterrupted by landscapes of different character. Fundamental to its character are a 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 LCT.

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 landform 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 across Dunkery and Horner Wood to Porlock Bay and across the Plantation (with Heathland) Hills to Dunster. The western part of the area is known as The Chains, and is an extensive area of grass moor, with little access other than on foot. It offers an exceptional sense of remoteness, and from here there are long views west over patchworks of fields. Between Dunkery and The Chains, the Middle Moor forms the central part of the moorland spine. This is another extensive and remote area of moorland, and encompasses the headwaters of several valleys including Hoaroak Water and Badgworthy Water- part of the culturally-significant landscape associated with 'Lorna Doone'.

The LCA is exceptional archaeologically, containing 19 Principal Archaeological Landscapes. Most of these are relict prehistoric landscapes, but there are also examples of medieval farming systems (Radworthy, Badgworthy and Mansley Combe) and a former military training site (Brendon Common).

Extensive areas of this LCA have been target areas for re-wetting the moor through the Exmoor Mires Project. The restoration of mires aims to reduce water runoff to improve the condition of the peat. It can result in changes to the landscape (e.g. altering species composition) and the wetter ground may also potentially affect accessibility.



LCA D2: Southern Moorland

Cornham Brake and the upper reaches of the River Barle, near Simonsbath

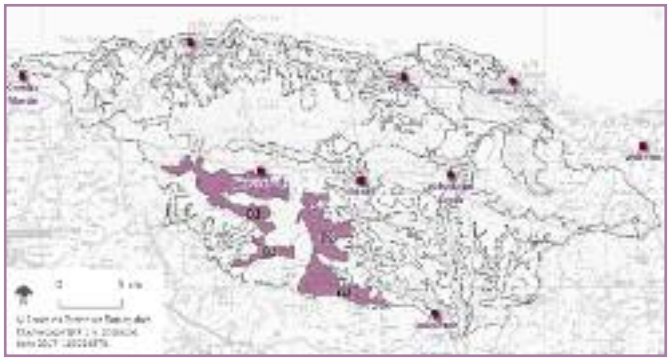
Description

The Southern Open Moorland is the second largest LCA within the Open Moorland LCT. Occurring within the southern half of the National Park, this LCA has a greater sense of fragmentation than the Northern . This is due to improvement of moorland to form an enclosed farmed landscape, which breaks up the continuity of the moor.

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.

The Southern Open Moorland LCA is uninhabited, but the village of Withypool (within the adjacent LCT:G Incised Wooded River Valleys) has a marked influence on the character of the moorland with housing development extending up onto the foothills of Withypool Hill. There are a number of secondary roads which provide access to the Southern Moorland. For example, the Ridge Road 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). This LCA is also a focus for peat restoration through the Exmoor Mires Project, with an extensive area to the south of Simonsbath.

Seven Principal Archaeological Landscapes occur within the Southern Open Moorland LCA Three (including the Iron-Age earthwork at Cow Castle) are prehistoric sites; two are medieval farming systems (Pickedstones/ Bradimoor and Molland Moor), and two are industrial. Wheal Eliza contains the remains of a copper and iron mine (in production until the early 1900s) and Burcombe has evidence of exploitation for minerals from the Bronze Age to the early twentieth century.



LCA D3: Winsford Hill

A typical scene on Winsford Hill near Spire Cross

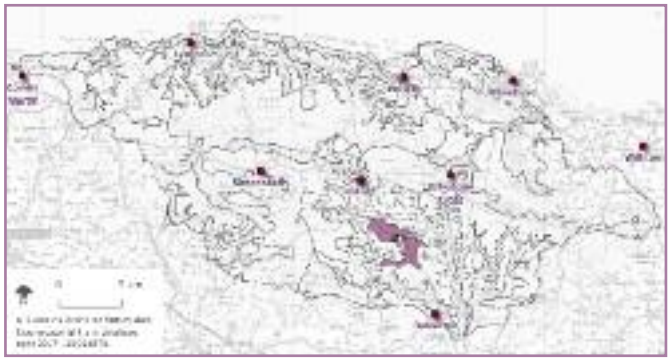
Description

Winsford Hill is one of the smaller areas of 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, it sits as a detached moorland area, immediately surrounded by LCT:G Incised Wooded River Valleys (River Barle and River Exe) and LCT:F Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons.

The B3223 cuts north-west to south-east through the landscape, forming a clear line across the moor's ridge with the land falling away on either side. Cattle grids at Comer's Gate and Mounsey Hill Gate define entrances to the moorland on the B3223 and create a clear sense of arrival. The location and elevation of the road provides views into the contrasting farmed and wooded valley landscapes. Long views are also possible of other areas of Open Moorland (views to Withypool Hill in the west, and to Dunkery to the north, for example). So although this area of moorland is physically detached, there is nonetheless a connection with the wider Open Moorland landscape. Views from along the road makes it a popular stopping point for motorists. Close to the highest point on the moor (Winsford Hill) there is a large car parking area.

Although these views from the road are a key feature, they are inhibited in places by scrub encroachment on the roadside. The moorland is grazed (by Exmoor ponies, cattle and sheep) but scrub encroachment is notable with bracken, gorse and young hawthorn and blackthorn trees covering a considerable area.

The majority of Winsford Hill is designated a Principal Archaeological Landscape. It contains prehistoric round barrows (notably the Wambarrows), and a significant relict medieval field system, including ridge and furrow, field banks and a system of routeways. The inscribed Caractacus stone is located near Spire Cross, adjacent to a former track running northwards out of the Exe Valley, and is thought to date from the early medieval period.



LCA D4: Haddon Hill

View east from Haddon Hill towards Hadborough Plantation

Description

Haddon Hill is by far the smallest area of Open Moorland. Located a few miles east of Dulverton, the LCA sits towards the southernmost point of the National Park. This small pocket of heather moorland occurs immediately south of both the River Haddeo and Wimbleball Lake and offers elevated views in all directions. Although it is a distinct moorland landscape, its character is strongly influenced by the surrounding farmed landscapes and woodlands - the patterns of enclosure and bright greens of improved pasture contrast with the more muted hues and open feel of the moor. Haddon Hill's rounded form and smooth profile creates a distinctive backdrop in views from the south-east part of the National Park.

Haddon is a popular area of moorland, especially with dog walkers. The adjacent car park (with toilets and interpretation boards) is well used, and perhaps because of its smaller size and ease of access, Haddon can feel noticeably busier than the other areas of Open Moorland. As well as the popularity of the moor, the views across to settlements, to Wimbleball Lake (popular for sailing, fishing and windsurfing) and to a number of farms and houses increases the awareness of people- their 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 parts of the larger moorland tracts. Exmoor ponies graze freely on the hill and are recognised as an intrinsic feature of this area of moorland.

The Hadborough Plantation (part of which was cleared approximately 10 years ago for heathland restoration) borders Haddon Hill. This area of coniferous plantation forms a solid boundary to the south and east, and adds a sense of containment and shelter.

Strength of Landscape Character and Landscape Condition in LCT D

This is a landscape of **strong** character, the Open Moorland being a very recognisable and distinctive landscape which is 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 the heather and grass moor landcover combine to create an inspiring and challenging landscape. Grazing cattle, sheep, Exmoor ponies and deer play a key role in defining the Open Moorland and are an intrinsic part of the landscape. The presence of historic features within the landscape- the barrows on hill summits, beech hedge banks and abandoned farmsteads- combine to create a strong sense of time-depth which adds to the strength of character.

The condition of the landscape is **variable** across the LCT. Some areas of moorland are in positive management, whilst others are affected by (for example) footpath erosion or changes in vegetation patterns. Even within individual LCAs, the picture is very mixed, so detailed reports should be consulted (see list on following page). SSSI Condition surveys show that the majority of the Open Moorland is in 'unfavourable recovering' condition, with some areas (e.g. Dunkery Beacon (D1), Porlock Common (D1) and Mill Hill (D1)) in 'favourable' condition. Ilkerton Ridge (D1) was assessed as 'unfavourable- no change' and the upper reaches of the River Barle as being in 'unfavourable declining' condition due to the presence of invasive Montbretia, and modifications to the natural river channel.

Despite various moorland management initiatives, the issues of concern described in the 2007 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment remain issues today. Many are related to the effects of changing grazing patterns and agricultural practices on moorland vegetation, including the declining condition of the moorland fringes; significant loss of the distinctive open purple heather covered hills due to encroachment by bracken, grass and scrub; secondary woodland regeneration of moorland valleys, and encroachment of gorse along roads restricting views. Additionally, incremental changes such as fencing increase the perception of human influence on the moors, and informal car parking affects levels of tranquillity. There are still localised views of poorly-managed adjacent farmland, and views outside the national park now include the windfarms at Batsworthy and Fullabrook. Damage to fragile vegetation due to footpath erosion remains a problem on popular routes. Initiatives involving re-wetting of the mires are also actively changing drainage processes on the moorland as well as creating new features in the landscape (albeit of a temporary nature) such as small scale dams and monitoring stations. This should improve the condition of the peat soils, and improve their ability to store carbon and water. However, the condition of vegetation, archaeology, access routes and grazing land may also be affected.

Landscape Issues and Forces for Change in LCT D

Landscapes are dynamic and are constantly affected by a variety of forces for change, which may be natural (e.g. coastal erosion) or man-made (e.g. development pressure, and changes in farming practices). The following table illustrates the main forces for change acting on this LCT, and how they will potentially affect the landscape. Recommendations for addressing these issues are provided in the following section. Please note that forces for change acting across the whole National Park are described in Section 2.9.

A number of detailed studies of Exmoor's moorlands have been carried out recently, and these should also be referenced. See:

- *Exmoor's Moorland: Where Next?* (The Exmoor Society, April 2016)
- *Exmoor Moorland Units* (ENPA, 2011 with subsequent reviews)
- *Principal Archaeological Landscapes on Moorland in Exmoor National Park: Assessment and Condition Survey* (ENPA, January 2015)

Encroaching bracken, scrub and trees, Haddon Hill

Invasive Montbretia alongside the river Barle

Mire Restoration notice, Exe Head

Issue/Force for Change	Landscape sensitivities and potential impacts	LCAs affected
Decline in management and encroachment of vegetation	Reduction in grazing pressure and less swaling leading to increases in bracken, gorse and scrub in areas of previously open moorland. This is resulting in dramatic loss of simple, open, purple expanses of heather associated with Exmoor. Also damage to buried and surface archaeology from roots and bracken.	All
Changes to land management grants and loss of local understanding	Uncertainty over future land management funding, potentially resulting in fewer grants for moorland management. There is a risk of loss of understanding of traditional moorland management techniques as the older generation of farmers retire, and family farms are sold rather than taken over by the younger generation	All
Loss of views	Roadside gorse affecting visibility from roadsides. This affects views, including intervisibility between moorland areas.	D1, D2, D3
Re-wetting of the mires	Introduction of artificial dams which introduce engineered elements into a relatively wild landscape. Changes in vegetation and species composition resulting from wetter peat e.g. increase in sphagnum moss. Access becomes more difficult for people and grazing animals. However, downstream flood damage should be reduced, so beneficial landscape effects are felt elsewhere.	D1, D2
Loss of wild moorland character	Threat to tranquillity, remoteness and wild character due to presence of fences, benches, signage, car parks etc. D1 is particularly sensitive as it contains the most remote areas (e.g. evocative landscape around Hoaroak). D4 has a more managed 'country park' character already.	D1, D4
Poor management of hedge banks and new fencing	Traditional stone-faced banks abandoned or repaired with post and wire. Lack of maintenance of beech hedges mean that they grow out and are no longer stock proof.	All
Roads and parking areas	Erosion of verges and establishment of informal car parks damaging vegetation and open moorland character. Road signs can also be intrusive in this relatively wild landscape. Speeding traffic threatens ponies and livestock, which acts as a disincentive for moorland grazing. Traffic also impacts on perceptions of	D1, D2, D3
Path erosion	Wide tracks through heather on popular routes due to use by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Problems are exacerbated when gullies form on slopes and water erosion increases damage.	All, but particularly D1 (Dunkery) and D4

Issue/Force for Change	Landscape sensitivities and potential impacts	LCAs affected
Damage to archaeological sites	Prehistoric stone sites prone to damage as stones are very small, and easily damaged by animals, or intentionally or unintentionally moved. Some sites are also damaged by livestock (e.g. barrows) or off-road vehicles (e.g. Cow Castle)	All
Buildings on the edge of the moorland	Setting of open moorland affected by development on the edge of villages e.g. Withypool, and by occasional isolated, agricultural buildings.	D2
Vertical structures	Localised impacts of poles and overhead lines along roads, which affect smooth open skylines and add visual clutter into the landscape. Smooth horizontal skylines would be potentially hugely impacted by vertical features such as telecommunication masts or wind turbines.	All
Development outside the National Park	From this LCT there are long views across surrounding areas (within and outside the National Park). Windfarms at Fullbrook and Batsworthy are already dynamic features in views and as such immediately noticeable. Built development, energy and transport schemes will all be potentially visible in views and affect the setting of the National Park. This LCT is particularly sensitive to such developments because of its inherent qualities and lack of development, and the fact that people visit this LCT to appreciate its sense of remoteness, wildness and tranquillity.	D2, D4
Pests, diseases and invasive species	Heather beetle has been a particular problem in the past, and remains an issue. Work has been carried out to control rhododendron in moorland valleys, but it remains an ongoing issue, along with other invasive species such as montbretia in the upper Barle Valley (D2).	All
Climate change	Warmer temperatures can lead to increased plant growth rates (and spread of vegetation), exacerbated by increased concentrations of carbon dioxide which acts as an air-borne fertilizer. This is a particular issue on moorlands, as the impact of atmospheric nitrogen is thought to be helping Molinia to outcompete heather, with consequences on landscape character. Hotter summers will result in an increased risk of drought (affecting moorland vegetation) and increasing the risk of uncontrolled moorland fires. Mature beech trees (including hedgebanks) are likely to be affected by wind damage associated with increased frequency and intensity of storm events.	All

Landscape Management Recommendations for LCT D

Landscape Strategy

The open and simple character of the open moorland is conserved and enhanced, and there is no overall loss of moorland area. There is a mosaic of moorland habitats, including extensive areas of heather moorland growing on healthy peat. Skylines remain uninterrupted and free from prominent or vertical features. The openness and quality of views from the Open Moorland are retained and enhanced, and visual connectivity with other moorland areas is restored. People are able to access and enjoy the moorland and the spiritual refreshment which it offers, but the visual impacts of roads and parking areas are minimised. Tranquillity and remoteness are retained, and the clutter in the landscape such as fencing and signage is minimal.

LCT-Specific Management Guidelines for LCT D

Protect

- Protect the open, smooth horizons of the Open Moorland, avoiding any development which would break skylines.
- Protect archaeological sites from damage by vegetation encroachment (particularly bracken and scrub) and erosion by people and animals.
- Protect views from moorland, both within the National Park and over its wider setting. Clear and control vegetation (particularly gorse) which restricts views from popular viewpoints. Ensure that the impacts of proposals which may affect views from open moorland are adequately assessed.
- Protect the sense of wildness, remoteness and tranquillity associated with much of the Open Moorland. Minimise the visual impacts of roads by reducing signage and markings as much as possible.
- Protect dark night skies, minimising sources of light pollution within and surrounding the Open Moorland.

Manage

- Manage moorland using appropriate combinations of grazing and swaling to retain the distinctive moorland vegetation which contributes to Exmoor's landscape character and sense of place. Retain the openness and expansiveness of high moorland, particularly where it forms a backdrop to views.
- Aim to achieve a diversity of moorland vegetation types which reflect the variations in moorland character, and which contribute to landscape character through their distinctive colour and texture. For example, Dunkery is associated with extensive swathes of purple heather moorland, whereas The Chains are dominated by golden grass moor (Molinia) which 'ripples' in the wind, with some areas of blanket bog.

- Create habitat links between distinct types of vegetation to encourage movement of species (e.g. insects and butterflies) and to counter habitat loss associated with climate change. This is particularly important in areas where moorland has been fragmented by farming/ forestry.
- Tackle the issue of bracken and scrub taking over moorland vegetation, particularly around archaeological sites, and in combes.
- Continue programmes to remove rhododendron and other invasive species, particularly in combes and around watercourses.
- Manage hedgerows and stone-faced banks, repairing using traditional techniques where possible and minimising use of post and wire.

Plan

- Aim to maintain the distinction between enclosed farmland and open moorland. The boundaries between woodland and moorland are often more transitional, but still need to be manged in order to avoid loss of open moorland.
- Consider undergrounding overhead wires which break skylines and draw attention to the presence of roads (for example on Withypool Hill (D2).
- Campaign at a national level for adequate funding for locally-appropriate moorland management.

NOTE - See also detailed recommendations in the following documents:

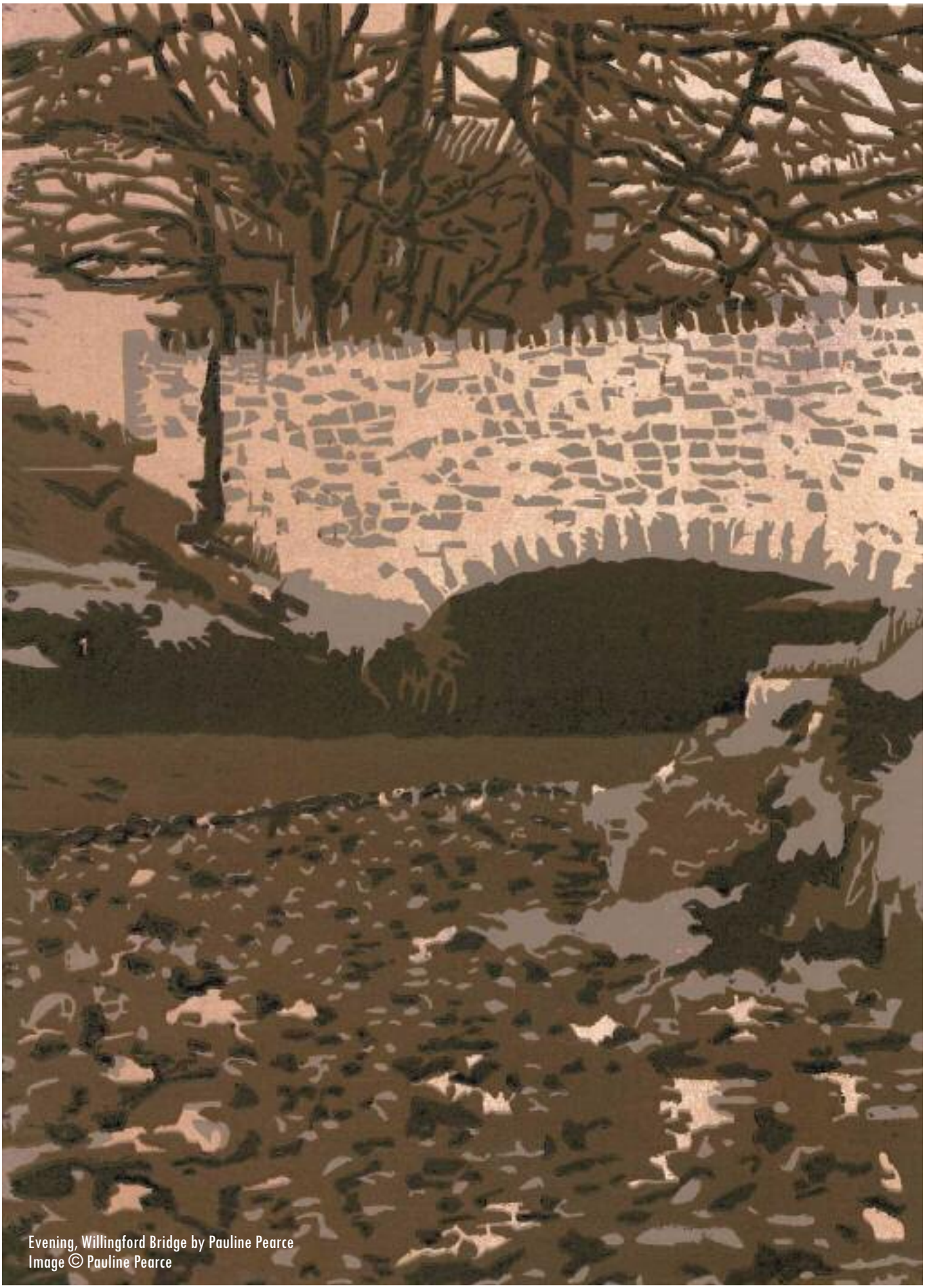
- *Exmoor's Moorland: Where Next?* (The Exmoor Society, April 2016)
- *Exmoor Moorland Units* (ENPA, 2011 with subsequent reviews)
- *Principal Archaeological Landscapes on Moorland in Exmoor National Park: Assessment and Condition Survey* (ENPA, January 2015)
- SAC and SSSI Management Plans

Specific Planning Guidelines for for LCT D Open Moorland

This section describes the planning guidelines which are specific to the Open Moorland Landscape Character Type. See also the general landscape planning guidelines in Part 3.

Defining qualities which need to be protected should new development occur, and which any new development should reflect:

Defining Quality to Protect	Perceived Threats and Issues	Guidance
An open, undeveloped landscape, with a sense of relative wilderness and isolation, away from development and human activity (All).	Introduction of new built form or other changes which undermine the sense of isolation or are poorly located. Light pollution affecting dark night skies.	New development should generally be avoided within this LCT unless it is essential to help conserve or enhance its special qualities. When considering new development associated with farms close to the Open Moorland, ensure that it is located carefully on the fringes of the moorland, preferably in association with existing farm buildings, and is set into the landform. Also ensure that the colour and texture of materials will help to conserve landscape character, and that there is no light spill.
Open, rounded, simple, unfettered skylines (All).	Avoid development which breaks the skyline.	Development of buildings, wind turbines, telecommunication masts and overhead wires should be avoided due to impacts on the open, uncluttered character of this LCT and on skylines. This is a landscape that is identified as an unsuitable area for small scale wind turbines and free-standing solar arrays.



Evening, Willingford Bridge by Pauline Pearce
Image © Pauline Pearce