



South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 Understanding the special qualities of the South Devon AONB

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Policy context

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007. It establishes the need to recognise landscape in law; to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and planning of landscapes; and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies.

The ELC definition of 'landscape' recognises that all landscapes matter, be they ordinary, degraded or outstanding: "Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". The Convention puts emphasis on the whole landscape and all its values and is forward looking in its approach, recognising the dynamic and changing character of landscape.

The updated Landscape Character Assessment makes a key contribution to the implementation of the ELC in the South Devon AONB and reaffirms the importance of landscape, co-ordinate existing work and guide future work to protect, manage and plan these nationally protected landscapes.

Landscape Character Assessment framework

This LCA forms part of a wider hierarchy of landscape character assessment information cascading down from the national, county to local (South Hams and West Devon) level.

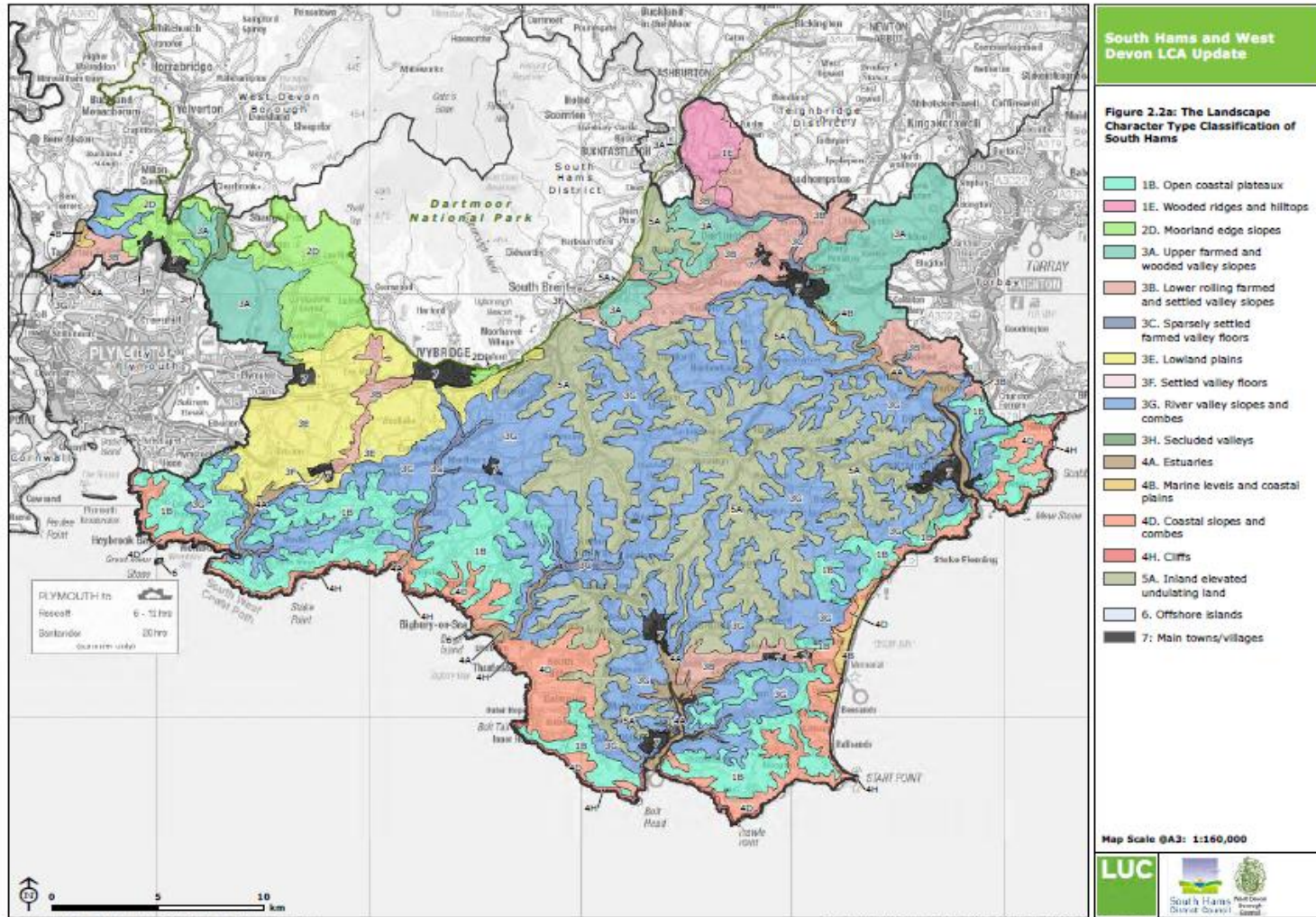
At the national level, England is divided into 159 distinct National Character Areas (NCAs). Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, history, and cultural and economic activity. There are descriptive profiles available for each NCA (published in 2014), setting out information on landscape character, changes happening in the landscape and an assessment of ecosystem services delivered.

At a county level, Devon's landscape character assessment describes the variations in character between different areas and types of landscape in the county. It divides Devon up into 68 Devon Character Areas (DCAs), each representing areas with a unique and distinct identity recognisable on a county scale.

Feeding up to the DCAs is a 'menu' of Devon-wide Landscape Character Types (LCTs), each sharing similar characteristics. Collectively, the Devon county work provides an evidence base articulating what people perceive as distinctive and special about all landscapes in Devon. It also set out strategies and guidelines for the protection, management and planning of the landscape.

Landscape does not stop at administrative boundaries but continues seamlessly into surrounding administrative areas. Therefore, a key aim of this work was to join up with the Landscape Character Assessments of adjacent authorities which were produced after the original two

assessments for the study area. These are Plymouth (a combined landscape and seascape character assessment, October 2016), Torrington (2011), Teignbridge (2009), Mid Devon (2011) and Dartmoor National Park (2017).



The landscape is the result of the interaction between people and the environment that gives an area a local identity. Landscape character is defined as “a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse”. Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing such variations in character across a landscape

Landscape Character Assessment is a tool to identify what makes a place unique, and can serve as a framework for decision making that respects local distinctiveness. It emerged in the 1980s as a process by which to define the character of the landscape - i.e. what makes one area distinct or different from another. It sought to separate the classification and description of the landscape from the evaluation process, the latter being more concerned with what makes one landscape 'better' than others. During recent years, the techniques and methodology have been refined, culminating in the publication of “An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment” (Natural England, October 2014), which updated the previous national guidance on the subject from 2002.

Understanding the character of place and evaluating an area’s defining characteristics is a key component in managing growth sustainably and ensuring that the inherent quality of the landscape in South Hams and West Devon can continue to be celebrated, creating places that people can be proud of. Understanding of character can be used to ensure that any change or development does not undermine whatever is valued or characteristic in a particular landscape.

This South Hams and West Devon Landscape Character Assessment can be used to consider landscape character when planning any type of change, such as:

- to inform work on policy development as part of emerging Development Plans;
- to inform development management, guiding development and land management that is sympathetic to local character and special qualities;
- to promote an understanding of how landscapes are changing and how they can be strengthened.

Landscape and Seascape Character

The South Devon AONB has a complex and varied landscape. Its landscape character has been analysed and described at a range of levels in different assessments.

National Character Assessment

The South Devon AONB lies wholly within National Character Area 151, known as South Devon, and forms 28% of it. Devon Character Areas <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/1911063?category=587130>

Landscape Character Assessment (2017) follows the method promoted by Natural England through 'An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment' (2014) which embeds the principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) within it. Landscape character areas have been defined at a county scale for Devon. http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/environmentplanning/natural_environment/landscape/landscapecharacter/landscape-map.htm

Landscape Character Types

Areas with common landscape character have been identified for Devon and Torbay, revealing twelve character types that overlap the South Devon AONB. A finer scaled assessment for the Torbay administrative area provides further detail and identifies Areas of Local Character. A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has been prepared for South Hams and West Devon in 2018 and replaces the earlier assessments produced in 2007 and 2008. <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/LandscapeCharacterAssessmentSouthHamsAndWestDevon.pdf>

Devon Historic Landscape Characterisation

This assessment enables a greater understanding of how today's landscape relates to its historical development, recognising that all parts of the landscape have historical significance which is the result of human activity and use over the millennia. <https://new.devon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policies/landscape/devons-landscape-character-assessment>

Historic Seascape Characterisation

This Seascape Characterisation of the South West Peninsula includes the coast and estuaries of the South Devon AONB. See *ArchSearch* via www.archaeologydataservice.ac.uk

Seascape Character Assessment

A broad scale seascape character assessment is being developed for the South Marine Plans which includes a small part of the South Devon AONB coast from the River Dart eastwards. A similar assessment is planned for the remainder of the AONB coast as part of the South West Marine Plans See <http://www.marinemangement.org.uk/marineplanning/index.htm>

The high level, over-arching term Natural Beauty includes landscape and scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage, that come together to make an area distinctive.

Special Qualities distil the key attributes that make the area special and worthy of designation as an AONB. Distinctive Characteristics are those components that define what it is that gives South Devon its sense of place and generally apply to areas smaller than the AONB as a whole. Key Features are specific and include detailed locations, places, landmarks, occurrences, events etc. that are of particular significance to South Devon and help illustrate how or where the special qualities, distinctive characteristics and natural beauty can be seen.

Each component of natural beauty identifies what is special about the landscape and should be afforded 'great weight' in planning decisions. The Plan, its policies and special qualities set criteria against which policy and actions can be assessed for compliance with Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000.

Special qualities define the unique "natural beauty" for which the South Devon AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape. The following list of ten special qualities define the unique "natural beauty" for which the South Devon AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape:

- Fine, undeveloped, wild and rugged coastline.
- Ria estuaries (drowned river valleys), steep combes and a network of associated watercourses.
- Deeply rural rolling patchwork agricultural landscape.
- Deeply incised landscape that is intimate, hidden and secretive away from the plateau tops.
- Iconic wide, unspoilt and expansive panoramic views.
- A landscape with a rich time depth and a wealth of historic features and cultural associations.
- A breadth and depth of significant habitats, species and associated natural events.
- An ancient and intricate network of winding lanes, paths and recreational routes.
- Areas of high tranquillity, natural nightscapes, distinctive natural soundscapes and visible movement.
- A variety in the setting to the AONB formed by the marine environment, Plymouth City, market and coastal towns, rural South Hams and southern Dartmoor.

Natural Beauty covers everything, including landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness, relative tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage, that add together to make an area distinctive. It is a high level, over-arching term.

Special Qualities are a subset of Natural Beauty, distilling the key attributes that make the area special and worthy of designation as an AONB. They apply to large areas or all of the AONB.

Distinctive Characteristics are those components that define what it is that gives South Devon its sense of place. They generally apply to areas smaller than the AONB as a whole.

Key Features are specific and detailed locations, places, landmarks, occurrences, events etc. that are of particular significance to South Devon and help illustrate how or where the special qualities, distinctive characteristics and natural beauty can be seen.

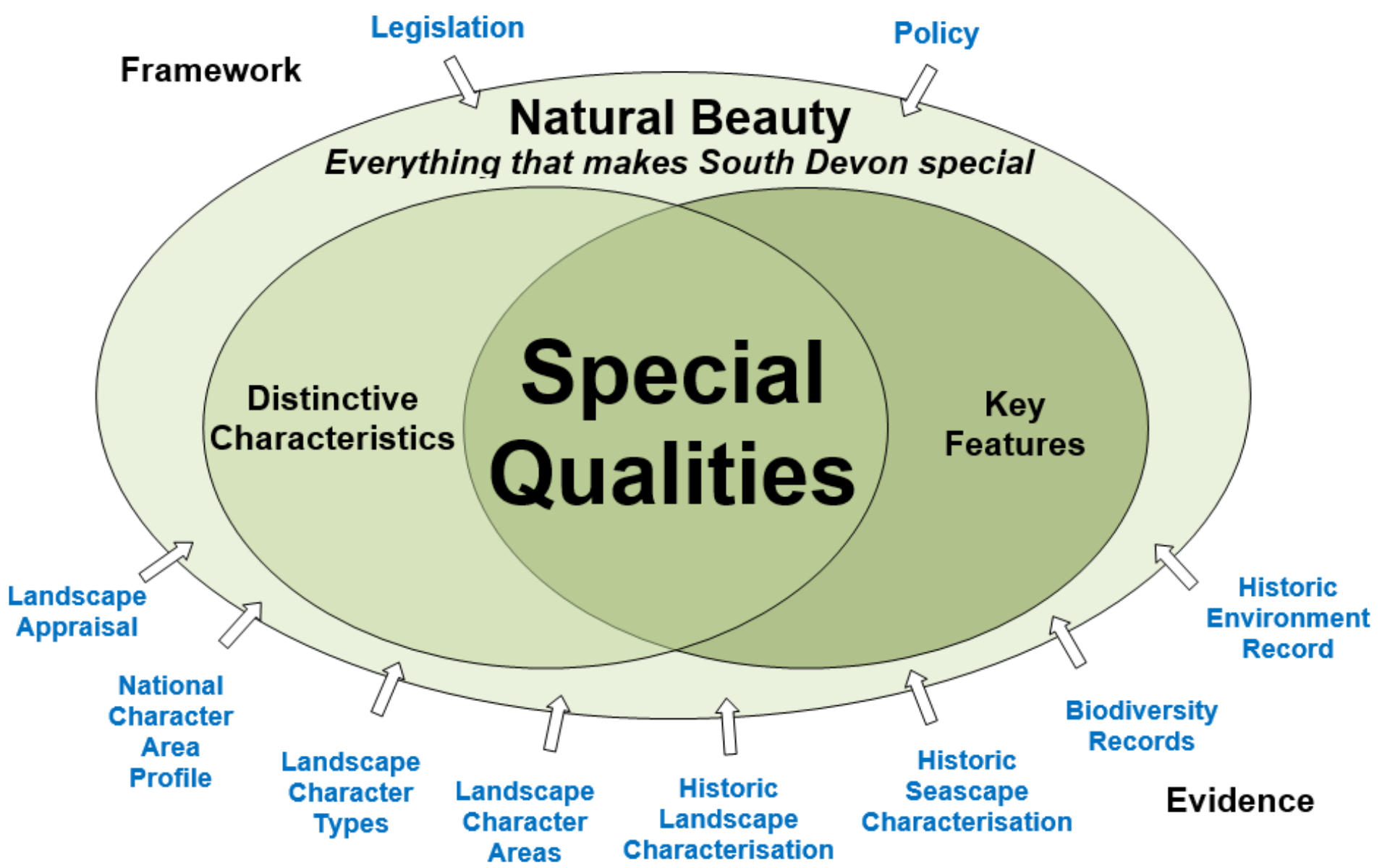
The South Devon AONB has a complex and varied landscape. Its landscape character has been analysed and described at a range of levels in different assessments.

Natural Beauty

The statutory definition of 'natural beauty' includes flora, fauna and geological and physiographic features. The natural beauty of AONBs is partly due to nature and is partly the product of many centuries of human endeavour. Landscape encompasses everything - natural and human - that makes an area distinctive: geology, climate, soil, plants, animals, communities, archaeology, buildings, the people who live in it, past and present, and the perceptions of those who visit it.

AONBs are cultural landscapes, shaped by people. They are also living landscapes, both by virtue of the species and habitats within them, and because their special qualities can only be maintained by continuing human activity. Very little in the English landscape can be described as 'natural', being the result of many centuries of human influence.

If circumstances occur where an action in support of one AONB Management Plan policy has the potential to conflict with another, the compelling statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty should be given great weight. The inclusion of this requirement has arisen from undertaking the Habitat Regulations Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal for the AONB Management Plan.



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| Fine, undeveloped, wild and rugged coastline | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A natural, dynamic and evolving coastline. • A richly diverse intertidal area of sand, shingle, rock and extensive rocky reefs. • A largely undeveloped coast where limited development is restricted to historic coastal settlements. • Existing small settlements with a strong historic relationship with the sea. • The diversity and quantity of geological and geomorphological features represented along the entire coast. • Dramatic near-vertical hard cliffs over 100m high contrasting with areas of low soft cliffs. • Striking and prominent headlands, secluded coves, bays and beaches providing both scale and contrast. • An extensive coastal rights of way network and open access opportunities. • Strong perception of being distant from significant habitation and an apparent absence of human intervention. • The smells, tastes, sounds and movement of the coast. • Exposure to the force of natural weather events and this effect on the senses meaning that character changes dramatically with the weather and seasons. • Sense of awe and wonder derived from the seascape – particularly the uninterrupted wide expanse of sea. |
| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scale, extent and continuity of fine undeveloped coastline that provided the primary reason for the AONB designation remains a finite and critically important national asset in its own right today. • The AONB coastline provides a distinct and abrupt contrast with the adjoining coastline of Torbay to the east and Plymouth to the west. • Many of the natural features exposed at the coast form important qualifying features for nationally important nature conservation designations including Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves and Local Geological Sites. | | | | | | | |

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| Ria estuaries (drowned river valleys), steep combes and a network of associated watercourses | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
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| Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All five of the AONB's estuaries share a very distinct character. Their extent, coherence and continuity are a defining feature of the South Devon AONB. • The South Devon AONB estuaries contrast markedly with the much bigger scale and more open and heavily developed nature of the nearby Tamar, Teign and Exe estuaries. • The Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary in particular is a nationally important example of a ria estuary having very little freshwater input, high salinity levels and a large tidal range. Many truly marine plants and animals are found which seldom occur intertidally in estuaries elsewhere. • Intertidal rocky foreshore, seagrass beds, mudflats and salt marshes are irreplaceable features associated with each of the AONB estuaries. | | | | | | | |

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| Deeply rural rolling patchwork agricultural landscape | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevated land with a pleasing rolling topography. • The pattern of wide, deep and mature Devon hedges (hedgerows on banks) makes a substantial contribution to character. • A generally small, irregular field pattern on lower and steeper land changes to one of medium to large fields on plateau tops. • Sparsely-wooded plateaux with wind sculpted and stunted hedgerow trees prominent in exposed locations near to coast, contrasting with tall mature hedgerow trees further inland. • Predominantly mixed farming with pasture on the steeper slopes. • Arable cultivation on flatter areas with larger field systems. • The sparse but clustered settlement pattern, farmstead layouts and local vernacular building materials make a significant contribution to a distinctive sense of place. • Farmsteads are scattered throughout the area, away from ridgelines and nestled in dips often with shelterbelts. • Sparsely wooded high ground is often accentuated by hill top copses. • Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites are found on steeper valley sides. • A vivid contrasting tapestry of colours change throughout the seasons from subdued pastels of winter stubble to deep-red newly ploughed soils, the bright yellow of flowering oil-seed rape, deep green young wheat, ripe golden barley, and the pale yellow-white of newly harvested grass. |
| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The patterned mosaic of predominantly small fields and Devon hedges reflects centuries of harmonious human involvement working in and shaping the landscape. • The complexity of the agricultural landscape vividly contrasts with the dramatic coastline and expansive apparent uniformity of the sea. • Mixed farming enterprises have been central to shaping the farmed landscape of the AONB and supporting its high nature value. • Away from the coast, wide, tall and mature Devon hedges supporting hedgerows enclose land at a very high density. | | | | | | | |

| Deeply incised landscape that is intimate, hidden and secretive away from the plateau tops | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
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| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharp incisions within the South Devon AONB landscape have been formed by rivers, the network of combes and the flooded former river valleys seen today as ria estuaries. • The minor road network is sparse and well hidden generally within sunken lanes bounded with high hedgebanks. The minor road network remains relatively lightly used by traffic. • Long views are afforded from plateau edges over the tops of combes or along valleys. • A perception of isolation is often quickly achieved by dropping from ridgelines or plateau tops to valley bottoms. • Steep valley sides, woodland and tall hedgebanks with mature hedges restrict and constrain views into and out of the combes and give a strong sense of enclosure, seclusion and at times relative isolation. • Dense ancient oak woods in sheltered and inland locations add to the sense of enclosure, restricting views, sound travel and light penetration. • In valley bottoms a more intimate close-to-hand scale is apparent and historic features become more visually prominent. • The sound of running water in the valleys, and the sounds of wildlife, sheep and cattle are all intensified by the more enclosed surroundings and shelter from prevailing winds. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to quickly immerse oneself in the landscape and “get away from it all” is an important and highly valued characteristic of the South Devon AONB. • When traversing the AONB, the incisions formed by the five main estuaries, the network of watercourses and their associated combes create a rapidly changing character – a key feature of the South Devon AONB. • The intimate and secretive character afforded by valley locations contrasts sharply with that of neighbouring plateau, coastal and urban locations. • Ancient woodlands form a finite irreplaceable resource of great importance. | | | | | | | |

| Iconic wide, unspoilt and expansive panoramic views | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
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| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal locations with high ground offer up to 360 degree panoramas that incorporate expansive seaward views to the horizon at up to 45kms away and contrastingly extensive, complex views inland toward southern Dartmoor and along the coastline. • A limited number of high inland locations have steeply falling topography to at least one side and offer up to 270 degree panoramic views, often including the presence of estuary or coastal water. • Long framed views are provided along combes, river valleys, estuary creeks, and along green lanes. • Views from the estuary waters offer a unique and particularly special perspective on the AONB landscape. |
| Rationale | | | | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gate gaps at field entrances form important 'windows' to the AONB landscape and provide wider views than those possible from within the constrained channels of lanes lined with tall hedgebanks and hedgerows. • Ridgelines and plateau edges form distinctive, unspoilt and very exposed skylines. • Views from the neighbouring inshore waters are dominated by the dramatic and varied AONB coastline and the range of prominent natural and historic built landmarks. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and uninterrupted panoramic views from high ground offer a real sense of remoteness, wildness and scale. They are a resource of exceptional value. • Vantage points with views that only contain natural features that are consistent with landscape character represent a diminishing, highly valued resource that is very highly regarded. | | | | | | | |

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| <p>A landscape with a rich time depth and a wealth of historic features and cultural associations</p> | <p>Natural Beauty Criteria</p> | | | | | | <p>Distinctive characteristics</p> |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prehistoric features include complex field systems, drovers' tracks, ridge ways, burial mounds, earthworks, hut circles, trading centres, settlement enclosures and hill forts. • Later features include farmsteads, field enclosures, orchards, lime kilns, catch meadows, deer parks, rabbit warrens, quarries and toll houses. • Historic defensive features include hillforts, castles, gun batteries, pill-boxes and observation posts. • Other historic coastal features include signal stations, navigation marks, lighthouses, coastguard cottages and shipwrecks. • Remains of earlier coastal settlements destroyed by storm events and erosion including Hallsands fishing village. • Smaller curving fields of medieval origin remain on valley and coastal slopes. • Large sophisticated country houses with estates and designed parkland. • Naval history associated with Dartmouth Royal Naval College and the former HMS Cambridge gunnery training school. • Historic villages and settlements with strong vernacular architecture and use of local materials give a strong sense of time depth. • Historic villages and towns are clustered at road crossings, bridging points, tidal limits and strategic waterside locations. • Strong cultural traditions associated with orchards remain including wassailing, cider and juice making and the championing of local apple varieties. • A packed calendar of estuary and coastal regattas, fairs and local produce remains a central part of South Devon AONB life. • A distinctive local dialect and vocabulary. |
| <p>Landscape Quality</p> | <p>Scenic Quality</p> | <p>Relative Wildness</p> | <p>Relative Tranquillity</p> | <p>Natural Heritage Features</p> | <p>Cultural Heritage</p> | <p>Rationale</p> <p>The extent, continuity and coherence of historic landscape character across the AONB is of national significance.</p> <p>The AONB was the threshold to Devon and England for millennia forming the "front door" for movements of people, goods and ideas.</p> <p>Layers of archaeological evidence and historic features reveal the evolution of the South Devon AONB landscape through time.</p> | |
| <p>Rationale</p> | | | | | | | |

| A breadth and depth of significant habitats, species and associated natural events | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
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| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | | |
| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality and importance of biodiversity features are reflected in the number and range of designated sites including Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, Important Plant Areas and Local Sites. • The geographical position occupied by the South Devon AONB combined with the diversity of habitats it supports makes the area important for a range of species at the limits of their natural distribution range. • The area's coast, estuary, countryside, aquatic and marine environment combine to form a uniquely diverse landscape and seascape providing habitat, niches and conditions for a wealth of species. • Of national significance, the combination of natural events makes a major experiential contribution to the South Devon AONB. | | | | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetated sea cliffs; dry calcareous grassland and scrubland; sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all the time; large shallow sheltered marine inlets; and exposed and sheltered rocky foreshores are all of European importance. • Sea grass beds; mudflats; coastal vegetated shingle; maritime grassland and heathland; hedgerows on banks; traditional orchards; and oak and wet woodlands are all of national importance. • Agriculture-related habitats including Devon hedges, arable field margins, lowland species-rich meadows, small deciduous woodlands and hedgerow trees all make an important contribution to the wider ecological network of the South Devon AONB. • Shore dock, early gentian, 13 of the 18 species of bats found in Britain, common otter, common dolphin, white beaked dolphin, harbour porpoise, leatherback turtle and grey seal are all of European importance. • A significant number of species are now endemic to the South Devon AONB including strapwort, cirl bunting, Mediterranean oil beetle, short necked oil beetle, cuckoo bee, long-horned mining bee, and the hornet robberfly. • 26 out of the 56 habitats of principal importance in England are found within the South Devon AONB. • Species records indicate 286 of the 596 wild British birds are associated with the South Devon AONB. • 160 of the 943 species of principal importance in England are recorded as being found within the South Devon AONB. • There are 2982ha of woodland including 30% semi-natural ancient woodland. • Bird migrations and roosts include barn swallow, guillemots and starling. |

| An ancient and intricate network of winding lanes, paths and recreational routes | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
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| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area's relative inaccessibility and reliance on an intricate minor road network means that there is no quick way to cover the ground of the South Devon AONB; it has to be experienced at a slower pace. • The South West Coast Path and coastal margin form a nationally significant resource and the primary recreational route of the South Devon AONB. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow, often sunken historic lanes are bounded by tall often stone-faced Devon banks and topped with thick, wide hedges • Today's North to South oriented roads derive from drovers' tracks connecting Dartmoor to the coast for trade, transhumance farming and shelter. • A collection of historic toll houses, mileposts, bridges and signposts. • Views from vehicles substantially restricted by high banks and hedgerows, with glimpsed views through gateways. • Road users regularly cross into and out of the designated AONB area when traversing from east to west. The surrounding and linking road network consequently forms an important part of the experience. • Users of the area's road system find they frequently have to retrace their routes from estuary and coastal destinations. • The more heavily used minor roads typically follow the area's ridgelines. • Away from ridgelines, particularly in an east-west direction the minor road network is exceptionally characterful being narrow, steep and winding. • The speed of vehicle travel throughout the area is suppressed by the narrow winding intricacy of the road network. • The 67km of unmetalled and unclassified county roads often referred to as green lanes make an important contribution to the area's network of routes. • Hedge banks and road verges are rich in wildflowers and colourful natural vegetation with the Devon county flower, the primrose, featuring heavily during spring time. • The 60 miles of South West Coast Path National Trail provide a stunning walking experience. | | | | | |

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| Areas of high tranquillity, natural nightscapes, distinctive natural soundscapes and visible movement | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The juxtaposition of coastal, estuarine, riverine, farm, village and woodland environments creates a rich experience of many different features, sounds, smells and textures perceived as being natural and contributing to a sense of tranquillity. • Some remote parts of the AONB distant from the primary road network, main population centres and tourist hotspots offer a real sense of high tranquillity at all times of the year. • Sections of the coast are wild and rugged offering a sense of remoteness with few signs of human presence and the perception of a strongly natural landscape and seascape. Extensive areas of semi-natural habitat reinforce this perception. • The coast provides a powerful experience of exposure to the elements, whether from steep vertiginous drops along cliff sections, the sound of waves, or during periods of strong south-westerly winds or easterly storms. • Away from the tightly focussed waterside settlements with harbours, historic cores and areas of moorings, the estuaries remain tranquil, remote and wild with little sense of human activity or presence. • Dark night skies can be viewed in locations away from the intrusive skyglow produced by the neighbouring large urban centres of Plymouth and Torbay or the area's market and coastal towns. |
| | Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spiritual, emotional and physical responses to the landscape, particularly its sense of timelessness, wilderness, remoteness and peacefulness are nationally significant. • As a combination of views, movement, sounds, smells, textures and tastes, the way the AONB is perceived is dramatic, yet subtle and varied. • The dark sky and natural nightscape resource of the AONB is particularly highly valued. | | | | | | | |
| | Natural Beauty Criteria | | | | | | Distinctive characteristics |

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| <p>A variety in the setting to the AONB formed by the marine environment, Plymouth City, market and coastal towns, rural South Hams and the southern Dartmoor</p> | ☑ | ☑ | | | ☑ | ☑ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plymouth and Torbay form important components of the South Devon AONB setting at the western and eastern ends of the area and contrast strongly with the deeply rural nature of the AONB itself. • Residents from Plymouth, Torbay and other areas of the South Hams choose to visit the South Devon AONB in significant numbers throughout the year for both leisure and business purposes. The reverse is also true with a high dependency of South Devon AONB residents for employment opportunities, goods and services provided by the neighbouring towns and city. • Off-shore rocks and small islands lie outside the AONB boundary but make a significant contribution to the coastal landscape setting. • In addition to its intervisibility with the AONB, the inshore marine environment is strongly linked to the AONB through centuries of maritime history, and modern day fishing industry, lifeboat services, recreational boating and Royal Navy training. • Dartmoor National Park forms a dramatic backdrop and distant skyline to inland views from the South Devon AONB. • Away from Torbay and Plymouth City, the principal character of neighbouring inland areas forming the setting of the AONB is one that is sparsely settled and deeply rural in nature. • The inland boundary of the AONB is mostly not marked by a distinct change in scenery and the landscape character continues seamlessly into the neighbouring countryside. The hinterland of the AONB – particularly the rural largely undeveloped countryside, farmland and woodland – is particularly significant as a setting for the AONB. |
| Landscape Quality | Scenic Quality | Relative Wildness | Relative Tranquillity | Natural Heritage Features | Cultural Heritage | | |
| Rationale | | | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The setting to the AONB provided by surrounding areas of land, sea and urban settlement together with the inter-visibility between the AONB and these areas is of great significance. • Distant views from locations within the South Devon AONB include many significant features that are not located within the AONB boundary. | | | | | | | |

What Makes South Devon Special project achievements

What Makes South Devon Special (WMSDS) was a 2018 HLF funded project that helped a wide range of people from communities within South Devon discover more about the AONB and look closely at the distinctive character of the natural heritage which makes up this nationally important landscape. The AONB team worked with a wide range of people to explore hidden places, find out more about what lies behind the view and discover what has shaped this landscape over time.

The project exceeded all the targets set out in the project application and plan. A programme of events over 7 months from April to October 2018 included 10 special landscape walks, 6 natural nightscapes events and a series of 4 beginner photography walks with an actual attendance of 1063 participants.

The AONB Unit worked with 3 local primary schools, bringing artists in to work with them to produce music, performance and art inspired by visits to an area highlighting a special quality near to them. The Unit also engaged 193 people working with A level photography students and 4 expert photographic artists, taking them out to different sites around the AONB.

A new series of What Makes South Devon Special geocaches were produced and added to the existing caches with a commitment to maintaining them into the future. They have been hidden in an area of the AONB to highlight a different special quality. Over the project period 163 visits were logged.

A photography competition based on special qualities generated 188 entries. An exhibition of the work of 45 finalists was attended by 68 people coming to the opening event and 100s of further visits over the month-long public showing. The popular exhibition has toured an arts centre in Totnes and the South Hams District Council public buildings.

Displays and activities were taken to 4 external events during the 2018 summer months where over 350 people were directly engaged. Printed postcards depicting special qualities were printed and given out at events, walks, in the geocache boxes and shows. They were used to invite comments about what does make South Devon special and where people loved in the AONB. 242 responses were received. Postcard packs were sent out to the parish councils in the AONB along with a questionnaire and received comments back from all 46 of them.

A high-profile social media campaign, new Instagram site, Twitter and Facebook pages were used to encourage people to think more about what makes South Devon special. The AONB Staff Unit publicised downloadable walks of the month in connection with public events. Print materials were developed to publicise the campaign as well as displays and exhibition materials.

