

I. Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes



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



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



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



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



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

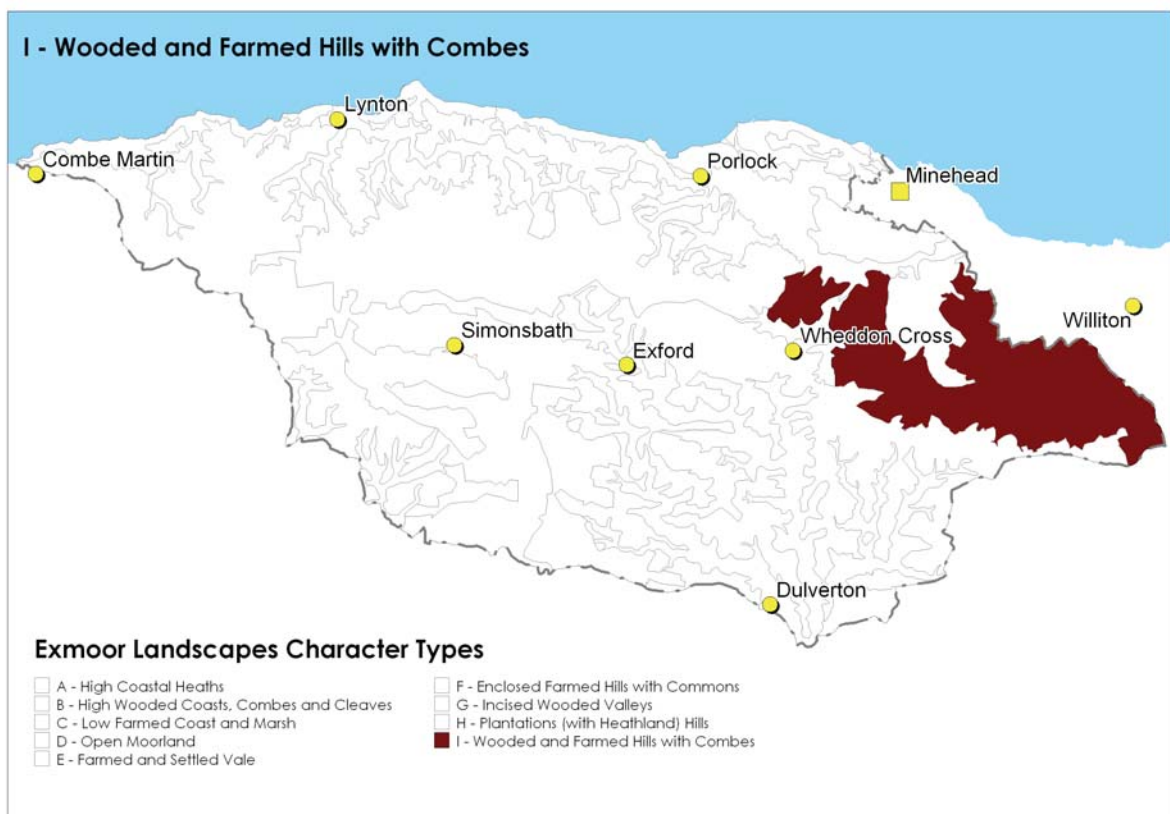


High open hills provide clear views to the Bristol Channel and to prominent vertical features sited not far from the National Park boundary.

11. I: Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes

Location and Boundaries

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



Key Characteristics

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

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

Landscape Character Description

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

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

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



Lime kiln and disused quarries at Treborough.

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



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

Landscape Evaluation

Strength of Landscape Character

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

Landscape Condition

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



Declining estate railing at Nettlecombe.

Landscape Strategy

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

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

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

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

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