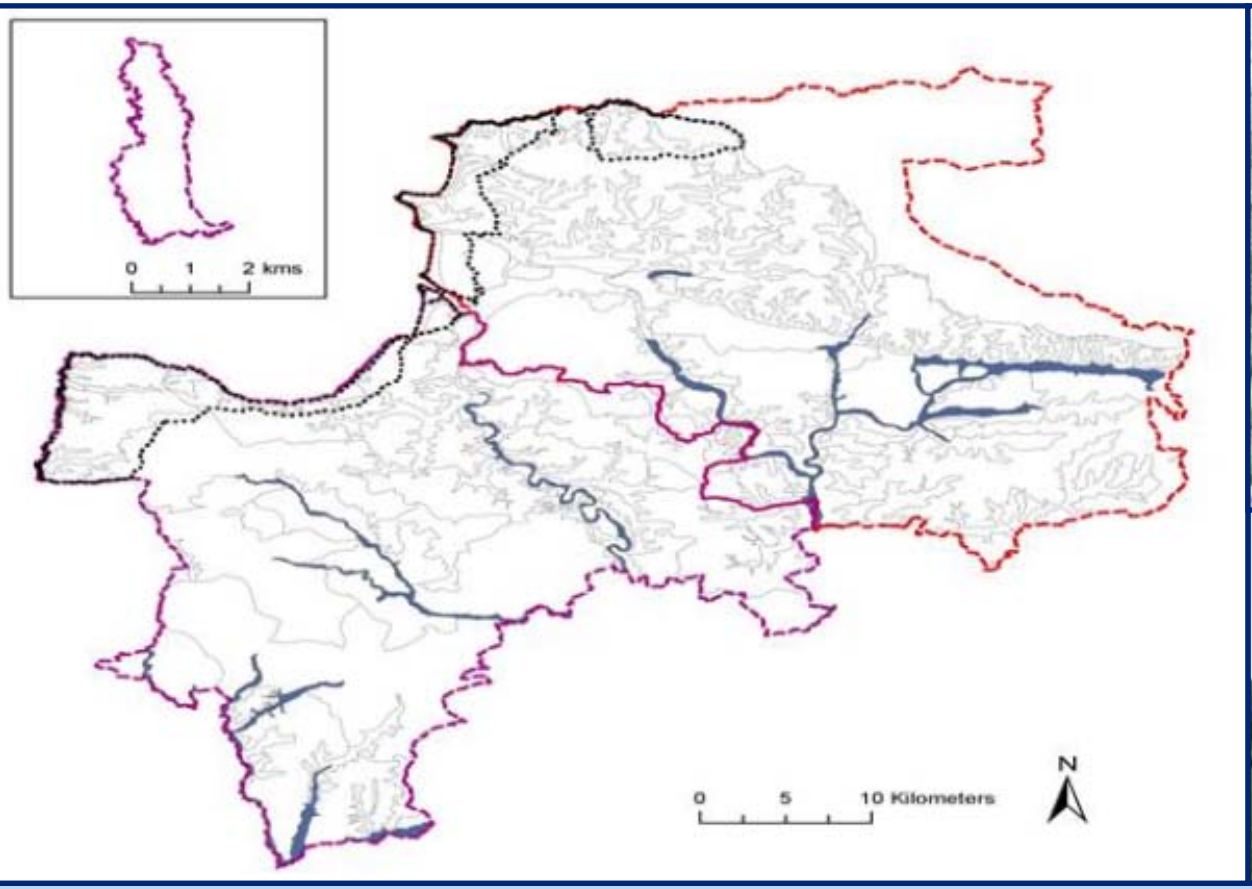
LANDSCAPE TYPE:

3C: SPARSELY SETLED FARMED VALLEY FLOORS

PART 1: DESCRIPTION



CONSITUENT LDUs: 367, 376, 377, 455, 469, 535, 536, 537, 542, 543, 546, 552, 567, 598, 599, 600, 603, 609, 653, 660, 664, 665, 666, 674, 675, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 686, 705, 734, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 745, 812, 817, 837, 849, 875, 876

SUMMARY OF LOCATION

This LCT covers the broad valley floors and floodplains of the main river valleys which flow through the two districts.

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KEY CHARACTERISTICS FOR THIS LCT WITHIN NORTH DEVON AND TORRIDGE

- Gently meandering river courses flowing through open valley floors and floodplains contained by steep valley sides.
- Underlying geology comprising Culm Measures (mudstones, siltstones and shales) with more resistant bands of sandstone. Red/orange soils exposed by river channels cutting through the landform.
- Flat floodplains include traditional orchards (e.g. alongside the River Mole), bands of wet woodland and areas of estate parkland with ancient trees. Views often defined by heavily wooded valley sides – a combination of oak-dominated semi-natural woodland and conifer plantations (falling within LCT 3G).
- Open pastoral fields enclosed by low-cut thorn hedges, with some areas of unenclosed rough grazing on wet meadows / rushy pasture. Fields form a regular pattern, of post-medieval and modern origin.
- Floodplain pastures and meadows grazed by cattle and sheep. Some areas of wood pasture associated with parkland estates.
- Rich semi-natural habitats lining the river courses including Culm grasslands, Molinia-rich mire, rush pasture, unimproved meadows, ponds and wet woodland – including willow and alder carr.
- Historic parkland estates with veteran trees and ancient wood pasture, including the Grade I registered Castle Hill estate (banks of the River Bray) and King's Nympton Park overlooking the River Mole. Other cultural features include Iron Age hillforts occupying commanding positions above the river valleys (outside this LCT), and mills, weirs and arched stone bridges relating to the valleys' rich industrial heritage.
- Strong literary association of the Taw and Torridge valleys with Henry Williamson's 1927 novel Tarka the Otter. The Tarka Line heritage railway follows the course of the Taw, whilst the multi-user Tarka Trail follows the course of an old railway line between Barnstaple and Torrington.
- Hamlets and villages located at river crossing points, with some extending in linear form along the valley floors. Strong local vernacular of cream, whitewash and pale yellow coloured cottages with slate or thatched roofs, with some use of local sandstone with red brick detailing.
- The winding courses of the valley floors sometimes traced by roads including the main A377, and A386, with minor routes crossing the rivers on historic stone hump-backed bridges.
- High levels of peace and tranquillity with scenic views along the open valleys and to the surrounding wooded slopes. Perceptions of tranquillity broken only locally by the presence of main roads and the fringes of the larger settlements of Barnstaple and Torrington.

PART 2: EVALUATION

SUMMARY OF SPECIAL QUALITIES

- Unspoilt, 'natural' and peaceful landscapes.
- Valued riparian and floodplain habitats / wildlife.
- Trees and woodlands tracing watercourses.
- Historic features including old barns, stone bridges and mills.
- Importance for recreation and 'escapism'.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

PAST / CURRENT FORCES FOR CHANGE AFFECTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- Riverside woodlands replaced with coniferous plantations in the 20th century.
- Ongoing decline in management including coppicing, damage by deer and an influx of invasive species affecting the biodiversity of the landscape's woodlands.
- Increasing demand for water for agriculture and from increasing populations – the River Yeo near Barnstaple is classed by the Environment Agency as over-abstracted (January 2006).
- Diffuse pollution from agriculture affecting the river's water quality – the Tamar catchment (including the Carey, Deer and Claw) is classed by Defra as a Priority Catchment.
- Recreation pressures leading to footpath erosion in some locations, particularly those close to the main settlements.
- Decline in grazing levels on areas of Culm grassland and wet meadows, leading to a spread of rank vegetation and scrub.
- Non-native wildlife species such as mink introduced, disrupting the natural balance of the river ecosystems.
- Loss of traditional orchards along riversides in favour of timber plantations or productive farmland.
- Peace and tranquillity interrupted by forestry operations (e.g. noise from chainsaws).

FORCES FOR CHANGE

FUTURE FORCES FOR CHANGE AFFECTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- Development pressure from the larger settlements leading to higher water supply demands – further impacting on water levels and potential demand for reservoirs.
- Continuing decline in traditional woodland management skills threatening the age and species diversity of semi-natural woodlands.
- Intensification of agriculture on more fertile valley pastures to meet rising food demands, leading to an increased risk of diffuse pollution in watercourses.
- More intense periods of drought leading to the drying out of important wetlands including wet meadows, Culm grassland and wet woodland – affecting their functions in reducing flood risk in the winter months.
- Summer droughts reducing the water supply from the uplands of Exmoor, Dartmoor and the Hartland plateau.
- Increased autumn and winter precipitation levels leading to higher water and consequential increases in flood risk in their lower catchments.
- Increase in poaching on river banks due to wetter autumn and winter conditions leading to waterlogged ground.
- Longer growing season and enhanced growth rates of vegetation including secondary woodland resulting in a spread of such vegetation in understoreys.
- Change in woodland / tree species composition as new pests/diseases spread (particularly phytopthora pathogens) and species intolerant of water level extremes die back. Individual trees may become more susceptible to damage from the increasing frequency and magnitude of storm events.
- Further spread of non-native and alien species in response to a changing climate.
- Increased demand for bioenergy planting, including Short Rotation Coppice (SRC) as well as a drive towards active woodland management to produce woodfuel as a low-carbon fuel source.
- Pressure for an expansion of the area of coniferous plantation and woodland, planted and allowed to spread through natural regeneration to enhance the landscape's roles in filtering water, minimising downstream flooding, storing and sequestering carbon dioxide and providing a low-carbon fuel source (through coppice management).
- Planting of non-native woodland species to respond to different growing conditions – altering the species composition of the landscape's oak-dominated valley woodlands.
- Higher demand for domestic food production potentially leading to an increase in stocking levels and consequential impacts of poaching and over-grazing.

FUTURE FORCES FOR CHANGE AFFECTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER (Continued)

- Increase in UK-based tourism with associated demands for new facilities and infrastructure, as well as an increase in traffic levels and recreational pressure at 'honeypot' sites (both on the rivers and within the surrounding valleys)

PART 3: LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

OVERALL STRATEGY: To protect the peaceful and unspoilt attributes of the valley floors, seeking to bring woodlands back into management and expanding floodplain habitats to build climate change resilience. Distinctive features such as traditional orchards, stone hump-backed bridges and mills are protected and restored for future generations.

Landscape and planning guidelines

Guideline	Identified delivery mechanisms (e.g. links to specific projects, Initiatives and policies)	Planning policy links and delivery recommendations
PROTECT		
Protect the sparse settlement pattern of clustered hamlets and villages often focused at river crossing points. Prevent the linear spread of development along river valleys wherever possible, to maintain their tranquil and unspoilt character.	• Conservation Area Management Plans / Appraisals	• Devon Structure Plan: Policies CO1, CO6, CO7 • North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policies COR3, COR4 and COR6.
Protect the landscape's traditional building styles, including cream, whitewash and pale yellow coloured cottages with slate or thatched roofs, with some use of local sandstone with red brick detailing. Any new development should utilise the same materials and building styles wherever possible (whilst seeking to incorporate sustainable and low carbon building construction and design). Characteristic features such as white wooden finger posts and stone hump-backed bridges should be retained and kept in a good state of repair.	• Conservation Area Management Plans / Appraisals • Devon Rural Skills Trust	• Consider formulating a Design Guide as a SPD in the forthcoming LDF. • North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policies COR1 and COR6. • Devon CC Environmental Review of permitted highway development proposals.
Protect and restore historic features within the valley landscapes, particularly those relating to the rivers' industrial	• Environmental Stewardship	• Devon Structure Plan: Policies CO7 and CO8

Guideline	Identified delivery mechanisms (e.g. links to specific projects, Initiatives and policies)	Planning policy links and delivery recommendations
heritage such as mill buildings.		• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6
MANAGE		
Manage and enhance the valleys' semi-natural woodlands through traditional techniques including coppicing. Control access by livestock, promoting natural regeneration to enhance longevity whilst using extensive grazing to promote the species diversity of woodland ground flora. Explore opportunities for community utilisation of coppice residues as a low-carbon fuel source.	• Environmental Stewardship • England Woodland Grant Scheme • Devon BAP • South West Woodlands Renaissance scheme • Devon Rural Skills Trust	• Devon Structure Plan: Policy CO1 • North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6
Manage and extend areas of Culm grassland, wet woodland, valley mires, ponds and damp meadows through appropriate grazing and traditional land management regimes – both to enhance their wildlife value and functions in flood prevention.	• Environmental Stewardship • The Working Wetlands project (Devon Wildlife Trust) • Devon BAP • South West Nature Map	• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6 • Share best practice between farmers working in areas of Culm grassland (e.g. through demonstration events). • Ensure management prescriptions provide a balance between wildlife needs and those of local farmers so agriculture remains viable.
Manage recreational pressure at popular sites by promoting alternative locations and sustainable transport options. Any signage or infrastructure requirements should be kept to a minimum and be sensitively sited within its landscape setting.	• Sustainable transport initiatives	• Devon's Structure Plan: Policies CO6, TO5 and TO6. • North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policies COR5, COR8 and COR17 • Devon Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Guideline	Identified delivery mechanisms (e.g. links to specific projects, Initiatives and policies)	Planning policy links and delivery recommendations
		(ROWIP)
Manage the area's existing plantations for sustainable timber production and wildlife interest, creating new green links to surrounding semi-natural habitats. Explore their use as recreational spaces away from the more sensitive habitats surrounding them.	• Environmental Stewardship • England Woodland Grant Scheme • Devon BAP	• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policies COR6 and COR17 • Devon Structure Plan: Policies CO9 • Green Infrastructure Strategy
PLAN		
Plan for the expansion of fragmented Culm grassland sites and other wetland habitats to create an intact and climate-resilient green network.	• Environmental Stewardship • Devon BAP • The Working Wetlands project (Devon Wildlife Trust) • South West Nature Map	• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6
Create, extend and link woodland and wetland habitats to enhance the water storage capacity of the landscape (reducing incidences of downstream flooding) and improve water quality through reducing soil erosion and agricultural run-off. The natural regeneration of woodland should be encouraged and new planting [using climate-hardy species] undertaken to link fragmented sites.	• Environmental Stewardship • The Working Wetlands project (Devon Wildlife Trust) • Devon BAP • Forest Design Plans • South West Nature Map	• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6
Restore and manage areas of relict traditional orchards and explore opportunities for the creation of new ones, including community orchards to promote local food and drink production.	• Environmental Stewardship • Devon BAP • Devon Food Links • South West Nature Map	• North Devon & Torridge Joint Core Strategy: Policy COR6 • Strengthen and promote links between local markets and produce from the area