

**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER  
ASSESSMENT  
OF  
EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK  
  
FINAL REPORT**

**Prepared for  
Exmoor National Park Authority  
  
by  
Land Use Consultants**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

- I.1. Exmoor National Park Authority commissioned Land Use Consultants (LUC) to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment of Exmoor National Park following LUC's work for The Exmoor Society<sup>1</sup> looking at the State of the Moorlands of Exmoor. This Landscape Character Assessment has been undertaken as, to date, there has been no objective assessment of the character of the landscape that follows current, best practice landscape character assessment techniques.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

- I.2. Landscape Character Assessment is concerned with determining and revealing the distinct and recognisable pattern of elements that occur consistently within particular types of landscape. It is the distinctiveness of a landscape (realised through the presence and combination of characteristics) that allows one to be distinguished from another (by evoking a particular sense of place).
- I.3. As well as continuing to provide important contextual and strategic information, landscape character assessment has significantly advanced in recent years to become an important tool for directing and assisting with the planning and management of the landscape, for example:
- the formulation of planning policy;
  - providing the basis for preparation of management plans and strategies
  - helping to guide land use change in positive and sustainable ways and
  - informing the targeting of agri-environment schemes.
- I.4. It is also increasingly being applied to assist decision-making within planning control and to provide supporting documentation in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- I.5. Landscape character has been, and is being used in a wide range of situations throughout England, Scotland and beyond.

## METHODOLOGY

- I.6. The assessment covers Exmoor National Park (excluding land between the low and high tide marks). It was a rapid, short study but has nonetheless followed the accepted method promoted by the Countryside Agency – *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland (2002)*. This landscape assessment of Exmoor has been developed within the context of the Character of England Map as

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<sup>1</sup> The Exmoor Society was founded in response to a threat to the moorlands in the 1950s and has taken an influential role in supporting the purposes of the National Park designation.

well as the National Landscape Typology. Consideration has also been given to the landscapes identified by the Exmoor National Park Authority in 1993.

- I.7. In order to assess and determine the character of Exmoor's landscapes, investigation of desk-based research and field survey work (at 1:25 000) has been undertaken, in line with the accepted and most recent guidance<sup>2</sup> for Landscape Character Assessment.

### **Data Collection**

- I.8. Resources and time were limited for this study. The *Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland* points to the fact that "where resources are limited and time is short, the desk study may need to be limited to an assessment of geology, landform, land cover and settlement distribution".
- I.9. The data used to characterise the landscape of Exmoor does exceed that is listed below. Map overlays were produced for identifying landscapes of common character.
  - **Physical:** OS map covering the County at 1: 25 000, geology, Section 3 Moor and Heathland areas.
  - **Ecological:** National Nature Conservation Designations – SSSI, NNR and Ancient Woodland.
  - **Historic:** Settlement Patterns, Historic Landscape Character Regions.
  - **Landscape Character:** Countryside Character Areas of the Character of England Map, National Landscape Typology and the 1993 Landscape Assessment of Exmoor.

### **Draft Characterisation**

- I.10. Using the material collated via data collection, a process of assimilation and interpretation of the layered material was undertaken in order to develop a draft classification of Exmoor's landscape. This desk based exercise provided preliminary boundaries and names for different landscape types within the National Park. Landscape types are generic and share common combinations of geology, topography, vegetation and human influences. The desk drawn boundaries and names were presented to the National Park's Landscape Architect (Sarah Bryan) to gain local, professional knowledge prior to the commencement of field work.

### **Field Survey**

- I.11. A rapid field survey (at 1:25 000) was undertaken to test and refine the draft landscape types defined by the Draft Characterisation process. It allowed verification and fine tuning of the classification of landscape types. Key characteristics of the landscape were identified and recorded. Perceptual and sensory elements of the

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<sup>2</sup> Landscape Character Assessment – Guidance for England and Scotland (2002) Prepared on behalf of The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage by Carys Swanwick (University of Sheffield) and Land Use Consultants.

landscape (remoteness and tranquillity) were also recorded. Field survey and photographic sheets and OS maps (at 1:25 000) were used to record data.

- 1.12. In order to determine degrees of remoteness and tranquillity, the following were considered:
- **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, over grazing, 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 and Description**

- 1.13. Following on from the preliminary desk and field survey work, the map of landscape types was refined and brief descriptions (comprising information on Location and Boundaries and Key Characteristics) developed.

## **THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES**

- 1.14. The process of landscape characterisation has identified 10 separate landscape types occurring on Exmoor. Landscape types are generic and have broadly similar patterns of geology, landform, soils, land use, settlement and field patterns. The landscape types are indicated below, outlined in Figure 1 and their location, boundaries and key characteristics described in the following pages.

**TYPE A: High Coastal Heaths and Commons**

**TYPE B: High Wooded Coast and Combes**

**TYPE C: Low Farmed Coast**

**TYPE D: Unenclosed Moorland**

**TYPE E: Settled and Farmed Vale**

**TYPE F: Enclosed Moorland Fringe**

**TYPE G: Moorland Valleys**

**TYPE H: Incised Wooded Valleys**

## **TYPE I: Wooded and Farmed Hills**

## **TYPE J: Plantations Hills**

- 1.15. It should be noted that Unenclosed Moorland is shown as one landscape type with, the differences in vegetation cover (heather and grass), described in the text. There is a valid case for division of the Unenclosed Moorland landscape type into Unenclosed 'Grass' Moorland and Unenclosed 'Heather' Moorland – to recognise, for example, colour and textural variations. This is a type division that the Exmoor National Park Authority may implement in the future.*

## **DRAFT CHARACTER AREAS**

- 1.16. In addition to identifying and defining the landscape character types, the study has included a quick desk based exercise to identify Indicative Draft Landscape Character Areas for each type (Figure 2). Character Areas share the same generic characteristics but have their own character and identity. It is the intention that the Indicative Draft Areas identified through this work are taken forward by Exmoor National Park Authority for more detailed study to refine and amend boundaries as appropriate.

## 2. A: HIGH COASTAL HEATHS AND COMMONS

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 2.1. The dramatic, elevated, open and exposed landscape type defined as *High Coastal Heaths and Commons* occurs in a series of areas aligning the North Devon Coast – marking the northern edge of the National Park. The presence of, and visual relationship with the sea has an overriding influence on the character of this landscape.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- With great topographic range (from 0-300m AOD) this is a **large-scale landscape of dramatic hogs-back coastal cliffs** (with coves and combes) that give rise inland to areas of **gently undulating moorland plateau**.
- Underlain by **purple, grey and green sandstone and reddish-brown mudstone** of the Hangman Sandstone formation, giving rise to well-drained soils.
- The steep coastal cliffs fronting the sea have a **strong sense of exposure to the elements**.
- The elevated, open character of the landscape provides **wide skies and distant views** across the Bristol Channel **to the south coast of Wales**.
- Due to the challenging terrain, **the cliffs** have remained largely free of modern agricultural practices and **are characterised by rich semi-natural heathland vegetation** with areas of gorse, bracken and scrub.
- The ecological value of this landscape type is reflected in the extensive areas of **heathland designated as SSSI**.
- **The plateau areas have been enclosed to create a series of commons** (grazed predominantly by sheep). This has left only **remnant patches of heather moorland** interspersing the areas of grazing land.
- **Inaccessibility and exposure to the elements creates a sense of solitude on the cliffs**.
- **On the plateau tops, human intervention is more evident** due to the presence of secondary roads, informal car parking areas, some small-scale settlement and a strong sense of management (due to extensive areas of National Trust land).
- Although containing some buildings, roads and human artefacts, **the commons remain for the most part tranquil**.

### Potential Character Areas

- 2.2. There are a number of geographical areas belonging to the *High Coastal Heaths and Commons* Landscape Type. These unique areas, having their own individual character and identity, have been identified as Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more

detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**A1: Holdstone Down**

**A2: Valley of Rocks**

**A3: Countisbury Common**

**A4: North Hill**

### 3. B: HIGH WOODED COAST AND COMBES

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#### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 3.1. Steep wooded coastal cliffs and deeply incised tree-clothed valleys characterise the landscape type of the *High Wooded Coast and Combés*. The landscape occurs as a series of clearly defined combe valleys that extend down from the *Open Moorland and Moorland Valleys* (landscape types D and G) as rivers meander and widen towards the Bristol Channel. Where the rivers meet the sea, the steep wooded sides extend along the coast to create a densely wooded cliff face and a series of woody bays.

#### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Generally occurring between 0 and 300m AOD, this is a landscape of dramatic landform character with **steep convoluted coastal cliffs and deeply-incised, narrow valleys**.
- **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.
- Dominated by tree cover with **extensive tracts of predominantly deciduous woodland** (much of which is **Ancient**) clothing the steeply sloping valley sides and cliffs.
- **Woodland cover reduces further inland** where there is a transition to the adjacent *Moorland Valleys*.
- **Series of gently meandering rivers and streams** running down from the surrounding higher moorland areas.
- **Small-scale field pattern**, surrounding and interspersing the woodland, reflecting **medieval enclosure of the landscape** (although some boundaries have been modified from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards).
- **The small fields are characterised by pasture** with sheep, horses and cattle grazing. Small-scale free-range poultry farming is also a feature.
- **Well served by a primary and secondary roads** close to the coast (and for the most part aligning the watercourses), but **considerably reduced coverage towards the headwaters** where there is a transition to the *Moorland Valleys*.
- **Picturesque villages occurring at the mouth of the river valleys**, spilling onto the coastal cliffs.
- **Villages and hamlets are also a feature further inland** – aligning the course of the river, close to the narrow valley floor, or centred around fords and river crossing points.
- **Sense of remoteness is variable** but is generally greater towards the *Moorland Valleys* and reduces on the approach to the coast where there are more roads, larger settlements and greater people-presence.
- Away from the larger coastal villages and sections of busy road, **the landscape has an overriding tranquil character**.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 3.2. There are a number of geographical areas belonging to the *High Wooded Coast and Combes* Landscape Type. These unique areas, having their own individual character and identity, have been identified as Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**B1: Heddon's Mouth**

**B2: Woody Bay**

**B3: Lynton and Lynmouth**

**B4: Culbone – Horner and Hawkcombe Wood**

**B5: Culver Cliff**

## 4. C: LOW FARMED COAST

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 4.1. This predominantly flat, farmed and settled landscape type, defined as the *Low Farmed Coast*, occurs within the north-east of the National Park. Located at the head of the *Farmed and Settled Vale*, this landscape abuts the beaches of Bossington and Porlock that, in turn, open out to the wide coastal arc of Porlock Bay. To the east and west the landscape is clearly defined by the dramatic slopes of the *High Wooded Coast and Combes*.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **A medium scale landscape, greatly influenced by** the proximity and views across the open waters of the **North Devon coast**.
- With an elevation range between **0 and 30m AOD**, the terrain is **strikingly flat with some localised, gentle slopes** occurring further inland.
- Solid geology of mudstone and sandstone (giving rise to reddish soils) but predominantly defined by **drift river terrace deposits, salt marsh deposits (mainly clay) and a mixture of silt, sand and clay with rock fragments**.
- A simple land cover comprising **open salt marshes – the muted hues and textured character of which** contrast with **bright green improved pastures** lying further inland.
- **Pasture dominates the agricultural land**, interspersed in places by occasional areas of cereal cropping.
- **Inland, the system of ancient field enclosure** has created a regular network of small – medium sized geometric fields.
- **The enclosed fields are defined by hedgerows** of varied height and condition creating a strong sense of containment and contrast with the open salt marshes towards the coast.
- **Narrow rural lanes**, flanked by high hedges, **channel and restrict views**.
- **Separated from the beach from a shingle ridge** that protects the low-lying farmland. The ridge is flanked by the **remains of a lime kiln and World War II pillboxes** - prominent landmark features.
- **Picturesque villages and hamlets** are of medium density, nucleated and located away from the coast at the foot of the surrounding wooded slopes.
- **Houses and farms are characterised by traditional vernacular style and building materials** – round chimney stacks thatched roofs and lime-washed walls are consistent features. Modern development, of varied styles, defines some settlement edges.
- **Although tranquil in parts, the landscape does not feel remote** due to the presence of villages and associated people-presence. Tranquillity is reduced in high season when visitor numbers increase.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 4.2. There is just one geographical area belonging to the *Low Farmed Coast* Landscape Type. This has been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Area. It is intended that this Draft Area is taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Area is:

#### **CI: Porlock Marsh**

## 5. D: UNENCLOSED MOORLAND

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 5.1. The windswept, exposed and open landscape of the *Unenclosed Moorland* occupies a central location within the National Park with some small outlying areas occurring to the south and south-east. The Moorland is bordered by a number of landscape types but it is for the most part flanked by the surrounding *Enclosed Moorland Fringe* (F) landscape type as well as being greatly influenced by the contrastingly enclosed landscape of the Moorland Valleys that intersect the expansive area of open moor.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **A large scale landscape defined by an expansive series of broad, rounded ridges and hills** that provide wide, often panoramic, views across both the moorland and landscapes beyond.
- Elevation range of approximately **250m to 520m AOD**.
- Underlying geology of **sandstone, slates and siltstone** with some higher areas **capped with peat**.
- **Prominent hills form discernible landmarks** at considerable distance from surrounding landscapes.
- **Dissected by a series of steeply-enclosed Moorland Valleys** (forming the headwaters of the rivers of the *High Wooded Coast and Combes* and the *Incised Wooded Valleys* landscape types).
- Vegetation cover varies from **vast areas of heather moor to large areas of grass moorland**, bringing colour and textural changes. Much of the moorland forms a **rich biodiversity resource** as reflected in large areas of SSSI designation.
- Land use largely characterised by **open rough grazing – predominantly sheep but also Exmoor ponies and cattle**.
- **Some areas of the moorland have been enclosed** (with post and wire fencing and occasionally banked beech hedges) and are close-grazed, marking a transition to the *Enclosed Moorland Fringe* (F) landscape type.
- **A general absence of settlement** with the exception of occasional dispersed farmsteads.
- **This is a tranquil landscape** with limited vehicular access, minimal built development or other visible human artefacts. People-presence is limited with the exception of popular viewing points and car parking areas.
- The elevation, extent and physical challenge of the moorland evokes a **strong sense of wildness and remoteness**. This further amplified in adverse weather conditions when visibility is restricted and the **sense of isolation is heightened**.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 5.2. There are a number of geographical areas belonging to the *Unenclosed Moorland* Landscape Type. These have been identified as Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**D1: Exmoor Forest and Dunkery**

**D2: Castle Common – North Molton**

**D3: Withypool**

**D4: Winsford Hill**

**D5: Haddon Hill**

## 6. E: FARMED AND SETTLED VALE

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 6.1. The mixed agricultural landscape defined as the *Farmed and Settled Vale* occurs within the north-east of the National Park; stretching to the south and east from the village of Porlock to terminate just south of Dunster. Here, it meets the National Park boundary but in reality the landscape extends beyond this line. The vale is clearly defined in the north-west and in the east by the prominent wooded slopes of the adjacent landscapes defined as the *High Wooded Coast and Combes* and the *Plantation Hills*.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- A medium scale landscape, with a variable landform – **flat to undulating with occasional small hills or hummocks.**
- Solid geology of **reddish-brown mudstone** and **reddish-brown calcareous breccia** with interbeds of **sandstone** giving rise to distinctive **red soils.**
- Surface geology largely defined by **alluvial flood-plain deposits** of streams and rivers.
- **Agriculture is a mix of arable (predominantly cereal cropping) and pastoral land-grazed** by sheep and cattle. Horsiculture is consistently evident across the vale.
- **Field are small to medium and of an irregular shape** reflecting the ancient enclosure of the land.
- **Fields are bounded by high hedgebanks** (predominantly field maple and wych elm) **and hedgerow trees** (oak, sycamore and ash) **creating a distinct sense of enclosure.**
- Relatively low level of woodland cover but there is a **strong wooded character** – in part borrowed from the **tree-clothed slopes of surrounding hills** but also due to the presence of **small copses, clumps** on hummocky land, **scattered trees and overgrown hedges.**
- Settlement comprises small **villages and hamlets** – located towards the edges of the vale where they are **sheltered at the foot of the surrounding hills.** Large individual farmsteads are scattered throughout.
- Settlement pattern is varied – both nucleated and linear **aligning or centred around crossing points or fords of streams and rivers** that weave across the vale.
- **Buildings are distinctively characterised by red sandstone, cob, lime-wash and thatch and clay-tiled roofs.** Stone bridges and walls are a feature.
- **Well –served by a series of winding secondary roads and lanes, often sunken** with overgrown hedges forming dark, enclosing tunnels.
- **The landscape is tranquil in parts** but, due to scattered settlement, network of rural roads and nearby settlements of Dunster and Porlock, the vale **does not feel remote.**

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 6.2. There is just one geographical area belonging to the *Settled and Farmed Vale* Landscape Type. This has been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Area. It is intended that this Draft Area is taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Area is:

#### **E1: Porlock**

## 7. F: ENCLOSED MOORLAND FRINGE

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 7.1. Extending into the north, south, east and west and covering vast areas of the National Park, the farmed landscape of the *Enclosed Moorland Fringe* immediately surrounds the *Unenclosed Moorland* landscape type. It is greatly influenced by the landscape types of the *High Wooded Coast and Combes* and *Incised Wooded Valleys*, both of which intersperse the landscape.

- **A medium scale landscape defined by broad rolling terrain** with an elevation range of approximately **250m to 450m AOD**.
- Defined by an **underlying geology of mudstones, sandstone and slates**.
- **Predominantly given over to pasture** (permanent-improved as well as unimproved rough grazing). Sheep, cattle and horses graze the land.
- Although not dominant, there are **some areas of arable land**.
- Irregular pattern of enclosure - **medium-sized fields divided during the 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> centuries**. Fields become **noticeably smaller** towards the adjacent valleys.
- Field boundaries defined by **prominent beech-topped hedge banks**.
- Where hedge banks are degraded, a number of lengths/sections have been replaced by **post and wire fencing**.
- **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 and settlement is characterised by **dispersed individual farmsteads**, sometimes flanked by small farm woods.
- Farms are typically **stone built with slate roofing**.
- This is a landscape with an **enclosed, tamed character**. As such it does not share the same wild and remote qualities that define the neighbouring *Unenclosed Moorland*.
- Although not remote, there is a general absence of settlement and, away from the roads that traverse the landscape, a **distinct tranquil quality pervades**.

### Draft Character Areas

- 7.2. There are two geographical area belonging to the *Enclosed Moorland Fringe* Landscape Type. These have been identified as Draft Landscape Character Areas and are outlined below. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**F1: North Exmoor**

**F2: South Exmoor**

## 8. G: MOORLAND VALLEYS

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 8.1 The landscape type defined as *Moorland Valleys* occurs in a number of different areas where the headwaters of the streams and rivers run down from the *Unenclosed Moorland*. This has resulted in the creation of deeply-carved valleys and an enclosed, more intimate landscape - a distinctive and dramatic contrast to the open and exposed character of the surrounding moors.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- With an elevation range of approximately **300 – 420m AOD**, this is a medium scale landscape defined by steep **valley sides and a narrow valley floor**.
- The **rivers and streams defined by narrow-channels with a gently meandering course**. In some instances the valleys are dry.
- Underlain by **sandstone, slates and siltstone** with the narrow valley floor lined with **alluvial deposits** of the streams and rivers.
- **Grass and heather land cover**, creating a strong visual relationship with the surrounding moorland.
- Adjacent to the rivers and streams the vegetation is frequently characterised by **boggy ground/valley mires**.
- **Predominantly defined by rough pasture** with sheep and Exmoor ponies grazing the valley sides.
- **Distinct absence of woodland** creating a marked contrast to the lower reaches of the valleys where *Moorland Valleys* give way to *High Wooded Coast and Combes* and *Incised Wooded Valleys*.
- **Some wetland tree species, such as alder**, infrequently occur alongside the watercourse.
- **Notable absence of settlement** and, for the most part, **inaccessible to vehicles**.
- Where the occasional secondary road does occur, **river crossing points are characterised by stone bridges**.
- **Limited boundary features**, with the exception of some post and wire fencing, creates a **continuous, seamless appearance** akin with the *Unenclosed Moorland*.
- Although enclosed and more sheltered from the elements, the valleys feel 'cut-off'. As such, a **strong sense of remoteness pervades**.
- With the exception of the occasional way-marked trail or secondary road, **there is little evidence of human intervention** and the valleys have a **tranquil, peaceful quality**.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 8.2 There are a number of geographical areas belonging to the *Mooland Valleys* Landscape Type. These have been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**G1: Exmoor Forest**

**G2: River Exe**

**G3: River Barle**

**G4: Danes Brook**

**G5: Triss Combe**

## 9. H: INCISED WOODED VALLEYS

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 9.1 Generally occurring within the southern half of the National Park, there are a number of areas belonging to the landscape type defined as the *Incised Wooded Valleys*. This landscape is characterised by deep, heavily wooded valleys which, particularly when viewed from high ground, form distinctive green fingers that push through surrounding areas of un-wooded 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, partridge and Exmoor 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**.

## **Draft Character Areas**

- 9.2 There are a number of geographical areas belonging to the *Incised Wooded Valleys* Landscape Type. These have been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**H1: Upper Aville**

**H2: Haddeo**

**H3: Exe**

**H4: Barle**

**H5: Twitchen**

**H6: Mole**

**H7: Bray**

## 10. I: WOODED AND FARMED HILLS

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- 10.1. The undulating wooded landscape type defined as the *Wooded and Farmed Hills* forms the easternmost part of Exmoor National Park. It covers a large area, extending to the north and east of the *Unenclosed Moorland* and *Enclosed Moorland Fringe* landscape types. The transition from the moorland landscapes is clear due to the dramatic increase in woodland cover and, although remaining small scale, the increase in the amount of settlement. Close the National Park boundary, on the north-east edge of this landscape type, the transition to the adjacent low-lying coastal landscapes is evident as the height above sea levels falls and the terrain becomes flatter.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- With a general elevation range of between **100m AOD and 400m AOD**, elevation is **wide-ranging and the landform strongly undulating**.
- **The land falls away to the north-east, from the high areas of moorland towards**, and forming a transition to, **the lower-lying coastal landscapes** occurring beyond the National Park boundary.
- Predominantly underlain by geological strata of **slates, siltstones and sandstones with localised areas of limestone** in the river valleys.
- An agricultural landscape of **predominantly pastoral land (improved)**, interspersed with arable (cereal and root) cropping. Where fields are ploughed, the **red soils create a strong contrast in colour**.
- Fields are generally **medium-scale and of an irregular shape and delineated by banked beech hedges with standard beech and oaks punctuating the hedgeline**.
- Open agricultural fields interspersed by large areas of **deciduous woodland** (much of which is Ancient), **coniferous plantations and mixed woodland** with a **particularly large concentration of irregular-shaped, often interconnected blocks** at the edge of the *Enclosed Moorland Fringe*.
- **Game shooting is evident** due to the presence of irregular-shaped game cover crops, rearing pens, access tracks and feeders.
- **A series of well-wooded narrow river valleys** intersperse the hills. These feel very much part of the wider landscape as opposed to a separate landscape type.
- The hills and defined valleys provide **dramatic, often surprise views across the rolling terrain**.
- **Hamlets and small villages are for the most part located in the valley bottoms** – both linear, following the course of the rivers, and in some instances nucleated around fords or crossing points. Individual farmsteads are dispersed throughout.

- **Houses are of traditional style with red sandstone, cob, thatch and slate** the predominant building materials.
- **Secondary roads criss-cross the hills** – frequently aligning the course of the rivers. Lanes are often sunken and flanked by banked beech hedges – both overgrown and flailed.
- **The landscape’s underlying ‘heathy’ character** is picked out by bracken-covered hedge banks, verges and plantation edges.
- As this is a working, managed agricultural landscape with frequent views to settlements and/or farms, and a network of secondary roads, **the hills do not feel remote.**
- Although not remote, **there is a strong sense of tranquillity** and this is particularly evident away from the rural roads.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 10.2. There is just one geographical area belonging to the *Wooded and Farmed Hills* Landscape Type. This has been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Area. It is intended that this Draft Area is taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Area is:

### **II: Luxborough and North Brendon**

## II. J: PLANTATION HILLS

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### LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

- II.1. The landscape of the *Plantation Hills* occurs within the north-east of the National Park. Divided by the *Farmed and Settled Vale*, this landscape type is bordered by a number of other landscapes that have views of, and are influenced by, the densely wooded and prominent hills. The *Plantation Hills* extend south from an area of *High Coastal Commons and Heaths* into the *Wooded and Settled Farmed Hills*.

### KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- With a general elevation range of between **150m – 380m AOD**, this is landscape of **moderate to high altitude within Exmoor**.
- The landform comprises a **series of hills and ridges cut by a number of combs**.
- Predominantly underlain by Hangman Sandstone Formation – **purple, grey and green, fine to medium-grained sandstone and reddish-brown mudstone**.
- **The land cover is dominated by coniferous plantations**.
- A considerable amount of **mixed and deciduous woodland (some Ancient)** **softens the harsh lines and edges** that are typical of large coniferous plantations.
- **A strong sense of enclosure and an overriding ‘dark’ character** due to the density of the planting and the highly restricted views.
- Although views are restricted within the plantations, **from the plantation edges, dramatic views can be gained across** the contrastingly open and low-lying landscape of the *Farmed and Settled Vale* as well as the *Wooded and Settled Hills and Incised Wooded Valleys*.
- **Remnant areas of heathy commons** occur within the plantations and provide a contrasting sense of openness and localised variation in character.
- There are some areas of agricultural land – **predominantly permanent pasture contained within medium-sized fields**. Agriculture is often concentrated towards the edge of the plantations where the landscape abuts the *Farmed and Settled Vale* and the *High Coastal Heaths and Commons*.
- **There is minimal vehicular access through the plantations**. Where secondary routes occur, lanes are often sunken and very enclosed.
- The lack of vehicle movement, combined with a general absence of settlement, makes for a **very tranquil landscape**.
- **Some parts of the landscape feel remote**. The sense of remoteness is however reduced by human influences such as the number of way-marked **footpaths and bridleways, picnic sites and Forestry Commission access tracks**.
- **The landscape’s underlying ‘heathy’ character** is picked out by bracken-covered verges and plantation edges.

### **Draft Character Areas**

- 11.2. There are two geographical areas belonging to the *Plantation Hills* Landscape Type. These have been identified as a Draft Landscape Character Areas. It is intended that these Draft Areas are taken forward by the National Park Authority for more detailed assessment and development of boundaries. The Draft Landscape Character Areas are:

**J1: Wootton Common**

**J2: Croydon Hill**

INDICATIVE DRAFT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS