

Landscape Sensitivity Study

Exmoor National Park Authority 2013

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Exmoor National Park Authority is the Planning Authority for the National Park and is responsible for producing a Local Plan. This landscape sensitivity study has been produced as evidence to support the preparation of the Exmoor National Park Local Plan. The study builds on the Exmoor National Park Landscape Character Assessment 2007 to assess the sensitivity of the landscape within and adjoining the 22 named settlements in the adopted Local Plan (2001 – 2011). Part of the evidence needed for the Local Plan is an assessment of the landscape sensitivity of settlements that informs their capacity to accommodate small-scale development (specifically housing) on greenfield sites within or adjoining the existing town, while conserving and enhancing the National Park’s nationally important landscape. The field assessment for this study was carried out during the summer of 2011.

1.2 This landscape study does not indicate sites for development as other material considerations will need to be evaluated as and when development proposals come forward, including flood risk, impacts on heritage assets, biodiversity, and highway implications. Furthermore the study does not include the capacity for development on existing brownfield sites including conversions, change of use and redevelopment, even though such opportunities are encouraged.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Topic Paper 6

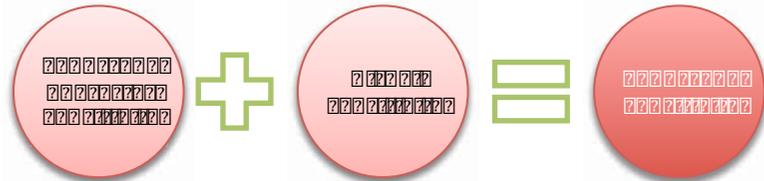
The methodology for the study has been derived from guidance set out in *Topic Paper 6: (Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity – Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2004)* where “Sensitivity” refers

to the inherent sensitivity of the landscape, irrespective of the type of change being considered, and “Capacity” is the ability of the landscape to accommodate different amounts of change or development of a specific type. For this study the overall Capacity of each settlement has been derived by combining “Landscape Sensitivity” with “Landscape Value”.



2.2 Landscape Sensitivity

In order to derive Landscape Sensitivity, Landscape Character Sensitivity and Visual Sensitivity are combined.



2.2.1 Assessment of Landscape Character Sensitivity

This was informed using the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment, field assessment and professional judgement to assess the strength of character of each settlement and its ability to accommodate change without eroding that character. This was based on landform, vegetation, scale, historic character, materials, design styles, surrounding enclosure patterns, shape and form of the settlement as well as landscape quality and condition. This also helped to identify

patterns that could reinforce local landscape character (e.g. farmsteads, groups of cottages, roadside terraces).

2.2.2 Assessment of Visual Sensitivity

An assessment of Visual Sensitivity was carried out in order to identify visually discrete and prominent areas within and adjoining the settlements. This was assessed in the field from the public highway, footpaths and public open spaces, and as a desk assessment using contours, *Google Earth* and *Street View*. Presence of receptors in the form of tourists and residents was identified. The appropriateness of mitigation through planting was influential in assessing overall visual sensitivity.

2.3 Landscape Value

Landscape Value is an evaluation of the settlement's importance. For this study it is derived from designations such as Conservation Areas, landmark or Listed Buildings, designed landscapes, important trees, wildlife designations, cultural identity and associations, tourism value, sense of tranquillity, remoteness, wildness, scenic beauty, significance to National Park character and residential appeal.

2.4 Landscape Capacity of Settlements

A combination of Landscape Sensitivity, and Landscape Value was used to evaluate the overall Landscape Capacity of the settlement as HIGH, MODERATE or LOW. This helps to inform the potential for new development, ie where Capacity is Low, there is little potential for new housing.

Overall Landscape Sensitivity	High	Moderate capacity for development	Low capacity for development	Low capacity for development
	Moderate	Moderate capacity for development	Moderate capacity for development	Low capacity for development
	Low	High capacity for development	Moderate capacity for development	Moderate capacity for development
		Low	Moderate	High
		Landscape value		

2.5 Identification of the Sensitivity of the Landscape to Development

Having carried out the assessment of landscape sensitivity for each settlement, the capacity for development has been identified. The whole area is designated as a National Park which is recognised as a nationally important landscape – in this context land has been identified as either of Low, Moderate or High sensitivity to development. In order to assess the sensitivity of an area to development, a number of criteria were considered, including the following:

- Visual prominence – identified through field assessment carried out during June / July 2011.
- Landscape Character / Settlement Character Patterns - from *Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment*, Exmoor National Park Authority (2007), plus professional assessment of the settlement character.
- Important Open Space for Visual Amenity and Recreation – identified in *The Adopted Exmoor National Park Local Plan 2001-2011*.
- Physical constraint of slope - the limit of slopes capable of being developed has been influenced by reference to existing good development.
- Existing development – this landscape sensitivity study has also identified potential capacity for greenfield development within or at the edge of existing settlements. There are likely to be opportunities for development on brownfield land, including conversion and sub-division of existing buildings, this is likely in many cases, to be preferable to greenfield development. This study has not looked opportunities for development on brownfield land. Nor has capacity been looked for through the redevelopment of existing properties, however in some cases, where gardens are large, existing property has been considered.
- Anticipated need - based on the existing size of the settlement and scale of expansion over recent years.

- Exmoor National Park boundary - some settlements extend beyond the Exmoor National Park boundary. Capacity for development has not been identified on the maps, however where it is considered that capacity exists, this has been mentioned in the notes – although capacity outside the National Park boundary is a matter for the local planning authority.

Constraints not considered included:

- Property ownership.
- Development boundary of the settlement, as shown in the Adopted *Exmoor National Park Local Plan 2001-2011*
- Site access.
- Land liable to flooding – land that is liable to flood has not been considered as a constraint to development in this study as it is beyond the remit of this study to investigate all flood mitigation options. However, it is recognised for some settlements that areas of low sensitivity are in low-lying areas at risk of flooding and in such cases flooding issues have been discussed in the text as it is considered that in some situations, innovative design solutions could be employed to mitigate against flooding.

2.6 Low Sensitivity to Development

These are areas where new development could be successfully accommodated. Areas of low sensitivity have been considered suitable on the grounds of being close to the existing settlement and in keeping with landscape/settlement character. In most cases these areas are not visually prominent, either being hidden from view, well-screened or in places that are likely to be seen by relatively few people. They are areas where new screen planting, if necessary, would be appropriate to landscape character. Development of within these areas would need to be of a high design standard, in

line with the *Exmoor National Park Design Guide* as well as applying planning conditions where necessary.

This study gives indications of capacity through the number of units each area could satisfactorily accommodate as well as suggesting appropriate character.

In identifying areas of Low Sensitivity, this study has taken account of the Adopted *Exmoor National Park Local Plan 2001-2011* designations and constraints however, these areas have not been scrutinised by specialist consultees, such as ecologists, archaeologists, and highways engineers. There may, therefore, be reasons why development in such locations would be unsuitable.

2.7 Moderate Sensitivity to Development

These are areas in more prominent locations than the “Low Sensitivity Sites” and would demand a very high design standard in order to accommodate development. Development in these areas would need to use natural, local, traditional, materials to emulate those used historically for traditional vernacular buildings and be of a scale and style that would reinforce landscape character. The buildings would be in more prominent locations, easily seen from the public realm, often in conjunction with vernacular buildings / landscape and would need to contribute to the character of the surroundings. To ensure that only appropriate proposals are made, it is recommended that Exmoor National Park Authority prepares detailed development briefs to outline the specific characteristics that would be suitable in these areas. In preparing the development briefs, the following should be considered:

- **Relationship between the building units and the highway.** Street layouts should reflect those historically established for vernacular buildings in

Exmoor with consideration given to pedestrian and other linkages between the new development and neighbouring areas of the settlement. Pedestrians and vehicles should share the same surface and the need for pavements avoided. Highway design should follow the buildings and street design and avoid standardised solutions. Buildings should generally be parallel or perpendicular to the highway. Kerbs and highway boundaries that respond to standard turning circles can detract from local character and should generally be avoided. Surfaces should be locally sourced aggregate (this will vary throughout the National Park) without kerbs, lighting and signage.

- **Relationship between the building units and ground levels.** Buildings should generally be parallel or perpendicular to contours. Buildings should sit into the site, with retaining walls at the rear, rather than being built up. On steep ground, the ground floor levels of a building could be stepped.
- **Arrangement of dwellings.** Site levels should determine the layout of buildings. Where buildings are grouped they should be aligned parallel or perpendicular to one another. The layout of buildings can support local character e.g. terraces and courtyards, rather than design led by road layouts.
- **Scale of units** – particularly height to eaves. Solutions may be considered that result in buildings having a scale and in particular a roof height and eaves height that is common with vernacular buildings. In many cases this will

require first floors to be within the roof space (i.e. 1 ½ storey dwellings).

- **Wall and roof materials.** Colour, texture and patina will affect the overall appearance of the building. Thatch, slate, clay pantiles or corrugated sheet material may be appropriate roofing materials. Exposed stone, cob, lime-render and waney edged timber may be appropriate wall materials. The palette of appropriate materials and building methods varies throughout the National Park.
- **Curtilage** should generally be small and hidden from public view. Landform, boundary walls, hedges or buildings can minimise the visual impact of domestic curtilage and provide private space for residents.
- **Boundary treatments.** Boundaries should reflect local character - local stone walls, stone walls plus hedge, high stone wall or hedge may be appropriate.
- **Building management and ownership.** In some cases it may be appropriate for strict planning conditions or restrictive covenants to be applied.
- **Planting.** This should hide, camouflage or ameliorate the development. The planting should relate to the surrounding context and be unnoticed.

Current building conventions and Highway Authority standards can lead to solutions that are in conflict with the above, and imaginative solutions may be needed.

Land identified with High Sensitivity to Development includes areas that are significantly detached from the settlement or areas within or immediately surrounding the settlement where it is considered that development would significantly erode character. There should be an assumption against development in these areas with development only being permitted under exceptional circumstances.

2.8 High Sensitivity to Development

4.0 Data Sheets and Settlement Maps

4.1 Data Sheets

The information relating to assessment of landscape sensitivity and capacity is recorded on data sheets for each settlement. The characteristics that apply to the settlement have been highlighted in orange.

Dunster				
Paul Bryan		Date 31 st May 2011		
Landscape Character Sensitivity (based on LCA & verified in the field)				
Natural Factors	Rivers	Cliff	Coast	Landscape Character Types. Set within (B) Farmed and Settled Vale, sandwiched between (B) Plantation (with Heathland) Hills immediately to north and south of the settlement.
	Slopes	Scrub	Stream	
	Moorland	Woodland	Woods/wetland	
	Unimproved grassland	Hedges	Brocken	
Landform	Plateau	River Valley	Harbour	Dramatic landform + castle
	Rolling	Combe	Other	
Cultural Factors	Parkland	Gardens	Venerable trees	Farmed parkland Baggage plots.
	Prominent Architecture	Disregard landscapes	Farmstead	
	Churches	Specimen trees	Distinct enclosure patterns	
Settlement type	Hamlet	Village	Local rural centre	Small
Quality / Condition	Low	Moderate	High	
Aesthetic factors (Pattern, shape, scale, form enclosure)	Large scale	Small scale	Unenclosed	Dramatic views in and out. Extremes of flat and undulating.
	Planned	Organic	Open	
	Nucleated	Fragmented	Linear	
	Outward-looking	Inward-looking	Other	
Position	Hill top	Valley	Coast	
Settlement setting	On side of hill	River side	Direct descent	Settlement merges in landscape
Settlement edge (How does the settlement abut the landscape?)	Abrupt change to agriculture S/E/W	Transition gardens	Transition with North	Much equestrian landscape at fringe of settlement.
	North	None transition North		
Animation	Quiet	Busy	Neither quiet nor busy	
Design Elements and Materials (Describe)	Devonian red sandstone, rendered predominantly slate and clay pantile roofs, with some chert. Pitched cobble streets. Bay windows. Medieval core, close abutted small scale, high walls, and Victorian fringe to north. Late 20 th century infill especially to south and west.			
Overall Landscape Character Sensitivity	Low	Moderate	High	A landscape of strong and distinct character holding a diverse though well unified settlement.

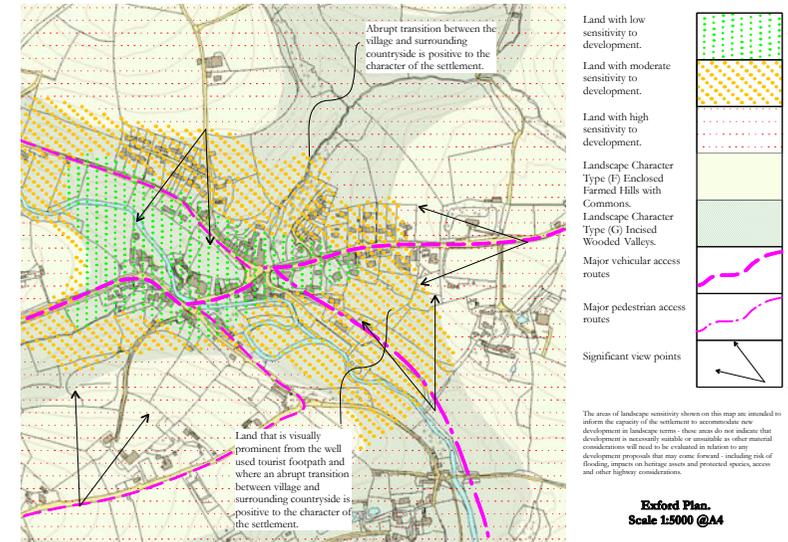
4.2 Settlement Plans and Sections

4.3 Plans

These have been produced from an OS Mastermap base, with contours added. The maps also show the Landscape Character Types¹, woodland, existing buildings, gardens,

¹ The Landscape Character Types are sourced from the "Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment", Exmoor National Park Authority (2007). The map data showing the Landscape

rivers and boundary features. Coloured hatching is used to indicate Sensitivity. Attention has been drawn to well used roads and paths, significant views and the National Park Boundary.

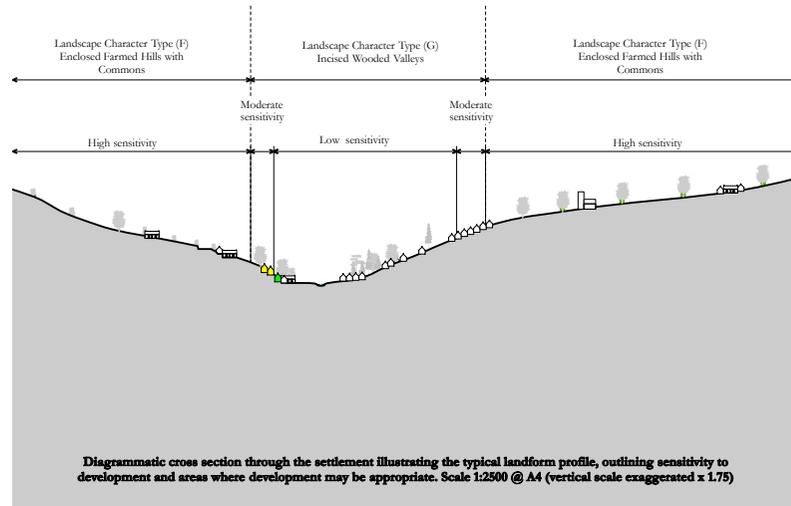


4.4 Diagrammatic Cross Sections

These drawings are diagrams and no true cross sections. The drawings are based on levels information taken from the OS Mastermap base, however, in order to express the site's characteristics effectively, the vertical scale has been exaggerated by 1.75 times the horizontal scale. Also, in some cases, the cross sectional line is not straight but zigzags

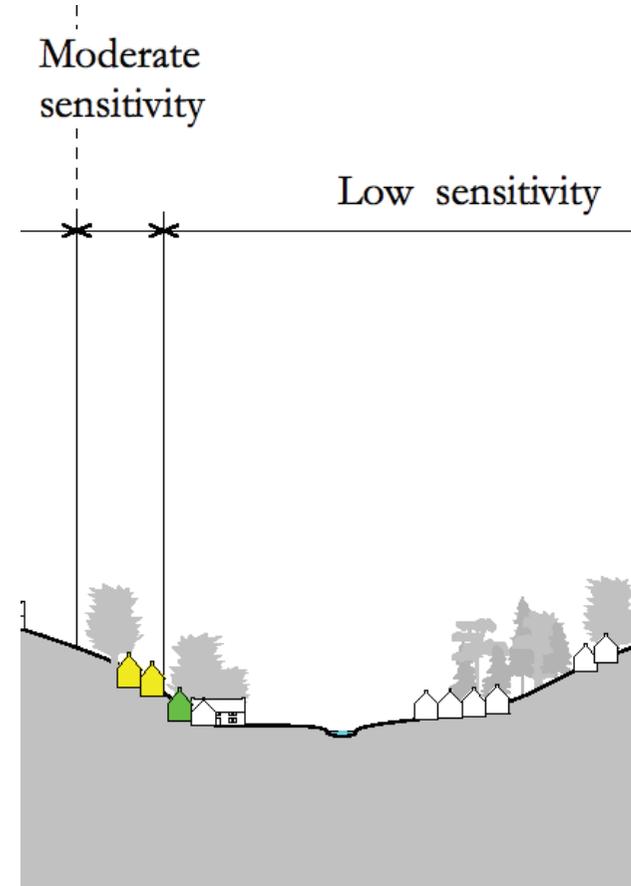
Character Types should not normally be presented at this detailed scale, consequently the boundaries of the Landscape Character Types are not precise and suggest abrupt changes between Character Types. They have been included in the maps found in this report, as they are useful at illustrating the character and morphology of the settlements, however the boundaries between Character Types should only have been seen as indicative

though the landscape. This has been done to make sure that all relevant features have been referenced.



The actual line of the cross section has not been indicated; however the landform and landmark buildings should give a good suggestion of how to read the sections in relationship to the plans.

The drawings show the boundaries of the Landscape Character Areas, the landform profile, presence of vegetation and existing development. The boundaries between Low, Moderate and High Sensitivity to development are indicated. Within the Low and Moderate areas, possible development solutions have been illustrated. These are shown using green coloured buildings for development within areas of Low Sensitivity and yellow coloured buildings for development within areas of Moderate Sensitivity. They give an indication of good site selection and site planning solutions along with suggestions for development volume, density and methods of amelioration.



Possible development solutions are shown, using green coloured buildings within areas of Low Sensitivity and yellow within areas of Moderate Sensitivity.
