

ITEM 10

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

14 November 2006

EXMOOR LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management

Purpose of Report:

To draw Members' attention to a draft Landscape Character Assessment of Exmoor which has recently been produced and to seek support for a proposed consultation process.

Legal Implications including Human Rights Act, 1998 and Equality Issues:

Environment Act, 1995.

Financial and Risk Implications:

The cost of preparing the Landscape Character Assessment has been met from the provision made for the National Park Management Plan Review in the 2005/06 revenue budget. Funding for the production of copies of the final report will be sought from the 2007/08 revenue budget in due course and is not expected to exceed £1500 some of which may be recoverable from sales.

Business Plan Objectives:

A/01.10 Landscape strategy: Identify priorities for action to conserve and enhance the Exmoor landscape, by, in particular, working in partnership with the Exmoor Society's Landscape Group to complete a Park-wide landscape characterisation study [and to] develop policies and proposals for inclusion in the National Park Management Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

Members are recommended to WELCOME the preparation of the draft Exmoor Landscape Assessment and to NOTE the consultation process and timetable outlined in the report.

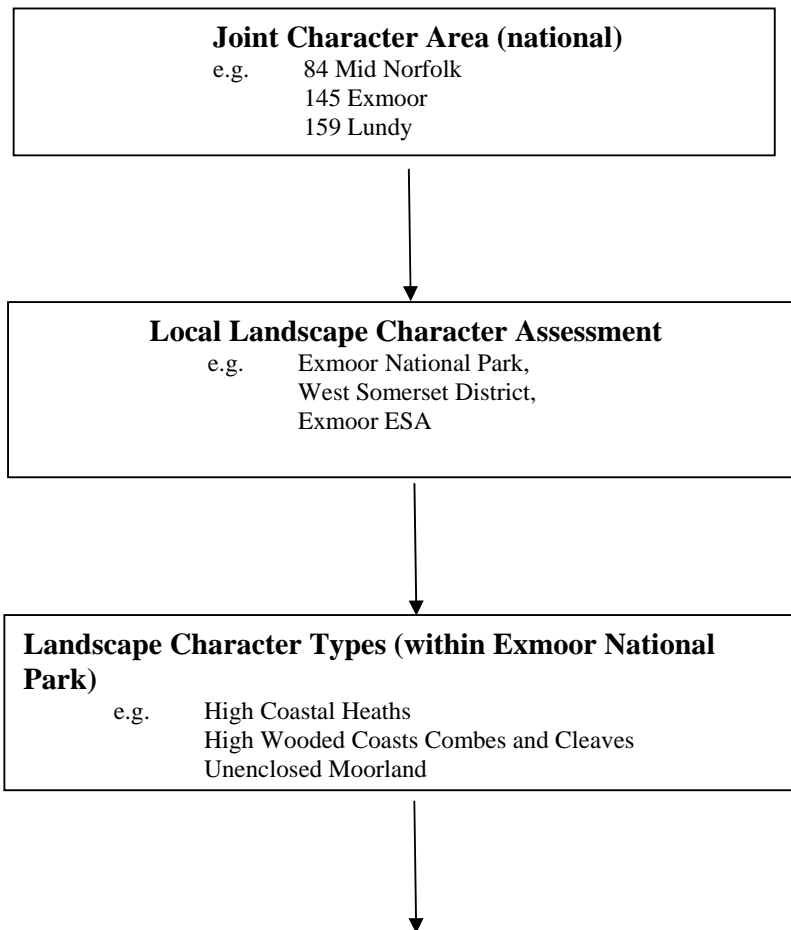
1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Landscape Character Assessment is a method of understanding, describing and analysing, the character of the landscape. It helps identify the features that give a locality its 'sense of place' and pinpoints what makes an area different from neighbouring areas. It is now a widely accepted technique used to give a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gives the countryside of England its character.
- 1.2 In 1996 the Countryside Agency and English Nature produced a map called the "Character of England". The map categorised the country into 159 distinct "Landscape Types", based on a detailed assessment of their geology, landform, soil, vegetation, land use, historic management and cultural associations. Since this time, the methodology around the subject has been developed and in 2002 the Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage published further detailed guidance on Landscape Character Assessment (*Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*, The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002). This is now recognised as the guiding document for Landscape Character Assessment.

- 1.3 The National Park Authority has been involved with a number of Landscape Character Assessments since this time, including the assessment carried out by the Environmentally Sensitive Area Project Team in the mid 1990s, studies carried out by North Devon District Council, Devon and Somerset County Councils, and the Authority's own preliminary landscape character assessment of Exmoor carried out in 1997.
- 1.4 However in 2004, the emerging Moorland Initiative identified the need for an up to date, computer-based (using the Geographical Information Systems software) and more detailed Landscape Character Assessment. The first stage of this work was carried out in the summer of 2004. This primarily looked at the moorland areas, but also gave a map-based outline assessment and characterisation of the whole National Park.
- 1.5 In 2005 the Authority, recognising the significance of this work to for the review of the National Park Management Plan, commissioned a consultant to work with Officers to complete the assessment. A draft document will be available at the Authority's meeting.

2.0 THE EXMOOR LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

2.1 The Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment uses the standard methodology and identifies nine distinct Landscape Character Types within the National Park as well as 26 smaller Landscape Character Areas. Landscape Character Types are pieces of landscape which share broadly similar patterns and combinations of elements, e.g. "High Coastal Heaths". The smaller Landscape Character Areas are identifiable geographic areas that sit within the Landscape Type but may be physically distinct. The figure below illustrates the hierarchy of landscape character assessment and description.



- 2.2 For each Landscape Character Type, the report describes the key characteristics of the landscape. This focuses on things like scale, landform, land use, boundaries, vegetation, extent, openness and tranquillity. The report describes the Landscape Character Type and the individual Landscape Character Areas and evaluates their strength of character and condition. An overall landscape strategy (conserve / restore/enhance /create) is provided with a detailed list of key issues and guidance for each Type. Photographs are used throughout to further illustrate the character of the landscape and issues affecting particular areas.
- 2.3 Key issues emerging from the characterisation exercise include the impact on the landscape of erosion and scrubbing up of moorland; “horticulture” – the accoutrements of equestrian activity; telecommunication masts; agricultural sheds; rhododendron encroachment; urbanisation of road corridors and the impact of commercial game shooting activity.
- 2.4 A renewed attention to landscape is emerging through the National Park Management Plan process and it is intended that the assessment will be used to inform the development of landscape policy, to supplement the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, to guide development control decisions and to direct future landscape conservation and enhancement work.
- 3.0 **CONSULTATION.**
- 3.1 The draft report was received from the consultant in September 2006. It is proposed to circulate the report to key partners including Natural England, the Exmoor Society, the Forestry Commission, English Heritage, the National Trust, Crown Estate, Badgworthy Land Company, North Devon District Council, West Somerset Council, Somerset County Council and Devon County Council. Because the cost of reproducing the document (which of necessity has coloured photographs and large coloured maps) only a limited number of papers will be produced at this draft, consultation stage but copies of the document will be available at the meeting and it can be viewed on the Authority’s website. (www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)
- 3.2 Comments on the draft will be invited to be made by 15 January 2007 after which the document will be revised before Members are invited to approve a final version at the meeting in March 2007. Officers are working with the Exmoor Society with a view to launching the final version of the Landscape Character Assessment at the Society’s Spring Lecture 2007 which is likely to have a landscape conservation theme.

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24 October 2006