

F. Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons



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.

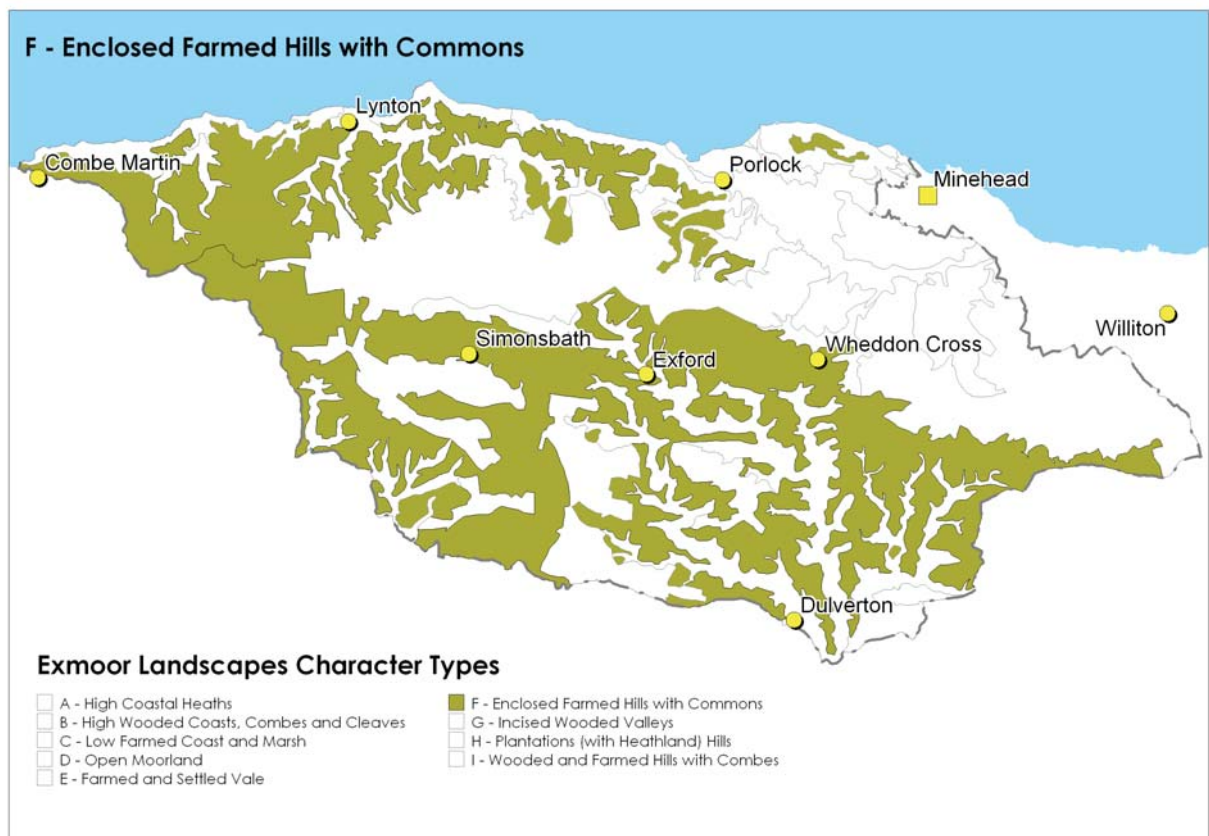


Silage bags on the roadside are a common sight.

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
Key Issues:	
<p>Weakened landscape pattern in places, due to varied management and decline of beech hedge banks.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Secondary Issues:	
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.

