

Devon Landscape Character Assessment - Extracts

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Torbay Hinterland



The Torbay Hinterland is a steeply undulating series of hills incised by small streams which extend into the adjacent urban areas. It includes a distinctive rim of landscape which forms the setting and backdrop to Torbay with views across the conurbation out to sea. Here the proximity of the urban edge has resulted in a proliferation of urban fringe development and recreation activities which have fragmented the hedgerow, woodland and land use patterns and made them vulnerable to change. Nevertheless, fingers of green landscape penetrate down the steep valleys into the built up areas of Torbay, creating welcome contrasts and opportunities for recreation. Further west the landscape looks inland, with views to Dartmoor in the west. Here there is a stronger rural character; the folds of the landscape and high hedgebanks lend visual enclosure and a greater degree of tranquillity; the historic pattern of hedgebanks, small woods, winding rural lanes and sparse settlement remains intact; and historic castle sites are a feature that adds to the time depth of the landscape.

Context

The Torbay Hinterland is located adjacent to the coastal resorts of Torbay (Torquay, Paignton and Brixham) and forms a rim of rural landscape that acts as a setting to these settlements, offering views eastwards across the built up area and out to sea. To the west the landscape faces inland and overlooks the tributary valleys of the River Hems. Here the boundary with the Denbury and Kerswell Farmlands is transitional. In contrast the eastern boundary is abrupt and is formed by the urban edge; while to the south the boundary follows the ridge which separates Torbay from the tidal Dart Estuary south-east of Totnes.

Constituent Landscape Character Types

Constituent LCTs:	3A: Upper Farmed and Wooded Valley Slopes, 3B: Lower Rolling Farmed and Settled Valley Slopes.
Part of NCA:	151: South Devon

Distinctive Characteristics

- Steeply undulating landform of intricate hills incised by small streams.
- Presence of underlying sandstone geology visible as red soils in occasional ploughed arable fields.
- Extensive views from hilltops to Torbay and the coast, across the Aller valley and rolling farmland and across the Dart valley towards Dartmoor.
- Occasional small mixed and broadleaved woods and orchards on steep slopes, together with hedgerow trees and hilltop pines, giving this landscape a relatively well-wooded appearance.
- Mainly pasture, with patches of arable land.
- Small- to medium-sized, irregular fields divided by mature hedgerows with trees.
- Nature conservation interest that includes broadleaved and mixed woodland, stream courses, wetlands and spring habitats.
- Historic landscape features including castles, remnant medieval field pattern, ancient hedgebanks, old orchards and vernacular buildings as well as winding, narrow lanes and greenways.
- Sparse settlement pattern of scattered houses, farms and hamlets with stone or render and slate vernacular buildings and some brick.
- Sense of tranquillity despite proximity of urban areas and major road and railway, by virtue of the steep, intricate landform.
- Major power lines across the hills; and A380 crossing the landscape on the fringes of Torbay.

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features:

- Highly distinctive, steeply undulating, folded landform lending panoramic views across Torbay to the coast and over the surrounding valleys and rolling farmland towards Dartmoor.
- High scenic quality due to intricate landform, patchwork of pasture and arable fields, mature hedgerows and winding lanes.
- Some of the best preserved traditional orchards in Devon.
- Sparsely populated rural hinterland and high quality rural setting to the coastal resorts.
- Numerous CWSs comprising ancient semi-natural woodland, herb-rich grassland and mixed farmland with bird interest (including curlew and bats).
- LNRs at Ocombe Farm, Scadson Woods and Ocombe Valley Woods which penetrate into the urban areas.
- Berry Pomeroy Castle (English Heritage) and Compton Castle (National Trust) which are notable historic sites and visitor attractions.

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications: Past and Current

- Major power lines and the A380 Torbay ring road impinge on the area.
- Tranquillity disturbed locally near the main road and railway, adjacent to the urban edge and where night light spill is significant.
- Replanting of ancient woodland sites with conifers.
- Masts on ridges and hills e.g. Beacon Hill, Borrow Down and Windmill Hill, which break the rural skyline that forms the setting to the coastal resorts.
- Recreational pressure, evident in the form of camping and caravan sites, golf courses, fishing lakes, Country Park at Cockington and quad biking.
- Spread of conurbation and associated industrial development onto the more exposed slopes e.g. around Long Road at Kemmings Hill, Linhay.

Future

- Potential large extensions to existing dwellings and new buildings in high visibility locations such as hilltops and open slopes, resulting in visual intrusion and erosion of characteristic vernacular built form.
- Pressure for new masts, turbines and power lines, which potentially would be highly visible on prominent skylines.

- Potential road improvements and roadside developments along the A380, leading to an erosion of rural character.
- Construction of new, large-scale agricultural buildings that would be out of context with existing traditional, smaller-scale buildings.
- Potential agricultural intensification, with loss of traditional field boundaries and patterns.
- Conversion of traditional agricultural buildings and attached land for domestic and leisure use, which can lead to unsympathetic boundary and surfacing treatments.
- Widening and new access points to narrow lanes, eroding their rural character.
- Expansion of Torbay urban area eroding the rural landscape setting.

Strategy

Overall Strategy:

To conserve and manage the existing hedgerow network and pattern of existing woodlands and nature conservation sites, strengthening the character and landscape resilience of the urban fringe of Torbay. The landscape's vulnerability to development and recreational pressures is reduced. Inland new development reflects the small scale, vernacular settlement pattern and conserves the pattern of fields, woods, hedgerows and narrow lanes. Views from high ground towards the coast and Dartmoor are conserved.

Guidelines:

Protect

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- Protect the distinctive, unspoilt, and exposed skylines above the coastal resorts avoiding the location of new development and vertical structures on prominent skylines.
 - Protect the existing small-scale settlement pattern of houses, farms and hamlets to the west. Resist the spread of new development (including caravan and camping sites) outside the limits of villages and hamlets and including along roads. Utilise the landscape's woodland cover and topography to filter views of any new development.
 - Protect the local vernacular – any new development should utilise the traditional materials and styles wherever possible (whilst seeking to incorporate sustainable and low carbon construction and design).
 - Protect the landscape setting of Torbay, ensuring new development enhances features such as hedgerows and woodland.
 - Protect the higher levels of tranquillity and rural character of the land to the west through the control and management of development, including highways and recreational development.

Manage

- Manage the pattern of field enclosure, particularly remnant medieval field enclosures, restoring lost and gappy Devon hedgebanks using local materials where ever possible (particularly on intensively farmed slopes where they can stabilise the soil and reduce agricultural run-off).
- Manage and enhance the wildlife interest of the farmed landscape (particularly for horseshoe bats and bird populations such as curlew), including the creation of species-rich grass buffers around arable fields (also serving to reduce agricultural run-off).
- Retain areas of rough grazing land and scrub patches on steep slopes.
- Reinststate traditional management techniques, particularly coppicing, to the landscape's semi-natural woodland to promote a diverse age and species structure and provide a low carbon fuel source to local communities.
- Manage areas of mixed conifer woodland with a view to reinstating broadleaved woodland where feasible.
- Explore the use of woodland for recreation access away from more sensitive sites.

Plan

- Plan for a network of green spaces and green infrastructure links to support existing populations whilst integrating any new development, particularly in the immediate hinterland landscape to Torbay.
- Restore and manage traditional orchards and explore opportunities for the creation of new ones, including community orchards to promote local food and drink production.

Plymouth and Modbury Farmlands



The constant presence of Dartmoor on the northern horizon is a defining characteristic of this area. Situated below the open skyline, moorland rim and wall-patterned upper slopes of Dartmoor, this landscape forms a patchwork of fields, small woodlands and some estate planting. Together they create a settled, well-treed and scenic landscape. Despite the presence of the A38 and the town of Ivybridge, the area's narrow wooded valleys retain an intimate and secluded character, with tree-lined rivers snaking through a pastoral landscape of meadows, woodland and estate parkland.

Context



This area is located to the east of Plymouth, and includes the town of Ivybridge. To the north is a gradual transition up to Southern Dartmoor and Fringes and to the south a transition to the Bigbury Bay Coastal Plateau; while to the east and west respectively lie the Mid Avon and West Dart Valleys and Ridges and the built-up area of Plymouth. The area includes the middle catchments of the Rivers Erne and Yealm and is crossed by the A38.

Constituent Landscape Character Types

Constituent LCTs:	3G: River Valley Slopes and Combes, 3E: Lowland Plains, 3B: Lower Rolling Farmed and Settled Valley Slopes
Part of NCA:	151: South Devon

Distinctive Characteristics

- Mainly underlain by mid Devonian rocks (mudstone and slate with limestone and sandstone) with extensive intrusions of basaltic lava and tuff; fault line between mid and late Devonian rocks near the northern boundary of the area.
- Gently rolling landform forming an irregular pattern of low hills and valleys.
- Rivers Erme, Yealm, Silverbridge Lake and Lud Brook flowing generally north-south from Dartmoor to the sea along pronounced valleys with flat valley floors; smaller tributary streams in shallower valleys.
- Deciduous woodland in valleys, with occasional blocks of deciduous or coniferous plantation on higher land; numerous smaller woodlands, copses, riparian and hedgerow trees (particularly oaks) enhancing the well-treed appearance of the landscape.
- Medium to poor soils, mainly supporting pastoral agriculture, with some pockets of arable; scattered orchards throughout the area.
- Fields generally medium in size and semi-regular in shape, with areas of smaller and less regular fields – representing earlier enclosures – surviving around some villages.
- Large block of surviving medieval enclosures in the central part of the area, and extensive ‘Barton’ fields (dating from 15th to 18th century) to the south and east of Ugborough.
- Fields divided by wide hedgerows with those around arable fields tending to be more closely flailed than those around pasture.
- Semi-natural habitats including woodland, wetland and unimproved grassland.
- Several estates, with parkland locally influencing landscape character (e.g. around Lyneham, Flete, and Strode) and occasional hilltop clumps forming landmarks.
- Numerous historic features within the landscape including lanes, tracks and stone bridges.
- Scattered settlement pattern of dispersed farmsteads and villages, often constructed of stone.
- The larger settlements of Ivybridge, Modbury and Yealmpton situated along the main roads which run east-west across the northern and southern edges of the area.

- Network of winding lanes, often sunken, with outward views frequently barred by high hedgebanks and contrasting major road of A38.
- Secretive, intimate valleys contrasting with the surrounding more open farmland.
- Rim of Dartmoor providing an important northern backdrop and strong sense of place.

Evaluation

Special Qualities and Features:

- Parts have high scenic quality and a key role as part of the setting of the South Devon AONB.
- Dominated by Dartmoor on the northern horizon, strongly influencing the character of the area; visible in views to and from Dartmoor, contributing to the setting of the National Park.
- Sense of remoteness, particularly within river valleys.
- Ancient woodlands, often in linear form along valley sides.
- Diversity of CWSSs, including ancient semi-natural woodland, secondary woodland, a large lake and swamp, marshy grassland and neutral grassland.
- Several RIGSSs, displaying various geological features including fossils; folded rocks; intrusions of gabbro and volcanic tuff (lava); limestone formations and the margin of Dartmoor granite.
- Northern part of the Flete estate (Grade II on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens), comprising late 19th and early 20th century gardens and pleasure grounds, within a wider 18th century parkland of national significance for wildlife due to its large number of veteran trees.
- Saltram House, Grade II* Historic Park and Garden on the edge of Plymouth, overlooking the tidal estuary of the River Plym.
- National Trust-owned estate (not open to the public) at Ugborough House.
- SM at Lyneham, encompassing Westerbury Camp Iron Age hillfort, medieval deer park (including sections of the park pale) and rabbit warren.
- Several Conservation Areas, reflecting the quality of the area's built heritage, covering the historic cores of Ugborough, Ivybridge, Modbury, Yealmpton and Ermington.
- Erne-Plym Trail recreational route running through the area.

Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications: **Past and Current**

- Visual and audible impact from A38 reducing tranquillity in the northern part of the area.
- Intrusive industrial estates north of the A38 between Plympton and Ivybridge affecting rural character.
- Urban expansion of Plymouth, Plympton and Ivybridge (often with poor quality urban edges) impinging on views.
- Urban fringe influences (e.g. equestrian activity, informal development, road signs etc.) affecting the character of the landscape, which may be exacerbated by poor management of agricultural land (e.g. neglect of hedgerows, poorly-maintained farm buildings etc.).
- Light pollution from Plymouth and A38 corridor resulting in loss of dark night skies.
- Past quarrying activities – lakes and tips remaining features in today's landscape.
- Localised visual impacts from large structures such as pylons, communications masts etc.
- Past intensification of agriculture, resulting in (for example) drainage and improvement of grassland, field amalgamation and hedgerow loss, and the construction of large farm buildings, glasshouses and polytunnels.
- Past replanting of ancient woodland with coniferous or mixed plantations.
- Threat of new pests and diseases (e.g. Phytophthora) resulting in loss of trees and woodlands.
- Invasive water-borne weeds (e.g. knotweed, Himalayan balsam) resulting in loss of native riparian vegetation and habitats.

Future

- Development pressure from surrounding settlements resulting in continued urban expansion e.g. Sherford.
- Continued prevalence of urban fringe activities, with gradual erosion of the condition of the landscape.
- Uncertainty over future levels of agricultural grants and funding, potentially affecting livestock numbers and maintenance of landscape features such as hedgerows and historic farm buildings.
- Tree and woodland loss as a result of increased magnitude and frequency of storm events due to climate change.

- Changes to seasonal weather patterns (e.g. increased summer droughts and winter flooding) potentially resulting in loss of drought- and wet-intolerant species and changes to agricultural practices.
- Demand for new quarries for building stone/ aggregate.
- Demand for renewable energy sources (e.g. wind turbines, solar arrays, hydro-electric plants and biofuel crops) potentially changing the appearance and pattern of the landscape; domestic and community scale schemes may have a cumulative impact on the landscape and built fabric of the area.

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To protect the landscape's scenic quality and rural character, and enhance the settings of Dartmoor National Park and the South Devon AONB. Agricultural land is well-managed, and urban fringe influences (including neglect of farmland) are resisted. Woodland, parkland and other semi-natural habitats are well managed. The visual and audible impacts of existing and future urban and road developments are minimised.

Guidelines:

Protect

- Protect the area's scenic quality and enhance the settings of Dartmoor National Park and the South Devon AONB.
- Protect the area's characteristic small woodlands, clumps, copses and hedgerow trees.
- Protect hedgerows and hedgebanks, retaining the 'patchwork' appearance of the landscape.
- Protect and manage remaining orchards.
- Protect the sense of remoteness experienced in the area (particularly in river valleys) resisting developments which may compromise this quality.
- Protect historic lanes and tracks, and their associated hedgebanks and bridges, resisting unsympathetic signage or highways measures.
- Protect the area's settlement pattern and distinctive stone-built traditional buildings, ensuring that any new development is sympathetic in terms of scale, form, style and materials.

Manage

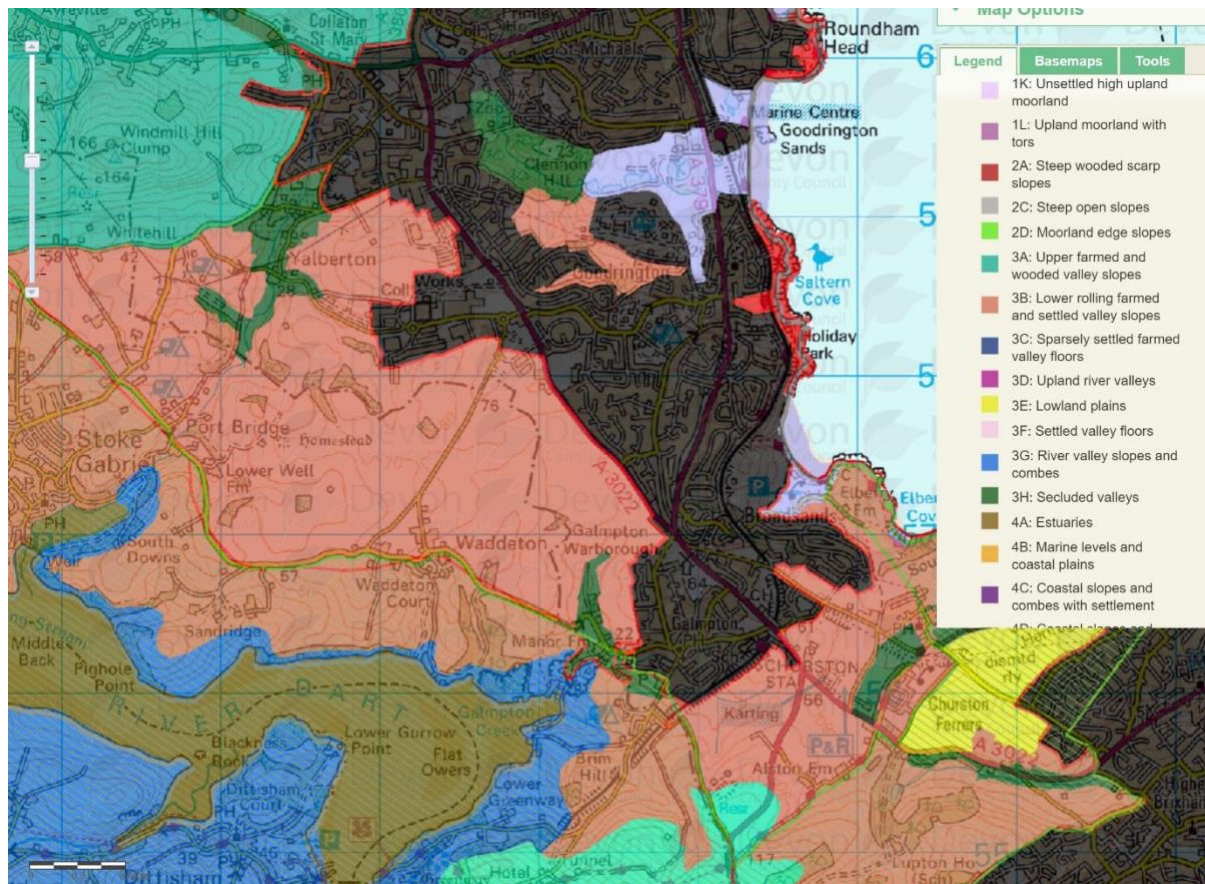
- Manage agricultural land to enhance its biodiversity; maintain the condition of the landscape, and keep traditional features such as hedgerows in good repair.

- Manage woodland and copses (including through traditional techniques such as coppicing) to maximise age and species diversity, and encourage a diverse ground flora.
- Manage river corridors and their associated wetlands to increase their biodiversity; control and eradicate if possible any invasive water-borne weeds.
- Manage grassland habitats through locally-appropriate levels of grazing.
- Manage parkland, protecting historic features – in particular conserving ancient and veteran trees and providing new generations of open grown trees to ultimately replace them, as well as ensuring extensive pasture management with low stocking.

Plan

- Plan to ensure that any future urban development is well sited and designed, incorporating screen planting (if appropriate) and suitable green infrastructure links.
- Plan to increase the accessibility of the landscape, exploring opportunities for improving public rights of way, and improving links between the countryside and surrounding settlements.
- Plan to improve the quality of the urban edges of settlements, roads and industrial developments to reduce their visibility from the surrounding countryside.
- Plan to consider the introduction of whisper tarmac on the A38 to reduce traffic noise.
- Plan to reduce light pollution from nearby settlements and roads.
- Plan to restore former quarry sites, reducing their visibility within the landscape, and increasing their biodiversity value.
- Plan to plant new orchards, possibly as community projects.
- Plan to extend and link semi-natural habitats such as woodlands and grasslands to enhance their biodiversity and role as wildlife corridors, and to increase their resilience to climate change.

DCCLCA Landscape Type – 3B Lower valley farmland and settled landscape (Extracts from DCC Interactive Map and list of distinctive characteristics)



LCT 3B: Lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes (Teignbridge, EDDC, East Devon AONB, Blackdown Hills AONB, North Devon AONB, WDBC, Tamar Valley AONB, SHDC, South Devon AONB, Torbay, Mid Devon DC, Plymouth CC)

- Gently rolling lower valley slopes
- Pastoral farmland, with a wooded appearance
- Variable field patterns and sizes with either wide, low boundaries and irregular patterns or small fields with medium to tall boundaries and a regular pattern.
- Many hedgerow trees, copses and streamside tree rows
- Settled, with varied settlement size, building ages and styles, sometimes with unity of materials in places through use of stone.
- Presence of leisure-related development often associated with coast
- Winding, often narrow sunken lanes with very tall earth banks. Main roads may dominate locally.
- Streams and ditches
- Some parts tranquil and intimate all year round, except near main transport routes.
- Enclosed and sheltered landscape and wider views often restricted by vegetation