West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Purpose of the study

1.1.1 This study was commissioned by WSDC to inform the preparation of the District Local Plan. It follows established techniques which have been developed by the Countryside Commission. On 1 April 1999 the Countryside Commission and the Rural Development Commission were merged to form the Countryside Agency with the aim of helping the Government to create a sustainable, living countryside.

1.1.2 The high quality of the West Somerset countryside is undisputed. It nestles between the Bristol Channel and around the boundaries of Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As such it is important to the setting of these nationally important landscapes. It is the district's aim, supported by government directives and government agency advice, that the countryside is protected and enhanced, and can be used and enjoyed now and in the future.

1.1.3 In February 1997 a revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 [PPG7] – The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development was published. Paragraph 4.16 of PPG7 states, "Local designations may unduly restrict development and economic activity without identifying the particular features of the local countryside which need to be respected or enhanced." The presumption is that local designations such as Special Landscape Area [SLA] will have to be rigorously justified or preferably replaced with a character area approach to the countryside.

1.1.4 PPG7, paragraph 2.14, however recognises, "that the countryside should be protected for its own sake and non-renewable and natural resources should be afforded protection." And paragraph 2.15 continues, "The character approach outlined should help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character."

1.1.5 Also in 1997 the Countryside Commission and English Heritage published their joint Map of England which identified broad landscape Character Areas and complimentary Natural Areas for the whole country. Summary statements are now available from both agencies.

1.1.6 The growing emphasis on landscape character as the methodology for valuing the landscape was introduced in the Countryside Commissions advisory booklet, Landscape Assessment Guidance - 1993. This has been followed through with additional advice and research, notably Countryside Design Summaries - 1996, Village Design, Parts 1 and 2 - 1996, a pilot study, What Matters and Why, Environmental Capital: A New Approach - 1997 and lately a working draft for discussion, Landscape Character Assessment, New Guidance for England and Scotland - April 1999. The emphasis is to identify
areas of cohesive character, and describe them in terms of their sense of place or local distinctiveness: landscape character, characteristic wildlife, archaeological and cultural heritage, natural features and the nature of change all contribute to the character of an area. Defining and valuing these attributes should guide change and inform the preparation of development plans.

1.1.7 The Somerset Structure Plan Review, Deposit Plan for the period to 2011, has taken note of this national guidance and no longer defines SLA’s but has an overall countryside policy. Policy 7, “The distinctive character of the countryside of Somerset should be safeguarded for its own sake. Particular regard should be had to the distinctive features of the countryside in both landscape and nature conservation terms in provision for development.” (November 97 recommended changes)

1.1.8 Other helpful information is available to inform the process of characterisation for instance, PPG20 sets out planning policy for coastal areas, and there is a Shoreline Management Plan for Bridgwater Bay to Bideford Bay. The Environment Agency have published Local Environment Agency Plans [LEAPs] and there is a wealth of information held by the district, notably the West Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan [BAP] - 1999.

1.1.9 The aim of this report is, therefore, to bring these up to date concepts and all the latest information about the countryside to bear on the West Somerset Local Plan and safeguard the valued and unique aspects of the district. In order to do so it must satisfy the following objectives:

• Provide an analysis of the character of the landscape.
• Assess the impact of the built environment on the landscape and identify areas of high vulnerability to land use change and built development.
• Review the policies and planning mechanisms which will allow the principles of sustainable development to be incorporated into emerging policies and proposals.
• Identify current forces for change and how these are likely to affect landscape character.
• Suggest landscape management alternatives which will sustain the character of the countryside.
2 STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The basic methodology followed that of Landscape Assessment Guidance (CCP 423, Countryside Commission 1993) although the developing refinements to the methodology of characterisation as detailed in Chapter 1 have influenced the overall approach to this document. The assessment process is summarised diagrammatically below.

Data assembly

Field work

WSDC inputs

Analysis

Product

Figure 2.1 Elements in the characterisation process (after What Matters and Why – 1997)

2.2 Data Assembly

2.2.1 Many aspects of West Somerset have been described in a wide range of publications. The major sources used are listed in the bibliography. Basic source materials as well as other landscape assessment and characterisation documents for all or part of the district were consulted.

2.3 Familiarisation Visits

2.3.1 Initial visits were made across the whole of the district and into surrounding areas to identify major viewpoints and get a feel for the variety of landscape types and character.

2.4 Overlay Analysis

2.4.1 Physical features, geology, soils and landform and drainage maps were generated at a common scale and overlaid to begin the process of preliminary division into character areas. Major vegetation features, the field and settlement pattern, archaeological features and coastal features were noted and studied on the 1:25000 Ordnance Survey maps and in conjunction with the physical analysis the principal divisions in the landscape preliminarily defined.

2.5 Fieldwork

2.5.1 WSDC officers were consulted regarding these preliminary results and detailed fieldwork was undertaken with the planning policy officer present. A
proforma recording sheet as recommended by the Countryside Commission was used and photographs were taken. The visual quality of major settlements was also studied during these visits. Additional visits were necessary to record features and attributes noted during these visits but not recorded at the time.

2.6 **Landscape Types and Landscape Character**

2.6.1 Analysis of the collected data allowed landscape types and landscape character within the area to be considered at different levels, as shown in the diagram below. In West Somerset the landform and land use in the area was most useful in defining character at what we have called Level 1. The main character areas defined at this level are:

- Minehead Exmoor Fringe
- Carhampton to Quantock Coastal Hills
- Quantock Vale
- Central Quantocks
- Doniford Stream and Quantock Fringe
- Brendon Fringe
- Exmoor Fringe

![Landscape Character Type Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.2 Landscape Character Type (after Landscape Character Assessment, New Guidance for England and Scotland – 1999)**

2.6.2 Each main character area can be sub divided into two or more, level 2, sub-areas on the basis of more detailed analysis and more subjective criteria. For each sub-area notes on the following have been provided before a description in Chapter 5.

- **Key Characteristics** (those features and attributes which best define the area)
- **Settlement** (comment on the impact of the countryside on settlements or potential for expansion of settlements)
- **Building Form** (as relevant).
West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Coastal Rock Platforms

Recent Alluvium
Recent Salt Marsh Deposits
Quaternary Sands and Gravels
JURASSIC
Lower Lias
CARBONIFEROUS
Culm Measures
TRIASSIC
Mercia Mudstones

PERMIAN Sandstones
DEVONIAN Pilton Slates
Baggy, Upcot & Pickwell Down Beds
Morte Slates
Ilfracombe Slates
Hangman Grits

MAP 3.1 A SIMPLIFIED GEOLOGY
3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE OF WEST SOMERSET
PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

3.1 Geology

3.1.1 West Somerset District has an interesting geology which exerts a strong influence on its landscape character; it dictates the form of the topography of the district and influences the character of the soils. The solid rocks of West Somerset were laid down in the Palaeozoic and Mesozoic eras and rocks from five geological periods are present in the district. For interest and to set the scene a brief geological history follows.

3.1.2 Devonian – The oldest rocks in West Somerset are the Lynton Slates of which there is a small outcrop north of Triscombe on the Quantocks. However, most of the northern Quantock Plateau is Hangman Grits which are consolidated river detritus that was deposited over the slates when the shallow sea in which they were deposited retreated. On the Quantock Plateau, to the east of the Hangman Grits are Ilfracombe Slates which mark a return to marine sedimentation.

3.1.3 The Ilfracombe Slates also outcrop on the Brendon, Exmoor fringe at Black Down. Younger Devonian rocks, the Morte Slates do not outcrop on the Quantock Hills in West Somerset though they occur further south. Morte Slates are the dominant rocks of the Brendon, Exmoor fringe in West Somerset.

3.1.4 On the Exmoor fringe south of Upton the Morte Slates are overlain by Pickwell Down Sandstones which represent a reversion to near terrestrial conditions having formed in rivers, lakes and shallow seas. Around Skilgate and across the isolated southern area of the district the Pickwell Down Sandstones are faulted against the Pilton Shales which originated in a more tranquil marine environment of gradually deepening water.

3.1.5 Carboniferous – The only carboniferous geology in West Somerset occurs in the isolated south, below Brushford, where across a narrow band the Pilton Shales are overlain by Culm Measures which are also deep water deposits.

3.1.6 Towards the end of the carboniferous period the above rocks were uplifted and much faulted by a major period of earth movement, the Variscan orogeny. The resultant metamorphic rocks created a rugged landscape subject to the arid climate that ensued. The synclinal basins between the Brendons and the Quantocks, on the coast and to the east of the district were formed.

3.1.7 Permian and Triassic – At the end of the Palaeozoic (Permian) and into the early Mesozoic (Triassic) gentle movement along the Variscan folds and faults appears to have continued. Erosion of the earlier Palaeozoic continental material led first to the deposition of a variety of sandstones and siltstones.
MAP 3.2 SIMPLIFIED LANDFORM AND DRAINAGE

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Land under 10m AOD
Land 10-50m AOD
Land 50-150m AOD
Land 150-300m AOD
Land over 300m AOD
3.1.8 These Permian Sandstones have been uplifted between faults in the upper reaches of the Doniford Stream. Later Triassic sediments, the group known as the Mercia Mudstones were deposited above the Permian Sandstones and now form the uppermost solid geology in a band through Williton to Old Cleeve and Carhampton in the coastal basin and around the periphery of the Quantock Hills.

3.1.9 Jurassic – The youngest solid strata of the district are interbedded limestones, mudstones and clays of the Blue Lias. These Lower Lias rocks were deposited in seas which invaded the synclinal basins formed during the late Carboniferous. A narrow coastal band of Blue Lias rocks underlies the coastal area of the district from Blue Anchor to St Audries. A wider band, north of Stogursey, underlies the coastal strip eastward from Quantocks Head.

3.1.10 During the most recent Quaternary era, Britain was subject to the Pleistocene ice-ages. Much of the lower land in West Somerset is covered by an ill defined mantle of unsorted stony sand and clay. This is known as Head and includes products of both periglacial and recent weathering. More clearly defined recent deposits are found, these include alluvial clays, silts, sands and gravels along river courses and in low lying coastal areas.

**Landform and Drainage**

3.1.11 The topography or landform of West Somerset is derived from the base and drift geology and result from it having been eroded by the climate and river systems. Two river systems, the West Somerset Rivers and the River Tone form the two main catchments in West Somerset district. Two other systems, the River Parrett and the River Exe drain small areas, the most easterly part of the district and the southern flanks of Exmoor respectively. These four catchments have been closely studied by the Environment Agency and each is the subject of a Local Environment Agency Plan (LEAP) a strategic document covering the related issues of, water quality, air quality, waste disposal, flood protection and biodiversity. LEAP’s also set targets for water abstraction and ground water protection.

3.1.12 The West Somerset Rivers catchment includes all the fast flowing streams which tumble from Exmoor and the Quantocks to the north coast. The lateral extent of the catchment is from Foreland Point on Exmoor in the west to Hinkley Point in the east. The Doniford Stream exploits the fault line between the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks. But tributaries to the Doniford Stream and all other streams have cut steep sided valleys in the older, hard Devonian rocks of Exmoor, the Brendon Hills and the Quantocks. Over the softer Permian and Triassic rocks toward the coast the river valleys become a little more gentle in profile but the general impermeability of the catchment means that the rivers respond rapidly to rainfall and storm water runs off the land quickly. This accentuates the steep relief in the catchment. This is also the case with those tributaries of the River Tone and the River Exe south of the district.
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EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Podzols

Brown Earth
- Shallow over rock

Brown Earth
- Loamy, little clay

Argillic Brown Earth
- Loamy, clay enriched

Argillic Pelosol
- Clayey sub soil

Calcaneous Pelosol
- Calcaneous sub soil

Stagnogley Soils
- Seasonally waterlogged

Alluvial Gley Soils
- Seasonally waterlogged

MAP 3.3 A SIMPLIFIED SOIL MAP
3.1.13 Only to the east of the Quantocks where the lower lying, predominantly Jurassic rocks are drained by tributaries of the River Parrett, do the streams flow through a more rolling countryside with less pronounced valleys.

3.1.14 On the coast there are small areas of lowland and marsh which form a marked contrast with the predominantly hilly landforms of the district and where deposition of gravel and river sediments has taken place. Landform most clearly defines the main landscape types found in the district. These are:

- Upland Plateau
- Hills with steeply incised valleys
- Hills with incised valleys
- Gently rolling countryside
- River flood plains
- Coastal flats

3.1.15 The action of the sea on the geological variation of the coast defines a further two landscape types:

- Low lying coast
- Coast with cliffs and rock platforms

3.2 Soils

3.2.1 The soils of West Somerset are also important in defining the landscape character of the area. They are fundamentally derived from the geology of the area and in conjunction with the climate and topography of the district soils have an important influence on land use and the wildlife resource. The climate of the district is wet and cool, high rainfall plays a significant part in the formation of several soil types. [Note, that agricultural soil classification is only a reflection of soil type].

3.2.2 Above the oldest rocks and on the highest ground in the Quantocks, due to the wet climate and constant erosion, there are thin ferric podzols, soils from which the nutrients have been leached and within which iron pans have formed. The upper horizon of these podzols is often bleached because salts and bases have been dissolved away. These podzols give way to shallow, well drained brown earths, over the underlying rocks on the scarp slope and in the combes of the Central Quantocks. These non alluvial loamy soils are the result of partially interrupted erosion and the addition of humus from vegetation. Shallow brown earths over Devonian rocks also occur south of Minehead, south of Clatworthy Reservoir and in the isolated southern area of the district.

3.2.3 East of the Quantocks, on the eastern fringe of the Brendon Hills and in the isolated southern area over Devonian rocks, where the land becomes less steep, brown podzolic soils, from which some nutrients have been leached, occur. These soils are subject to less leaching and erosion than the podzols of the Quantock Plateau so they have a brown or ochreous sub soil and no bleached horizon.
3.2.4 In the isolated southern area over the Carboniferous Culm Measures, stagnogley soils which are seasonally waterlogged, slowly permeable and prominently mottled, occur because the underlying geology is impermeable.

3.2.5 Over the lower land on the Exmoor, Brendon fringe; below 150 to 200 metres AOD and over the Permian Sandstones west of the Doniford Stream there are significant areas of reddish well drained brown earths. These brown earths are non alluvial, loamy soils with non calcareous sub soil and no significant clay enrichment. In contrast a band of argillic brown earths occurs along the east of the Doniford Stream and around to the eastern side of the Quantocks. These brown earths are distinguished by the fact that they contain a sub surface horizon showing significant clay enrichment. Mercia Mudstones are the predominant solid geology under this group of soils but variations in the deposition of periglacial head materials is the probable explanation for many changes in soil type. More recent gravels have collected on lowland, at the mouths of rivers in several coastal locations and to the east of the Quantocks and soils above these gravels are reddish, fine, well drained brown earths.

3.2.6 Extending inland from the Blue Lias geology of the coast are a variety of pelosols. Pelosols are slowly permeable, clayey soils which crack deeply in dry weather. Over the Mercia Mudstones and head deposits in the vicinity of Old Cleeve, Washford and Carhampton there are argillilic pelosols which have a clay enriched subsoil. But over the Blue Lias itself calcareous pelosols occur. Calcereous Pelosols have a calcareous sub surface horizon and no clay enriched sub soil.

3.2.7 Small areas of alluvial gley (waterlogged) soils occur in West Somerset. The most significant are on the coast at Minehead, Wick Moor and Wall Common but there are spots in the south of the district notably along the River Exe.

3.3 Wildlife

3.3.1 The recently published ‘West Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan, 1999’ [BAP] has reviewed the biodiversity resource within the district, evaluated its importance and identified actions that need to be taken. However, there must be a resume of aspects of the BAP in this document for the following reasons.

- The knowledge that species and habitats of wildlife importance occur in any locality will colour peoples perception of the value and character of an area.
- Habitats such as woodlands, hedgerows, heath land, coastal vegetated shingle and, to a lesser extent, unimproved pasture have a direct effect upon the visual quality of character areas.
- It is also important to recognise that a BAP generally concentrates on priority species and habitats but there are wildlife features, e.g. flowery hedge banks and hedgerow trees, which make a significant contribution to landscape character but may not be notable in terms of the BAP.

3.3.2 The West Somerset BAP notes that 21 percent of the area of the district is designated SSSI or County Wildlife Site. The BAP, through a combined
3.3.3 Five habitats were identified by specialists and conservation bodies as in need of Habitat Action Plans.
- Lowland Heath
- Upland Oak Wood
- Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture
- Coastal Vegetated Shingle
- *Sabellaria Alveolata* Reef

3.3.4 Action plans for three species were also developed.
- Skylark
- Lesser Horseshoe Bat
- Water Vole

3.3.5 The BAP notes that in the wider countryside agriculture has a great effect upon the biodiversity of an area. In Chapter 19 it proposes some generic action for biodiversity

3.3.6 The management of the wider countryside is important and very dependent upon the farming community and economic pressures. Economic pressure and probably a lack of understanding of the wildlife resource have been the major factors in losses to the wildlife of England since the 1950’s. To the visitor West Somerset appears to be a predominantly agricultural district, it is still visually attractive despite past woodland and hedgerow loss and intensification in agricultural practice, notably changes from pasture to arable farming

3.3.7 Features by which the district can be defined include the Quantock heaths, copses and woodland, hedgerow trees, species rich hedges, floristic hedge banks and a variety of coastal habitats. The challenge is to halt decline and manage these resources for the benefit of wildlife as well as farming, recreation, and the local economy. This may result in some visual changes to the countryside as we have come to know it, e.g. shaggier hedges and wildlife friendly arable field margins, but as the following section on the cultural landscape explains, the basic pattern of the agricultural landscape has been established for centuries. Providing for wildlife should not disturb this pattern. The minor visual changes involved would be gradually introduced and become accepted as the norm.
4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE OF WEST SOMERSET
HUMAN INFLUENCES

4.1 The Historic Shaping of the Cultural Landscape

4.1.1 The archaeological potential of West Somerset is much greater than the known discoveries and only a small proportion of this resource is protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Most of the present landscape pattern dates from the Saxon and Medieval periods but from a knowledge of regional trends a brief summary of earlier human activity and its impact on the evolution of the landscape can be deduced. Somerset County Council intend to undertake an Historic Landscapes Characterisation Project to be completed by the end of the year 2000, it is hoped that this will add to and help define the following review of historic influences on the landscape character of the district.

4.1.2 Early hunter gather communities, were present in area as is apparent from finds of their flint tools and weapons at various locations, including Dunster, East Quantoxhead, Blue Anchor Bay and the mouth of the Doniford Stream. These early humans would have obtained resources from the hills, woods, streams, foreshore, and the sea. There are submerged forests in peat deposits along the coast where artefacts have been found. These deposits represent an important resource and represent a pre historic landscape which was later submerged by a rise in sea level.

4.1.3 Early farmers of the Neolithic, 4000-1750BC would probably have found the better soils of the river valleys attractive for farming once the trees had been cleared. Flint and stone artefacts are known from several places including Rydon Hill near Williton.

4.1.4 In the Bronze Age and Iron Age, 1750BC-450AD farming continued to be the basis of the economy. Scattered Bronze Age artefacts have been found throughout Exmoor and North Somerset. Some Bronze age field systems remain on Exmoor and there are barrow cemeteries on the tops of the Quantock, Brendon and Exmoor Hills. However, evidence of any settlement in the district during this period is poor.

4.1.5 During the Iron Age the area of Cornwall, Devon and West Somerset formed the tribal kingdom of the Dumnoni, the boarder is thought to either have run along the eastern boundary of the Quantocks or along the River Parrett. Hill forts in the district [e.g. Elworthy Barrows] may have been frontier posts with the potential for both military and trading opportunities. Minerals in the Devonian rocks of the hills would have been important sources of metallic ores in both the Bronze and Iron Ages.

4.1.6 The Romano-British period, 43-450AD, is not as clearly understood in West Somerset as it is in other parts of the county. Settlement is known to have occurred at Williton, Hinkley Point and Doniford and it is possible these sites were centres for exploitation of the Iron Age tribal economy. It was during the Romano- British period that the coast attained more or less present sea levels.
4.1.7 Before 450AD the influence of peoples, their culture and economy appears to have had little influence on the pattern of the landscape and settlements that are characteristic of the district today. After the withdrawal of the Romano-British, during the Dark Ages, 450-700AD, the countryside would have reverted to or been maintained as an Iron Age landscape.

4.1.8 It was during the Saxon and Early Medieval period, 700-1350AD that much of the present rural composition of fields, roads, hollow ways, farms and settlements were established as the population exploded. Early fields are characteristically small and often irregular, they would have been carved out of woodland and waste ground. These fields are rarely found above 300m OD and there is little evidence in West Somerset of Saxon open field systems but Watchet was an important port in Saxon times and a defended burgh mint was established at Daw’s Castle. Later the town became an important market centre and the main port for trade to Ireland.

4.1.9 The Early Medieval rise of the wool trade on Exmoor and perhaps the Quantocks (Quantock is mentioned as Royal Forest but it may have had a short life as the Hundred Rolls of 1279 refer to it in the past tense) encouraged the development of farms, hamlets and villages. The current settlement pattern is dominated by dispersed farms and hamlets and dates from at least these times.

4.1.10 The Late Medieval to Tudor period, 1350-1540, saw epidemics of the Black Death and the collapse of the manorial system led to changes in the rural economy that are still reflected in the landscape today. Shrunken settlements and deserted farmsteads or woodland growing over deserted small fields [e.g. at Crowcombe Heathfield and Huish Cleeve Plantations] are evidence of a reduced population. Oddly, heath land on top of the Quantocks, which would have been common until this period, shows earth banks and narrow ploughed ridges which are evidence of arable farming between 1400 and 1700. Given the general retraction of farming during this period it has been surmised that this is evidence of a population shaking off villeinage and striking out on its own.

4.1.11 Cleeve Abbey was a major ecclesiastical institution in the area but was abandoned with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry the eighth.

4.1.12 Of the Post Medieval, 1540-1900, impacts on the landscape the large regular fields created by the parliamentary enclosures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are notable features on the higher land which had not previously been enclosed. These fields are often enclosed with stone faced banks topped with beech trees as is notable on the Quantocks and the Exmoor fringe. The use of lime as a soil dressing was common practice and remains of lime kilns are found on the coast [e.g. at Kilve and East Quantoxhead] as well as in the valleys at many locations. It is known that although local Blue Lias rocks supplied some lime the mineral was also imported through the many small coastal ports.
4.1.13 There is little evidence of significant industry in the district, copper mining on the Quantocks was extensive but does not appear to have been very intensive. There is historical evidence that a cottage clothing industry with, weavers, dyers, tuckers and clothiers, was an important part of the economy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Fast flowing streams of the district having been used since the Medieval period as power for fulling and tucking mills. Water powered corn and saw mills survive on some farms and it is known that water power was used in smelting and smithying iron. Small disused quarries for building and road stone are scattered throughout the district, a building stone quarry at Capton has recently reopened and Triscombe quarry on the western Quantocks was established in the eighteenth century and is still worked at present, though it is to close in the near future.

4.1.14 Country parks and gardens and many of the large houses [e.g. St Audries and Fairfield House] of the district were created during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries though others were established around older houses. The development of railways in the nineteenth century was an important factor in the growth of Minehead as a holiday resort and the West Somerset Line when built created a new transport corridor through the countryside.

4.1.15 Another prominent nineteenth century industrial feature is the line of the West Somerset Mineral Railway from Watchet, through Washford and Roadwater to the Brendon Hills. The line became operational in the middle of the century and served iron ore mines in the hills. Although derelict since the First World War the bed of the railway now serves as a popular footpath and link to such features as Washford Station (housing the Somerset and Dorset Railway Museum) and Cleeve Abbey.

4.2 Twentieth Century Change

4.2.1 Until the First World War, 1914-18, the pace of change was slow in comparison with the last eighty years. Following this war a perceived need for timber introduced one of the major landscape impacts on the countryside of the first half of this century, namely the introduction of extensive coniferous plantations. Particularly on the Quantocks and on the Brendon Fringe significant plantations were planted on poorer farmland and as an alternative to existing deciduous woodlands.

4.2.2 Relics of the Second World War, 1939-45, are present in the district, particularly evidence of coastal defences. Pillboxes still remain in several locations such as Minehead Bay and there is an observation post at Kilve Pill. At Kilve there is also the remains of a brick built oil retort which is evidence of a failed commercial venture to extract oil from the shales on the foreshore.

4.2.3 Though it started earlier, it is since the Second World War that the increasing mechanisation and intensification of farming and a significant change from pastoral to arable has most affected the essentially medieval landscape of the district. Impacts include the loss of hedges to create larger fields, changes in the colour and texture of the landscape and the removal of traditional features such as orchards and ponds. However, in this regard, West Somerset is less...
affected than other parts of the county and Somerset in general is less affected than many areas of the country.

4.2.4 Also most significantly in the latter half of this century, the development of tourism and demands for recreation have had an impact on the coastal landscape in particular. Camping sites, mobile and static caravan sites and holiday paraphernalia are scattered along the coast, notably at Doniford, Blue Anchor and Watchet. Minehead is a major tourist town and the Butlins Holiday Camp on the marshes east of the town was a significant twentieth century development. The construction of the camp’s white dome in 1998 has added a significant feature visible from many view points and at distances of over four miles.

4.2.5 The nuclear power station at Hinkley Point is another visually dominant building of the twentieth century.

4.3 Perceptions of the Landscape

4.3.1 Landscapes can assume significance not only because of factual objective matters, physical form and/or the historic or modern land use, there are other subjective perceptual features and cultural associations, literary and artistic for instance, which influence appreciation.

4.3.2 The Countryside Commission published the following table of subjective features, not all apply to the character areas of West Somerset, those that were noted during survey work have been highlighted. The Central Quantock heath accounts for most of the more extreme impressions, as marked below, but there are no negative impressions so the overall conclusion can only be that the countryside of West Somerset is of a generally high quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Vast</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Open</td>
<td>Exposed</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Simple</td>
<td>Varied</td>
<td>Complex</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Balanced</td>
<td>Discordant</td>
<td>Chaotic</td>
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<td>Dead</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Busy</td>
<td>Frantic</td>
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<td>Smooth</td>
<td>Managed</td>
<td>Rough</td>
<td>Wild</td>
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<td>Muted</td>
<td>Colourful</td>
<td>Garish</td>
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<td>Ordinary</td>
<td>Unusual</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Unique</td>
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<td>Safe</td>
<td>Unsettling</td>
<td>Threatening</td>
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<td>Boring</td>
<td>Bland</td>
<td>Interesting</td>
<td>Invigorating</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLEASURE</td>
<td>Offensive</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>Beautiful</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.3.3 There are numerous literary and artistic associations with the Quantock Hills, the AONB is nationally important for its role in the development of the English Romantic movement, particularly its influence on the romantic poets Coleridge and Wordsworth. The poets were attracted by the special and unique qualities of the area including its tamed wilderness, secret and secluded combs and contrasting and surprising variety of scenery. The views from the hills to the wider countryside and the sea were also much admired, West Somerset constitutes a significant proportion of the landscape in these views and fortunately it is still possible to appreciate the quality of these views today.
West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment

1 - Blue Anchor Bay
2 - Central West Somerset
3 - Quantock Vale
4 - Central Quantocks
5 - Doniford Stream and Quantock Fringe
6 - Brendon Fringe
7 - Southern Flanks of Exmoor

MAP 5.0 THE MAJOR CHARACTER AREAS
5. **LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS**

5.1 **BLUE ANCHOR BAY**

National Character Area 146 – Vale of Taunton and the Quantock Fringes.
County Character Area - Exmoor, Brendon and Quantock Foothills (Western).

5.1.1 This area is essentially characterised by areas of marsh and very low land but it also includes the town of Minehead and the steep slopes of Exmoor fringe to the south and west of the town. Five sub areas have been defined within this small character area.

- Minehead Exmoor Fringe
- Minehead Salt Marsh
- Dunster Flats
- Blue Anchor Flats
- The Coast [Minehead to Blue Anchor]
PHOTOGRAPH 5.1A  Buttercup meadow south of Minehead on the Exmoor fringe

PHOTOGRAPH 5.1B  Minehead Salt Marsh viewed from Lower Marsh Farm: note the Butlins Dome in the middle distance.
Blue Anchor Bay
• Minehead Exmoor Fringe

Key Landscape Characteristics
Field Pattern
Hedges, trees and woodland.

Settlement
This area is an important backdrop to the only town of the district and as such should be preserved so little building is envisaged in this area.

Description:
5.1.2 This sub area is an important buffer between the town and Exmoor National Park. The steep slopes rise to the park boundary at between 100 and 150m AOD. They are covered with shallow well drained brown earths over Permian and Triassic rocks. There are small areas of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland, linked by species rich hedges creating a pattern of small irregular fields. These fields suggest early, at least medieval settlement of the area.

Blue Anchor Bay
• Minehead Salt Marsh

Key landscape characteristics
Drainage ditches and pasture
West Somerset Railway

Settlement
This area could contribute more to the setting of Minehead. No new building is envisaged in this area.

Description
5.1.3 The Minehead salt marsh is all low lying under 10m AOD. It is an area of alluvial clays with waterlogged gley soils. Today overgrown, gappy hedges fringe the pattern of drainage ditches that divide the fields. The main period of drainage of the marshes is likely to have started in xxx and continued until yyy and then as now they would have been used as summer grazing.

5.1.4 Much of this small area of salt marsh has been developed; Minehead has spread eastwards throughout the twentieth century and on the coast is Butlins Family Entertainment Resort and associated recreation facilities such as the golf course. The West Somerset Railway crossing the marsh is a feature which comes into delightful prominence when a steam train passes by.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.1C  View from Ellicombe, northeast to Minehead Salt Marsh, Dunster Flats and the Bristol Channel.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.1D  Holiday Chalets at Dunster Beach
5.1.5 There is the potential to reclaim a vestige of the historic salt marsh through modified farming practice; this should encourage an improvement in the wildlife reserve of the area and might be used as living history for recreation and educational purposes. However, urban fringe pressures for alternative land use are considerable, there is scope to make a modern visual improvement to the interface of existing and approved areas of development but there is no intention of allowing further built development on the remains of the salt marsh.

Blue Anchor Bay

- Dunster Flats

**Key landscape characteristics and features:**
- Field Pattern
- Hedges and Hedgerow trees
- The Hawn
- West Somerset Railway

**Settlement:**
Marsh Street might be considered for new development at selected sites within the village but further twentieth century sprawl should be avoided. It would desirable that development blend with and reflect the older character of the village. Closely packed cottages at the core, giving way to more dispersed groups of farm buildings around the edges of the village. Boundaries with the countryside should reflect the agricultural nature of the area and be hedged and treed with native species.

**Buildings:**
Mostly small, two story cottages and agricultural buildings of a simple form. Strong emphasis on the use of local stone and render. Roofs steeply pitched, slate and tile.

**Description**

5.1.6 East of Minehead Marsh are the Dunster Flats, visually the two areas link as the flats are also low lying area, under 20m AOD, bounded by the sea to the north and the steeply rising hills of Exmoor to the south. It is the geology, soils and subsequent land use which differentiate the two.

5.1.7 Dunster Flats is an area of alluvial gravels overlain by a soil that is a reddish, fine, well drained brown earth. This soil is suitable for varied agriculture and the area is divided into medium to large regular, hedged fields which suggest that as the area became better drained it was subdivided into fields, perhaps as a result of the enclosure acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

5.1.8 Dunster Marsh, an area which includes the coast and coastal parts of both Minehead Marsh and the Dunster Flats has been designated a Prime Biodiversity Area [PBA] in the West Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan.
5.1.9 The Hawn is a prominent feature and the twentieth century holiday chalets between The Hawn and the sea exploit this feature. The visitor pressure these chalets and tourists bring to bear on the PBA and the high density layout of the site is perhaps undesirable but this older tourist development does have an odd charm of its own.

5.1.10 Marsh Street is the only settlement of the area, once an outpost of Dunster it has a nucleated core of older houses to the A39 and a significant number of middle to late twentieth century dwellings to Sea Lane to the north.

Blue Anchor Bay

- Blue Anchor Flats

**Key landscape characteristics and features:**
- Field Pattern
- Hedges and small copses
- West Somerset Railway
- Caravan and camping sites – these have a negative impact on the countryside and coastal character.

**Settlement:**
As the area is divorced from the coast by the sea defences and as the area has a more treed feel it might be appropriate to encourage further screen planting of native trees and shrubs around the camping sites. A return to an historic landscape would not benefit the local economy so a new and complementary visual improvement seems the appropriate way forward. Little new building or other development is envisaged in this area.

**Description**

5.1.11 The Dunster Flats terminate at Ker Moor in the east where a narrow coastal strip carries the West Somerset Railway north of Eastbury Hill. But east of Blue Anchor there is another low lying area, under 20m AOD, the geology, soils and subsequent land use is similar to the Dunster Flats. Blue Anchor Flats is also an area of alluvial gravels overlain by a soil that is a reddish, fine, well drained brown earth. The streams of the area have been straightened and channelled to aid drainage.

5.1.12 The soil is suitable for varied agriculture and the area is divided into medium to large regular, hedged fields which suggest that as the area became better drained it was subdivided into fields, perhaps as a result of the enclosure acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are small deciduous woodland copses within and around the Blue Anchor Flats which gives the area a less exposed coastal character.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.1F  A view of Blue Anchor Flats with a caravan site in the foreground & low land receding to Withycombe Wood in the middle distance.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.1G  The sweep of low coast from Blue Anchor Bay to Minehead.
Blue Anchor Flats – continued.

5.1.13 The B3191 road runs over sea defences and groynes along the sea front which provides an abrupt boundary with the coast and protection to the land behind. The caravan and camping sites immediately south of the road and the early to mid twentieth century residential housing at Blue Anchor have a significant impact on the visual quality of the coastal strip. The level of tourism here is subdued and not brash but the coastal area is not as harmonious and tranquil as the meadows further inland.

Blue Anchor Bay
- The Coast [Minehead to Blue Anchor]

Key Landscape Characteristics and Features
Sand dunes
Vegetated Shingle
Wide open stretches of inter-tidal muds, sands, shingle and gravel.

Description

5.1.14 This section of the West Somerset coast is wide and open with no significant cliffs. Sandy inter-tidal deposit comprise the upper foreshore from Minehead to Dunster these grade seaward and south east into inter-tidal and sub-tidal muds, sandy gravels and shingles. The sand dunes at Dunster Beach are of botanical interest and there are significant areas of vegetated shingle which has been designated a priority habitat in the West Somerset BAP. There is a submarine forest off the coast at Minehead which is an important site for marine archaeology.

5.1.15 Coastal settlement and development is dealt with in the appropriate inland sub character areas above but throughout the whole of the Blue Anchor Bay character area the coast is a significant feature linking the disparate lowlands together.
5.2 CENTRAL WEST SOMERSET

National Character Area 146 – Vale of Taunton and the Quantock Fringes.
County Character Area - Exmoor, Brendon and Quantock Foothills (Western).

5.2.1 An area of rolling or undulating hills, rarely over 100m AOD, divided by numerous streams and rivers in generally narrow but not exceptionally steep valleys. The hills of Exmoor and the Quantocks visually enclose the area yet the sea to the north creates an openness of view.

5.2.2 Essentially an ancient agricultural landscape of small fields, hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands but it also contains the main settlements of the district as well as numerous farms, hamlets and villages. The enclosure provided by the surrounding hills and the sea gives this area a cohesion which is difficult to divide it will, therefore, be considered as two simple sub areas.
- Carhampton to Quantock Coastal Hills
- The Coast [Blue Anchor to St Audries]

Central West Somerset
- Carhampton to Quantock, Coastal Hills

Key landscape characteristics and features:
Field Pattern
Hedges and Hedgerow trees
Tree clumps, copses and woodland
The radio masts

Settlement:
Williton, Washford, Watchet and Carhampton might be considered for new development at selected sites within and around these settlements. Standard twentieth century development should be improved upon. In most cases it would be desirable that development blend with and reflect the older character of the settlement. Closely packed cottages and farm buildings of simple design. Boundaries with the countryside should reflect the agricultural nature of adjacent land and be hedged and treed with native species.

Buildings:
Mostly small, two story cottages and agricultural buildings of a simple form.
Strong emphasis on the use of local stone and render.
Roofs of thatch, slate and tiles.

Description
5.2.3 The geology of this area includes a strip of Jurassic, Blue Lias rocks at the coast overlying the Mercia Mudstones and subsequently the Permian Sandstones toward the Exmoor hills. Changes in rock type, often complexly faulted and then overlain with head deposits, have influenced the courses of the small streams, many of which rise from springs in the area before flowing in to the main rivers. Erosion along these irregular courses has assisted in breaking the land up into the complex of low hills that typifies it today.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.2A  A panorama of the Carhampton to Quantock Coastal Hills: Carhampton nestles to the left, Minehead is just visible beyond the hills to the right and Exmoor creates a dramatic backdrop.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.2B  Williton: post war-housing blends poorly with the adjacent countryside.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.2C  Williton: in comparison with 5.2B an old wall and trees create a much more attractive divide between housing and open space.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.2D  Williton: old cottages illustrate the vernacular building of the area.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.2E  The typical field pattern of the Carhampton to Quantock Coastal Hills: this view is from Cleeve Priory with Old Cleeve to the left of the photograph.
5.2.4 Soils also vary, sometimes clearly defined by the underlying geology, as with the calcareous pelosols over the Jurassic, Blue Lias but elsewhere strongly influenced by head deposits. So the centre of this character area and the Eastbury Hill area are dominated by argillic pelosols which have a clay enriched subsoil but the Permo-triassic rocks to the south and east are found below reddish well drained brown earths.

5.2.5 From the mouth of The Swill into the Doniford stream a narrow finger of flatter land created by the deposition of alluvial gravels is apparent on maps but is less noticeable in the landscape. Like Blue Anchor and Dunster Flats the gravels are overlain by a soil that is a reddish, fine, well drained brown earth. All these form reasonable to good agricultural soils and soil differences do not appear to have had any significant influence on the vegetation or development of agriculture over the area.

5.2.6 There are numerous tree groups and copses and some medium sized woodlands dotted across the hillsides, many appear to be older secondary woodland and several have newer coniferous planting creating mixed woodlands of fairly recent date. Hedges, floristic hedge banks, hedgerow trees, predominantly oak and ash, surround the small fields and frequent lanes and tracks. This creates a complex wild life mesh, valuable though not exceptional; recent removal of some hedges and the general intensification of farming will have reduced species numbers and perhaps variety.

5.2.7 Historically and culturally it is still possible to read the medieval pattern of the landscape and as archaeological information about the area improves insights into the inter-relationships between the countryside and its settlements will also improve.

5.2.8 All the major settlements in West Somerset, except Minehead, occur in this character area. The rural centres of Williton, Washford, Watchet and larger villages such as Carhampton, and Old Cleeve have a nucleated core of older houses and an accretion of more recent buildings, a high proportion of which are twentieth century.

5.2.9 The buildings in some small settlements, notably Chaple Cleeve, Bilbrook and Five Bells are all or mostly twentieth century. Never the less, the majority of the many scattered small villages, hamlets and farmsteads of this area are part of the, at least medieval, pattern of the landscape and have not been spoilt by recent development.

5.2.10 Notable features in the wider views of this character area are the radio masts at the Washford transmitting station. The masts are not intrinsically attractive but they do not significantly detract from the quality of the landscape and given their inter-war history and age (the station became operational in 1933) might be considered valuable as twentieth century archaeological artefacts.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.2F Coastal cliffs begin at the east end of Blue Anchor Bay

PHOTOGRAPH 5.2G Low cliffs to the west of Donniford
Central West Somerset
• The Coast [Blue Anchor to St Audries]

Key Landscape Characteristics
Cliffs
Wave Cut Platforms
Coastal Flora

Settlement
Caravan sites are important for tourism which contributes to the local economy. The present sites are not highly disruptive of the character of the coastline having a predominantly localised visual impact. But any significant increase in the extent of camping and caravan sites would have a disproportionate impact on both the visual quality of the coast and through visitor pressure, tramping and erosion, on coastal flora and the easily eroded cliffs.

Description

5.2.11 This is an erodable cliffed coastline, the cliffs are fronted by a wave cut, inter-tidal rock platform, both are of considerable interest for their geological and geomorphological features. The cliffs, and those from St Audries to Lilstock, are internationally important for their geology and are used as a geological standard for the Jurassic, Blue Lias. Much of the sequence is rich in fossils.

5.2.12 The inter-tidal platforms are some of the best examples in Britain. St Audries Bay has been created because at this point an outcrop of the softer Mercia Mudstone base rock has been differentially eroded.

5.2.13 There are a number of sites, such as land slips, where interesting coastal flora, including the nationally rare fly orchid (*Orchis insectifera*) occur. The West Somerset BAP also includes a Habitat Action Plan for Sabellaria Reef which occurs in the lower third of the foreshore or subtidally on pebbles or bedrock such as the inter-tidal platforms.

5.2.14 After many centuries Watchet Harbour ceased to function as a commercial port in 1993. It is now used for leisure and there are plans for marina development. Other coastal development of note are caravan and camping sites at Warren Bay, Doniford Camp and St Audries.
MAP 5.3 QUANTOCK VALE
a) Eastern Lowlands
b) The Coast [St Audries to Hinckley Point]
c) Wick Moor and Coast
d) Wall Common and Coast

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5.3 QUANTOCK VALE

National Character Area 146 – Vale of Taunton and the Quantock Fringes
National Character Area 142 – Somerset Levels and Moors (part).
County Character Area - Exmoor, Brendon and Quantock Foothills (Eastern).

5.3.1 East of the Quantock Hills the steep and semi-steep slopes and hills which characterise most of West Somerset give way to a more flowing lowland landscape of wider valleys and gentle hills which are rarely over 60m AOD. The Quantock ridge is a dominant feature to the west. In common with most of the district the landform is overlain by an essentially ancient agricultural landscape of small fields, hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands. Stogursey is the only village of significant size but there are several small settlements and numerous farms. The lowland defines this character area but two small areas of marsh and the coast have led to four sub character areas being defined.

• Eastern Lowlands
• The Coast [St Audries to Hinkley Point]
• Wick Moor and Coast
• Wall Common and Coast

Quantock Vale

• Eastern Lowlands

Key Characteristics
Field Pattern
Deciduous woodland
Hedges and Hedgerow trees
Hinkley Point and the power lines (negative)

Settlement
Stogursey might be considered for new residential development at selected sites within and around the village. Standard twentieth century development should be improved upon. In most cases it would be desirable that development blend with and reflect the older character of the settlement. Closely packed cottages and farm buildings of simple design. Boundaries with the countryside should reflect the agricultural nature of adjacent land and be hedged and treed with native species.

Buildings:
Mostly small, two story cottages and agricultural buildings of a simple form. Strong emphasis on the use of local materials
Roofs of thatch, slate and tiles.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.3A  The tiny village of Skilgate with its unusual church spire

PHOTOGRAPH 5.3B  The centre of Stogursey, it also has a church spire, which is unusual for the district and the county.
Eastern Lowlands

Description

5.3.2 The Eastern Lowlands geology includes a band of Mercia Mudstones at the foot of the Quantock Hills but over most of the area to the north the Jurassic, Lower Lias overlays these rocks. In the Lower Lias area the soils are calcareous pelosols similar to those found over similar rocks west of the Quantocks. Over the Mercia Mudstones fine loamy soils of a reddish colour have developed. These soils include both well drained brown earths and argillic brown earths, the argillic brown earths occur over clayey subsoils so they are slowly permeable and subject to slight seasonal waterlogging.

5.3.3 The predominant topography is low rolling hills to about 70m AOD, although at the foot of the Quantocks, between Stringston and Dodington, the gentle slopes rise to the Quantock Hills. The landform and soils are suitable for agriculture and they do not appear to have had any significant influence on the overall distribution of vegetation of the agricultural pattern of the area.

5.3.4 Medium sized deciduous woodlands and copses are scattered throughout the area. The frequent lanes, which are straighter than elsewhere in the district perhaps because the landform is less hilly, are hedged with mixed species hedges and hedgerow trees as are the fields. The whole creates a complex wild life mesh, valuable though not exceptional; recent removal of some hedges and the general intensification of farming will have reduced species numbers and perhaps variety.

5.3.5 Historically and culturally it is still possible to read the medieval pattern of the landscape and as archaeological information about the area improves insights into the inter-relationships between the countryside and its settlements will also improve.

5.3.6 Within this long settled area the only village of any size is Stogursey all other settlements are small, nucleated villages, hamlets and farms. Hinkley Point power station is a notable modern development in the area. Given the lie of the land and vegetation it is not as visually dominant from within the area as might be expected, although it is a significant feature in views of the area from the Quantock Hills. The power lines in the east are locally dominant features.

5.3.7 Not differentiated from this area is the very small area of coastal lowland at Lilstock. This small area of recent alluvial deposits is drained by a small complex of drainage ditches but is farmed fields and not significantly different to the rest of the Eastern Lowlands.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.3C  View of the beach path at Kilve with the historic brick built oil retort visible in the middle distance.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.3D  The beach and low cliffs at Kilve
Quantock Vale
• The Coast [St Audries to Hinkley Point]

Key Landscape Characteristics
- Cliffs
- Wave Cut Platforms
- Coastal Flora

Settlement
None is appropriate in this area.

Description

5.3.8 The coast adjacent to the north west of the Eastern Lowlands is essentially a continuation of the coast from Blue Anchor to St Audries. Between St Audries and Quantocks Head the cliffs abut the North East Quantock Agricultural Fringe but they are included here as the majority of their length is within this character area.

5.3.9 It is an erodible cliffed coastline, the cliffs are fronted by a wave cut, inter-tidal rock platform, both are of considerable interest for their geological and geomorphological features. The cliffs, are internationally important for their geology and are used as a geological standard for the Jurassic, Blue Lias. Much of the sequence is rich in fossils. The inter-tidal platforms are some of the best examples in Britain.

5.3.10 There are a number of sites, such as land slips, where interesting coastal flora, including the nationally rare fly orchid (*Orchis insectifera*) occur. The West Somerset BAP includes a Habitat Action Plan for Sabellaria Reef which occurs in the lower third of the foreshore or subtidally on pebbles or bedrock such as the inter-tidal platforms.

5.3.11 This cliffed coastline differs from the Blue Anchor to St Audrie’s section in that there is virtually no settlement or tourist development on the coast.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.3F

A panorama of Wick Moor and Coast, which illustrates the dominance of Hinkley Point power station on the landscape.
Quantock Vale

• Wick Moor and Coast

Key Characteristics
The area is nationally important for its nature conservation features.

Settlement
None is appropriate in this area.

Description

5.3.12 Immediately east of Hinkley Point there is a finger of coastal marsh at Wick Moor. The land is below 10m AOD and covered with recent alluvial deposits. The area is quite open and bleak, it is used as grazing marsh in the summer and is not divided into fields although some scrubby vegetation has developed along the line of drainage ditches. The marsh is subject to flooding and is of high nature conservation value; it is designated SAC, Ramsar Site, SPA and SSSI, as are the fronting beach and sub tidal areas. There is a submarine forest off the coast at Wick Moor, which is an important site for marine archaeology.

5.3.13 The area is visually dominated by the bulk of Hinkley Point power station to the west; it is separated from the sea by a significant sea wall, which provides vehicular access to Hinkley Point.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.3G  Open fields on Wall Common: note the development of vegetation along drainage ditches.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.3H  Salt Marsh and the coast at Wall Common
Quantock Vale
- Wall Common and Coast

Key Characteristics
The area is nationally important for its nature conservation features.

Settlement
None is appropriate in this area.

Description

5.3.14 The land like Wick Moor is below 10m AOD and covered with recent alluvial deposits, sands and gravels. Humic alluvial gleyed soils cover these deposits and it is drained by a complex of rectilinear drainage ditches that divide the common into pasture fields. The area is quite open and bleak, it is used as grazing marsh in the summer and some scrubby vegetation has developed along the line of drainage ditches.

5.3.15 The fields are at risk of flooding but are separated from the sea by a series of low cobble embankments. To the seaward side there is a strip of salt marsh the fronting beach and sub tidal areas. This coast is of high nature conservation value; it is designated SAC, Ramsar Site, SPA and SSSI, and forms part of Stert Flats National Nature Reserve.

5.3.16 Two farms are located in the area on rising land toward the Stolford ridge which separates this lowland from Wick Moor to the west.
West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment

MAP 5.4 CENTRAL QUANTOCKS
a) The Upland Plateau and Combes
b) The Western Scarp Slope

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Photographic points
District Boundary
Main Area Boundaries
Sub Area Boundaries
5.4 CENTRAL QUANTOCKS

National Character Area 144 – The Quantock Hills.
County Character Area - The Quantock Hills

5.4.1 This character area composes most of the Quantocks AONB that lies in West Somerset. The Central Quantocks rise to smooth rounded summits incised by deep combes, they are common land and are not divided into fields. Visually they are a dominant feature from many view points within the district. The highest summits are over 300m AOD, and they are covered with heathland and moor of great aesthetic and wildlife value. To the east deeply incised, wooded combes dissect the highland plateau but to the west a scarp slope drops steeply from the upland plateau. There are no settlements in this open countryside although West Quantoxhead is on the boundary. The landform suggests two main sub divisions to the Central Quantocks.
- The Upland Plateau and Combes
- The Western Scarp Slope

Central Quantocks
- The Upland Plateau and Combes

Key Characteristics
The area is nationally important for its landscape and nature conservation features.

Settlement
None is appropriate in this area.

Description
The highland plateau of the Quantocks and the steep wooded combes of the eastern edge are composed of Devonian rocks; Hangman Grits and Ilfracombe Slates. Over these rocks the resultant soils are poor podzols on the plateau and shallow well-drained brown earths in the combes.

5.4.3 The narrow plateau rises to smooth rounded summits but where it is incised in the east by deep combes the characteristic of the landscape is repeated ridges and valleys. Much of this upland area would originally have been woodland but this has been depleted and replaced by heath and moor on the plateau. Semi natural woodland now only remains in the combes although significant areas of coniferous plantation have been planted on steep slopes in the north and east.

5.4.4 The area is of significant nature conservation interest and is a designated SSSI. On the plateau there is a virtual absence of trees apart from a few wind sculpted oaks. There are features of Bronze Age ritual and Iron Age fortification on the summits but there is an absence of any settlement today.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.4A

A panorama of Vinney Combe at the northern end of the Quantocks shows the upland heath, coniferous woodland, oaks and scrub in the steep combe
The Upland Plateau and Combes – continued.

5.4.5 The area is managed as common land and is the central part of the AONB which is so popular with walkers, riders and tourists. Magnificent panoramic views are available in all directions and the aura of tamed wildness which so influenced the Romantic Poets is still as strong today.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.4B  The Quantock Western Scarp above Weacombe Park.: note the occasional parkland trees.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.4C  The western Scarp from a distance showing woodland, combes and the lack of agriculture.
Central Quantocks
- The Western Scarp Slope

**Key Characteristics**

- The area is a nationally important landscape feature.
- Prominent landform and skyline
- Moorland vegetation
- Parkland
- Beech hedges

**Settlement**

None is appropriate in this area.

**Description**

5.4.6 The Western Scarp drops steeply from the Quantock plateau to the rich agricultural land of the Doniford Valley which divides the Quantocks from the Brendon Hills. Devonian Hangman Grits faulted on the east-south-east axis typical of the Variscan Orogeny of the late Palaeozoic create the scarp slope. The soils over the rocks are shallow, non-calcareous, well drained brown earths.

5.4.7 In West Somerset the scarp slope is mostly unwooded and moorland spills over from the upland plateau although parklands at Weacombe and Crowcombe include significant conifer plantations. Beech hedges are characteristic of the parkland enclosures but they are less dominant on the northern scarp than they are further south out of the district.

5.4.8 There are features of Bronze Age ritual and Iron Age fortification on the scarp but there is an absence of any settlement today and the area is managed as common land. Old, disused quarries are present and Triscombe Quarry, which is on the boundary of West Somerset, is still working; the dark red stone faces of this quarry are a significant feature in the landscape although work is to cease and the quarry will be restored in the near future.

5.4.9 The Western Scarp is a prominent landform, the steep slope and smooth crest line are visible from many vantage points to the west.
5.5 DONIFORD STREAM AND QUANTOCK FRINGE

National Character Area 146 – Vale of Taunton and the Quantock Fringes.
National Character Area 144 – The Quantock Hills (part)
County Character Area - Exmoor, Brendon and Quantock Foothills (Western).

5.5.1 Along the western boundary of the Quantock AONB there is a narrow (rarely more than two to three field wide) agricultural fringe which is only divided from similar agricultural land use in the valley of the Doniford Stream by the line of the A358 county road. A wider band of coastal agricultural fringe encloses the northern end of the Quantock AONB. On the basis of geology, landform and land use these hills are linked to the valley.

5.5.2 The Doniford Valley is a distinct linear character area enclosed by the Brendon Hills to the west and the Quantock to the east. The hilly terrain is much broken and incised by small streams. There is scattered woodland throughout the area, some in the south is quite extensive. Two sub divisions of this character area are relevant.
• Doniford Valley
• North East Quantock Agricultural Fringe

Doniford Stream and Quantock Fringe
- Doniford Valley

Key landscape characteristics and features:
Field Pattern
Hedges and Hedgerow trees
Tree clumps, copses and woodland
Enclosed by hills

Settlement:
Crowcombe and Bicknoller are within the Quantock Hills AONB and subject to stricter controls over development than other non designated parts of West Somerset. Stogumber might be considered for new development at selected sites within and around the village. In most cases it would desirable that development blend with and reflect the older character of the settlement. Closely packed cottages and farm buildings of simple design. Boundaries with the countryside should reflect the agricultural nature of adjacent land and be hedged and treed with native species.

Buildings:
Mostly small, two story cottages and agricultural buildings of a simple form. Strong emphasis on the use of local materials Roofs of thatch, slate and tiles.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.5A  This view of the Doniford valley illustrates how the fields at the foot of the Quantock scarp flow into the pattern and landscape of the valley. Note Triscombe Quarry in the distance.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.5B  The Doniford Valley from above Crowcombe on the Quantocks.
Doniford Valley
Description

5.5.3 The Doniford Stream runs in a valley that follows the synclinal basin between the Quantock and the Brendon Hills. Permian sandstones and siltstones dominate the base geology of this area but at the base of the Quantocks a band of the Triassic, Mercia Mudstone group occurs; at the conjunction of these rocks with the Devonian rocks of the Western Scarp a clear break in slope occurs. Thin and patchy head deposits overlay the base rocks and this leads to some variety in the soils of the area.

5.5.4 All the soils are reddish in colour and both argillic brown earths and non-alluvial loamy brown earths occur. The former occur mainly to the east of the stream and have a clay enriched sub-soil which leads to slight seasonal waterlogging. The latter have a non-calcareous sub-soil and are better drained.

5.5.5 The landform of the Doniford Valley is typified by steep hills cut by incised tributary streams. Between Stogumber and Bicknoller, before the stream flows into Central West Somerset, steep hills closely enclose the valley but upstream, particularly on the eastern side the hills are a little gentler.

5.5.6 There are numerous tree groups and copses and some medium sized woodlands dotted across the hillsides, many appear to be older secondary woodland and several have newer coniferous planting creating mixed woodlands of fairly recent date. Hedges, floristic hedge banks, hedgerow trees, predominantly oak and ash, surround the small fields and frequent lanes and tracks. This creates a complex wild life mesh, valuable though not exceptional; recent removal of some hedges and the general intensification of farming will have reduced species numbers and perhaps variety.

5.5.7 Historically and culturally it is still possible to read the medieval pattern of the landscape and as archaeological information about the area improves insights into the inter-relationships between the countryside and its settlements will also improve.

5.5.8 Three medium sized villages, Crowcombe and Bicknoller at the western foot of the Quantocks and Stogumber towards the western boundary of the area are the major settlements but like most of West Somerset there are numerous hamlets and farms in this character area.

Doniford Valley and Quantock Fringe
• North East Quantock Agricultural Fringe

Key landscape characteristics and features:
Field Pattern
Hedges and Hedgerow trees
Tree clumps, copses and woodland
Views out to sea
PHOTOGRAPH 5.5C  Cottages, part of the old village of Kilve on the A39.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.5D  A view of land west of East Quantoxhead shows the field pattern of the North East Quantock Agricultural Fringe.
North-east Quantock Agricultural Fringe
Settlement
All this area is within the Quantock Hills AONB and subject to stricter
controls over development than other parts of West Somerset.

Description

5.5.9 Around the northern coastal fringe of the Quantocks AONB are Mercia
Mudstones, a continuation of the geology of the east of the Doniford Valley.
These steep slopes are incised by headwater streams running the short distance
from the Quantock Plateau to the sea. The soils are reddish; argillic brown
earths with a clayey sub soil so they are subject to some slight seasonal
waterlogging.

5.5.10 As in the associated landscape of the Doniford Valley there are numerous tree
groups and copses and some medium sized woodlands dotted across the
hillsides, there is also notable parkland at St Audries. The vegetation creates a
complex wild life mesh and it is still possible to read the medieval pattern of
the landscape.

5.5.11 Kilve is the only village of significant size north of the Quantocks, but the
common pattern of small settlements and farms dotted across the landscape is
repeated in this area. The views out to sea give this area a less enclosed
character in comparison with the Doniford Valley and consequently the area
feels more exposed and a little wilder.
5.6 BRENDON FRINGE

National Character Area 146 – Vale of Taunton and the Quantock Fringes. 
County Character Area - Exmoor, Brendon and Quantock Foothills (Western).

5.6.1 The Brendon Fringe is the most extensive area within West Somerset. It includes land over 150m AOD to the east of the Brendons and all the south west of the district around Clatworthy Reservoir. In the eastern finger above the Doniford Stream and notably at Raleghs Cross the area is quite open and bleaker than elsewhere in the district. The fields are larger and more regular in shape. Further south, to the south-west and east of Clatworthy reservoir the landscape is essentially an ancient agricultural landscape of small fields, hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands.

5.6.2 There are no significant settlements in this character area it is dominated by numerous, scattered villages hamlets and farms. The main villages are, Brompton Ralph, Huish Champflower, Skilgate and Upton. Two sub divisions of this area have been recognised.
- Open Brendon Fringe
- Clatworthy Farmlands

Brendon Fringe
- Open Brendon Fringe

Key landscape characteristics and features:
Field Pattern
Hedges particularly beech
Close association with Exmoor

Settlement:
This area is divided into two relatively isolated patches which are important to the setting of Exmoor National Park so most forms of development would seem inappropriate.

Description

5.6.3 To the west of the Doniford Valley at about 150m AOD, on the Brendon fringe the base geology changes to older Devonian rock. Morte Slates fringe most of the Brendon Hills but to the south bands of younger Devonian rocks occur.

5.6.4 Over these ancient hard rocks brown podzolic soils and loamy brown earths similar to those found in the Central Quantocks occur. However, unlike the Quantocks the Open Brendon Fringe is farmed. It is an almost plateau landscape, less incised by streams, many of which have their sources at springs in this area.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.6A  Beech Hedges are typical boundaries on the edge of Exmoor.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.6B  This large, regular field on the Open Brendon Fringe close to Raleghs Cross is typical of the area.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.6C  A field on the eastern Brendon Fringe, above the Doniford Valley the landscape becomes more open and there are fewer trees.

5.6.5  The area includes several small groups of fields on the boundary of Exmoor National Park which are larger and more regular in form than elsewhere in the district. They were probably heathland until two or three centuries ago but are now enclosure landscape as found on poorer land on Exmoor. The fields are hedged, some of the hedges being lines of beech, but the areas are generally less well treed than the Doniford Valley and the Clatworthy Farmlands.

5.6.6  The association of these areas with the moor gives them a bleaker aspect, settlement is sparse and limited to a few farmsteads.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.6D  Upton, vernacular buildings at Bridge End.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.6E  The River Haddeo valley north of Upton is typical of the Clatworthy farmlands.
Brendon Fringe

- Clatworthy Farmlands

**Key landscape characteristics and features:**
Field Pattern
Floristic banks
Hedges and hedgerow trees
Coniferous woodland
Clatworthy Reservoir

**Settlement:**
All this area has a strong sense of history it is difficult to envisage significant development in or around the small villages without losing much of the character. Very limited infill and reuse of redundant buildings might be acceptable if sympathetically carried out.

**Buildings:**
Small cottages, larger farm houses and agricultural buildings.
Strong emphasis on the vernacular and use of local materials.
Roofs of thatch, tile and slate.

**Description**

5.6.7 This large, southern part of the district is underlain by Devonian rocks, Morte Slates to the north and younger beds to the south. Over these ancient hard rocks some brown podzolic soils but mostly loamy brown earths occur. Frequent tributaries to the river Tone and river Exe run in steep and moderately steep valleys which break the area into irregular hills.

5.6.8 There are numerous tree groups and copses and some medium sized woodlands. Many of the woodlands are coniferous plantations of fairly recent date. Hedges and floristic hedge banks surround the small fields and frequent lanes and tracks. This creates a complex wildlife mesh, which is valuable to the protection of wildlife in general. Small areas of purple moor grass and rush pasture, priority habitat in the district BAP, occur in the south of the area on alluvial gleyed soils in the upper reaches of some of the tributaries to the River Exe.

5.6.9 Historically and culturally it is still possible to read the medieval pattern of this landscape. Settlements are frequent but small; villages, hamlets and farms scattered across the landscape in sheltered locations. There is a sense of going back in time when travelling through this area which is sustained even when in the vicinity of the relatively modern Clatworthy Reservoir which is a major feature of the locality.
5.7 **SOUTHERN FLANKS OF EXMOOR**

National Character Area 148 - Devon Redlands.
County Character Area - Upper Exe Valley

5.7.1 Exmoor National Park divides this southern part from the rest of the district. The character area is hilly land to about 300m AOD in the west of the area. The hills are broken by steep sided tributary valleys. It is a diverse landscape of significant groups of woodland, small fields and hedgerows and scattered farms. Brushford is the only village and it lies on the edge of the Exe Valley. The Exe Valley is quite narrow at this point but forms a finger of lowland in the east of the area which is marshy and quite distinct from the hills to the west. The area can be divided into two sub areas.

- Upper Exe Valley
- Hills South of Dulverton

MAP 5.7 SOUTHERN FLANKS OF EXMOOR

a) Upper Exe Valley
b) Hills South of Dulverton

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Southern Flanks of Exmoor
• Upper Exe Valley

Key landscape characteristics and features:
Hedges, Floristic banks and verges
Coniferous and mixed woodland

Settlement:
This area has a strong sense of continuation with Exmoor National Park most forms of development would seem inappropriate.

5.7.2 The Upper Exe Valley is only about 500 to 600m wide but it is distinctly different from the hills to the west in this isolated southern part of the district. The area is at the confluence of the Rivers Barle and Brockey with the Exe and the lowland is covered with recent alluvial deposit above which gleyed alluvial soils have developed.

5.7.3 This is an area of water meadows used for seasonal pasture. The grassland is interspersed with small clumps of trees, mainly willow. There is no settlement on the marshy valley floor but several villages, hamlets and farm line the immediate valley sides, the area is a gateway to Exmoor and is important for recreation, walking and fishing and notably there is a fish farm north of Exebridge.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.7A A view of the alluvial plain of the Upper Exe Valley.
PHOTOGRAPH 5.7B  A typical view of farmland on the Hills South of Dulverton.

PHOTOGRAPH 5.7C  The lanes south of Dulverton are notable for their floristic verges.
Southern Flanks of Exmoor
• Hills South of Dulverton

Key landscape characteristics and features:
- Field Pattern
- Floristic banks and verges
- Hedges
- Coniferous and mixed woodland

Settlement:
This area has a strong sense of continuation with Exmoor National Park most forms of development would seem inappropriate. However, Brushford might be considered for limited development to relieve pressures in the National Park.

Description

5.7.4 Younger Devonian rocks, the Pickwell Down beds and the Pilton beds, compose the base geology under the northern part of this area. These are overlain to the south by Carboniferous Culm Measures. Thin soils, non-calcareous brown earths, have developed over the Devonian rocks but above the Culm Measures the soils are more varied; reasonably well drained brown podzolic soils and seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soils occur. These latter soils are associated with areas of purple moor grass and rush pasture, priority habitat in the district BAP. The area is hilly rising to over 300m AOD and deeply incised by tributaries to the river Exe.

5.7.5 Over the hills there is a pattern of small to medium sized fields broken by significant woodland in the steeper valleys and occasionally on the hill tops. Much of this woodland is coniferous or mixed woodland of fairly recent date though it is unlikely that the steep valleys have ever been cleared for farming. The fields are hedged with mixed species hedges below which floristic banks and verges are a notable feature. Part of the area is a Prime Biodiversity area defined in the West Somerset BAP. Settlement is sparse with a few scattered farms except for the village of Brushford which lies on the boundary of the hills and the Upper Exe valley.
6 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

6.1 Planning Policies and Mechanisms for Sustainable Development

6.1.1 There is now increasing recognition that the human race must act responsibly so that:
- No group or community passes on wastes and pollution or uses resources unreasonably.
- Each generation leaves the environment in as good or better condition than they found it.

6.1.2 From the above we can deduce that no renewable resource should be managed so that its natural capability to regenerate is threatened, this is the principle of environmental sustainability. Also, human activity and development should not exceed the carrying capacity of the local environment, this is the principle of sustainable development.

6.1.3 The process of ensuring that future change and development leads to more sustainable use of energy, less waste, and greater protection of the natural and man made environment is an integral part of town and country planning. It is therefore appropriate that a main emphasis should be on improving the environmental credentials of planning policies in the Somerset Structure Plan and District Local Plans.

6.1.4 This Landscape Assessment emphasises that West Somerset has a high quality landscape. High Quality landscape provides evidence that the natural and man made environment is in good heart, whereas impoverished or degraded landscapes are symptomatic of serious problems affecting both the environment and human well being.

6.1.5 The challenge for the West Somerset Local Plan is to ensure that this situation does not deteriorate and the principles of environmental sustainability and sustainable development is fully recognised. Some thoughts on these considerations are included in the following final two sections of this document.

6.2 Current Forces for Change

6.2.1 Most forces for change in the West Somerset landscape are related to the dominant land use of farming. They include the following:
- Loss of hedgerows
- Poor management of hedgerows by frequent flailing
- Poor management of ditches and water features
- Some large new farm buildings
- Changes to arable farming and the growing of non traditional crops

6.2.2 Tourism is important to the economy of West Somerset and most visitors arrive by car. Excessive car use is not sustainable and national and local policy is to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, excessive energy consumption.
and use of non renewable resources. In a rural area the necessary change to basic lifestyle and a major source of income will be difficult to implement but the emphasis in future must be on improvements to public transport especially ease of access.

6.2.3 Other improvements to the local economy are also required; all of West Somerset is a Rural Development Area [RDA]. The amalgamation of the Countryside Commission with the Rural Development Agency should ensure that landscape protection and enhancement is an integral part of rural development.

6.3 Landscape Management Alternatives

6.3.1 Farming has suffered significant economic set backs in the last few years, assistance is needed but in landscape terms the following should be considered:

- Encourage sensitive hedgerow management by laying or flailing on rotation.
- Allow selected hedgerow trees to grow to maturity
- Increase awareness of the wildlife value of ditches and water bodies
- Use the notification system to influence the siting and design of new agricultural buildings
- Promote appropriate agri-environment schemes.

6.3.2 Enhancement of the landscape can benefit recreation and tourism, for instance:

- Safeguard the quality and availability of open space.
- Improve access to and interpretation of the natural and built environments.
- The landscape setting of footpaths, bridleways and other local access routes should be considered in order to increase the attractiveness of the route itself.
- Safeguard and enhance as necessary the landscape quality of views from public roads passing through the district.
- Safeguard and enhance as necessary the landscape and built quality of individual settlements.
- New businesses in appropriate accommodation; make the most of older, attractive derelict farm and industrial buildings and ensure new building respects, historic character and local distinctiveness.
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