

3. SPATIAL PORTRAIT

3.1 Exmoor was designated as a National Park in 1954 and is situated within the counties of Somerset and Devon. The total area of the National Park is 693 square kilometres (267 square miles), of which approximately two thirds lies within the West Somerset District and one third of the area in the North Devon District. The northern boundary is formed by the Bristol Channel. A total of 43 parishes are within (or partly within) the National Park with most of the population living in small dispersed settlements.

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING EXMOOR

3.2. Exmoor is one of the few upland areas of southern England, the highest point at Dunkery Beacon rising 519m (1704 feet) above sea level. The landscape has been shaped by both natural elements and human activity over thousands of years; however, its remoteness, topography and climate have helped to maintain a large extent of well preserved, semi-natural upland landscapes and undeveloped coastline.

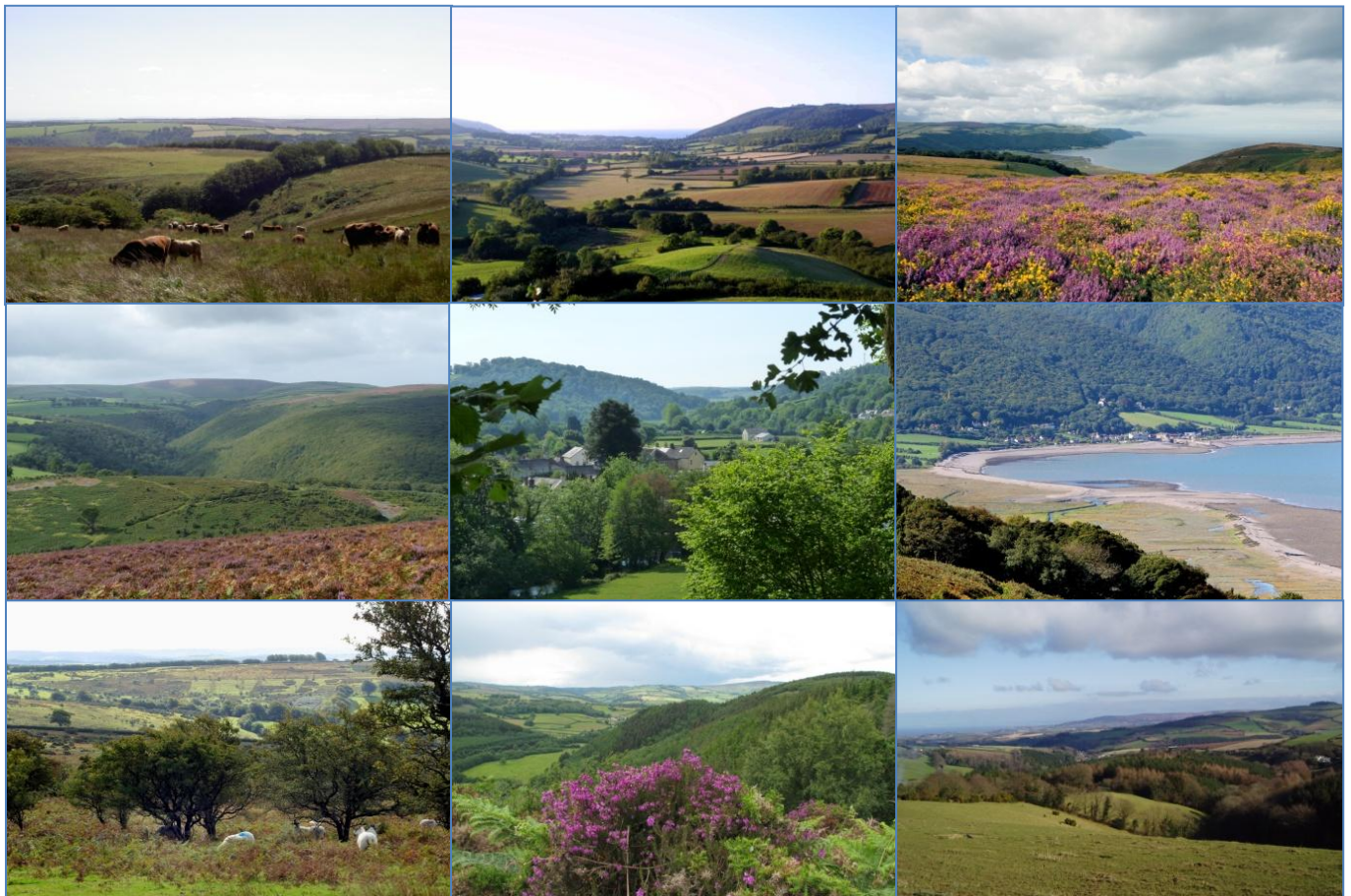


Figure 3.1 Landscape Character Types on Exmoor: (Each row L-R): Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons – Codsand Moor; Farmed and Settled Vale – Porlock Vale; High Coastal Heaths – Bossington Hill; High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves - View from Easter Hill; Incised Wooded Valleys - Barle Valley at Dulverton; Low Farmed Coast and Marsh – Porlock Marsh; Open Moorland – Winsford Hill; Plantation Hills – Grabbist Ridge View; Wooded and Farmed Hills with Combes – Brendon Hills.

3.3. The Exmoor landscape is extremely diverse and characterised by the extent of semi-natural vegetation over moors, mires, woodland and coast; these areas are fringed by farmland that has its own distinctive character. The Exmoor National Park Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is based on a detailed understanding of the landscape. Published in 2007, the LCA identifies nine different landscape character types which define the diversity and character of the Exmoor landscape (see fig 3.1).

3.4. Some of the darkest skies in England are found in Exmoor. In 2003 The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the British Astronomical Association produced light pollution maps

of the UK. The study highlighted Exmoor as a dark sky island in a growing sea of light pollution. Darkness is an important component of the tranquillity and quality of Exmoor's landscape character. In October 2011 Exmoor became the first National Park to achieve 'Dark Sky Reserve' status and only the second Dark Sky Reserve in the world.

- 3.5. Exmoor has an extraordinary variety of wildlife and habitats that provide numerous opportunities for people to understand and enjoy nature, and are a key reason why people visit the National Park. Around 28% of the National Park is designated by UK and European law to protect its distinctive wildlife, a large part of this area is internationally designated as Special Areas of Conservation or nationally designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs). There are many rare species found in the National Park and the Exmoor Biodiversity Action Plan lists 118 species as being 'important', of which 33 animals and plants have been specified as 'key species' meriting special attention for their conservation.

CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

- 3.6. The character of buildings and settlements also varies considerably with diverse vernacular building styles and materials reflecting local geology and traditions, as well as periods of significance in each settlement's history. The built heritage of Exmoor is therefore a valued and distinctive feature of the National Park. The siting and form of Exmoor's long established settlements have been determined largely by physical factors such as local materials, topography and climate. Exmoor's built environment consists of a range of dispersed farmsteads, hamlets and villages as well as market towns and Victorian coastal resorts.
- 3.7. A variety of vernacular building materials have resulted in a diversity of traditional building designs across the National Park that integrate with the surrounding landscape character. Exmoor's traditional buildings are generally constructed from sandstone, sometimes with lime render, and cob. Roofing materials such as (wheat-reed) thatch and local, Cornish or Welsh slates and clay tiles have been traditionally used depending on the age of the building and its location. The range of materials, details and finishes found in Exmoor's buildings has established a distinct palette of colours and textures which are essential elements of detailed design, settlement character, and local identity. Although in the past there were a number of small scale local quarries, now there are no active mineral extraction workings within the National Park. Local stone resource has therefore been obtained from quarries outside the National Park boundary.
- 3.8. The excellent quality of preservation of archaeological sites and historic features and the diverse nature of the historic resource within the National Park make it of special significance. However, these resources are also fragile, vulnerable to insensitive change and, ultimately irreplaceable. Significant research has been undertaken in recent years, which has considerably increased understanding of the heritage of Exmoor.

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE & MANAGING RESOURCES

- 3.9. A significant challenge for the National Park Authority is to enable landowners, communities and businesses across Exmoor to mitigate the causes and adapt to the effects of climate change. The Exmoor National Park Carbon Neutral Programme aims to transform Exmoor into a low carbon community through a number of measures such as implementing energy efficiency measures, renewable heat and electricity technologies, changing travel patterns, and developing carbon sinks and other local solutions relating to land management and farming.
- 3.10. There has already been considerable success in developing local approaches to low carbon living and mitigating climate change through taking advantage of renewable energy sources. A number of communities have benefitted from installing renewable energy systems in local services and businesses through the Low Carbon Communities Challenge fund. Other Government incentives have resulted in the installation of a large number of small-scale renewable energy schemes across the National Park. These have been predominantly solar photo-voltaic panels, but also include wind turbines and micro-hydro schemes. Whilst small-scale renewable energy schemes are encouraged, some forms of this technology are more easily assimilated within the National Park's high quality landscape than others.
- 3.11. In terms of sustainable building methods, recent local need affordable housing developments developed by Registered Providers (housing associations) have incorporated sustainability

measures meeting Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. Improving the energy efficiency, sustainable use of natural resources, and better adaptation to climate change in developments is encouraged. The forthcoming staged amendments to building regulations will result in the Zero Carbon Homes standard being applied by 2016, with non-domestic buildings expected to be zero carbon by 2019 which will help to improve the sustainability of future developments in the National Park. The Carbon Neutral Programme¹² also encourages an energy efficiency programme for existing homes and businesses to help reduce carbon emissions emitted as a consequence of energy used for heating.

- 3.12. **Flood Risk:** The topography and geology of Exmoor significantly influences the catchment hydrology and the response to rainfall. Many of the watercourses within Exmoor National Park form incised channels flowing through steep confined valleys, where channel gradients are steep, flood flows respond rapidly to rainfall and velocities and depths can be high. Most settlements on Exmoor are located in valley bottoms and often the low-lying areas of the settlement are at risk of flooding. It is predicted that climate change will result in milder wetter winters that are characterised by periods of long duration rainfall. However, frequent and short duration, high-intensity rainfall linked with longer drier summers is also predicted. These scenarios are likely to cause increased flooding from fluvial, surface water and sewer sources. In addition, the effects of climate change on sea level will increase the likelihood of coastal and tidal flooding in low lying areas¹³. This is a key constraint for new development and enabling existing development to adapt to the increased risk of fluvial and coastal flood events as an effect of climate change.
- 3.13. **Pollution:** Air quality in the National Park is generally thought to be good; however some habitats have been shown to be particularly sensitive to nitrogen deposition through acid rain – including blanket bog and old sessile oak woods¹⁴. These habitats are found within the internationally designated Special Conservation Areas and have been found to exceed the maximum amount of nitrogen deposition that can be tolerated before damage is caused. The ecological status of the majority of river length, including the Barle, Exe, West Lyn and Badgworthy Water, in the National Park area is good. Other watercourses classified as moderate or poor are subject to ongoing surveys and monitoring to identify further measures to improve their ecological quality.
- 3.14. **Waste:** The waste generated within the Park is recycled, composted and land-filled at sites outside the National Park. Both North Devon and West Somerset district councils operate kerbside recycling schemes, and a number of settlements also have community recycling facilities available so that waste is managed in a more sustainable way.

ACHIEVING A THRIVING COMMUNITY

- 3.15. The population of Exmoor was 10,273 in 2011 a decline of 600 (5.5%) from 2001. Approximately three-quarters of the population are within the West Somerset area of the National Park, and a quarter within the North Devon area. Exmoor's age profile shows a slight shift in the demographic pattern as the proportion of the population aged 60 years¹⁵ and over has increased by over 6% from 2001 to 39.5%. Exmoor together with The Broads, have the highest mean average age of all National Parks in England and Wales. Consequently there is a slightly lower proportion of people aged up to 14 (-2.3%) – however the most significant decrease has been within the 30 to 44 age group (-5.7%). Patterns of migration have shown that there has generally been a net increase of population through in-migration to both North Devon and West Somerset districts¹⁶ which has not been reflected on Exmoor. However, the high proportion of homes with 'no usual residents' (empty, second and holiday homes) has increased since 2001 by 5.5%¹⁷, this factor, combined with the out-migration of younger people, is likely to account for the population decline. The significant proportion of dwellings without permanent residents can exacerbate the problem of maintaining the viability of local services.

¹² Exmoor National Park Carbon Neutral Programme Consultation 2010 – Forum 21

¹³ West Somerset Council and Exmoor National Park Authority Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

¹⁴ Environment Agency and English Nature assessment in 2006

¹⁵ 39.5% of the population aged over 60 in 2011 compared to 33.1% in 2001

¹⁶ Northern Peninsula Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008 (NPSHMA)

¹⁷ 19.2% of households with no usual residents in 2011 Census

3.16. The highest proportion of household type on Exmoor relates to family households; however, almost a third are single person households with single pensioner households constituting 17.7% of occupied households, whilst other single person households account for 13.8%. In the West Somerset area of the National Park over a third of households consist of only people aged over 65. Population projections identify a dramatic growth in single person households (50%), most of whom will be older people) and a reduction in family households with more than one child (dependent and non-dependent)¹⁸.

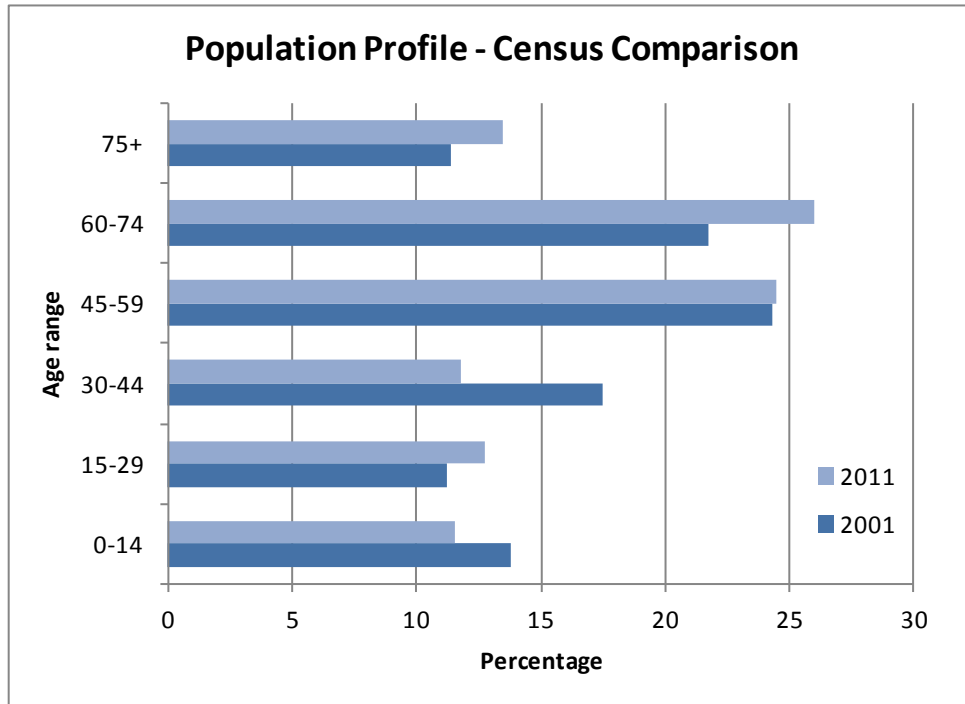


Figure 3.2 Population Profile of Exmoor National Park

3.17. The majority of housing (47%) within Exmoor is detached, which is comparable to other National Parks, but considerably higher than national and regional figures. The proportion of detached dwellings has slightly decreased with a comparable increase in the proportion of flats and apartments. Most housing is owner-occupied, with 46% of houses owned outright with no mortgage. This high percentage may reflect in-migration of those selling homes elsewhere to buy housing outright in the high quality environment of the Exmoor National Park. A residential occupancy survey in 2000 of recently completed dwellings found that 89% were occupied by people who had previously lived outside the National Park boundary, and 54% were people who had lived outside of the south west region. However, despite this trend, around a third¹⁹ of occupied household spaces are rented from social and private landlords; this is significantly higher than regional or national figures and reflects the significance of providing affordable housing within the National Park.

3.18. Exmoor has one of the highest differentials between local wages and house prices in the country. The average household income in 2010 was £28,668²⁰ the lowest for all English National Parks and 15% lower than that for the South West region as a whole. In 2012 the mean average house price²¹ was £392,555 – 74% higher than the average house price for the South West region. Evidence shows that households with an average income would not be able to afford the mean average house price in the lowest quartile at £169,573 without a significant deposit; whilst households with below average income are even further constrained. The Exmoor, North Devon and West Somerset Rural Housing Project, funded by a partnership of local authorities and registered providers (housing associations), has worked in the National Park and the adjoining rural areas of the two districts since 2002 to carry out Parish Housing

¹⁸ Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update: Exmoor National Park in West Somerset – Housing Vision 2013

¹⁹ 33.6% social and private rented housing – 2011 Census ONS

²⁰ National Parks: economic comparison – DEFRA Rural Statistics Unit 2010

²¹ Exmoor National Park Annual House Price Survey 2012

Needs Surveys and to work with organisations, communities and landowners to help create new affordable housing for local communities. Since policies were introduced in the last Local Plan (adopted March 2005) to ensure all new housing in the National Park met a local affordable need, 101 units have been granted planning permission in communities across Exmoor²².

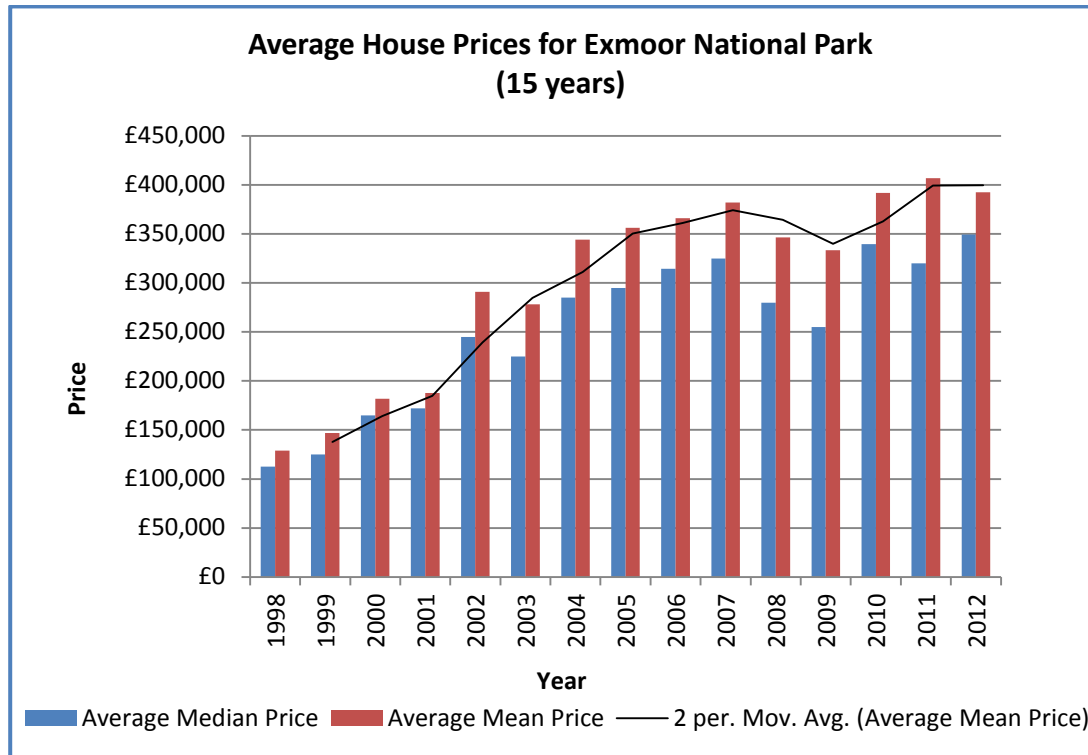


Figure 3.3 Mean and median average house prices for Exmoor National Park 1998 - 2012²³

- 3.19. In-migration has had an impact on both the economy and the social fabric of Exmoor, including retired, semi-retired, commuters, and second-home residents. The attractiveness of the area to relatively wealthy incomers can help to maintain the local economy and services, but also places additional pressures on the local housing market²⁴.
- 3.20. The larger settlements that provide a range of services, facilities and employment for the resident community and a wider hinterland are Porlock, Dunster, Dulverton and Lynton & Lynmouth; however a greater range of services are found in the surrounding areas within the nearby coastal and market towns of Minehead, Taunton, Tiverton, South Molton, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe (see the Key Diagram). Community services and facilities within Exmoor’s smaller villages are relatively restricted; and loss of services has been exacerbated by the closure of three Post Offices during 2008 as a result of national changes to the Post Office service. This has resulted in the closure of two village shops which have been replaced either by existing services or through shared facilities. Recent years have also seen a number of small petrol stations close, leading to only six remaining facilities available for residents and visitors (two of which are located in the same settlement).
- 3.21. There are six first schools, two primary schools and a middle school within the National Park; access to further and higher education is poor due to travel distances and the lack of accessible public transport. Due to falling school roles, a 2006 review of the schools within the National Park by the education authorities led to the majority of Exmoor schools forming federations across the National Park to enable closer working and sharing of resources. However, further reviews of how education is delivered in the National Park have not been ruled out by the education authorities. West Somerset College in Minehead and Ilfracombe Media & Arts College are the main providers of secondary and further education; the

²² At the time of consultation on the Draft Local Plan (November 2013)

²³ Exmoor National Park Annual House Price Survey 2012

²⁴ Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update: Exmoor National Park in West Somerset – Housing Vision 2013

percentage of students achieving 5 or more GCSE's between grades A*-C are 49% and 35% respectively²⁵. These figures are lower than averages for the local authority area and nationally.

ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

- 3.22. Exmoor's landscape has limited the development of centres of population and the main service centres for Exmoor villages are situated around its periphery, these local circumstances have an important bearing on the strength of the economy and its potential for growth. In 2011 there were 7,626 people of working age²⁶ within the National Park, of which two thirds (66.6%) were economically active – this low figure can be explained by the relatively high proportion of economically inactive retired persons which accounts for 23% of the working age population. Set against this figure however, is a relatively low level of unemployment. The majority of the economically active population are self-employed (39%), which continues to reflect an economy dominated by small scale businesses. A large sector of the working population work at or from home (31%) – this is a considerable proportion of the working age population when compared to the national average (9%)²⁷, but reflects the rurality of the National Park, and the increasing importance of high speed broadband roll out to sparse rural areas that can enable people to work effectively at home.
- 3.23. In terms of the number of employees, the 2011 census results indicate that the largest proportion of the working population (15.6%) is employed in the accommodation and food service sector. This is a reflection of the nature of the National Park and its attractiveness as a tourist destination. The retail sector accounts for 14.2% of employees which tourism will indirectly and directly influence. The third largest business sector is agriculture, hunting and forestry with 11.7% of all employees. Together these three sectors make up over 40% of employment within the National Park showing that tourism (see paras.3.26 – 3.29) and land-based enterprises are the main drivers of the local economy and an important employment resource.
- 3.24. Agriculture and forestry is essential for the maintenance of the characteristic landscape of the National Park relating to its mosaic of vegetation cover, the wildlife it supports, the pattern and character of Exmoor's farmsteads. Traditional hill farming and the skill and commitment of the farming community therefore provide economic benefits locally and regionally. The agricultural economy is dominated by livestock farming, which is typical of upland farms, and has access to a combination of moorland, enclosed pasture and improved land. Upland farms are typically larger than lowland farms, and tend to be owned by one farmer, or has been in one family for a long period of time. It is also more likely that the farmer is over 65 years of age. As at 2005, there were a total of 864 registered farm holdings covering an area of 53,000 ha on Exmoor, some of which will be small holdings. Research has predicted a continuing increase in the average size of farms due to moves towards even more extensive farming and a commensurate reduction in numbers of people supported by upland farming which could result in the loss of upland management skills. Farm diversification is an important source of revenue for hill farms as research shows that the average farm business generates substantial underpayment for farm family's labour and no return on their investment in the business²⁸.
- 3.25. There are emerging employment opportunities which exist in a number of key sectors in the National Park including agriculture, agricultural/forestry products, tourism, environmental technologies, lifestyle and knowledge-based businesses.

ACHIEVING ENJOYMENT FOR ALL

- 3.26. Tourism is a vital component of the economy on Exmoor. The opportunities that Exmoor offers are rare in southern England and surveys support the view that the area remains an important environmental asset for a wide range of people. Most visitors to Exmoor come to enjoy unspoiled countryside (91%) and outdoor recreation (69%), of which walking is the most

²⁵ 2012 Department for Education Performance Table Results

²⁶ Usual resident population aged 16-74

²⁷ 2001 Census data – awaiting statistical release of this data for National Parks for 2011 Census

²⁸ Hill Farming Systems in South West England: Economic Viability and the Delivery of Public Goods (2008) University of Exeter

popular activity²⁹. There are over 1000km of public rights of way on Exmoor which enables access on foot, by bicycle and on horse-back. Permitted and de-facto access also have a very important role to play and many of the most popular routes include permitted sections. Exmoor's open access land provides opportunities for more adventurous walkers and some areas of open access for horse riding are also available.

- 3.27. Other forms of recreation include on-water activities, and field sports including a notable increase in game-bird shooting, that help to extend the season for accommodation providers which cater for this market.
- 3.28. The high quality landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage that Exmoor provides are major attractors for visitors^{30 31}. Exmoor's landscape and scenery are primary attractors for visiting the National Park and 79% of visitors specify tranquillity and peace and quiet³². Whilst many business owners may wish to see visitor numbers increase, the general quietness of Exmoor is one of its key assets. The National Park's Dark Sky Reserve status is helping to attract visitors to experience Exmoor's dark night sky and inspiring interest in astronomy.
- 3.29. Although it is relatively distant from large urban areas, Exmoor has always attracted a relatively high proportion of staying visits compared to day visits. Visitors to the National Park spend over £80 million each year, supporting businesses in the accommodation, retail, food and drink, recreation and transport sectors. Over 400 businesses in the accommodation sector alone rely on visitors for their income, where occupancy levels are higher for self-catering than serviced accommodation. The peak visitor season runs from Easter to the end of October on Exmoor.

ACHIEVING ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

- 3.30. Transport: Due to the rural nature of the National Park and its dispersed settlements, it is not unexpected that just over half of economically active people commute to work by car³³ with the average commuting distance around 13km³⁴. Key employment centres are situated outside of the National Park boundary within surrounding towns. A high percentage of housing and employment growth will be directed to Barnstaple and Taunton as significant centres for key services and employment. This may have implications for increased commuting out of the National Park, or local people relocating to access jobs and homes (where the housing is closer to their place of employment). More sustainable transport solutions are encouraged, such as walking, cycling and using public transport, but it is recognised that for the majority of journeys the car is the only practical solution. Relatively few communities have access to a year round daily³⁵ bus service, although there are opportunities to use demand responsive transport for parishes within the West Somerset area of the National Park and community transport schemes to help those with no or limited access to transport access shopping or medical and other healthcare needs.
- 3.31. Exmoor has two principal transport routes, the A39 and A396 (with a short section of the A399 passing through the western edge of the Park), some B roads are also significant especially for local freight movements; the Exmoor Route Network Map (see Section 10 Achieving Access For All and the Proposals Map) illustrates the most significant transport routes within the National Park. Traffic flows on Exmoor are increased particularly during the main summer months when greater numbers of tourists visit the National Park. The Moorland Rover bus provides a flexible service for residents and visitors to enable them to access and enjoy the National Park. Although traffic pressures are not severe there can be specific locations which face congestion issues and parking problems during the busy holiday periods particularly within Porlock, Dunster, Dulverton and Lynton & Lynmouth. The annual average daily traffic figures have remained relatively stable over recent years³⁶.

²⁹ Exmoor National Park Authority Visitor Survey 2010

³⁰ Tourism Economy of Exmoor 2004

³¹ South West Tourism and Valuing our Environment 1998 - National Trust

³² ENPA 2010 Exmoor Visitor Survey

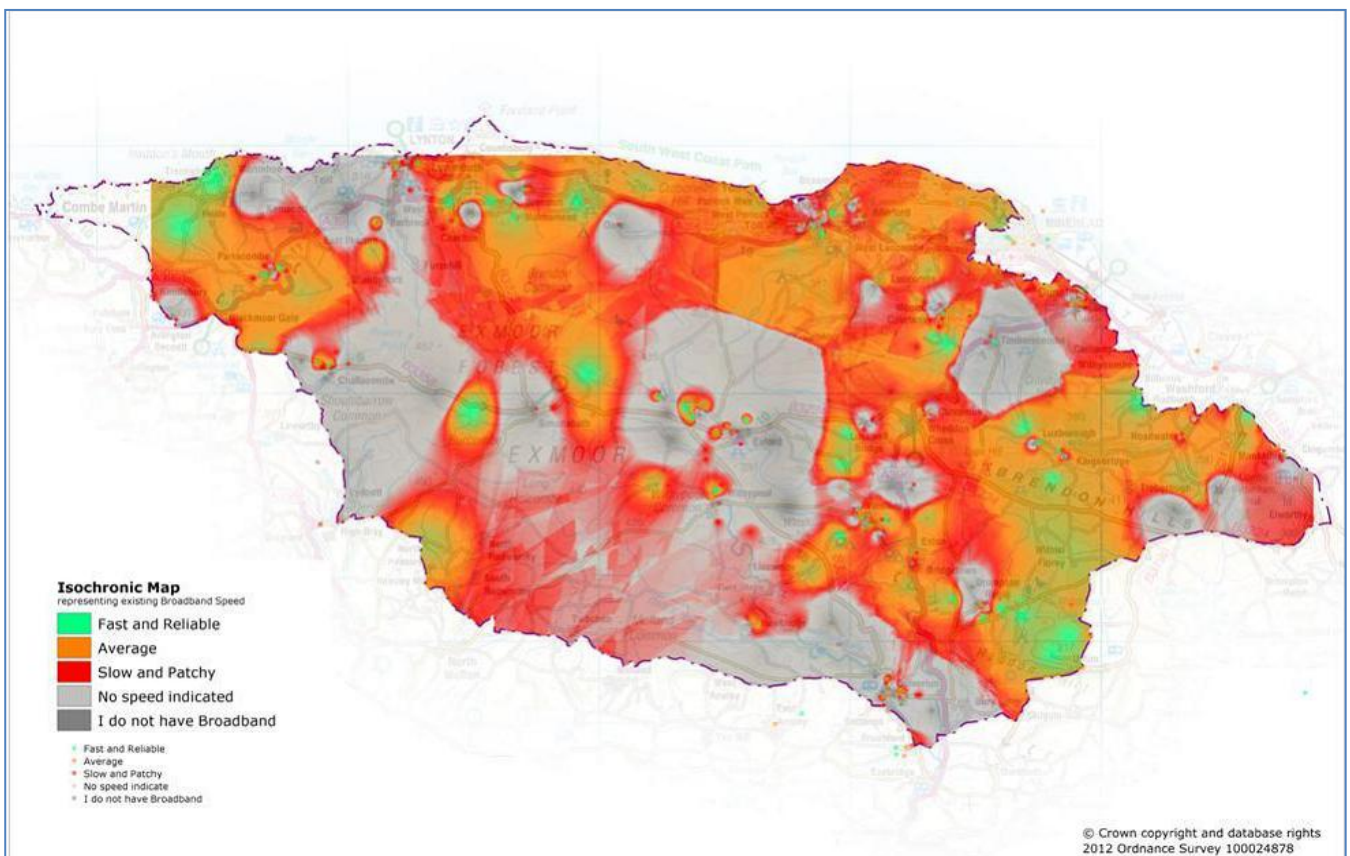
³³ 2001 Census – awaiting statistical release of this data for National Parks for 2011 Census

³⁴ 2001 Census – awaiting statistical release of this data for National Parks for 2011 Census

³⁵ Running at least on a Monday – Saturday basis

³⁶ ENPA Annual Monitoring Report 2011-12

- 3.32. **Communication:** Access to broadband and mobile telecommunications across the National Park has been identified as a key issue. Due to the dispersed nature of rural settlements, broadband speeds tend to be average to very slow (see Map 3.1), compared to main urban areas that have benefitted from the roll-out of high speed connections to date.
- 3.33. Much of the demand for broadband in rural areas is driven by online shopping, banking and communication. Currently, the incidence of rural home working is as much as three times greater than for urban areas nationally. Within the National Park almost a third of the working age population works at or from home³⁷. The negative impacts of the digital divide are increasingly evident. However, existing telecommunications infrastructure has already benefited those rural areas with broadband access through: businesses relocating to rural areas from urban areas to enjoy a better quality of life; people moving out of cities on the basis they can work from home and access online services; and the potential for rural manufacturers and retailers to access worldwide markets³⁸. Improving and adapting this infrastructure can ensure that the social and economic benefits of accessing digital technology are available across the National Park. Access to superfast broadband is being addressed across the National Park through Connecting Devon and Somerset to help deliver faster broadband to the rural areas of both counties. Broadband will help to overcome significant transport constraints experienced by rural upland areas, through increased home working, distance learning and remote access to public services.
- 3.34. There are a number of mobile telecommunication masts across Exmoor which generally serves the larger centres/areas of population; this leaves a number of areas and communities unable to receive a mobile phone signal as it is not always cost-effective for mobile operators to improve coverage. A Mobile Infrastructure Project has been set up by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to invest in improving mobile coverage in rural areas. The National Park Authority is within the Phase 2 area, and the project intends to bring improved coverage from 2013 to 2015³⁹.



Map 3.1: Broadband speeds across the National Park (Your Future Exmoor 2010)

³⁷ 2001 Census – 31.35% of people aged 16 – 74 in employment who work mainly at or from home within Exmoor National Park – awaiting statistical release of this data for National Parks for 2011 Census

³⁸ CRC Mind the Gap (2008)

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-it-easier-for-the-communications-and-telecoms-industries-to-grow-while-protecting-the-interests-of-citizens/supporting-pages/improving-mobile-coverage>

KEY DIAGRAM

3.35. The Key Diagram (Map 3.2) sets out the strategy of the Local Plan in a visual context. It identifies the spatial strategy for the National Park (General Policy GP4 Spatial Strategy) which provides the basis for future housing and employment development across Exmoor, as well as environmental areas of international significance.

MAP 3.2 KEY DIAGRAM

