

Part 1: Introduction

Looking along the North Devon
Coast of Exmoor



1.1 Introduction to the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment

1.1.1 Exmoor National Park is one of the most varied and beautiful landscapes in Britain. It is a living and working landscape containing a unique combination of spectacular coastlines, expansive moorlands, steep wooded valleys, attractive settlements and distinctive farmlands. The Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment is both a celebration and an analysis of the Exmoor landscape. As a Supplementary Planning Document it is also a planning and management tool to aid the continuation and enhancement of Exmoor's landscape into the future.

1.2 Purposes of the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment

1.2.1 The Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment is an overview of Exmoor's landscapes presented within a single document. It is an update of the 2007 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Emma Jane Preece. It brings together a very wide range of information, gathered from many different sources. A full list of references and sources of further information is provided in Appendix E. It is important to note that it is NOT trying to replicate or replace any of these specialist documents, and should not be used in place of them. The Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment should therefore be used in conjunction with more detailed studies which may refer to a particular topic or location.

1.2.2 Updating the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment provides an opportunity to incorporate the wealth of new research which has been undertaken on Exmoor in the past 10 years. Examples of new information include moorland surveys, the identification of Principal Archaeological Landscapes, the *North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Character Assessment* (2015), the *Exmoor Landscape Perceptions Study* (2011), the *State of Farming in Exmoor Report* (2015), *Exmoor's Moorland - Where Next?* (2016) CPRE Dark Skies information (2016) and the *Unlocking Exmoor's Woodland Potential Report* (2013). These reports (and others) enable more information to be provided on the cultural and perceptual qualities of the landscape, as well as on its physical characteristics. This is in line with current

best practice in the process of landscape character assessment. The update also enables new concepts such as ecosystem services and natural capital, which are now part of landscape thinking, to be included in the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment. These concepts are introduced in Section 2.8.

1.3 How to Use the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment

1.3.1 The Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment is intended for a wide range of users, including: Exmoor National Park Authority; land owners and land managers; developers and those submitting planning applications, and also people who are simply interested in Exmoor's landscapes and would like to learn more about them. It is set out in five parts:

1.3.2 Part 1 describes the purposes of the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment, its status and how to use the document. It introduces the issues affecting Exmoor's landscapes, and also gives an overview of the landscape character assessment process.

1.3.3 Part 2 sets the scene for the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment, describing the statutory purposes and special qualities of Exmoor National Park, and telling the story of the Exmoor landscape. It sets out the various designations which cover natural and cultural heritage sites, and the changes affecting Exmoor's landscape. Part 2 also contains an introduction to the relatively new concepts of ecosystem services and natural capital.

1.3.4 Part 3 contains landscape planning guidelines to enable the successful integration of appropriate new development into Exmoor National Park's landscapes, and should be read in conjunction with the final sections of the profiles in Part 3.

1.3.5 Part 4 is the heart of the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment. It contains a map showing the Landscape Character Types and Areas within Exmoor National Park, and a series of profiles - one for each of the nine Landscape Character Types.

1.3.6 Part 5 contains the appendices: Glossary; methodology and consultation details; adjoining Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments; comparison of landscape change and condition between 2007 and 2018 Assessments, and reference list.

1.4 Status of the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment as a Supplementary Planning Document

1.4.1 The 2018 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment contains a new section on landscape planning guidelines. Through its adoption from the outset as a Supplementary Planning Document it provides more detailed advice and guidance on the policies that are focussed on landscape in the Local Plan and assists in the determination of planning applications. It also provides an opportunity to look ahead, to create visions and priorities for each of the Landscape Character Types, and to address the forces for change acting on the landscape now and over the next 15 years.

1.5 Statement of Consultation

1.5.1 The 2018 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment has been the subject of extensive internal and wider consultation. Stages of consultation have included a stakeholder workshop; internal review by the project steering group, Landscape Advisory Group and specialist team members within Exmoor National Park Authority, and a full public consultation on the draft report (open for eight weeks in summer 2017). A detailed Statement of Consultation is available from Exmoor National Park Authority’.

1.6 Defining ‘Landscape’

1.6.1 The European Landscape Convention provides a holistic definition of the term ‘landscape’, as follows:

Landscape is an area of land, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/ or human factors¹.

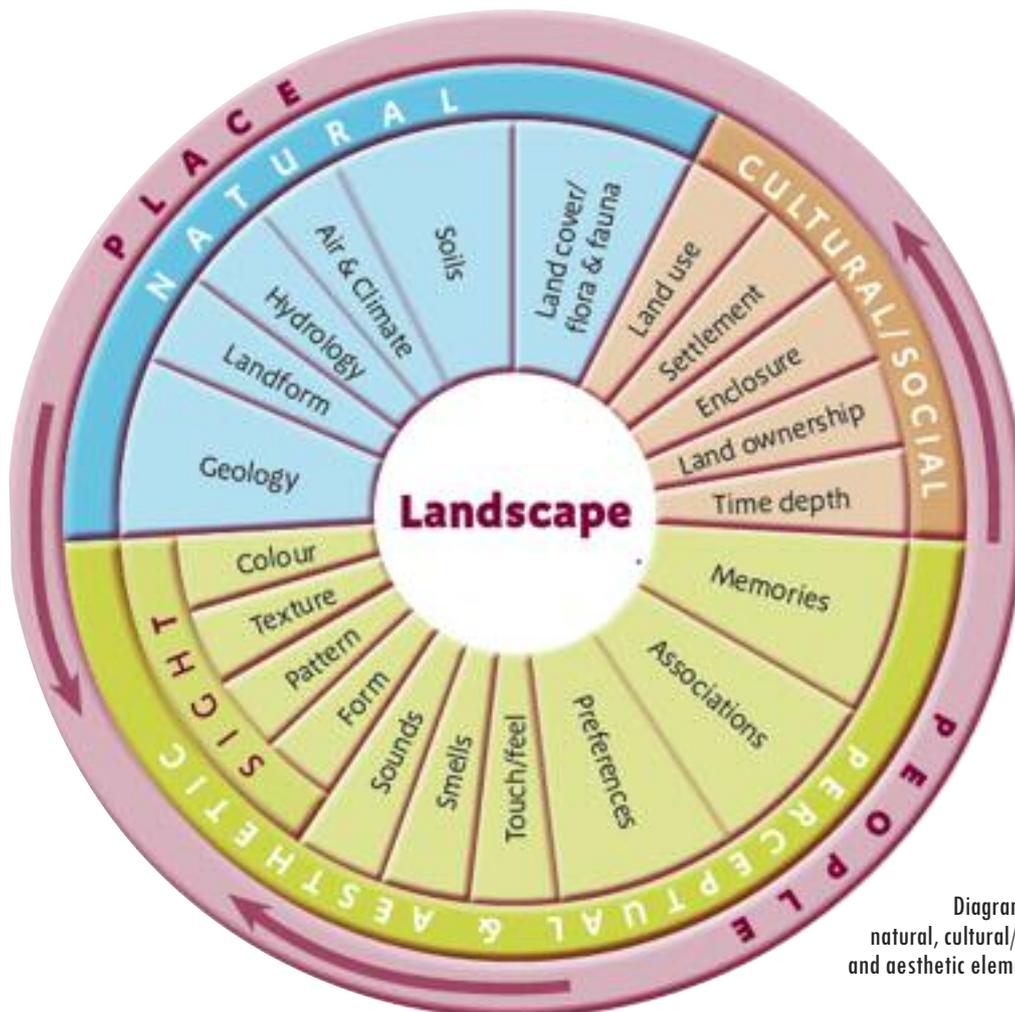


Diagram showing the various natural, cultural/ social and perceptual and aesthetic elements which combine to create ‘landscape’²

¹ An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014) p. 7

² An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014) p. 9

1.7 The Process of Landscape Character Assessment

1.7.1 The concept of landscape character is embedded in the planning system (including the National Planning Policy Framework 2012) and has been used in the UK for many years to inform the management of change and deliver sustainable development.

1.7.2 Landscape Character Assessment is *the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features (characteristics) that make landscapes*

*distinctive. This process results in the production of a Landscape Character Assessment*³. It requires desk studies, fieldwork, writing-up and consultation, as described in Appendix B. The process of Landscape Character Assessment seeks to identify the distinct and recognisable patterns of physical, cultural and perceptual elements in the landscape that make one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. To do this, it identifies distinctive Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Landscape Character Areas (LCAs). These can be defined as follows:

- **Landscape Character Types** are *distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas... but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use, and settlement pattern*⁴.

- **Landscape Character Areas** are *single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each area has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type*⁵.

1.7.3 When using Landscape Character Assessments it is important to remember that in reality, the boundaries of LCTs and LCAs are usually gradual. The lines on maps showing the boundaries have been drawn at a suitable point within the zone of transition between LCTs or LCAs. Therefore if a site is close to the boundary with an adjacent LCT or LCA, it is necessary to read relevant information for both LCTs or LCAs.

³ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014)* p. 8.

⁴ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014)* p.54.

⁵ *An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014)* p. 54.

1.8 Existing Landscape Character Assessments which overlap or abut Exmoor National Park.

1.8.1 The process of Landscape Character Assessment can be undertaken at any scale, from national right down to parish level. The national-level assessment undertaken by Natural England identified 159 National Character Areas and was updated and republished in 2014. Exmoor National Park lies within the wider Exmoor National Character Area (145).

Exmoor National Character Area (145): Key characteristics

- A diverse upland landscape, rising abruptly out of the surrounding lowlands.
- Central high, treeless moorlands used for rough grazing, incised by steep wooded valleys and combes with occasional grass and arable fields.
- The underlying consistent geology of mid to late Devonian sandstones, slates and fissile mudstones (shale), underpin and give coherence to the entire area.
- Complex coastline of headlands, steep cliffs, waterfalls and coves with dramatic exposures of folded strata accessible via the South West Coast Path, a National Trail. It boasts the highest coastline, the highest sheer sea-cliff and the longest stretch of coastal woodland in England.
- The vast dune system at Braunton Burrows and Woolacombe, the rocky coast and sandy beaches, and the long shingle ridge at Porlock Bay are distinctive coastal geological and geomorphological features.
- The Taw/Torridge estuary with large areas of high quality saltmarsh, mudflats and sandbanks providing a rich source of food for overwintering and migratory waders visible from the higher plateaux and clearly defining the western boundary of the area.
- Acidic peaty soils on the moorland plateau give rise to tracts of heather, occasionally turning rich purple in late summer, blanket bog, grass heath and bracken.
- 19th century farms and rectilinear moorland-edge enclosures with beech-topped hedgebanks and wind-sculpted standard beech trees and windbreaks. Elsewhere, older field patterns are defined by irregular hedges and stone walls. Medieval field systems occur across the area and are particularly notable at Braunton Great Field.
- Across the western plateau, fields of semi-improved rush pasture and arable of 19th-century origin are defined by closely trimmed hedges with occasional standard trees.
- Villages and farmsteads nestle in sheltered valley bottoms often at river crossings. Buildings are mainly of local slate and shale rubble, sometimes whitewashed. A variety of local stone is used in the villages, along with cob and brick, with slate roofs. Scattered, often whitewashed farmsteads punctuate the western plateau.
- Woodlands, mostly ancient and oak-dominated, cloak the steep coastal combes and inland valleys. Ancient parks and more recent conifer plantations are features of the lower slopes.
- High archaeological interest from all eras of human activity. A particularly rich source of bronze-age monuments such as stone rows, stone settings and barrows. Notable industrial archaeology including quarrying, mining and iron working, lime burning and longshore fishing (fishweirs) from all eras.
- Red deer and Exmoor ponies, trout-filled, fast flowing, shallow rivers and streams over stony and pebbly beds.

1.8.2 At a more local level Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments which abut or overlap Exmoor National Park include *Devon's Landscape Character Assessment*, *The Joint Landscape Character Assessment for North Devon & Torridge Districts* and the *North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Character Assessment*. Appendix B explains how these Assessments relate to the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment in terms of their methodologies, and also briefly outlines these areas which abut/ overlap the boundary of Exmoor National Park.

1.9 Landscape Change and Condition

1.9.1 There are many forces for change acting on the Exmoor landscape. These are ongoing processes which affect the landscape. They may be positive or negative, natural or man-made, single large changes or small cumulative impacts. The impacts of cumulative changes acting over many years, or over a large area, should not be underestimated. The changes to Exmoor's landscapes which have occurred over the past 10 years, both positive and negative, are reflected in this updated version of the Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment. For a comparison of landscape condition as identified in this document and in the 2007 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment, please see Appendix C.

1.9.2 The impacts of positive landscape management projects can be seen throughout the National Park, including work to control rhododendron and other invasive species (an ongoing challenge), positive agricultural management initiatives, and projects to reduce the visibility of visitor facilities. Examples of positive landscape management projects include reducing the visual impact of visitor facilities at the Valley of Rocks to re-create a more wild character; removal of fences at Kipscombe Gate; undergrounding of overhead wires on Porlock Common and Porlock Marsh and the stabilisation of historic buildings at Hoarook. In addition, Exmoor became the first Dark Sky Reserve in Europe in 2011.

1.9.3 Overall, the condition of Exmoor's landscapes are considered to be good, although there are variations across the National Park. In general, there are few intrusive developments, most SSSIs are in

View north from near Blue Gate, south of Simonsbath, encompassing moorland and farmland Landscape Character Types



Gorse and hawthorn trees on Porlock Common



‘unfavourable recovering’ or ‘favourable’ condition; there are few listed buildings identified as being at risk, and farmland is generally well-managed. However, there is no room for complacency; much work needs to be done to keep Exmoor’s landscapes in good condition, and to retain their character in the future. The forces for change acting across the National Park are described more fully in Section 2.9.

1.9.4 The greatest current threats to Exmoor’s landscapes include: the loss of extensive areas of open space and key views through changes in vegetation; the continuing loss of heather and grass moorland to bracken, gorse and trees; the damage to buried archaeology by encroaching bracken and trees; loss of trees through pests, disease and climate change; changing farming practices and uncertainty over future agricultural and woodland grant funding; loss of landscape pattern as field boundaries deteriorate; new large scale farm buildings; equine land uses and skyline development (particularly telecommunications

masts). Other ongoing changes to the landscape include intensification of game shooting; tree felling as plantations reach maturity; decline in traditional woodland management; loss of small hay meadows and pasture due to agricultural intensification; catchment-based flood amelioration schemes; coastal change; large scale renewables; the proliferation of non-native species; poor sewage management and climate change affecting rivers and streams, and recreational impacts.

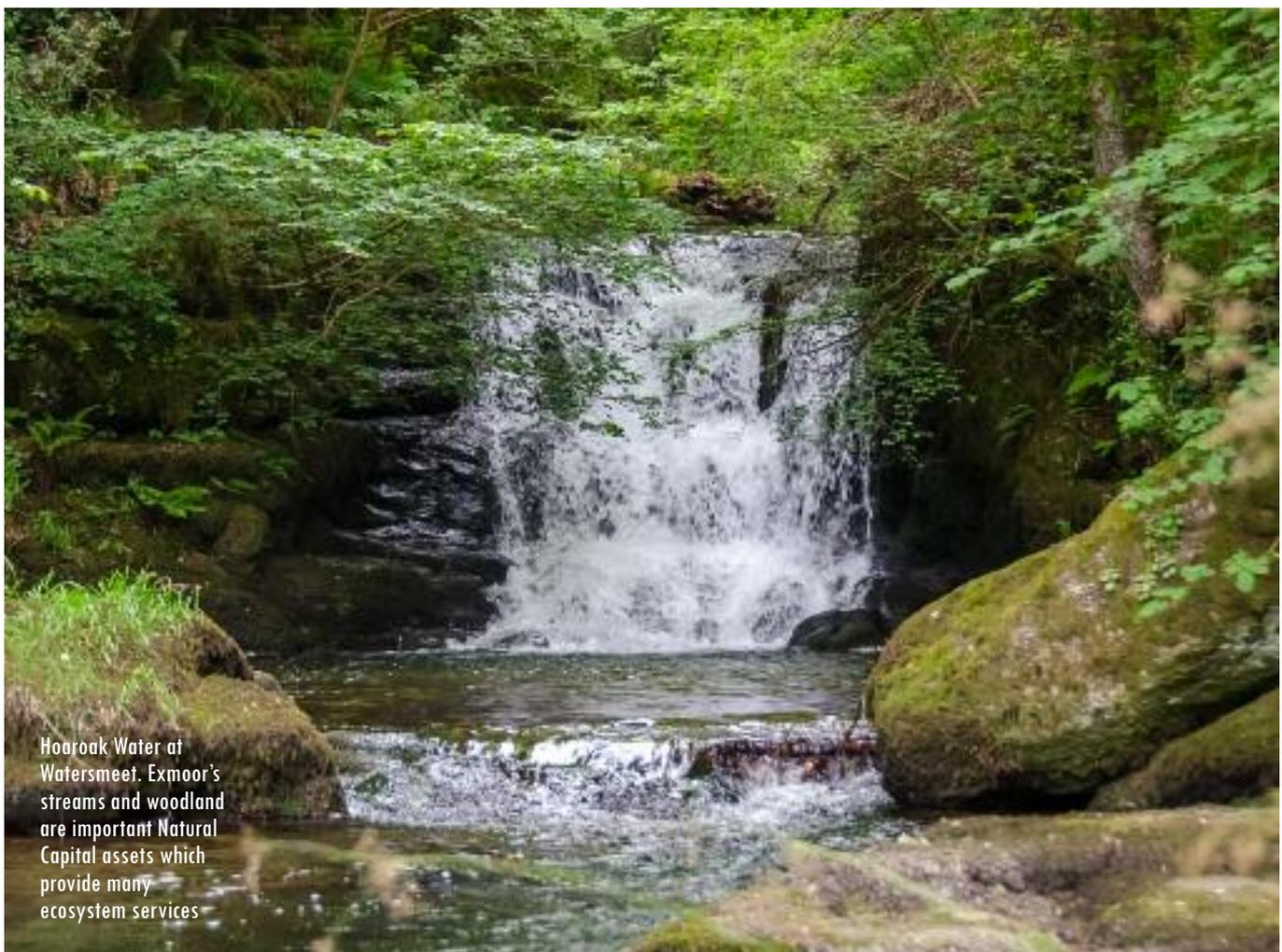
1.9.5 Changes in the landscapes outside the National Park are also affecting views from within Exmoor. Since the 2007 Exmoor Landscape Character Assessment was written, large wind farms have been constructed at Fullabrook and Batsworthy which are clearly visible from Exmoor. Other potential infrastructure developments outside the National Park (for example solar farms, tidal power schemes, wind turbines, communications masts, roads and housing) all have the potential to impact on views to varying extents, and some may also increase light pollution levels.

1.10 Valuing Exmoor's Natural Capital

1.10.1 Exmoor contains a wealth of Natural Capital, including the inherent scenic beauty of its landscapes which provides an important resource for people's wellbeing. Considerations of Natural Capital and ecosystem services are becoming increasingly important tools in the management of landscapes both in Exmoor National Park and more widely. The concepts of Natural Capital and ecosystem services are explained more fully in Section 2.8, and the Natural Capital and ecosystem services associated with the various Landscape Character Types are described in the profiles in Part 4.

1.10.2 Natural Capital can be defined as the *'world's stocks of natural assets', which include the elements of nature that directly and indirectly produce value or benefits to people, including*

*ecosystems, species, fresh-water, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions*⁶. It is from this Natural Capital that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible. The most obvious ecosystem services include the food we eat, the water we drink and the plant materials we use for fuel, building materials and medicines. There are also many less visible ecosystem services such as the climate regulation and natural flood defences provided by forests, the tonnes of carbon stored by peatlands or the pollination of crops by insects. Even less visible are cultural ecosystem services, such as the inspiration we take from wildlife and the natural environment.⁷



Hooroak Water at Watersmeet. Exmoor's streams and woodland are important Natural Capital assets which provide many ecosystem services

⁶ Natural Capital Committee, 2014

⁷ World Forum on Natural Capital Conference, Edinburgh 2015 See <http://naturalcapitalforum.com/about/>



Beech Hedge, Exmoor by Rosina Woodthorpe,
Image ©Rosina Woodthorpe