

Devon Landscape Policy Group

Advice Note 4:

Using Landscape Character Assessments in Neighbourhood Planning

An opportunity to enhance your distinctive local environment, and positively shape the place where you live

Version 1 June 2015



Looking South-east from Beacon Hill, Blagdon. South Devon National Character Area; Torbay Hinterland Devon Character Area; Upper Farmed and Wooded Slopes Landscape Character Type. Photo © Torbay Council



Introduction

Devon contains a rich diversity of high-quality and distinctive landscapes which attract people to live, work and visit, and contribute to a sense of belonging and identity. As well as being the setting for everyday lives, Devon's landscapes also provide areas of beauty and tranquillity which provide opportunities to improve mental and physical wellbeing.

Recognising landscape in Neighbourhood Plans provides an opportunity to identify what makes the place where you live unique, and to ensure that its special qualities and distinctive characteristics are protected, and enhanced, through the Neighbourhood Planning process.

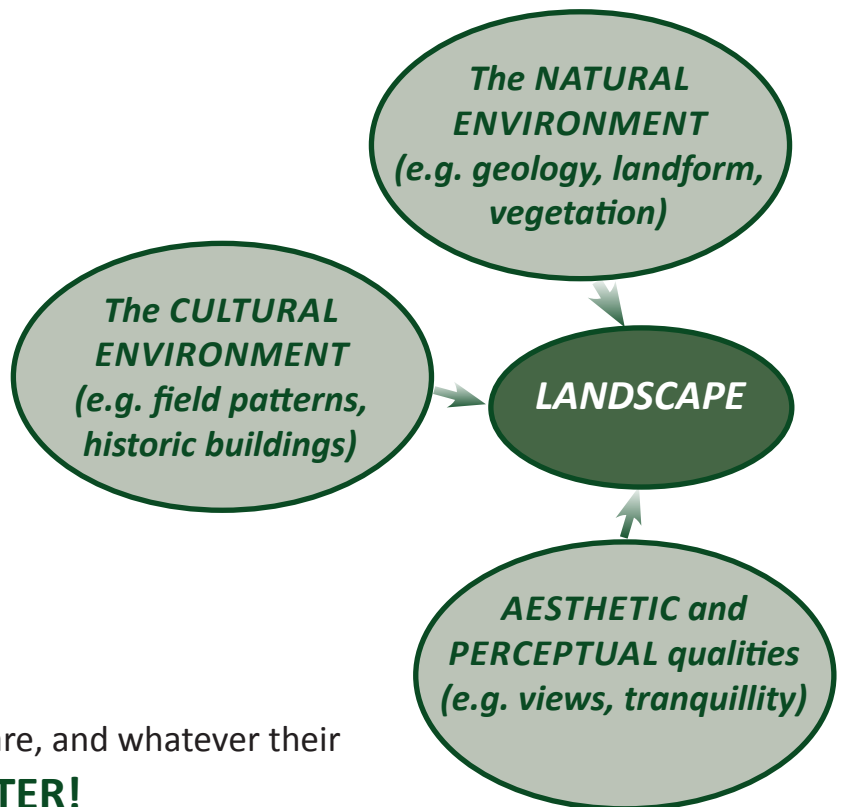
This Advice Note introduces 'landscape' as a planning term. It explains why landscape is an important consideration in Neighbourhood Plans and introduces the range of landscape evidence which already exists within Devon. It then provides practical advice on how the landscape evidence should be used and presented to inform Neighbourhood Planning Policy. There is also a reference list, providing internet links to sources of further information.

What is Landscape?

"An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors... it includes natural, rural, urban and peri-urban areas.

It includes land, inland water and marine areas. It concerns landscapes that might be considered outstanding, as well as everyday or degraded landscapes."

European Landscape Convention, ratified by the UK in 2006.



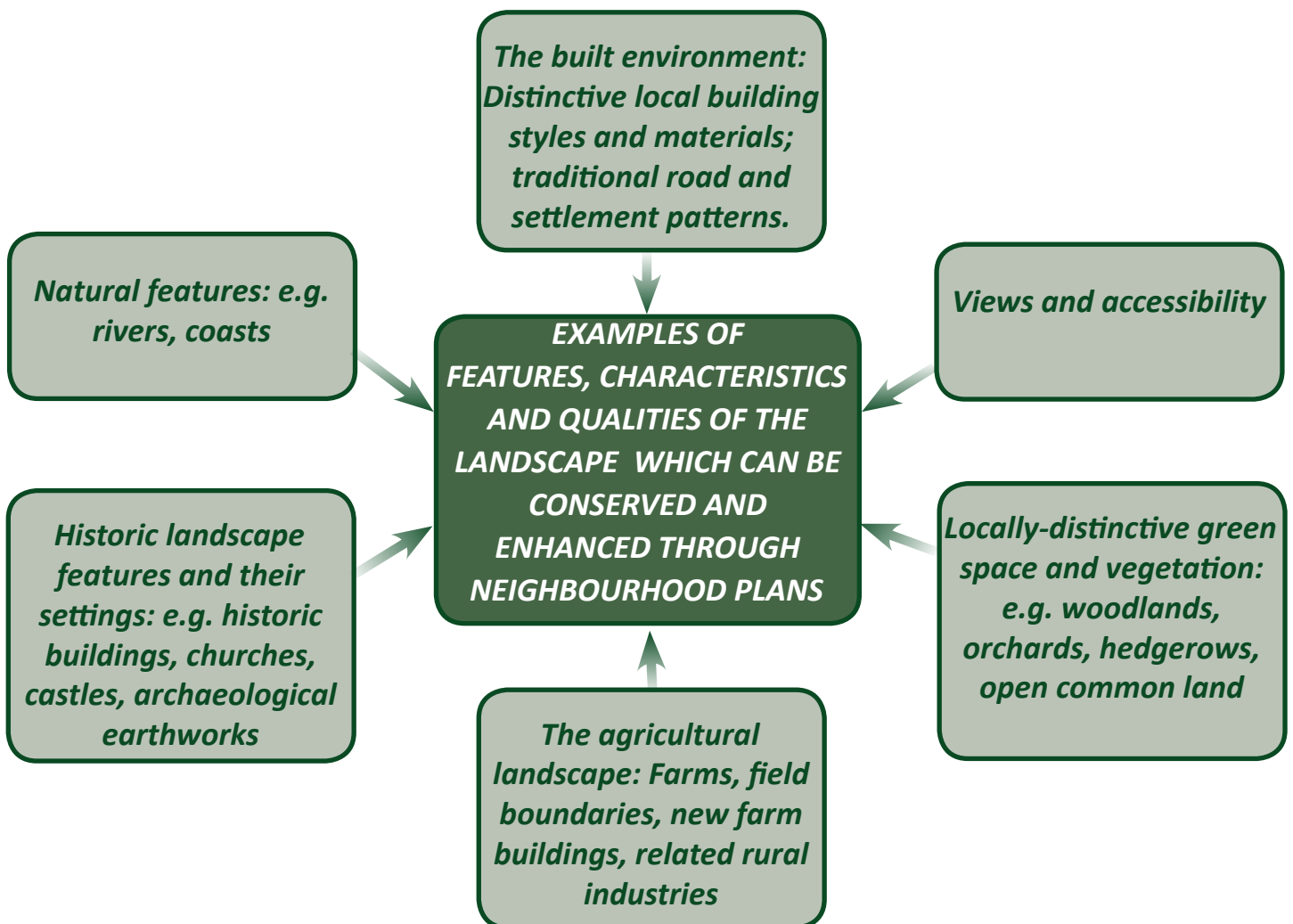
The key message is that wherever they are, and whatever their condition, **ALL LANDSCAPES MATTER!**

It is important to remember that landscapes are dynamic, and constantly evolving in response to environmental, social and economic changes. The European Landscape Convention sets out a three-point approach to help us protect and enhance what we value, and positively guide change within our landscapes: **PROTECT, MANAGE** and **PLAN**.

Why should landscape be considered?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) highlights the need to consider the environment (including landscape) within the planning process. Landscape provides a framework for people to think about what gives their area its 'sense of place', and to manage change in a way which makes a positive contribution to the character of an area. The diagram below gives examples of landscape elements which can be enhanced through Neighbourhood Plans.

"The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes..."
National Planning Policy Framework (2012), para 109.



View south from Yarcombe. Blackdowns National Character Area; Axe Valley Devon Character Area; Lower Rolling Farmed and Settled Slopes Landscape Character Type. Photo © Fiona Fyfe

What landscape evidence is already available?

1) DEVON'S LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS

“Landscape character assessment is a tool to help understand what the landscape is like today, how it has come to be like that, and how it may change in the future. Its role is to help ensure that change and development does not undermine whatever is characteristic or valued about any particular landscape.”

Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland, 2002.

Landscape character assessments can be undertaken at a range of scales, from national to local, as described in the table below.

Devon already has a comprehensive suite of Landscape Character Assessments. These describe Devon's landscapes, and define a series of Landscape Character Types and Devon Character Areas within the County. The photos in the page footers show a range of Devon's Landscape Character Types and Devon Character Areas, as described in the photo captions.

Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are generic types of landscape which can occur in different places. They have similar characteristics wherever they occur, and are called by a descriptive name (e.g. Estuaries, Moorland Edge Slopes, Settled Valleys).

Devon Character Areas (DCAs) are geographically unique areas, each with a distinctive 'sense of place'. They are called by a descriptive place-based name (e.g. Taw-Torridge Estuary, East Dartmoor Moorland Fringes, Axe Valley).

<p>Lower</p> <p>Level of local detail</p> <p>Higher</p>	<p>National</p>	<p>There are seven National Character Areas (NCAs) within Devon (including Lundy), providing a 'snapshot' of the landscape diversity present within the County.</p>
	<p>Devon-wide</p>	<p>The Devon Landscape Assessment describes the 68 distinctive DCAs within Devon.</p> <p>District/ AONB/ National Park/ Unitary Authority assessments describe the 37 different LCTs (which may occur in more than one location) which combine to create the Devon DCAs.</p>
	<p>Local</p>	<p>Some areas of Devon have local assessments of smaller landscape units which break down LCTs into more detail. Locally-specific Landscape Character Assessments may also be prepared to inform Neighbourhood Plans (see page 6).</p>

The format for Landscape Character Assessments varies slightly, but all contain profiles for each DCA/ LCT which typically include:

- Map and text describing the location of the DCA/ LCT;
- Summary description and photograph showing a typical scene;
- Key landscape characteristics (including natural, cultural and perceptual elements);
- Forces for change in the landscape;
- Management recommendations or guidelines to PROTECT, MANAGE and PLAN.

Full details of Devon's Landscape Character Assessments are provided in Advice Note 1. They are all available online through the Devon Landscape website www.devon.gov.uk/landscape. Mid Devon District also has a Townscape Character Assessment which describes Settlement Character Types and Areas (details provided on the back page).

2) HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISATION (HLC)

This digital map-based resource shows the historic patterns of fields and other historic land uses (e.g. woodland and common land) which survive in the modern landscape. Some historic landscape character types are rare and/ or locally-distinctive, and these should be protected where possible. The web address for the Devon HLC is provided on the back page.

3) LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS AND PROTECTED SITES

There are many relevant landscape-based designations which should be respected (and ideally enhanced) through the Neighbourhood Planning process. Information about these designations and protected sites (maps and links to citations) can be found on the MAGIC website (see back page for details) and on the Proposals Map of your Local Plan. Information about landscape designations and protected sites can also be found (along with lots of other relevant facts and figures) in the National Character Areas profiles. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) website also contains information on tranquillity and dark skies.

Level of Designation	Designations primarily based on landscape quality and character	Other protected landscape features, sites and areas
International		Special Protection Area; Special Area of Conservation; World Heritage Site
National	National Park; Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; Heritage Coast	Site of Special Scientific Interest; Ancient woodland; National Nature Reserve; Scheduled Monument; Registered Historic Parks and Gardens; Registered Battlefield; Listed Building
Local	Areas of Great Landscape Value; Local Green Space*; Coastal Preservation Area	County/ Local Wildlife Site; Local Nature Reserve; Conservation Area; Tree Preservation Order; Important Hedgerows

*See page 9

View south-east from near Letterford. Dartmoor National Character Area; East Dartmoor Moorland Fringes Devon Character Area; Moorland Edge Slopes Landscape Character Type. Photo © Fiona Fyfe

How should the landscape evidence be used?

There are a number of ways in which landscape evidence can be used to inform Neighbourhood Plans:

- 1) Use the descriptions within existing Landscape Character Assessments and designations to **IDENTIFY LOCALLY-DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPE FEATURES, CHARACTERISTICS AND SPECIAL QUALITIES** which can be protected, managed or enhanced through the Neighbourhood Plan. These elements could relate to the natural environment (e.g. trees/ woodland), the cultural environment (e.g. distinctive building styles) and/or perceptual qualities of the landscape (e.g. views or tranquillity) [REFER TO DIAGRAM ON PAGE 3]. To find Landscape Character Assessment information relevant to your area visit the Devon County Council Landscape webpages or look directly under the Evidence Base of your Local Plan.
- 2) Use the 'Forces for change' or 'Management guidelines' sections within existing Landscape Character Assessments to **IDENTIFY LANDSCAPE ISSUES OF LOCAL CONCERN** which could be addressed through Neighbourhood Plan policies. For example:

Issue	Example of Policy Response
Are there pressures to develop on locally-distinctive green areas (e.g. traditional orchards, meadows, etc.) that are valued by the local community?	Propose designation as Local Green Space to safeguard the area against future development (see page 9).
Are modern developments of bland design which fail to reflect local distinctiveness in building styles and settlement patterns?	Identify distinctive building styles, materials, features, vernacular details and traditional settlement patterns in a local/ village design statement, and require developers to take account of this in the design of new development.
Would development within land allocated in the Local Plan obscure or detract from important views that contribute to local distinctiveness and the quality of a place?	Identify local iconic views from publicly-accessible locations and propose a policy requiring new development to respect these views.



River Dart near Dartmeet, Dartmoor National Character Area; Central Dartmoor Devon Character Area; Upland River Valleys Landscape Character Type. Photo © Fiona Fyfe

- 3) If you feel inspired to engage further with your local landscape, or you don't feel that the special qualities of your own area have been sufficiently described in existing landscape character assessments, you could **CONDUCT YOUR OWN ADDITIONAL RESEARCH**, or undertake a **NEIGHBOURHOOD-SCALE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT**. Advice Note 1 provides information on what should be included in such an assessment.

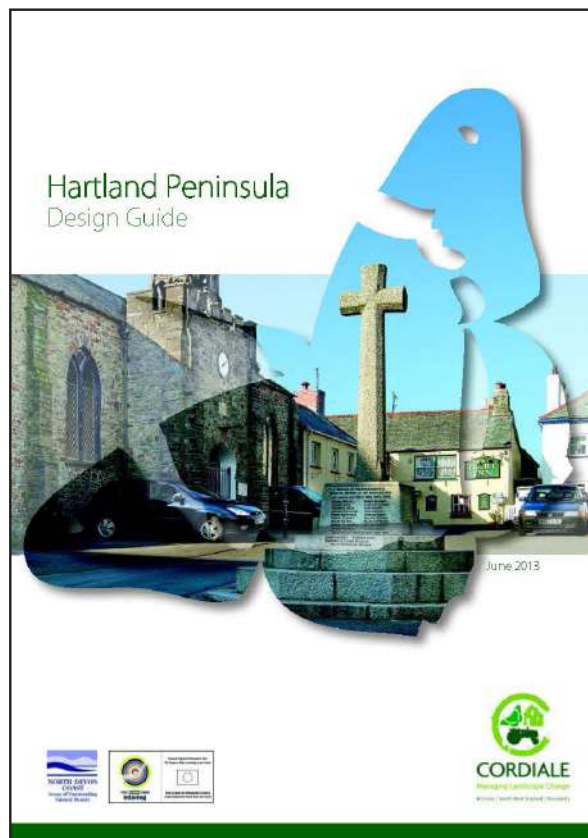


*Landscape Character Assessment in practice
Photo © Fiona Fyfe*

The Hartland Peninsula Design Guide is an example of a local planning tool. Published by North Devon AONB in 2013, it is intended to be used in conjunction with relevant Policies and Supplementary Planning Documents of the Torridge District Council Local Plan.

The document describes the landscape and settlement character of the Hartland Peninsula, and provides detailed design guidance on a range of topics including residential, agricultural, tourism and commercial developments. Accompanying illustrations show how to apply principles and objectives in practice.

It aims to increase appreciation of local characteristics which make the place special; provide guidance on conserving and enhancing the outstanding and distinctive qualities of the AONB; positively inform the creation of new/ adapted buildings, and strengthen strength of place and individuality.



How do I present landscape policies effectively within the Neighbourhood Plan?

Remember that there is no need to repeat existing general landscape policies already covered by a Local Plan.

The illustration below uses Devon hedgebanks as an example to show how the conservation of these distinctive landscape features could be addressed in a Neighbourhood Plan. However, in some parts of Devon, hedgebanks may be adequately protected under existing Local Plan policies, and there may be other landscape-based topics which are more relevant in that area.

Whatever your topic, it is very important that your Neighbourhood Plan contains clear and logical connections between landscape evidence and related policies.

EVIDENCE BASE
presenting the relevant information from landscape character assessments and landscape designations. This can go in the introduction of the Neighbourhood Plan, or in an Appendix.

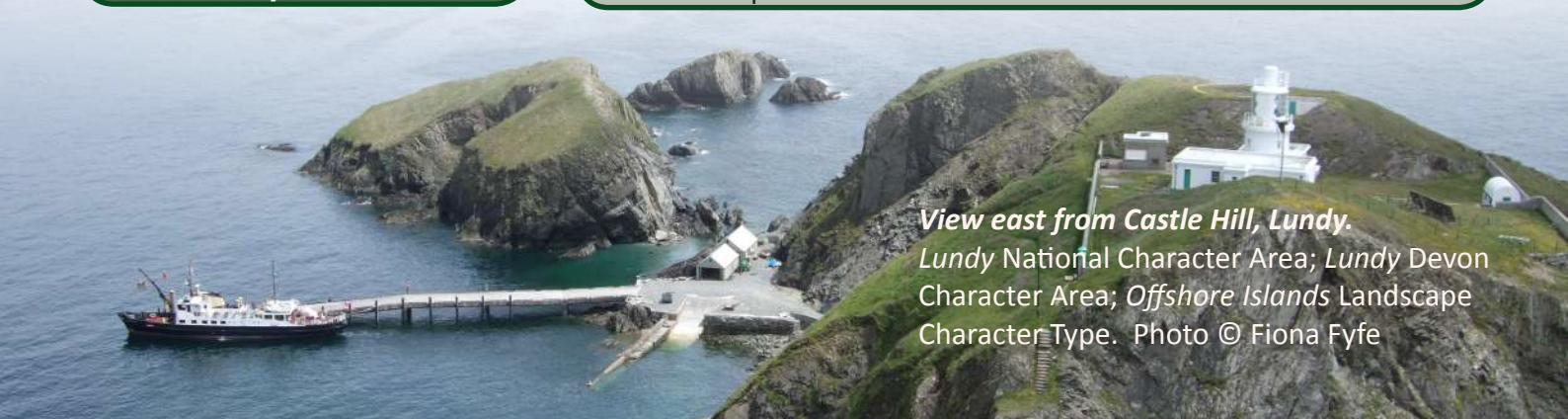
Traditional hedgebanks landscape element The Devon County Landscape Character Assessment identifies loss of traditional hedgebanks as being a force for change within our Devon Character Area (DCA X). The X District Landscape Assessment for LCT X (in which our Parish is located) also identifies this as an issue. Our own research indicates that approx. XXm of hedge banks have been lost within the Parish in the past 10 years. Some have collapsed after falling into disrepair, whilst others have been lost as a result of highway improvements and visibility splays for new developments.

LOCAL OBJECTIVES FOR LANDSCAPE ENHANCEMENT
based on the evidence base.

Objective 1: Hedgebanks
There will be no further loss of traditional hedgebanks within the Parish, and there will be a net increase in length of hedgebanks within the Parish. Both new and existing hedgebanks will be kept in good condition.

LANDSCAPE POLICIES
(to protect, manage and plan) to put these objectives into practice.

Protect hedgebanks during the development process, and ensure appropriate **management** and protection thereafter. **Plan** to identify and record locally important views and distinctive boundary features (e.g. hedgebanks and walls), vernacular styles and materials, and for these to be taken into account in the design of any new development within the Plan area.



View east from Castle Hill, Lundy. Lundy National Character Area; Lundy Devon Character Area; Offshore Islands Landscape Character Type. Photo © Fiona Fyfe

Local Green Space

The ability to identify Local Green Space is a power for Parish/ Town Councils and Neighbourhood Forums set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Local communities can now identify green areas of particular importance in order to protect them from development except in very special circumstances. Local Green Space designation does not apply to extensive tracts of land, and there are a number of qualifying criteria which must be met, including the special nature of the space in question (See NPPF paragraphs 76 and 77).

Landscape Character Assessments can be used to support a proposed Local Green Space through reference to its beauty, tranquillity, local distinctiveness etc. Further information is provided on the National Planning Policy Guidance website.

Local Green Spaces can be covered by Landscape Policies in a Neighbourhood Plan, for example: *Protect Local Green Space that is of particular importance to the Neighbourhood/ Parish and which fulfils key criteria as outlined in National Planning Policy Guidance.*

Things to remember

Neighbourhood Plans must have regard to the relevant statutory duties regarding landscape and the conservation of the natural environment (e.g. protection of landscape quality in AONBs and National Parks). The legislation is set out in various Acts and Regulations, which can be accessed through the Government Planning Portal (see link on back page). A summary of relevant legislation is also provided on the Devon County Council website.

Neighbourhood Plan policies must be in general conformity with strategic policies in a current Local Plan. When considering your Neighbourhood Plan, ask yourself: Do existing policies in the Local Plan adequately protect valued and distinctive local landscape features, characteristics and qualities? If the answer is 'no', would an additional policy in the Neighbourhood Plan help? The Devon County Council website contains a checklist showing how landscape should be taken into account in Neighbourhood Plans, and which is also used when Neighbourhood Plans are being assessed.

If your Neighbourhood Plan allocates sites, you will need to demonstrate that you have considered the sensitivity of the landscape to the proposed allocations, and any adverse visual impacts they may have (e.g. on sensitive views to/ from nationally-protected landscapes or heritage assets, including their settings). Any sensitive views should be mapped and recorded within the evidence base. Assessment of landscape and visual impacts requires a systematic and robust approach, as outlined in best-practice guidance from the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. This is normally undertaken by landscape professionals.

Sources of further information

Topic	Organisation	Website
National Planning Policy Guidance	HM Government	http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk
General advice on Neighbourhood Planning	HM Government	http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/neighbourhood-planning/
	Planning Advice Service	http://www.pas.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning
	Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)	http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/housing-and-planning/planning/item/2689-how-to-shape-where-you-live-a-guide-to-neighbourhood-planning
	Locality	http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Roadmap-worksheets-map-May-13.pdf
National Planning Policy Framework	HM Government	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2
Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment	Natural England	https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/396192/landscape-character-assessment.pdf
Implementing the European Landscape Convention	Natural England	http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6361194094919680?category=31019
National Landscape Character Area Profiles	Natural England	http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/587130
Mid Devon Town and Village Character Assessment	Mid Devon District Council	http://www.middevon.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10831
Devon Historic Landscape Characterisation	Devon County Council	http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/environment/historic_environment/landscapes/landscape-characterisation.htm
Landscape Designations (maps and links to text)	Defra (MAGIC)	http://magic.defra.gov.uk/
Protected Landscapes within Devon (websites contain additional planning guidance and related documents for these areas)	Exmoor National Park	http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk
	Dartmoor National Park	http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk
	Blackdown Hills AONB	http://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk
	East Devon AONB	http://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk
	North Devon Coast AONB	http://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk
	South Devon AONB	http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk
	Tamar Valley AONB	http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk
For more information and to find links to all LCAs throughout Devon go to http://www.devon.gov.uk/landscapecharacter		

View south near Rackenford. The Culm National Character Area; Witheridge and Rackenford Moors Landscape Character Area; Farmed Lowland Moorland and Culm Grassland Landscape Character Type. Photo © Fiona Fyfe