



**NORTH DEVON  
COAST**  
Areas of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty



# AONB Management Plan

2019 - 2024

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

# A 20 Year Vision

“The North Devon Coast AONB will remain as one of England’s finest landscapes and seascapes, protected, inspiring and valued by all. Its natural and cultural heritage will sustain those who live in, work in or visit the area. It will be valued by residents and visitors alike who will have increased understanding of what makes the area unique and will be addressing the challenges of keeping it special to secure its long-term future.”



*Front and Back Covers, Inside Cover - Neville Stanikk*

## Ministerial Foreword



I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover - the first of its kind for generations - will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people - farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff - for the beautiful places they live and work in. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the North Devon AONB. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the North Devon AONB. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.

## AONB Partnership Chairman Foreword



The production of this Plan has been an excellent example of the AONB Partnership working at its best, showing how dynamic and vibrant a group it is. The process was well managed and timely, with inclusive workshops and good debates informing its production. The level of agreement and support the Plan has received in development gives it great strength. It is a pleasure to be the Partnership Chairman working with such a wide cross section of local authorities, agencies, charities and community representatives, all dedicated to supporting the work of the excellent AONB team.

There have been significant changes since the last Plan in both legislation and forces for change. The National Planning Policy Framework and the new Local Plan for North Devon and Torridge have strengthened protection for the AONB. However, there is a visible impact from climate change on species, water, soils and land management practices, alongside the development and recreation pressures of a living and working landscape. Some of the highlights over the last five years have included: two Heritage Lottery Fund supported partnership projects on wildlife and built heritage delivering environmental enhancement and community engagement with the AONB; sustained community action to remove marine litter from our beaches to protect wildlife and people; increased engagement with schools, colleges and communities to support learning in the natural environment and wildlife monitoring; landscape enhancements through undergrounding of power lines; responding to the health and wellbeing agenda through information and pro-active engagement; continuing to offer the Defra supported Sustainable Development Fund small grants for local groups and businesses to deliver AONB priorities through innovative projects.

The North Devon coast is a national treasure that includes some of the best coastal scenery in the country, and this Plan demonstrates a clear, joint ambition to improve the Area within an interesting political, economic and cultural climate. I have great confidence that members of the Partnership will deliver the Plan with commitment, dedication and energy.

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# Summary of Objectives and Policies

## Landscape and Seascape

To conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special landscapes of the AONB

- A1 Ensure that the landscape character, natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB are conserved, enhanced and fully respected in all decisions affecting the Area
- A2 Preserve the dark skies, peace and tranquillity of the AONB
- A3 Ensure developments both onshore and offshore, take account of open views, wilderness and maritime connections
- A4 Recommend that no development should be permitted inside or outside the AONB that would harm the natural beauty, character or special qualities of the AONB
- A5 Ensure developments comply with the North Devon Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments

## Environmental Quality and Climate Change

To promote the sustainable management of natural resources and of climate change impacts

- D1 Increase understanding, adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts on coastal landscapes and communities
- D2 Contribute to marine planning to conserve and enhance seascape quality, coastal species and habitats
- D3 Improve inland, coastal and bathing water quality through catchment management, local flood management and litter management

(Note: former 'Coast' objective and policies incorporated into this section and others)

## Sustainable Rural and Visitor Economy

To promote sustainable development within the AONB that is consistent with the designation

- G1 Take account of the value of the natural environment in economic development decisions using the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services approach
- G2 Support partners to develop sustainable tourism opportunities that promote the special qualities of the AONB, without damaging protected sites and species

## Biodiversity and Geodiversity

To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity of the AONB, in terrestrial, aquatic and marine habitats

- B1 Support and promote approaches to conserve and enhance habitats and species, increase wildlife richness and ensure the resilience of the landscape
- B2 Identify and address actual and potential impacts on biodiversity from invasive species, disease and climate change
- B3 Encourage actions to enhance, maintain and promote the geodiversity of the AONB through appropriate site management and public awareness

(Note: former 'Geodiversity' objective and policies (C1-3) incorporated into this section)

## Planning, Development and Infrastructure

To ensure the planning process and infrastructure development protects and enhances the designated AONB and its special qualities

- I1 Provide planning advice and policy guidance to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the designated AONB
- I2 Promote and maintain the local distinctiveness and historic character of the built environment
- I3 Support affordable housing proposals to meet local housing needs, that take full account of the AONB designation
- I4 Conserve and enhance the coast and marine environment in relation to onshore and offshore developments
- I5 Support appropriate infrastructure, signage and transport networks in the AONB, for the benefit of local and visiting communities
- I6 Ensure that new development delivers suitable biodiversity net gain

## Access, Health and Wellbeing

To ensure sustainable access to the AONB for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors, consistent with the designation

- H1 Work with partners and landowners to develop improved access to and interpretation of the natural environment
- H2 Support new opportunities and reduce barriers to improve the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors

## Historic Environment and Culture

To conserve, enhance and understand the historic and cultural features of the AONB

- E1 Support actions to conserve and enhance the historic and cultural features of the AONB, and their setting
- E2 Develop approaches to increase understanding of local heritage and culture

## Farming and Land Management

To promote farming, food production and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB

- F1 Support partners to deliver sustainable and exemplar land management, forestry and farming practices in keeping with the AONB designation
- F2 Work with landowners and managers to maintain landscape features such as hedge-banks and woodlands
- F3 Support approaches to enhance the Natural Capital within the AONB including carbon storage, clean water, clean air, timber, renewable energy and food, consistent with the designation

## Community Action, Learning and Understanding

To support more people to learn about, understand and take action to conserve the AONB

- J1 Raise awareness and understanding of the AONB, its special qualities, natural and cultural heritage
- J2 Develop opportunities for people to volunteer and gain appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver AONB policies
- J3 Support the provision of community facilities and services to improve the quality of life and sustainability of rural and coastal communities
- J4 Support communities and businesses to reduce carbon emissions from the designated AONB so long as they are complementary to the special qualities of the AONB

# Statement of Significance and Special Qualities

The North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1959 and confirmed by the Secretary of State in 1960<sup>1</sup>. It was the first of the five Devon AONBs to be designated. It covers 171 square kilometres (66 square miles) of mainly coastal landscape including special places such as Combe Martin, Lee Bay, Woolacombe, Croyde, Saunton, Braunton Burrows, Northam Burrows Country Park, Westward Ho!'s Pebble Ridge and the Hartland Peninsula. The extensive, mobile, dune system at Braunton Burrows has an immense diversity of wildlife and lies at the heart of the AONB. In 2002 Braunton Burrows earned the international status of a UNESCO World Biosphere with the AONB being an important part of its core and buffer zone.

## Statement of Significance

The North Devon coast has a wide diversity of scenery including some of the of the finest cliff scenery in the country, the primary reason for its designation. Tall rugged cliffs and wave-cut platforms contrast with wide, sandy bays and sand dunes. In the north, steeply dipping rocks form hogsback cliffs at varied heights in a natural continuation of Exmoor's coastline. To the south, facing the full force of the Atlantic, sheer crags and razor-like reefs present the coast at its most rugged and beautiful. The AONB reaches inland to the Hartland plateau, scored by deep valleys, which reach the coast as steep hanging gaps in the cliffs, often with spectacular waterfalls.

In contrast, the broad sweep of Bideford and Barnstaple Bay is a mixture of low cliffs, long sandy beaches and the dunes at Braunton Burrows. Inland a pastoral landscape of hedged fields complements the steep-sided wooded combes and valleys where villages shelter from the Atlantic winds. Whilst skirting larger settlements such as Ilfracombe and Westward Ho!, the AONB boundary takes in bustling seaside resorts such as Woolacombe and Croyde and picturesque fishing villages such as Clovelly and Bucks Mills along this spectacular coast.

## Distinctive Coastal Scenery

Walking along the South West Coast Path across the open, windswept clifftops, and gazing westward across the seemingly infinite expanse of ocean, there is a sense of timelessness and of raw nature devoid of human influence. The feeling is sharpened when Atlantic storm waves crash against the twisted strata of exposed rocky cliffs, sending thunderous sprays of surf into the air. Dropping down into a coastal combe from the cliffs or farmland, a strong sense of refuge and shelter prevails, made more striking by the presence of enclosing woodland in the combes.

Where stretches of coastline are distant from the coast road, a sense of tranquillity and remoteness is strong. In Braunton Burrows, the vast sand-dune system, infinite sky and an expansive sandy beach are bordered by tranquil grazing marshes. Likewise, the Hartland Coast possesses a sense of wilderness, but this is a fragile quality, which can dissolve with the sight of a wind turbine or mast on a skyline, or a car parked in an open combe. Coastal landforms provide classic examples of erosion and deposition, as well as rare and characteristic landscape features.

## A Landscape and Seascape of High Visual Quality

Panoramic views from elevated areas across rolling countryside are an important feature of the AONB. Within the combes, framed sea views are characteristic, and coastal vistas across to Lundy are wide and empty. Further north the view is framed by intimate distant views of the Welsh coast. Inland, the countryside, much of it undesignated, forms an important backdrop to the coast and is a defining element to the visual quality of the AONB providing a variety of open views. The coast path provides long views along the coast across the estuary and inland to the undeveloped skyline and downland.

## A Significant Wildlife Resource

Much of the coastline is designated for its biological importance. The rarest AONB habitat is rush pasture, or Culm Grassland, small fragments of which are found on the wet inland moors of the Hartland area such as Bursdon and Brownsham Moors. Elsewhere, there are mosaics of maritime grassland, heathland and scrub, estuarine salt marsh, along with sea cliffs and rocky shores especially around Morte Point and Hartland Quay. There are internationally important sand dunes and hundreds of miles of hedgerows with isolated trees and Devon hedge-banks providing extensive havens throughout the inland area. Western oak woodland is found along the Clovelly coast and within the combes, whilst excellent air quality, constantly freshened by Atlantic westerlies, is a particular asset supporting a proliferation and variety of lichens, all contributing to the local landscape character.

## A Varied Geology

Much of the coastline is also designated SSSI for its geological importance. Coastal landforms provide classic examples of coastal erosion and deposition as well as rare and unique landscape features. These include the pebble ridge at Northam Burrows, the mobile sand dune system at Braunton Burrows, Blackchurch Rock at Mouthmill, the Tuts Hole anticline at Abbotsham and the dramatic waterfalls cascading on to rocky shores from truncated combes. The variety of coastal landforms from wave-cut platforms to wide sandy beaches offers an immense resource for marine wildlife that inhabit the foreshore.

## A Remarkable Heritage

The legacy of a long history of human habitation in the area is woven into the landscape, with some threads tracing back to pre-historic times. The most extensive historic landscape features are the enclosed fields defined by ancient hedge-banks, from the narrow, enclosed strip fields of Combe Martin to the 19th century regular enclosures of the downland above Ilfracombe, their patterns reflecting centuries of agricultural change. This is made more appealing by historic farmsteads, hamlets and villages and the winding lanes which connect them.

Inland the ridgelines are marked by ancient burial mounds, whilst along the coast, promontory sites such as the ancient earthworks at Hillsborough and Embury Beacon, have been home to strategic defences from the Iron Age to the 20th Century wars. Devon's seagoing heritage is represented by historic quays and fishing villages like Clovelly, with lime kilns in almost every inlet and wrecks of ships and planes on both land and sea.



# Special Qualities

This list of special qualities was drawn up by the Partnership to fully illustrate the landscape features of the designated area.



1. Diversity of scenery contained within a small area, including some of the finest cliff scenery in the country (as mentioned at designation).



2. Panoramic seascape, with seaward views to Lundy within the Atlantic Ocean, across the Bristol Channel to Wales and along the coastline. Views are of a landscape and seascape devoid of human influence.



3. Narrow framed views of the sea from coastal mouths of steep-sided combes.



4. Panoramic views across a rolling landscape of pastoral farmland, wooded combes and valleys from elevated inland areas.

# Special Qualities



5. Wild coastal scenery. In the north, hogsback cliffs of varying heights; in the south high, rugged cliffs, dramatic rock formations, exposed headlands, wavecut platforms and rocky coves.



6. A vast sand dune system at Braunton Burrows of exposed wild character, with high nature-conservation interest of international importance, and the pebble ridge at Westward Ho!



7. Long, broad sandy beaches backed by extensive dune systems.



8. A strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness where the coast road is located away from the coastline.

# Special Qualities



9. Rare and fragile quality of wilderness in Branton Burrows and on the Hartland coast.



10. Historic landscape pattern of hedge-banks, farmsteads, hamlets, villages and lanes.



11. Historic coastal quays and fishing villages, coastal promontory sites for strategic defences and lighthouses.



12. Deep combes and cliffs cloaked in ancient woodland along the Bideford Bay coast.

# Special Qualities



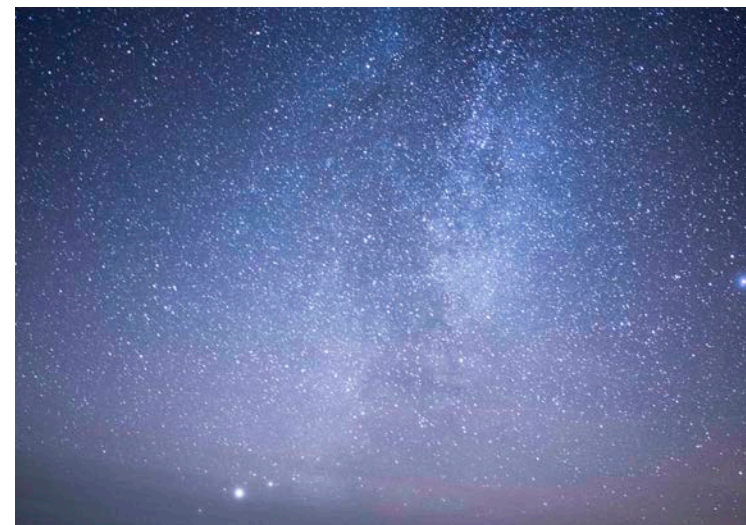
13. Small pockets of remnant lowland coastal heathlands around Morte Point and Hartland Quay.



14. Tourist-orientated settlements in sheltered seaside locations.



15. Secluded, secretive and tranquil steep sided valleys that dissect the high downland and coastal plateau.



16. Dark night skies, particularly in the Hartland Peninsula.

## 1.1 Purpose of AONB Designation

The North Devon AONB was designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. It is part of a family of protected landscapes of 34 AONBs in England including two conservation boards, plus ten National Parks. The primary purpose of AONB designation is:

“To conserve and enhance natural beauty”

Subsequent legislation has emphasised that in pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and rural industries as well as the economic and social needs of local communities. Regard should be paid to social and economic development that conserves and enhances the natural and historic environment. Whilst recreation is not an objective of the designation, the demand for recreation should be met insofar as it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty.<sup>2</sup>

### Duty of Regard

Several different guidance documents and legislative changes have amended or clarified the terms, duties and understanding of elements of the 1949 Act. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 subsumes and strengthens the 1949 Act:

- Section 85 places a duty on all public bodies ‘to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty’ of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting the designated area.
- Sections 89 and 90 place a statutory duty on local authorities with an AONB in their area to prepare a Management Plan ‘which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’, and thereafter to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years.
- Section 92 clarifies that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of ‘flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.’



# 1.1 Purpose of AONB Designation

## The AONB Management Plan

This is a place-based plan, derived through local consensus, that is for the area as a whole not just for the AONB team or Partnership members. It seeks to define the approach to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB through the application of local solutions to local challenges, that respect the national and international importance of the AONB. This plan is the fourth to be produced by the AONB partnership, at the request of the local authorities covering the AONB - North Devon Council, Torridge District Council and Devon County Council. The five-year plan has the following purposes:



## AONB Management Plan Purposes

- To provide a statutory plan that sets out the objectives and policies for the designated AONB
- To identify the special qualities of the area that contribute to its natural beauty
- To inform and influence the determination of planning applications and appeals as the Plan is a 'material consideration' in the planning system
- To inform public bodies how they can demonstrate compliance with their statutory duty to "have regard to" the AONB designation
- To inform and engage local people, visitors and organisations with the AONB's purpose 'to conserve and enhance' through their actions to deliver the Management Plan objectives
- To guide the work of the AONB Partnership and other local actors and organisations

## 1.2 State of the AONB

As part of the review process for the Management Plan, a 'State of the AONB' report was produced in 2018 to collate monitoring information against performance indicators and measures of progress over the previous four years. Seventeen indicators were reported on using a traffic light system, with evidence available for 16 of them. In summary 11 were green showing good progress, 4 were amber requiring more work and 1 was red indicating limited progress. The full report is available on the AONB website<sup>3</sup>.



*Westward Ho! beach - Neville Stanikk*

# 1.3 Strategic and Policy Context

The following policies, documents and strategies have been considered during the production of this plan: -

## International

At an international level, the AONB is classified as a Category V landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature recognising it as a 'cultural landscape' managed mainly for landscape and seascape protection and for recreation. Additional status is given to the area from the North Devon UNESCO World Biosphere international designation covering the whole of the AONB and the catchments of the Taw and Torridge rivers.

At a European level, this plan is under development during the negotiations for the UK to leave the European Union in 2019. The consequent political and policy decisions in progress during this period will have an impact on the AONB through new agricultural, environmental and economic policies. As examples, the Agriculture Bill 2017-19 is progressing through the various parliamentary stages with proposals on direct payments during an agricultural transition period and other matters. The Environment Bill 2018 proposes that the 25 Year Environment Plan becomes the government's Environmental Improvement Plan to be overseen and reported on through a new independent scrutiny and advisory body – the Office for Environmental Protection. These may be some of the most significant forces for change for the AONB and will be considered through the Delivery Plan produced each year in the AONB Annual Business Plans but are only mentioned here once rather than in each of the thematic sections below.

## National

- A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (DEFRA, 2018)
- Natural England's Conservation 21 Strategy (2018)
- Natural England Framework Document (2017)
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009
- Biodiversity 2020 (DEFRA, 2011)
- The National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2018)
- Water Framework Directive (EU, 2000)
- Government Forestry Policy Statement (DEFRA, 2013)

## Local

- North Devon and Torridge Local Plan (2018)
- Northern Devon Tourism Strategy 2018–2022 (2018)
- Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership – Strategic Economic Plan (2014) and Productivity Strategy (2018)
- Devon Minerals Plan 2011–2031 (2017)
- North Devon Biosphere Strategy for Sustainable Development 2014-2024
- North Devon and Somerset Shoreline Management Plan
- Northern Devon Economic Strategy 2014–2020 (2014)



# 1.4 The North Devon UNESCO World Biosphere

**Biospheres are designated by UNESCO to be sites of excellence for demonstrating sustainable development on a bio-regional scale.**

**They have 3 functions:**

- Conservation of ecosystems, habitats, species and genetic diversity
- Development that is environmentally, economically and socially equitable
- Knowledge management to promote learning and understanding to be an example for the local and international community.

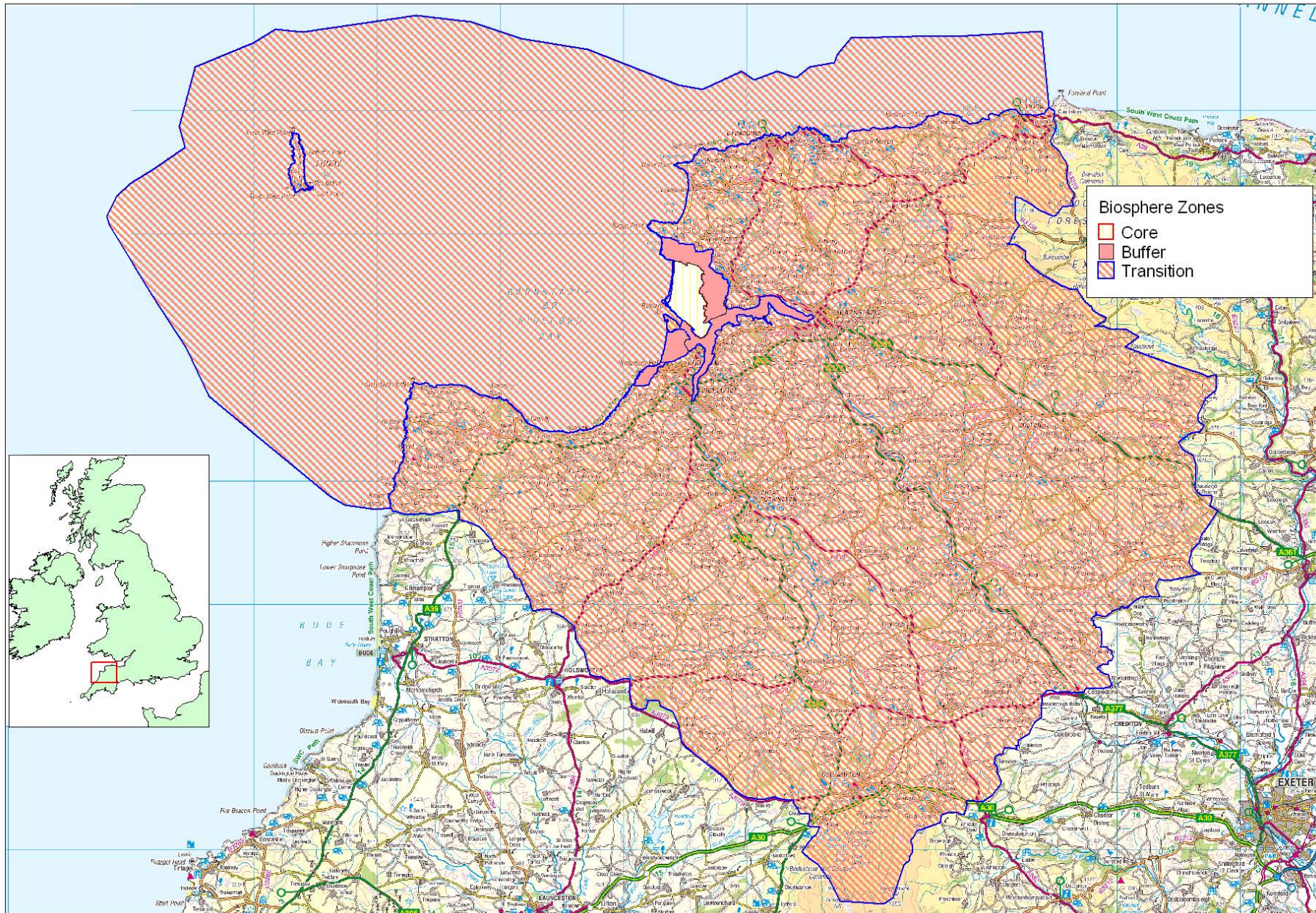
**Biospheres are structured with 3 zones:**

- **Core Area: Braunton Burrows**  
- a highly protected ecosystem of bioregional significance
- **Buffer Zone: Part of the AONB and Taw Torridge Estuary**  
- an area where land/sea management is sympathetic to the conservation of the objectives of the core area
- **Transition Area the catchment areas of the Taw and Torridge rivers and the adjacent marine area including Lundy Island, taking in the whole of the North Devon and Torridge districts, and parts of Mid and West Devon districts and of Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks:**  
- denoted by the extent of the ecosystems where sustainability will be a key aim of the community

The interests of the Biosphere and the AONB have much in common ranging from biodiversity to cultural traditions. With a strong focus on catchment based and landscape scale approaches, Biospheres seek adaptation to climate change through the optimisation of natural capital and the range of ecosystems services from the area. Both bodies are required to produce a Management Plan and these two documents work in tandem. The Biosphere Partnership's Strategy is delivered through seven working groups on Catchment Partnerships & Agriculture, Marine, Woodland, Green Economy & Energy, Nature Improvement, Community & Communications and Research & Evidence. This provides a broad conservation, research and development framework for the AONB and its setting ([See www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/](http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/)).



# The North Devon UNESCO World Biosphere



# 1.5 Setting and Boundary Review

## Setting

The North Devon coast's designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover a long and narrow sliver of largely coastal land based on the catchments of the coastal streams of Hartland and North Devon. This reflects the reasons for designation – coastal cliffs, coastal scenery and sand dune systems. In consequence the designation does not cover key areas in its setting which have a significant landscape, environmental and economic impact on the AONB because of the narrowness of the area. These include: the majority of the Taw Torridge Estuary SSSI and the wider catchments of the Taw and Torridge rivers which specifically affect water quality, biodiversity, tranquillity and visual impact; the surrounding marine environment including the Atlantic Ocean, the Bristol Channel and Lundy Island which impact on the seascape, visual impact, recreational impact and biodiversity; and the settlements of Ilfracombe and Westward Ho! with effects on tranquillity, visual impact and recreation.

Developments and management activities outside of the designated area in its setting, be it on land or at sea, can have a profound effect across the entire AONB, and extreme care must be taken when making management decisions within these special areas. This is recognised in Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 which states that activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area, are also covered by the 'duty of regard'.

This is particularly relevant to Lundy Island which lies outside of the designated AONB but is defined as Heritage Coast and forms an important backdrop to the AONB. Some of the AONB's special qualities include seaward views to Lundy and with the potential development of offshore wind farms in the approaches to the Bristol Channel, the seaward setting of the AONB is vulnerable.

Several recent legislative and evidence gathering activities have helped to address some of these issues. Firstly, the completion of the North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Assessment in 2016 provides evidence to make informed decisions in relation to onshore and offshore planning, management and policy activities by local partners, agencies, developers and planners over the coming years. It will also contribute to development of the new Marine Management Plan for South West England. Secondly, the designation in 2016 of two Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) along two thirds of the AONB coastline covering Hartland Point to Tintagel and Bideford to Foreland Point from Mean High Water out to 1 nautical Mile. These complement the existing MCZ around Lundy Island, with two further offshore sites at Morte and NW of Lundy under consideration in the third Tranche. The MCZ designation helps to strengthen existing legislation and management activities along the coast and in the setting of the AONB.



# 1.5 Setting and Boundary Review

## Reviewing the AONB Boundary

There has been a longstanding objective to extend the AONB boundary to include two significant landscape areas – Lundy Island and Braunton Great Field and Marshes. These are iconic places in England of great natural beauty as highlighted in the evidence provided to the AONB Landscape Assessment in 1999. Firstly, they are significant in landscape and natural beauty terms as evidenced by their definition as Heritage Coast in the 1990's. Secondly, including the full Heritage Coast defined area as part of the AONB would enhance protection of the intertidal zone, as this would cover the marine area of up to two nautical miles from the mean low water mark. Thirdly, this would provide additional protection for the coastal setting of the AONB, whose value has been clearly demonstrated in the Seascape Character Assessment. Finally, both sites are vulnerable to significant threats including: development pressures within the Bristol Channel affecting Lundy Island; changes in farming methods, viability and pressures of globalisation affecting traditional farming and land management; and the impacts of climate change resulting in coastal re-alignment near Braunton.

The Review of National Parks and AONBs carried out under the 25 Year Environment Plan is due to report in 2019 and is considering the boundary review process for designated landscapes ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan)). During the call for evidence for the Review and the consultations on this Management Plan, several Partnership members raised additional boundary

extension priorities to meet both environmental enhancements and better engagement with local communities. These include parts of the Taw-Torridge Estuary and the fringes of Ilfracombe. Both areas have experienced significant change since the AONB boundary was determined sixty years ago and provide a range of landscape, wildlife and community benefits which need to be evidenced to inform any further ambitions for AONB boundary extensions.

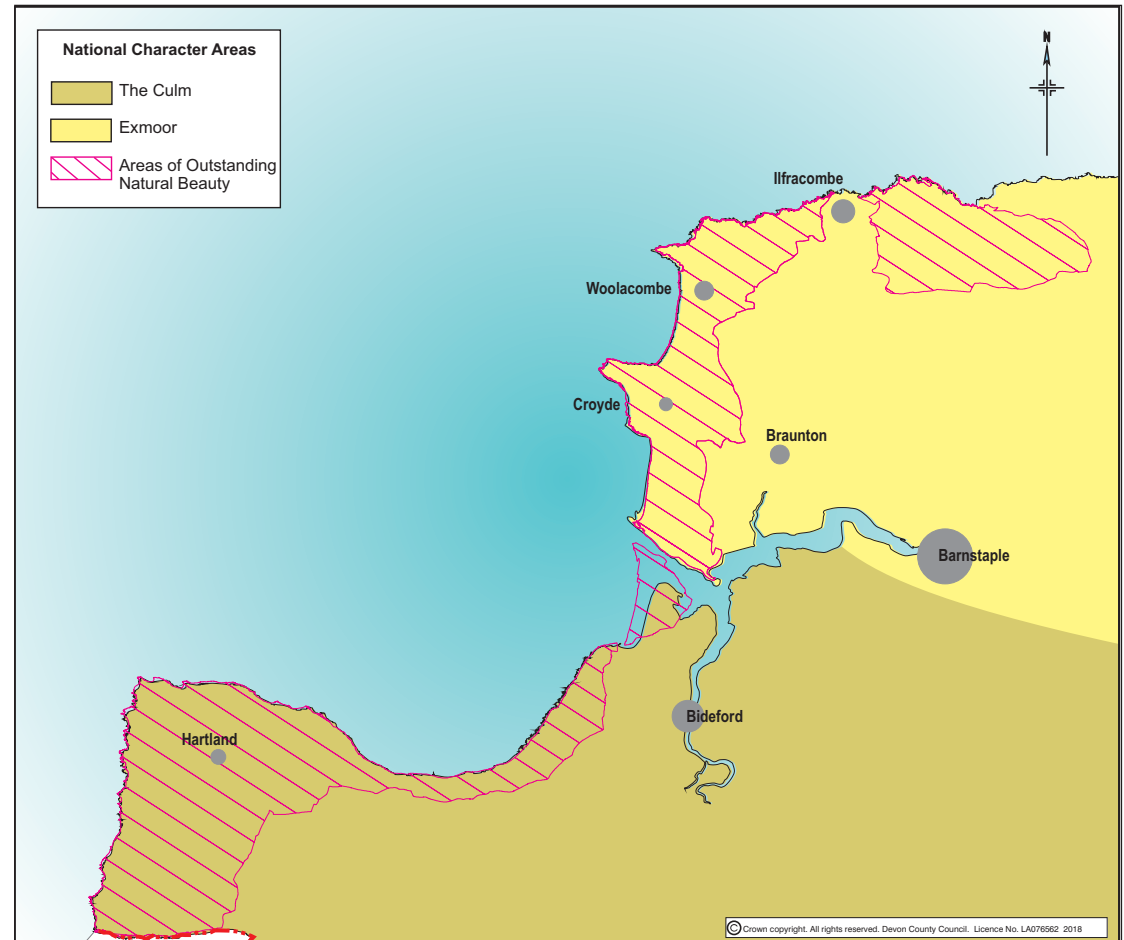


## 2.1 Landscape and Seascape

The exceptional landscape and seascape of the North Devon coast is the main reason why it was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1960 and defined as Heritage Coast in 1990 for Hartland and 1992 for North Devon. To assist in the management of this valuable landscape several Landscape Character Assessments have been undertaken at different levels and scales which can be viewed as maps on the Devon County Council Environment Viewer landscape section at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/environment/environmental-maps>. These Assessments provide an objective appraisal of what special features and qualities make the landscape valuable and worthy of conservation. This is important to help understand the potential impact of onshore and offshore development and to inform planning decisions. These Assessments look at the pressures and forces for change acting on the landscape and others provide a strategy of how to protect, manage and plan the area to keep it special.

### National Character Areas

At a national level, the whole of England has been divided into 159 unique National Character Areas (NCA). These National Character Areas are defined by a combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity, cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape, rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment. The North Devon AONB is split between two National Character Areas: Exmoor (145), which covers the AONB to the north of the Taw & Torridge Estuary and The Culm (149) which covers Bideford Bay and the Hartland coast.



# Devon Character Areas

In 2011, Devon County Council, in partnership with other Devon local authorities, AONBs and Dartmoor National Park produced a new set of 68 Landscape Character Areas for Devon. These areas are geographically unique and recognisable at a County level. It provides a valuable evidence base for the AONB, local planning decisions and local development plans including County Council minerals and waste plans, by articulating what people believe is distinctive and special.



## North Devon High Coast

This is an area in the far north of the AONB stretching from Combe Martin to Morte Point and covers the important seaside resort of Ilfracombe. It is a landscape of spectacular seascapes, with a rugged, jagged coastline containing a series of rocky headlands and small coves with grey shingle beaches. The western part of the area has a remote and ancient feel, with extensive areas of colourful coastal heath and grassland containing prehistoric standing stones. The area around Ilfracombe is more developed, its imposing Victorian architecture telling the story of its rise as a holiday destination. The enclosed, wooded coastal combes (each with its own unique character) cut through rolling, agricultural downland to the sea. Trees are prominent features which soften the windswept landscape of the open downland below the ridge tops.



## North Devon Coastal Downs

From the headland at Morte Point to the ridgeline at Saunton Down, and covering the resorts of Woolacombe and Croyde, this is a landscape of contrasts, dominated by its seascape. There are wide westerly views to the sea, with the long, low outline of Lundy visible on the horizon, and views across Bideford Bay as far as Hartland Point. A series of rolling downland ridges run on to long headlands interspersed with wide sandy beaches. The smooth downland has an elevated, open, character, whilst the rough headlands feel wild, remote and windswept. The beaches are crowded with holidaymakers in summer, but in winter they feel empty and desolate. This is a colourful landscape – green fields; golden sands; vivid purple and yellow heath; brown and grey rocks; and glorious sunsets – but its mood is always set by the ever-changing sea.

# Devon Character Areas

Devon Character Areas describe the key “forces for change” affecting those landscapes and provides management guidelines. The unique features of the seven Devon Character Areas found in the AONB provide a great “sense of place”.



## North Devon Downs

Inland, the North Devon Downs is a simple, agricultural landscape dominated by the sky within an open, westerly aspect. The smooth hills have rounded profiles, and are covered by a patchwork of large, regular fields. Views are long and wide, sometimes with glimpses of the sea or estuary as a backdrop. The steep valleys which punctuate the downland run like wooded ribbons across the landscape, contrasting with the farmland in their rich colours and textures. These valleys have a secluded and secretive character. They are very tranquil, the only sounds often being birds and running water; and their sunken lanes have a timeless quality. Small sections of this Landscape Character type occur within the AONB occupying the high ground behind the coast and, whilst largely undesignated, it forms an important visual backdrop to the AONB, helping to define its setting.



## Taw and Torridge Estuary

This Landscape Character Area sits astride the Taw-Torridge Estuary and covers the internationally important sand dune system at Braunton Burrows, which is the core of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It is a flat, sky-dominated landscape with strong sensory characteristics. The habitats within the mosaic (dunes, beach, saltmarsh, mudflats and farmland) each have unique qualities of pattern, colour and texture which are juxtaposed in different combinations. The salty smell of mudflats and the sea are ever-present, as are the calls of birds. Within the dunes, the landscape feels disorientating, and has a strong sense of enclosure, isolation and wilderness. This contrasts with the open views towards the surrounding settlements, and the history associated with the strip fields at Braunton. The estuary settlements have a strong maritime character, with historic quays and impressive bridges.



## Bideford Bay Coast

Running from the seaside resort at Westward Ho! to the west of Clovelly, the Bideford Bay Coast begins with rolling farmland that runs right up to the coastline. It is largely defined by its deep combes cloaked in oak woodland winding inland from the wooded cliffs, with carpets of bluebells in spring. Streams rush down the valleys, and ferns thrive in the dark, damp conditions. The woodland paths, with their glimpsed views of the sea, have a sense of intimacy, secrecy and peace. Narrow lanes with high, fern-covered banks provide access to the shelteredcombe villages of Bucks Mills and Clovelly, the latter with its picturesque harbour and whitewashed houses. On higher land behind and between the combes is a lush landscape with a rolling patchwork of fields, a peaceful settled feel, and views of the woodlands and the sea. There are open sea views across Bideford Bay towards the Taw Torridge estuary, with Lundy a distinctive feature on the horizon.



## Hartland Peninsula

The Hartland Peninsula forms the most southern part of the AONB and includes the settlement of Hartland. In the Hartland Peninsula, complex geology, combined with centuries of pounding by the full force of the Atlantic waves, has produced some of the most dramatic seascapes and coastal scenery in Devon. The cliffs are high and rugged, with zig-zag faults and folds. Wave-cut platforms and spectacular coastal waterfalls are also distinctive features of this jagged, exposed and windswept coastline, with the profile of Lundy visible in the open seascape. Coastal heathland on the cliff tops produces vivid and changing colours for much of the year. Inland, the area contains an open, flat, elevated plateau of agricultural land, which contrasts with the twisting, wooded and secretive combes that are cut into the plateau at its coastal edge. Dramatic sunsets over the sea add to the drama of the area.





## High Torridge Culm Plateau

Inland sections to the south and east of Hartland are categorised by the High Torridge Culm Plateau. The important culm grassland at Bursdon Moor lies within this landscape character area, although much of this LCA lies outside of the boundary of the AONB, it nonetheless helps to define the inland setting of the AONB.

This open landscape of pastoral farmland, rough ground and forests has an elemental, empty character, dominated by wet, unenclosed moorland, including Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor in the distance. The colours of the moorland – yellow gorse, purple heather and golden grasses – contrast with the dark green of coniferous plantations and the patchwork of brighter green pastoral fields. Occasional clustered villages are linked by straight lanes flanked by rush-filled ditches.



## Lundy Island in the Setting

Whilst Lundy Island lies outside of the designated AONB, it is defined as Heritage Coast, like other adjacent landscapes. It forms an important backdrop to the AONB and helps to define the setting. Some of the AONB's special qualities include seaward views to Lundy.

Lundy is an isolated and unique place, surrounded by and dominated by the ever-changing sea. Remote and undeveloped, it is a 'sanctuary' away from the mainland. Its seascapes are dramatic, with sheer cliffs rising out of the water, battered into dramatic shapes by the force of the Atlantic breakers. The desolate, windswept moorland is alive with the sounds of crashing waves and the cries of sea birds. The island's remoteness from 21st century life, and its sense of changelessness, is enhanced by the extraordinary richness of its history. This historic site provides a tangible link with the island's past, stretching as far back as prehistoric times.

## Landscape Character Types

In 2010, a comprehensive assessment was undertaken on behalf of Torridge and North Devon District Councils<sup>4</sup> which uses the definition of Landscape Character Type as its base. Landscape Character Types are generic, and they describe key landscape types within the area, such as cliffs, estuaries and river valleys. This document was adopted by the respective Local Authorities and assists with both spatial planning through the Local Plan and development control decisions. They have also been used as the basis for landscape sensitivity assessments to help inform and develop district council strategies for the deployment of renewable energy schemes within the North Devon and Torridge areas<sup>5</sup>.

## Landscape Description Units

In 2010 the AONB Partnership commissioned a further fine-grained study to produce Landscape Description Units<sup>6</sup>. This work defined some 43 unique Landscape Description Units, which are frequently referred to as the “building blocks” of the other Landscape Character Assessments.

This is an important baseline document when assessing and describing the landscapes, geology, land use and built environment of the AONB.

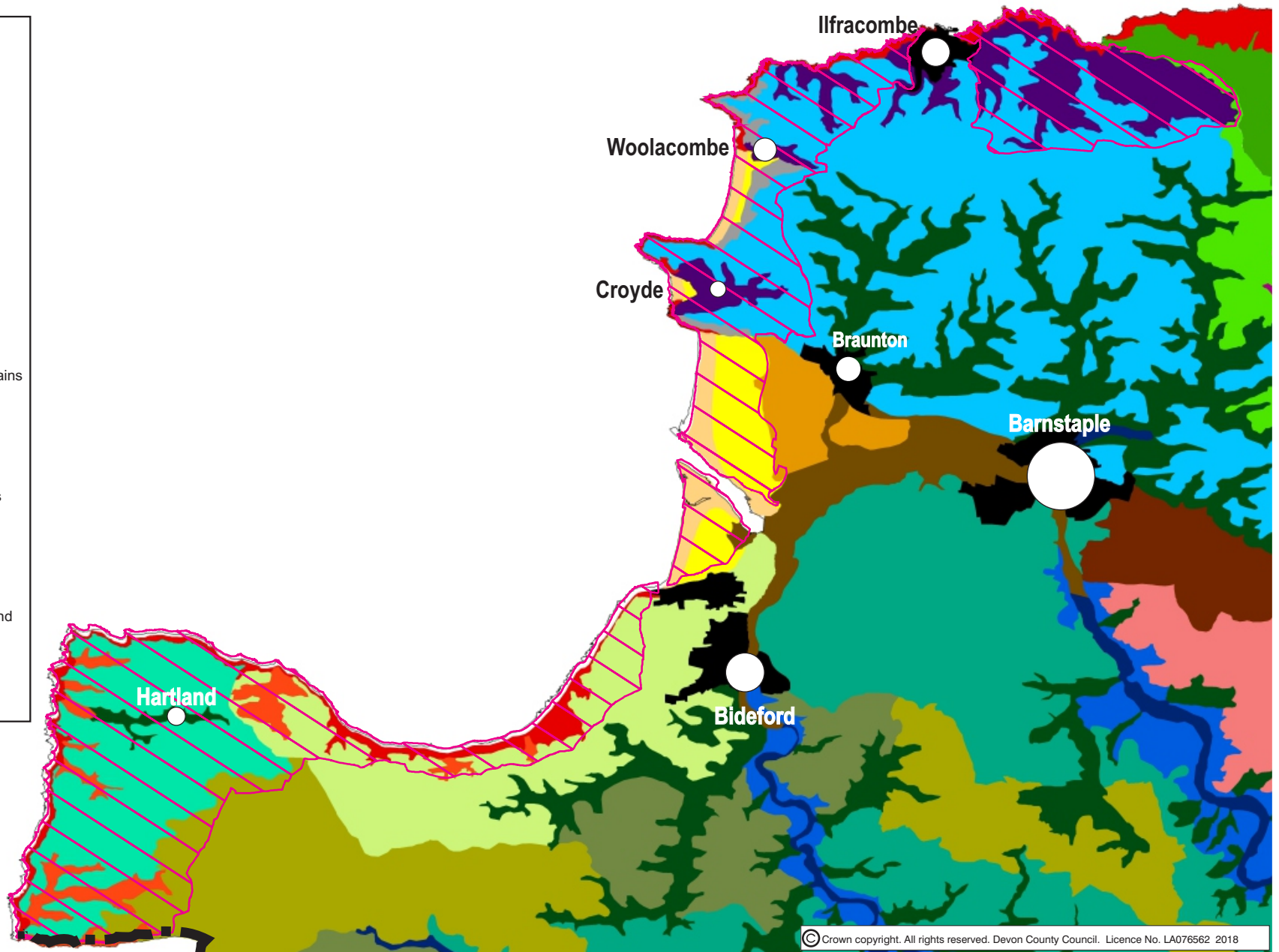
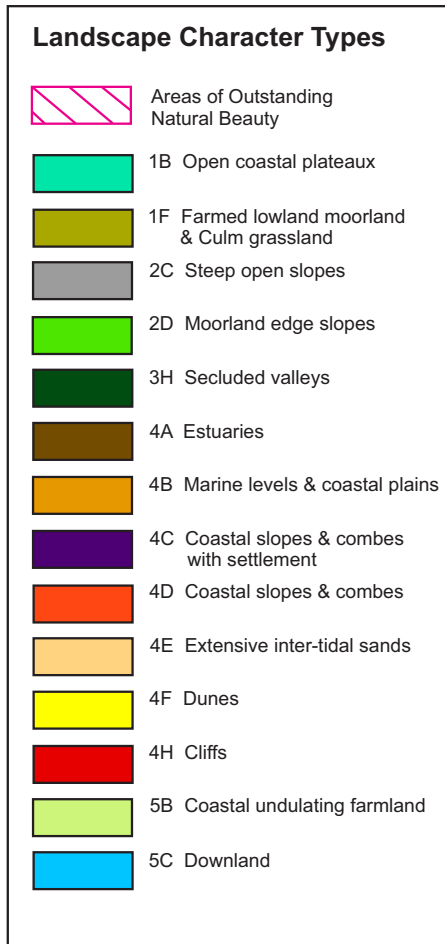
## Seascape Character Assessment

The North Devon AONB was largely designated because of its stunning seascapes, where the land interacts with the sea. In response to potential offshore developments which could impact on the designated area, the North Devon Coast AONB in partnership with other organisations commissioned in 2015 a Seascape Character Assessment of the Exmoor and North Devon coast<sup>7</sup>. This assessment which identified 18 Seascape Character Areas relevant to the North Devon AONB, provides valuable information on how to conserve and enhance the coastline of the area to protect it for future generations to enjoy.

In September 2018 the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) completed the Seascape Characterisation and Visual Impact in Marine Areas project (MMO1134) with the publication of Seascape Character Assessments for the final four areas, integrating with the existing assessments for the east and south marine plan areas. The AONB coastline is covered by four marine character areas within the South West Marine Plan<sup>8</sup>.



# Landscape Character Types



## Work to Date

- North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Character Assessment completed in 2016 and training workshops held across the area
- Fixed Post Photography maintained since 2007 providing comparative landscape assessments for the 'Coastal Change' project with Beaford Archive in 2016/17
- Contribution to new Local Plan consultations
- Development work for Defra Landscape and Marine Pioneers in North Devon
- Power line removal at Morteohoe and Croyde
- Responding to 'major developments' including the Atlantic Array Offshore Wind Farm, Route 39 School and Beckland Slurry Lagoon



## Forces for Change

- Number, scale and cumulative impact of renewable energy projects within, and in the setting of, the designated landscape
- Changes to environmental and agricultural policy may impact on farmers' priorities and hence the landscape, with possible intensification, extensification and/or diversification, alongside increased emphasis on Natural Capital and biodiversity Net Gain
- Glover Review of nationally protected landscapes as part of Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan
- Farm diversification and changes in technology and techniques are changing the landscape and increasing farm building sizes
- Increased development and continuing impact of car dependency affects the tranquillity of the AONB and facilities for them
- Climate change is reflected in farming changes, and impacts of disease and pests, for example loss of trees from Ash Dieback
- Coastal erosion and sea level rise affecting low lying landscape
- Potential impact of marine plans and management of marine protected areas
- Pressure for development in the setting of the AONB, particularly in the Estuary and adjacent settlements, eroding character, tranquillity, dark night skies and quality of views

## Objective

To conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special landscapes of the AONB

## Policies

- A1 Ensure that the landscape character, natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB are conserved, enhanced and fully respected in all decisions affecting the Area
- A2 Preserve the dark skies, peace and tranquillity of the AONB
- A3 Ensure developments both onshore and offshore, take account of open views, wilderness and maritime connections
- A4 Recommend that no development should be permitted inside or outside the AONB that would harm the natural beauty, character or special qualities of the AONB
- A5 Ensure developments comply with the North Devon Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments

## • Priority Actions

- Review of the designated AONB boundary to incorporate all of the defined North Devon Heritage Coast (Lundy island, Braunton Great Field and Braunton Marshes) into the AONB
- Research and evidence the potential contribution of key areas in the AONB's setting to deliver environmental enhancement and/or increased community engagement for the AONB (e.g. parts of the Taw-Torridge Estuary, Ilfracombe fringes)
- Review Devon Landscape Character Assessments working with Devon, North Devon and Torridge councils and Natural England through the Devon Landscape Policy Group
- Continue to monitor and respond to landscape change
- Promote understanding and use of AONB landscape and seascape character assessments, and Devon Landscape Policy Group Advice Notes
- Deliver Morte Point landscape and habitat enhancements
- Engage with and support cross-boundary initiatives to identify and protect tranquil areas

## • Indicators

- Light Pollution levels
- Area of Landscape Enhanced (AONB/NAAONB KPI)

## 2.2 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

### Biodiversity

The AONBs varied landscapes support a rich wildlife resource the highlight of which are two internationally designated sites: Braunton Burrows Special Area of Conservation (SAC) includes a spectacular dune system with over 400 plant species whilst the Tintagel-Marstrand-Clovelly Coast SAC is home to western oak woodlands, vegetated sea cliffs and coastal heath. Small fragments of rare Culm grassland survive in the Hartland Peninsula, notably in the Bursdon Moor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are 14 SSSI in or partly in the AONB and 54 County Wildlife Sites. Of the areas designated as SSSI, 94% are now in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition, compared to only 78% in 2008 (Natural England data 2018).

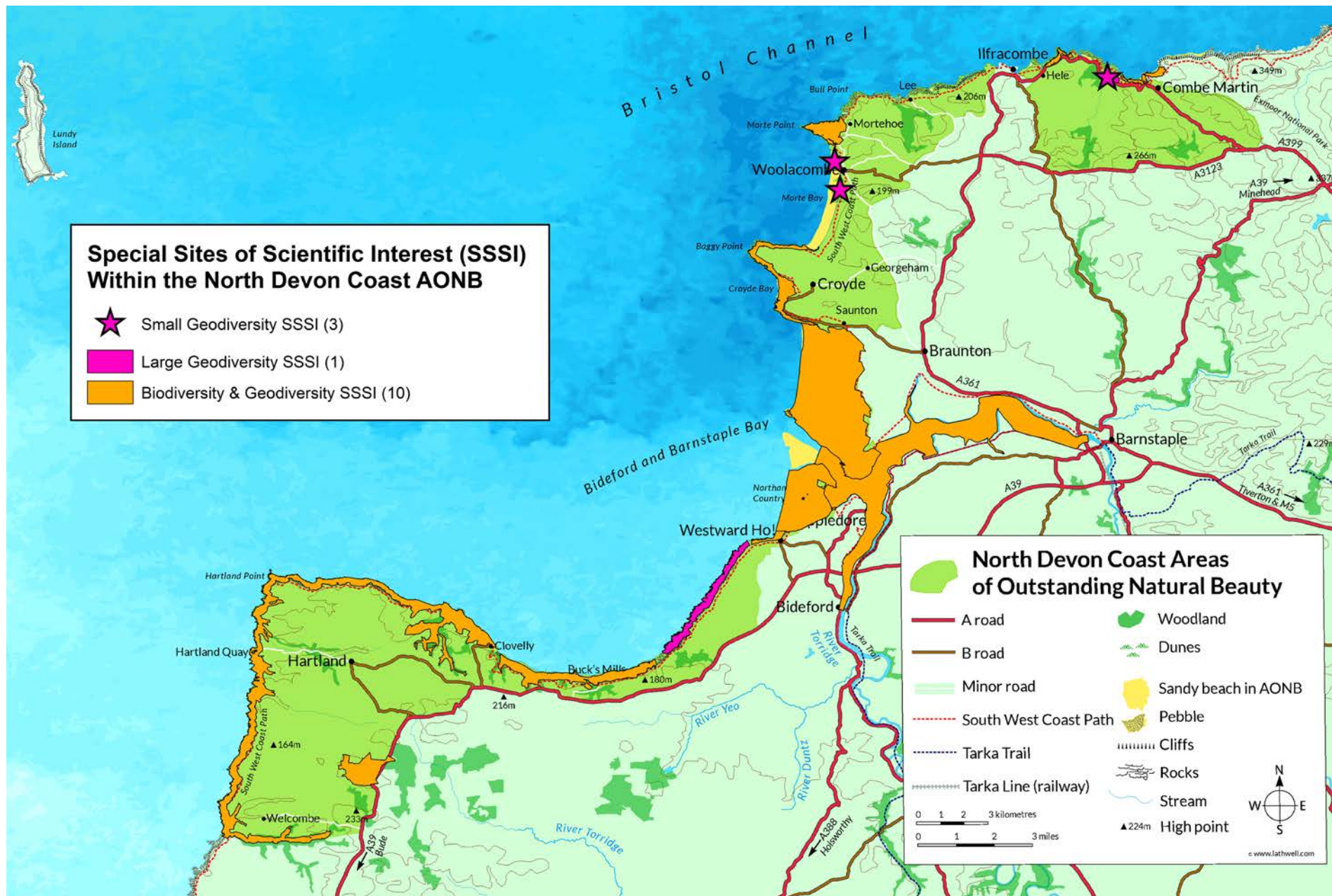
Priority habitats found in the AONB include oak woodland, parkland and wood pasture, species-rich hedgerows, farmland, Culm grassland, coastal heathland, sand dunes, estuary and salt marsh, rocky foreshore and seabed<sup>9</sup>. The Devon list of priority species was updated in 2018 and includes a list of 96 Special Species for which the county has a particular responsibility<sup>10</sup>. A number of these Special Species are found in the AONB including sea stock, round-headed club-rush and the scrambled-egg lichen found in Braunton Burrows, pink sea fan, pearl bordered fritillary and greater horseshoe bats. See <https://www.naturaldevon.org.uk/devons-natural-environment/devons-wildlife/devonspecialspecies/>.

Citizen science surveys of marine species in the inter-tidal zone, under the Coastal Creatures project in 2016-2018, identified 441 different species across four beaches with Lee Bay having the richest wildlife resources. All verified records have been uploaded to the National Biodiversity Network website<sup>11</sup>.

The AONB contains several Strategic Nature Areas, areas with higher than average concentrations of existing wildlife habitats. These are largely based on coastal sand dunes, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and mudflats, see <http://www.dbr.org.uk/strategic-nature-areas-snas/>



# Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI)



In response to the 'Lawton principles' from the 2010 review "Making Space for Nature"<sup>12</sup> and publication in 2011 of both the Natural Environment White Paper and the 'Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services', Devon has made considerable progress in better understanding and taking action on biodiversity issues. This has been facilitated through the Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP)<sup>13</sup> and delivering projects at a more local level working to address their three aims:

## 1. To protect and improve Devon's natural environment

- We will protect and enhance our natural resources and achieve bigger, better, joined-up and resilient wildlife habitats, together with characteristic landscapes.

## 2. To grow Devon's green economy

- We will support and promote business opportunities which depend on and help to sustain a healthy natural environment.

## 3. To reconnect Devon's people with nature

- We will improve and promote access to the environment for residents and visitors, benefiting our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and quality of life.

Examples of actions relevant to North Devon include: landscape scale activities and making habitats better connected to provide better ecological networks (through Nature Improvement Areas); work on valuing the natural environment through the ecosystem services based approach and more recently the Natural Capital approach ([www.gov.uk/government/groups/natural-capital-committee](http://www.gov.uk/government/groups/natural-capital-committee)) under the Defra Pioneer work on landscape and marine habitats; and engaging the public with a wide range of Devon Local Nature Partnership campaigns and awareness raising, for example on invasive species, diseases, pollinators and the value of road verges for wildlife.

Strengthening ecological networks is a challenge for the AONB given the development pressures in unprotected areas of its setting, the narrowness of the area and private ownership of most of the land in the AONB. It is therefore critical that habitat improvement and creation become a stronger part of sustainable land management systems in the AONB, whether through support schemes, one-off targeted projects or a changing farming ethos incentivised by payments for public goods. The National Trust's 'nature-friendly farming' approach launched in 2016 in response to the recorded decline of species<sup>14</sup>, is an example of shifting farming methods and priorities to balance food production by making space for nature, whether wildlife, water quality, timber production or hedgerows. The long-term priority for all partners is to deliver a robust and resilient AONB and ensure that wildlife-rich sites such as the designated SAC, SSSI, non-designated County Wildlife Sites and other priority habitats are conserved, and species are in favourable conservation status. This will be supported by Local Plan Policy ST14 to provide a net gain for biodiversity from new development.





## Geodiversity

The term 'geodiversity' encompasses the variety of rocks, minerals, fossils, landforms, sediments and soils in an area, together with natural processes, such as erosion and landslips that may still be active. The rocks, fossils and minerals have been formed over millions of years, shaping the landforms of the area and providing much of the spectacular scenery along the coastline.

The underlying geology is a mixture of carboniferous sandstones and shales, Devonian slates, sandstones and volcanics, with an area of transition sandwiched in between. Spectacular zig-zag patterns in the carboniferous rocks can be seen along the Atlantic coast at Hartland Quay. This illustrates how the rocks were crumpled and contorted by the collision of crustal plates and thrust up into mountains. In the northern part of the AONB, the slates and sandstones provide building materials, clearly visible in the village of Morteheo. A scattering of Limestone intrusions around Ilfracombe and Combe Martin have left their legacy in the remains of industrial heritage such as lime kilns and burners.

Within the North Devon Coast AONB there are 10 designated geological SSSI of which 94% were in a favourable or favourable recovering condition in 2018. Additionally, there are thirteen Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) defined due to their value for education, geological research or aesthetic reasons. Whilst they are non-statutory designations, they are recognised as important "material considerations" when local authorities assess planning applications.

## Work to date

- Devon Wildlife Trust's 5-year Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project – with the AONB team as North Devon lead partner
- The AONB's 2-year Coastal Creatures community engagement and citizen science project focussed on the wildlife on four beaches and marine litter. This followed on from the Clean Marine project focussed on marine litter and beaches.
- A survey of potential chough nesting sites commissioned with the RSPB, supported by SDF grants to install nest boxes for seabirds
- New wildlife monitoring project started in 2017 across all National Trust sites, to support their Nature Friendly Farming work
- Sustainable Development Fund grant provided to the Biosphere - Life on the Verge project to engage communities in managing wildlife on local verges
- SDF funding provided towards a high tide roost and recreational impacts study on the Taw-Torridge Estuary
- New wildlife trails produced for Woolacombe, Ilfracombe and Northam Burrows through Coastal Creatures project
- West Country Buzz project by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust supporting pollinator friendly farming
- AONB team and partners actively involved in the Devon Local Nature Partnership
- A Local Geodiversity Action Plan for the North Devon Coast AONB produced in 2017<sup>15</sup>
- Advice to land owners to manage, connect and improve habitats e.g. work on the Nature Improvement Area and West Country Buzz
- North Devon Defra Pioneer work on Natural Capital approaches

## Forces for Change

- State of Nature 2016 (2018) report stated that over 50% of species in the UK had declined in the previous ten years
- Impact of new developments for housing, infrastructure, business and agriculture
- Changing land management practices and technology in agriculture and forestry in the AONB and in its setting
- Climate change benefits and negative consequences
- Management of Marine Protected Areas that cover majority of the AONB coastline
- Net gain policies in new Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework achieving benefits for biodiversity
- Increased numbers and changing recreational and sporting activities bringing people closer to nature
- Community engagement and citizen science opportunities to address resource constraints on knowledge, data, scale and reach
- Invasive species and diseases e.g. ash dieback
- Opportunities for habitat restoration at Braunton Burrows through the 'Dynamic Dunescapes Project' led by Plantlife

## Objective

To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity of the AONB, in terrestrial, aquatic and marine habitats

## Policies

- B1 Support and promote approaches to conserve and enhance habitats and species, increase wildlife richness and ensure the resilience of the landscape
- B2 Identify and address actual and potential impacts on biodiversity from invasive species, disease and climate change
- B3 Encourage actions to enhance, maintain and promote the geodiversity of the AONB through appropriate site management and public awareness



## • Priority Actions

- Work with partners to develop Nature Recovery Networks to provide bigger, better, more and joined up habitats building on Strategic Nature Areas within the AONB
- Support development work on new colonisations and species re-introductions appropriate to the AONB
- Support schemes for land managers which will benefit wildlife and farmers in the AONB
- Promote community engagement opportunities that benefit wildlife and people – building on the legacy of Coastal Creatures and Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project work
- Identify the Special Species in the AONB and how partners can work together to enhance their populations
- Monitor and reduce the impact of invasive species and diseases on wildlife in the AONB
- Play an active role in the Devon Local Nature Partnership
- Implement the Local Geodiversity Action Plan for the AONB

## • Indicators

- Percentage of SSSI in favourable condition (NE)
- Area of Habitat/Land enhanced (AONB/NAAONB KPI)



## 2.3 Historic Environment and Culture

The long social and cultural history of North Devon is reflected in the landscape, shaped by centuries of farming practices as seen in the strip field systems, hedge banks with facings of slate and stone or remnants of orchards and soft fruit production. Human habitation of the area stretches back to pre-historic times with ancient burial mounds, coastal hillforts, historic farmsteads, remote fishing villages and ancient landscape features. The maritime and agricultural heritage are reflected in local culture and traditions often linked to the seasons or particular historic events. The remoteness of this landscape at the periphery of South West England and its protection through landscape designations, has ensured that many historic features are still visible today whether from the iron age or from the Cold War in the 1950's. There are 25 scheduled monuments in the AONB, 413 listed buildings, 12 conservation areas and one registered Historic Park and Garden.

The National Mapping Programme<sup>16</sup> carried out analysis of historic hard copy photos (e.g. from the 1940's), lidar and archaeological aerial surveys of the North Devon AONB in 2013 and identified 1100 new sites. These included a possible southern extension of the iconic Iron Age hillfort of Clovelly Dykes, the effect of military action on the landscape such as explosions at Northam Burrows and fish weirs and hulks from the eighteenth century onwards.

Full details are available on the Devon Historic Environment Record <https://new.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/>

or the Heritage Gateway record of historic sites and buildings - <http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>.

Historic Landscape Characterisation is a method for understanding and mapping the landscape that we see today with reference to its historical development, using digital maps. The AONB has been analysed at four levels and data is available on the Devon Environment viewer - <http://map.devon.gov.uk/dccViewer/>.

### • Work to Date

- Five new Monuments scheduled in the AONB – Saunton Lynchetts, two wrecks at Westward Ho!, Northam Burrows Radar station and extension to Hillsborough
- Three Scheduled Monuments received conservation work – St Clare's Well at Philham, Holywell and Butterwell at Clovelly Dykes and a standing stone at Damage Barton
- Scrub clearance at Windbury hillfort and Bucks Mills enclosure by National Trust with Historic England support
- Clovelly Dykes hillfort – survey and small excavation of unscheduled southern section in AONB setting
- North Devon Coastal Heritage project developed, and partnership funding obtained in 2018 for 2 years
- SDF grants to restore historic wooden signposts at Hartland and restoration of Morteheo church clock



# Clovelly Dykes Hillfort



## Forces for Change

- Development increasingly impacting on the traditional character of settlements through infill, increased density, inappropriate building style and design, loss of non-protected architectural styles and developments in the setting of conservation areas
- Reduction in funding, knowledge and skills for appropriate management of archaeological sites and traditional landscape features (e.g. field boundaries)
- Lack of management and scrub encroachment for many historic features
- Challenge to engage people with local heritage including: new people moving into the area; local schoolchildren not accessing heritage due to constraints on curriculum and funding; whether the next generations will carry on traditions, customs and skills
- Coastal erosion affecting sites on cliffs and in coastal margins
- Potential in the 'Place-Making' and 'Health and Wellbeing' agendas to re-engage the public with their heritage

## Objective

To conserve, enhance and understand the historic and cultural features of the AONB

## Policies

- E1 Support actions to conserve and enhance the historic and cultural features of the AONB, and their setting
- E2 Develop approaches to increase understanding of local heritage and culture

## • Priority Actions

- Delivery of North Devon Coastal Heritage project with local partners including training volunteers to survey and monitor heritage assets,
- 75th Anniversary of D-Day commemorations, and community archaeology projects in the Hartland Peninsula
- Monitoring, maintenance and interpretation of Scheduled Monuments
- Seeking protection for undesignated locally important heritage
- Repair of East Titchberry Malthouse

## • Indicators

- Number of Scheduled Monuments at risk (NAAONB/Defra KPI)
- Heritage Assets enhanced with AONB support (local)

## 2.4 Environmental Quality and Climate Change

Climate change is one of the most significant pressures on the quality of the environment of South West England that may add to other trends in farming and land management to increase pressure on the natural environment. Trends from Met Office data based on a range of scenarios indicate the area could experience warmer and drier summers, warmer and wetter winters with more extreme weather events resulting in increased flood risks and coastal erosion. The UK Climate Change Predictions for 2018 provide more detail of these trends: [www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/collaboration/ukcp/about](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/collaboration/ukcp/about). Mitigating and adapting to climate change is Goal 7 of the 25 Year Environment Plan and the issue of climate change appears across the Plan as a cross-cutting theme. The four areas that need to improve to adapt to climate change are resilience of habitats and biodiversity; soil health; flood hazard protection; and the marine environment and fisheries. The ability of the AONB Partnership to contribute to the mitigation of the effects of climate change is minimal in global terms. However, the Partnership can, and should, support local adaptation and mitigation initiatives which will have a positive impact.

The high-quality environment within the AONB is reflected in the clean air, low levels of light pollution,<sup>17</sup> clean bathing waters and tranquillity that then attract significant visitors to the area. This environmental quality provides a healthy environment for people living in and visiting the AONB. Whilst bathing waters and water bodies have seen quality improvements over the last few years, there has been a reduction in tranquillity in some areas with new developments and new leisure activities. The more remote areas have continued to experience high levels of tranquillity and environmental quality although intensive farming has begun to affect some quality measures even in the more remote areas such as the Hartland Peninsula.

### • Work to Date

- North Devon Catchment Partnership working with external funds and contractors to address issues related to water quality, flood risk, soil quality and coastal realignment
- Public communication on climate change through 'Character of our Coast' talks and displays
- Natural flood management works in Combe Martin and Braunton areas
- Advisory visits and small grants from Environment Agency to reduce diffuse pollution going into the Taw Torridge estuary
- Water quality monitoring in Hartland streams
- Regular beach cleans along the whole coast and Plastic Free North Devon campaigns<sup>18</sup>



## Forces for Change

- Public understanding of climate change impacts and policy responses and their concern at perceived lack of action
- Climate change impacts on water quality, quantity and flows
- Climate change impacts on soils, productivity and crop types
- Risk from pests, diseases (such as ash dieback, Phytophthora, bovine Tb etc.) and non-native invasive species
- Renewables developing more at farm scale than commercial scale
- Natural flood management schemes with landscape impacts
- Marine litter increasing on the coast
- New regulations (e.g. Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulation 2018)
- The North Devon UNESCO World Biosphere Partnership includes priorities on soils, water quality, woodlands and flood risks

## Objective

To promote the sustainable management of natural resources and of climate change impacts

## Policies

- D1 Increase understanding, adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts on coastal landscapes and communities
- D2 Contribute to marine planning and protection to conserve and enhance seascape quality, coastal species and habitats
- D3 Improve inland, coastal and bathing water quality through catchment management, local flood management and litter management

## • Priority Actions

- Support for actions through the North Devon Catchment Partnership and use of Water Environment Grants
- Support beach cleans and litter picks in rural, coastal and village locations

## • Indicators

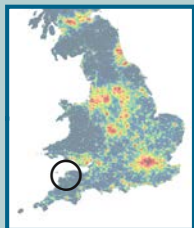
- Status of Water Bodies – river and coastal (EA)
- Area of Land Enhanced (beach cleans - local)



## England's Light Pollution and Dark Skies

www.cpre.org.uk

### North Devon AONB

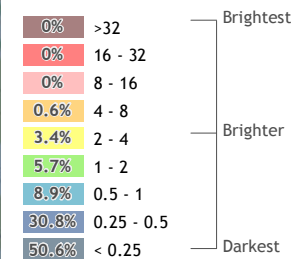


Key

North Devon AONB

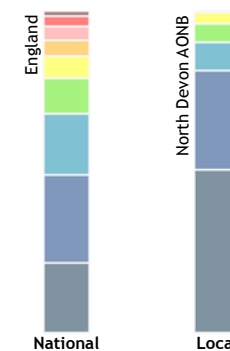
#### Night Lights

(NanoWatts / cm<sup>2</sup> / sr)



Each pixel shows the level of radiance (night light) shining up into the night sky. These have been categorised into colour bands to distinguish between different light levels. The percentage of pixels that fall within each band is shown as a % in the chart above.

#### Proportion of land covered by each Night Lights category at various extents



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## 3.1 Planning, Development and Infrastructure

### Key Planning Policies and the AONB

**The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** legislation from 2012, revised in July 2018, provides specific guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBs. **Paragraph 172** states:

*“Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads<sup>54</sup>. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development<sup>55</sup> other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”*

Footnote 55 within Paragraph 172 above clarifies how decision-makers must decide what is ‘major development’ which is not just about size but

significant effects. It should also be recognised that the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ does not necessarily apply within AONBs as confirmed by Paragraph 11, footnote 6 of the NPPF, due to the other restrictions placed on AONBs elsewhere within the Framework.

**The North Devon and Torridge Local Plan<sup>19</sup>** contains specific policies related to the designated AONB and confirms the AONB Management Plan is a ‘material consideration’ in the planning process:

#### **Policy ST14: Enhancing Environmental Assets**

The quality of northern Devon’s natural environment will be protected and enhanced by ensuring that development contributes to: conserving the setting and special character and qualities of the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty whilst fostering the social and economic well-being of the area;

#### **Policy DM08A: Landscape and Seascape Character**

(2) Great weight will be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of designated landscapes and their settings. Proposals affecting the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or Exmoor National Park or their settings should have regard to their statutory purposes including to ensure that their landscape character and natural beauty are conserved and enhanced. Development should be appropriately located to address the sensitivity and capacity of these designated areas and will not be permitted where it would conflict with the achievement of their statutory purposes.

# Croyde from Saunton Down



(3) Proposals within or affecting the setting of the AONB should be informed by, and assist in the delivery of, the North Devon Coast AONB Management Plan. Major development within the AONB will be refused subject to the tests of exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest as set out in national policy.

## Maintaining the Undeveloped Coast and Heritage Coast

Additional protection for the coast is within the NPPF and Local Plan.

**The NPPF Paragraph 173** states “Within areas defined as Heritage Coast (and that do not already fall within one of the designated areas mentioned in paragraph 172), planning policies and decisions should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within a Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate unless it is compatible with its special character.” This is relevant to the Setting of the AONB, particularly Lundy Island and Braunton Great Field and Marshes.

The Local Plan has specific policies on the Coast that are designed to ensure that it is conserved and enhanced:

**Policy ST09: Coast & Estuary** states:

The integrity of the coast and estuary as an important wildlife corridor will be protected and enhanced. The importance of the undeveloped coastal, estuarine and marine environments, including the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, will be recognised through supporting designations, plans and policies. The undeveloped character of the Heritage Coasts will be protected.

**Policy DM08:** further includes:

(4) Development within the Heritage Coast should maintain the character and distinctive landscape qualities of the area.

## Sustainable Development and Infrastructure

The AONB designation is not about preventing development within the area, rather it is about encouraging sustainable development, which does not harm the purposes of AONB designation. Developments that reflect local design and heritage, that use locally distinctive building stone and/or meet clearly evidenced local needs are more likely to be supported. Increasing house prices and competition for properties due to demand for holiday homes or second homes presents difficulties for local people accessing the housing market either for long term rentals or to purchase their own home. This local need for housing has prompted inclusion of a new policy to support affordable housing development within the AONB where they will meet evidenced, local housing need and are appropriate to the AONB designation. An additional sustainable development pressure is for essential infrastructure to meet transport, utilities, communications and information requirements to ensure the area is a living and working landscape.

## Net Gain for Biodiversity

A new opportunity for wildlife under threat from development is the policy of ‘net gain for biodiversity’ in the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan, the revised National Planning Policy Framework (2018) and the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan. Piloting of the net gain metric is being carried out under the Defra Pioneer programme in North Devon.

## Work to date

- North Devon and Exmoor Seascape Assessment completed
- Planning protocol signed with the three local planning authorities
- AONB planning panel and planning contractor providing advice on planning application responses
- In 96% of planning applications commented on, the decision matches the recommendation of the AONB
- Provided advice to Neighbourhood Plans in North Devon
- Worked with Western Power, National Trust and other landowners to underground power lines in the AONB
- Provided small grants to support locally distinctive village signage in Hartland and Berrynarbor from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund
- Member of the North Devon Marine Pioneer stakeholder group



## Forces for Change

- New North Devon and Torridge Local Plan in place
- Ongoing potential for onshore, inshore and offshore renewable energy developments
- On-going pressure for development inside the AONB and in its setting
- Increasing house prices and lack of affordability for local people, lack of affordable housing
- Development impacts leading to loss of tranquillity and increased light pollution
- The change in size and design of existing buildings is having a negative and cumulative effect on the landscapes of the AONB
- Current unavailability of many of Devon's traditional building stones
- Impact of new communications technology to support mobile phone and broadband/internet access improvements
- Changes in highway management and maintenance
- Community led initiatives to maintain signage and local distinctiveness
- Landscape improvements achieved through undergrounding of overhead power lines

## Objective

To ensure the planning process and infrastructure development protects and enhances the designated AONB and its special qualities

## Policies

- I1 Provide planning advice and policy guidance to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the designated AONB
- I2 Promote and maintain the local distinctiveness and historic character of the built environment
- I3 Support affordable housing proposals to meet local housing needs, that take full account of the AONB designation
- I4 Conserve and enhance the coast and marine environment in relation to onshore and offshore developments
- I5 Support appropriate infrastructure, signage and transport networks in the AONB, for the benefit of local and visiting communities
- I6 Ensure that new development delivers suitable biodiversity net gain

## • Priority Actions

- Maintain planning advice service to local planning authorities
- Develop Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document for North Devon district
- Research affordable housing needs within the AONB
- Training of local authority officers, planning advisors and agents on landscape issues within the AONB
- Development and implementation of the Net Gain for Biodiversity policy to ensure that development minimises impacts on wildlife within the AONB and contributes to net gains
- Support the development of a Marine Natural Capital Plan for the North Devon Marine Pioneer as part of the 25 Year Environment Plan

## • Indicators

- Number of Planning Applications commented on (local)
- Percentage of Decisions on Planning Applications commented on, that match the AONB Partnership recommendation (local)

## 3.2 Farming and Land Management

The North Devon Coast AONB is a farmed landscape reflecting centuries of land management traditions and change. More recent changes have been heavily influenced by the European Common Agricultural Policy and its different strands of support to improve productivity, maintain a stable and affordable supply of food and good stewardship of the land (for wildlife, heritage and ecosystem services). Farming is not just about food production, it is also about the supply and management of natural resources and a viable rural economy and community.

Over 80% of the AONB is agricultural, three quarters of which is managed by owner occupiers. Significant landowners within the AONB include the National Trust, Stucley Estate (Hartland), Christie Estate (Braunton) and Clovelly Estate. With over 180 commercial holdings and an estimated 100 smallholdings, the majority are engaged in livestock farming including 10% in dairying with only a handful specialising in poultry, pigs, forestry or horticulture. However, slight changes in crops and livestock can be seen with a doubling of land under horticulture, a 30% increase in poultry, a slight decline in beef cattle but static dairy and sheep numbers over the last five years<sup>20</sup>. These 'trends' may not continue given the changing context for agricultural and environmental policy in 2019/20.

Several organisations give advice to farmers and landowners, usually linked to environmental stewardship schemes or specific landscape or biodiversity projects. This includes Natural England, the Environment Agency, the Forestry Commission and charities such as Devon Wildlife Trust and the National Trust amongst others often working in partnership.

### • Work to Date

- Engagement with farmers to understand impacts of leaving the European Union
- Facilitation Fund in the Braunton area to support Greater Horseshoe Bats and environmental improvements coordinated by Devon Wildlife Trust
- Conservation grazing by cattle on Woolacombe dunes and Baggy Point using 'invisible' fencing
- Reduction of diffuse pollution in the estuary from farming and investment to support natural flood management on farmland



## Forces for Change

- Changes to agricultural and environmental policies, with a stronger focus on public goods and environmental services
- Ageing farming population (although there is a growing pool of younger people in farming with new technical knowledge and skills)
- Increases in “lifestyle” farming with high land values and consequent impacts on landscape, woodland and biodiversity
- Trends in farming vary across sectors with larger, intensive or extensive livestock farms and more land under poultry and horticulture in small units
- Managing and reducing potential pollutants from agricultural and rural economic activities
- Changes to soil structure through compaction due to farming practices causing surface water flooding problems, soil erosion and diffuse pollution
- Limited forestry grants and low level of woodland management in the smaller, fragmented and less accessible sites
- Local food products and outlets valued by visitors and residents
- Visitor expectations of landscape, access and land management e.g. reduction in grazing livestock, access for dogs
- Increasing scale of agricultural buildings and development pressures/opportunities for older building stock
- New regulations requiring upgrades in farm infrastructure with potential impacts on the landscape and natural environment

## Objective

To promote farming, food production and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB

## Policies

- F1 Support partners to deliver sustainable and exemplar land management, forestry and farming practices in keeping with the AONB designation
- F2 Work with landowners and managers to maintain landscape features such as hedge-banks and woodlands
- F3 Support approaches to enhance the Natural Capital within the AONB including carbon storage, clean water, clean air, timber, renewable energy and food, consistent with the designation

## • Priority Actions

- Support environmental land management trials and work of Defra Landscape Pioneer to support 25 Year Environment Plan
- Develop a design guide for new farm buildings and conversions
- Provide interpretation about farming and land management for visitors
- Facilitate advice services for farmers/land managers to support nature conservation, pollution management and business viability

## • Indicators

- Percentage of Land in Agri-environment Schemes (NE)
- Percentage of Woodland in Management (FC)



# Red Devon Cows grazing at Braunton Burrows



## 3.3 Sustainable Rural and Visitor Economy

The AONB is a living and working landscape requiring a balance between economic activity, societal expectations and environmental conservation. The economy of this coastal strip is more dependent on agriculture and tourism than other parts of the region, due to its natural beauty and the significant boost from water-sports linked activities on the coast and estuary. This economic activity closely reflects the landscape and seascape, the coastal climate and soil types as well as agricultural and economic policies.

Tourism is a vital part of the local economy with visitors drawn here by the stunning beaches, dramatic coastlines, the South West Coast Path and the tranquillity of the Hartland Peninsula. Surfing alone is worth more than £52m per annum to the North Devon economy and supports around 1500 jobs<sup>21</sup>. The North Devon Marketing Bureau has been revived as a private-sector led group to market the area and has worked in partnership with the local authorities to produce their 'Northern Devon Tourism Strategy 2018 – 2022' following visitor surveys in 2017. This acknowledges the very high quality and natural beauty of the landscape and its attraction for most day and staying visitors. An action plan is being developed to implement the strategy, to support and maintain a sustainable tourism sector in Northern Devon. This sustainability is related to both economic and environmental factors reflecting the need for a very fine balance between these two elements that are inter-dependent.

However, Northern Devon is a remote rural area with limited transport networks, a high proportion of micro businesses, few large employers and limited markets due to its distance from urban areas and its peripheral location in the UK. In consequence, the area has a high level of self-employment and some of the lowest wage levels in the country<sup>22</sup>.

The AONB is even more dependent on tourism and agriculture than the sub region as a whole due to more limited other opportunities. The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership covering Devon and Somerset, developed its Strategic Economic Plan in 2014 and produced a Productivity Strategy in 2018 with the aim of doubling the size of the economy over the next 20 years<sup>23</sup>. These economic ambitions need to accommodate the importance and value of protected landscapes, hence the work of the Devon Local Nature Partnership to produce a Natural Environment context to inform the strategy, and the role of the government's work on valuing Natural Capital and ecosystem services through the Natural Capital Committee.

The protection of the designated landscape requires a sustainable development approach to new and existing economic activities to avoid damage to its natural beauty. There is potential for growth within the environmental economy, including wood fuel, local food and drink products, sustainable construction, heritage businesses, energy efficiency and sustainable tourism. Sensitive location of communications infrastructure can facilitate remote working, reduce commuting and support high-tech businesses in remote rural areas to retain jobs and wealth within the AONB.



# Beach Huts at Saunton Sands



*Martin Batt*

## • Work to Date

- Revised AONB website with improved event listings and beach clean calendar
- Encouraged awareness, understanding and action on marine litter across the AONB (including 2-minute beach clean boards and equipment on most public beaches)
- Delivered rockpool rambles and beach cleans for the public, with various partners, on most public beaches in the AONB through the Coastal Creatures project
- Group winner of South West Tourism Alliance Outstanding Contribution to Tourism award (2017-18) with other SW protected landscapes
- Northern Devon Tourism Strategy produced in 2018
- Rockham beach access re-opened in 2017 and new public toilets and showers provided at Bagg Point by NT



## Forces for Change

- Diversity of tourism activities needs guidance and education to ensure protection of area, promote opportunities and avoid negative impacts
- Increased recreation and visitor numbers in some areas having negative impacts on heritage assets, wildlife and footpath maintenance
- Social media opportunities to better promote local food products, events and outlets and for visitors to share their experiences
- New investments from the Coastal Communities Fund programme, for the A361 Link Road and on the England Coast Path
- Trend towards: specialist and 'experience' holidays rather than traditional seaside stay; shorter, more frequent breaks and increasing the length of the season through specialist offers
- Impact of minimum wage on rural and coastal businesses
- High level of repeat visitors offers seasonal and event opportunities
- Digital challenges in relation to local connectivity and availability of skills in businesses to benefit from new technology and communications

## Objective

To promote sustainable development within the AONB that is consistent with the designation

## Policies

- G1 Take account of the value of the natural environment in economic development decisions using the Natural Capital and Ecosystem services approach
- G2 Support partners to develop sustainable tourism opportunities that promote the special qualities of the AONB, without damaging protected sites and species

## • Priority Actions

- Improve interpretation of and engagement with heritage by residents and visitors
- Review of interpretation information and boards to update/replace as appropriate
- Improve visitor facilities
- Work with partners on Northern Devon tourism action plan
- Work with Devon Local Nature Partnership, Biosphere Partnership and Defra Pioneer projects on valuing the environment

## • Indicator

- Number of Beaches in AONB meeting the 'Higher' Standard for Bathing Water Quality (EA)



## 3.4 Access, Health and Wellbeing

Whilst the primary purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance natural beauty, an important activity of many members of the AONB Partnership is to engage people and organisations with the landscape at every level. This is vitally important to ensure people understand why the area is designated and to ensure future generations look after its natural beauty. Engagement happens in many different ways including on a visual, physical and emotional level.

Physical access has been a high priority for much of the coast and countryside management activities through provision of public rights of way, open access land and opportunities for sport and recreation. The AONB has 334km of Public Rights of Way in the AONB, including the 128km South West Coast Path. This well-established National Trail is also within the new England Coast Path which provides considerable economic value to the AONB. The South West Coast Path is one of the most popular National Trails in England, and this can lead to direct and indirect impacts on the local environment arising from transport, visitor and tourism business pressures.

The 935 hectares of 'Open Access' land, as defined under the CRoW Act, covers just over 5% of the total area within the AONB<sup>24</sup>, much of it along the coast path and including the wide sandy beaches found along the coast from Westward Ho! through Saunton, Croyde and smaller beaches along to Combe Martin. North Devon is known for its water sports particularly surfing, however other water sports such as kayaking, coastering, paddle boarding and wild swimming have become increasingly popular taking people closer to nature and reaching previously inaccessible or less visited sites. All of these have the potential to impact negatively on the AONB if not sensitively managed.

Although there has been a range of works and projects over the years to improve access for people with varying physical abilities or mobility issues, the more recent trend is to take a broader health and wellbeing approach. This has increased attention on the potential of protected landscapes to contribute to the health and wellbeing of resident and visiting populations. Evidence of the value of being in or just looking at natural environments, particularly green and blue environments, for both physical and mental health is growing<sup>25</sup>. In response, AONB Partnership members have begun to broaden out and customise their activities to meet the needs of very different groups within the population. This can range from targeting activities towards children in local schools who have never been to the beach, to offering artistic activities linked to the natural environment to encourage older isolated people into the countryside, or organising non-competitive physical activities and celebrations, and using special interests to stimulate exploration and activities in the countryside (history, art, music, literature, film).



# Volunteers working at Hillsborough Hillfort, Ilfracombe



## • Work to Date

- SW Coast Path Association has improved the path at Woolacombe and Watermouth
- AONB updated walks leaflets, produced two heritage trails at Combe Martin and Ilfracombe, plus three wildlife walks
- Coastal Creatures project developed improved engagement with schools and community groups through beach activities
- Biosphere Reserve team produced a coastal code and a good practice guide for marine wildlife activities
- Tramper for public hire and new tramper route provided at Woolacombe by National Trust with Woolacombe TIC
- Research commissioned with communities on 'naturally healthy activities' in the AONB producing a report and action plan
- AONB Health and Wellbeing working group set up and nominated a representative of this theme on to the AONB Partnership
- Devon Local Nature Partnership's 'Naturally Healthy May' with walks and promotion supported in North Devon
- Small grants supported community health and wellbeing projects at Welcombe and Westward Ho!, new interpretation materials for Braunton Burrows and four beaches, and setting up a 5km community parkrun at Woolacombe dunes

## Forces for Change

- Public funding constraints affect communications, interpretation, visitor facilities and maintenance of green infrastructure
- Reduction in vegetation, water and erosion management on public rights of way and coast path
- Housing and business developments are affecting longstanding footpaths, changing their character and potential for users
- Reduction in public transport services and increased charges due to reduced subsidies, but community transport schemes available in some areas and increasing infrastructure for electric cars with charging points in the AONB
- Coast less affordable for visits due to rises in parking, accommodation and transport costs
- A surprising proportion of local children and young people have not visited the coast or a beach
- England Coast Path may create more open access land along the coast, improved paths and provide additional marketing
- Increasing recognition of the potential and cost savings from 'naturally healthy activities' for the physical and mental wellbeing of the whole population, reflected in recent policy and activity in the health and environment sectors
- Health and wellbeing could be addressed by improving the accessibility of beaches, paths and countryside for all
- Obesity and levels of inactivity are major issues for both adults and children in Northern Devon



## Objective

To ensure sustainable access to the AONB for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors, consistent with the designation

## Policies

- H1 Work with partners and landowners to develop improved access to and interpretation of the natural environment
- H2 Support new opportunities and reduce barriers to improve the health and wellbeing of local people and visitors

## • Priority Actions

- Deliver the North Devon Coastal Heritage project providing volunteering and activity opportunities
- Address health and wellbeing issues working with Devon LNP, Biosphere Reserve, local health organisations and charities
- Improve information on access and activities on AONB and partner websites
- Develop new access and engagement activities using the arts and special interests to reach new audiences

## • Indicators

- Percentage of Area accessible to the public (local)
- Number of Health and Wellbeing initiatives in the AONB (local)



## 4.1 Community Action, Learning and Understanding

The resident community of North Devon and Torridge is very diverse ranging from very affluent areas to some of the most deprived rural communities in Devon. This diversity is also visible in the visitor population reflecting historical tourism flows, a wide range of visitor accommodation types and changing activity trends among visitors and service providers. North Devon's coast provides both high end and budget opportunities for those wishing to enjoy the AONB. This presents a challenge to the AONB Partnership to provide appropriate messages and use a range of communication methods to reach as wide an audience as possible.

Partnership working and community engagement projects (such as Coastal Creatures, Clean Marine, Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat project<sup>26</sup> and North Devon Coastal Heritage) are used to provide a flexible range of opportunities for community action and understanding. In addition, the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) has provided small grants to support different approaches to community engagement using art, music, theatre, creative industries and science targeted at children, adults and communities who may be excluded from the AONB.

Community action in support of the AONB is directly demonstrated in the ten 'community representative' places on the AONB Partnership, the public survey and consultation activities held by members and the opportunities presented by the Sustainable Development Fund small grants. Action, enjoyment and understanding of the AONB encompasses every element of its natural beauty as well as the opportunities linked to sport, recreation, learning, volunteering and employment.

### • Work to Date

- Updated website for the AONB, reinstated bi-annual public Forum
- Coastal Creatures community engagement project provided education, training, volunteer capacity and work placements
- Beach cleans supported through delivery, SDF grants, equipment and raising awareness of marine litter through Clean Marine and Coastal Creatures projects
- Community, visitor and business engagement through Plastic Free North Devon Community Group and wider agency Consortium to support behaviour change and understanding of impact of plastics on people, wildlife, the environment and the sea
- New interpretation materials including walks leaflets and downloads, Spotter Guide and three Wildlife trails
- Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project activities engaging communities and schools around Braunton and Combe Martin
- Attended community, public and partner events with AONB stand to promote understanding
- Provided SDF small grants every year totalling £25,000 to support community projects

## Forces for Change

- Changing local population characteristics – ageing and fewer young adults; larger retired community including range of incomes, education, fitness and volunteering commitment
- Changes in media and communications methods and formats, but traditional boards and leaflets still required
- School and College engagement needs to be based on curriculum requirements due to time and funding constraints
- Confusion among the public and organisations about the multiple agencies and groups operating in the natural environment
- Challenge of 'AONB' brand as long-winded and difficult to communicate to the public, 'North Devon Coast' name is more comprehensible and potential brand for local communities and businesses
- Improvements to connectivity for internet and telecommunications opening up new digital communication opportunities
- Challenge of optimising community volunteer potential due to lack of management capacity in local organisations
- Media generated campaigns and content stimulating interest and action from the public (e.g. BBC's 'Blue Planet' programmes, reducing single-use plastic, marine litter/beach cleaning, iconic species)
- Challenge of communicating responsibility and respect for environment alongside positive action, access and enjoyment
- Limited funding and capacity to maintain and renew existing community facilities such as halls, parks, sports and play areas

## Objective

To support more people to learn about, understand and take action to conserve the AONB

## Policies

- J1 Raise awareness and understanding of the AONB, its special qualities, natural and cultural heritage
- J2 Develop opportunities for people to volunteer and gain appropriate skills and knowledge to deliver AONB policies
- J3 Support the provision of community facilities and services to improve the quality of life and sustainability of rural and coastal communities
- J4 Support communities and businesses to reduce carbon emissions from the designated AONB so long as they are complementary to the special qualities of the AONB



## • Priority Actions

- Provide Beach Clean calendar on AONB website and ongoing support for community beach cleans
- Promote the AONB and the work of the Partnership and its member organisations
- Provide information, interpretation and educational materials on the AONB for a wide range of interests
- Develop an education strategy for the AONB
- Work with Plastic Free North Devon on community and business engagement, understanding and behaviour change
- Publicise and celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 Act and the 60th Anniversary of the North Devon AONB designation
- Utilise national campaigns to engage new audiences (e.g. 2019 Year of Green Action, 2021 Year of the Coast)

## • Indicator

- Number of People Participating in AONB activities (AONB/NAAONB KPI)
- Value of Work and Projects secured by the AONB team (local)

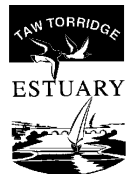


# 4.2 Management and Monitoring

## Managing the North Devon Coast AONB

The governance arrangements for the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were established under the guidance of the former Countryside Agency and subsequently Natural England<sup>27</sup>. Since 2011, Defra has provided direct funding to the host authority to support delivery of the Management Plan and running of the Partnership and staff team. This funding covers 75% of the running costs, the remaining 25% coming from the local authorities within the AONB. Governance arrangements are specified in a Memorandum of Agreement between the three Local Authorities.

**The North Devon Coast AONB Partnership** is a voluntary, non-executive body which meets three times a year to develop policy, champion the AONB, provide advice and guide work within the area. The Partnership decided to use the name **'North Devon Coast AONB'** from 2009 to more clearly describe the areas' geography to the public. The Partnership has sub-groups overseeing key areas of work such as planning, SDF grant allocations and communications. It is comprised of ten community representatives, two parish council representatives and twenty organisations:



**The Executive Group** comprising the Chair, Vice Chair, AONB Manager, representatives of the funding partners and Natural England meets four times a year to oversee day-to-day management issues and monitor delivery of the business plan. Devon County Council is the host authority employing the team and providing office services in Barnstaple.

**The AONB Team** is core funded by Defra and the three local authorities providing a Manager, Projects Officer and part time Communications and Support Officer (2.6 FTE roles). The Team provides: administrative support and reporting to the governance structures; planning and development advice to the local planning authorities; promotion and awareness raising of the AONB designation and offer; administration of the Sustainable Development Fund small grant scheme; project development and external funding bids; partnership working and engagement at the local, regional and national level including participation in the National Association of AONBs, the South West Protected Landscapes Forum, the Devon Landscape Policy Group and the Devon AONBs group.

**Delivery of the AONB Management Plan.** The Management Plan has formerly included a five-year Delivery Plan specifying indicative actions and proposed partners to achieve the policy objectives. Due to the very changeable context in 2018 in relation to environmental and agricultural policies during the preparation of this Plan, a different approach has been adopted. This Plan includes priority actions for the plan period, with a more detailed delivery plan being produced within each AONB annual business plan. This will include short and longer-term actions indicating a lead partner where known.

**The Annual Business Plan and Delivery Plan produced early in each calendar year provides an implementation, monitoring and reporting function. Firstly, it will include an annual delivery programme for the Management Plan, secondly it will provide monitoring of some performance and progress indicators as they become available and thirdly it will provide a report to the public and partners. Annual Business Plans are available on the AONB website.**

**The National Association of AONBs.** The North Devon Coast AONB is a member of the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), which is a registered charity<sup>28</sup>. Its purpose is to support and develop a network of ambitious AONB partnerships with a strong collective voice. Four objectives have been agreed that are common to all 46 AONBs across the UK. The NAAONB provides learning, support and collaboration across the 'AONB Family' through an online intranet, joint marketing activities, national meetings and an annual conference. The coordinated 'Outstanding Week' in September every year raises the profile of AONBs through experiential activities and joint marketing.



## Monitoring the North Devon Coast AONB

Monitoring of the North Devon Coast AONB is led by the AONB team with input from Partnership members and other statutory agencies. This is dependent on the availability of datasets provided by third parties and funding to commission specific data collection where this is not routinely available. Performance and Progress indicators are shown in the Table below but may be refined to reflect changing issues, activity or data availability. Some indicators have been provided from national datasets by Natural England (NE), the Environment Agency (EA) and the Forestry Commission (FC) as shown below. Some indicators are reported collectively with other AONBs through the National Association to Defra

as Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), others are reported locally as indicated in the table. Monitoring information will be communicated in three different ways: -

- 'State of the AONB' report produced every five years to inform the five-yearly review of the Management Plan
- Monitoring section included in annual Business Plans
- Public reporting through a bi-annual public forum or review document, plus regular E-news and social media

### Table of Performance and Progress Indicators

<p><b>Landscape and Seascape</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Light Pollution levels (local)</li> <li>• Area of Landscape enhanced (AONB/ NAAONB KPI)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental Quality and Climate Change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Status of Water Bodies - river and coastal (EA)</li> <li>• Area of land enhanced (beach cleans - local)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sustainable Rural and Visitor Economy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of beaches meeting the 'Higher' Standard for Bathing Water Quality (EA)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Biodiversity and Geodiversity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of SSSI in favourable condition (NE)</li> <li>• Area of Habitat/Land enhanced (AONB/ NAAONB KPI)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Planning, Development and Infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of planning applications commented on (local)</li> <li>• Percentage of decisions on planning applications commented on, that match the AONB Partnership recommendation (local)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Access, Health and Wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of Area accessible to the public (NE)</li> <li>• Number of Health and Wellbeing Initiatives in the AONB (local)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Historic Environment and Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments at Risk (NAAONB/HE KPI)</li> <li>• Heritage Assets enhanced with AONB Support (local)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Farming and Land Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of Land in Agri-environment Schemes (NE)</li> <li>• Percentage of Woodland in Management (FC)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Action, Learning and Understanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people participating in AONB activities (AONB/NAAONB KPI)</li> <li>• Value of work and projects secured by the AONB team (local)</li> </ul>

## 5. Appendices - Glossary and Abbreviations

**Affordable housing** – housing provided for those whose incomes do not allow them to compete in the open market for house purchase.

**Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** is an area of high scenic quality which has statutory protection in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of its landscape.

**Biodiversity** – the variety and variability of life on Earth measured at the genetic, species or ecosystem level. Includes wildlife and flora.

**Biodiversity 2020** – the biodiversity strategy for England.

**Conservation Area** – an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to conserve.

**Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** – the CRoW Act provides for public access on foot to certain types of land, amends the law relating to public rights of way, increases measures for the management and protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest, strengthens wildlife enforcement legislation and provides for better management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**County Wildlife Site (CWS)** – sites of significant wildlife value from a county perspective.

**Culm Grassland** – damp unimproved grasslands that are found overlying the Culm Measures of N Devon and NE Cornwall.

**Devon Landscape Policy Group (DLPG)** – facilitates joint working between public authorities and land management organisations across Devon.

**Ecosystem services** – these are the benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment (see Natural Capital).

**Environment Agency (EA)** – part of the Defra family of organisations providing environmental protection and enhancement to create better places for people and wildlife.

**Environmental stewardship** – a scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England to deliver effective environmental management.

**European Landscape Convention (ELC)** – this is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape, created by the Council of Europe. The convention promotes landscape protection, management and planning, and European co-operation on landscape issues.

**Heritage Coast** – stretches of undeveloped coast, defined by local authorities, for their outstanding scenic value where resolution of conflicts is needed between recreation, conservation, access and agriculture.

**Landscape** – comprises the visible features of an area of land including: the physical elements of landforms such as mountains, hills, water bodies such as rivers, lakes, ponds and the sea; living elements of land cover including indigenous vegetation; human elements including different forms of land use, buildings and structures; and transitory elements such as lighting and weather conditions.

**Landscape character assessment (LCA)** – the tool that is used to help us to understand, and articulate, the character of the landscape. It helps us identify the features that give a locality its ‘sense of place’ and pinpoints what makes it different from neighbouring areas.

**Landscape character type (LCT)** – distinct types of landscape which are generic in character in that they may occur in different parts of the country, but wherever they are they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement pattern.

**Landscape description units (LDU)** - these are relatively homogenous units of land, each defined using a series of definitive attributes including landform, structural geology, rock type, soils, land use, tree cover, settlement and farm type.



## 5. Appendices - Glossary and Abbreviations

**Landscape resilience** – creating healthy and adaptable landscapes for species and people by establishing large core areas and networks that provide both refuges and stepping stones, to support adaptation to climate change, to deliver wider ecosystem benefits and to provide opportunities for public enjoyment and engagement.

**Listed building** – a building of notable architectural or historic interest listed by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport under the Planning Act 1990. Buildings must be at least 30 years old.

**Local nature reserve** – land owned or controlled by local authorities protected for their nature conservation value.

**National Character Areas (NCAs)** - divide England into 159 distinct natural areas, defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geo-diversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision-making framework for the natural environment.

**Natural Capital** – the parts of the natural environment that produce value to people. The natural capital assets such as water, soil, food and timber, deliver ecosystem services such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, energy and wildlife which then benefit people.

**Natural Flood Management** – the use of natural processes to reduce the risk of flooding and coastal erosion, for example using environmentally sensitive approaches rather than hard flood defences such as planting woodland or creating hedge banks to slow water flow, retaining water in the uplands through restoring moorland, changing land management practices to manage water flows.

**Net Gain for Biodiversity** – is development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before. Previous policies required mitigation of development impacts (e.g. road or house-building) so there was no net loss of biodiversity, but this new policy approach seeks a net gain on the site or on an alternative site to address the significant species loss in the UK.

**Public Rights of Way** – public footpaths, bridleways and cycleways along which the public has the right to travel.

**Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS)** – locally important geological and geomorphological sites of value.

**Scheduled Monument** – a process to provide state protection of a selection of nationally important archaeological sites and monuments.

**Seascape** - this planning and land use term covers the complex interrelationship between the landforms, coast and sea within a landscape.

**Shoreline Management Plan** – a document that sets out strategic guidance over the approach to coastal management, providing guidance to local authorities, EA, landowners and communities.

**Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** – areas designated by Natural England as being of special interest by reason of their flora, fauna or geology.

**Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** – areas designated under the EU Habitats Directive.

**Special Qualities of the AONB** – those aspects for which it is considered important, and on which priorities for management are based.

**Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** – is a process to ensure that significant environmental effects arising from policies, plans and programmes are identified, assessed and mitigated for.

**Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)** - small grant scheme administered by the AONB to help deliver Management Plan policies.

# Line Removal at Croyde – Before and After



*North Devon AONB*

## **Croyde Line Removal Project**

In 2017 the North Devon Coast AONB in partnership with Western Power Distribution, worked on a project to remove unsightly overhead power lines on a popular tourist route within the AONB. This was achieved with financial support from central government through OFGEM's Allowance for Line Removal in Protected Landscapes. This project is a great example of how we can work in partnership with a range of agencies, to conserve and enhance our valued and special landscapes.

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