

Area of LDU within AONB: 279.3 hectares

% of LDU within AONB: 79%



Date surveyed: 25 February 2010

Survey points: SS446374, SS439380 (from LDU 382)

Summary of landscape character

This LDU comprises the wide and long sandy beach of Saunton Sands in the west of the AONB. It is framed along its eastern extent by the sand dunes of Braunton Burrows, grading out to the south where the beach meets the shores of the Taw & Torridge Estuary. The northern end of the beach is flanked by rocks and roughly vegetated cliffs rising up to Saunton Down, with the bright white imposing building of the Saunton Sands Hotel looking down on the beach below. The northern area is a popular tourism destination including for surfing, kite surfing, dog walking and traditional beach holiday activities. As such, the perceptual qualities of the landscape are greatly affected by the changing seasons – contrasting between times when the expansive beach is deserted and the only sounds to be heard are the roar of the sea; to summer days when the beach is busy with people and buzzing with activity.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

LANDFORM / TOPOGRAPHY

Landform description	Wide, flat sandy beach sheltered by high sand dunes, grading to the south as intertidal sands on the edge of the Taw & Torridge Estuary.
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LAND USE AND PATTERNS

Agriculture	<i>Main agricultural land use</i>	<i>Other agricultural land use(s)</i>	
	N/A	N/A	
Field patterns and boundaries	<i>Field patterns and origins</i>	<i>Size (note variations)</i>	<i>Boundary type / description</i>
	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other land uses (e.g. recreation)	The beach is used for a range of recreational activities including walking, sunbathing and surfing (including kite surfing).		

WOODLAND AND SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS

Trees / woodland cover	<i>Size and distribution within landscape</i>	<i>Type and species(broadleaved / conifer)</i>
	N/A	N/A
Semi-natural habitats	<i>Description and location within landscape</i>	
	Saunton Sands lies within the Braunton Burrows SAC and SSSI, which is also part of the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. A small part of cliff slopes in the north is within the Saunton to Baggy Point SSSI. The LDU's lime-rich sandy foreshore forms part of an internationally important ecosystem, acting as a focal point for bird migration routes down the west coast of Britain. The sea and estuary shores provide important wintering grounds for waterfowl.	

SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Settlement pattern	<i>Settlement size, type, density and relationship to landscape</i>		
	There is no settlement or development within this LDU.		
Transport pattern (including Public Rights of Way)	<i>Road pattern, character and relationship to settlement / landscape</i>		
	There are no roads or formal rights of way crossing the LDU. The Lundy Island ferry route passes through the estuary immediately south of the LDU.		
Local vernacular styles and materials	<i>Predominant traditional building materials</i>	<i>Any local variations</i>	<i>Other built features reflecting vernacular</i>
	N/A	N/A	N/A
Modern development styles / materials	Although in the adjacent LDU, the white Art Deco style building of the Saunton Sands Hotel is highly prominent in the north, as are other properties along the same ridgeline overlooking the beach.		

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Key historic features visible in the landscape	<i>Description</i>
	There are no historic features visible in the landscape.

VIEWS / PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

Views	<i>Key views / landmark features</i>	<i>Intervisibility with LDUs</i>	
		<i>From this LDU</i>	<i>To this LDU</i>
	The wide and open aspect of the beach affords extensive views across the surrounding land- and seascape to as far as Hartland Point in the south-west. There is a strong visual and relationship between the beach and the sand dunes of Braunton	358 (Braunton Burrows) 382 (ridgeline/ cliff to the north) 399 (lower	358 382 399 526

	<p>Burrows to the east – which provide shelter to the exposed landscape. The height of the dunes restrict easterly views from the beach.</p> <p>Northerly views are defined by the cliffs and higher downland above Saunton (including the prominent white-painted Saunton Sands Hotel on the ridge and telecommunications masts on Long Lane to the north-east); whilst views to the south over the Taw & Torridge Estuary include development at Appledore and Westward Ho! framed by Northam Burrows / beach in the foreground.</p>	<p>ridge slope to the north-east)</p> <p>526 (upper ridge slope to the north-east)</p> <p>403 (elevated ridge/downland including Saunton Down & Long Lane)</p> <p>361,362,364 (Northam coastal areas)</p> <p>836 (Westward Ho!)</p> <p>694 (Hartland Point)</p>	<p>403</p> <p>361</p> <p>362</p> <p>364</p> <p>836</p> <p>694</p>
<p>Perceptual qualities (description)</p>	<p>The perceptual qualities of the landscape are greatly affected by the changing seasons – contrasting between times when the expansive beach is deserted and the only sounds to be heard are the roar of the sea; to summer days when the beach is busy with people and buzzing with activity. Sounds from military training activities (tank driving) on the adjacent Braunton Burrows can also disturb the peacefulness of the beach. Views to linear development at West Saunton (including the Saunton Sands Hotel) detract from the open, undeveloped character of the beach.</p>		

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Number	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
NATURE CONSERVATION		
SAC	1	99.81%
SSSI	2	100%

UK BAP PRIORITY HABITATS

UK BAP Priority Habitat	Area (ha)	% of LDU land area that is within the AONB
Maritime cliff and slope	0.2	0.07%

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Perceptual qualities	Perceptual qualities are greatly dependent on the seasons and influx of visitors / recreational users to the beach. Levels of peace and perceptions of tranquillity are also affected in the south by views to development across the Taw / Torridge Estuary at Appledore and Westward Ho!. Sporadic sounds from military training on the nearby Braunton Burrows also impact on the peacefulness of the landscape.
Views	Inter-visibility between Saunton Sands and its surrounding landscape / seascape is high due its open and flat character – long distance views to Hartland Point are afforded in clear conditions. Detracting skyline features viewed from the LDU include the telecommunications masts on the north-eastern ridgeline (LDU 403) and development and industry lining the southern banks of the estuary (including Northam and Westward Ho!). The bright white building of the Saunton Sands Hotel is an imposing feature on the cliff side immediately north of the LDU.
Land use	Despite the area's popularity as a tourism destination, the beach itself retains its scenic, unspoilt qualities.
Field patterns	N/A
Field boundaries	N/A
Trees and woodland	N/A
Semi-natural habitats	The wider Braunton Burrows SSSI is currently assessed as in unfavourable recovering condition – with parts of the foreshore in favourable condition.
Settlement and development	No issues within the LDU itself. Linear development at West Saunton on the cliff/ridgeline to the north is visually prominent (LDU 382), including the large white building of the Saunton Sands Hotel.
Local vernacular	N/A