

DEFINITION

Landscapes are the environments, rural and urban, in which we live, work and play. They provide a wide range of ecosystem services, from water supply and floodwater retention to inspiration and a sense of place. Landscape is much more than a view, or a beautiful place: it is a coming together of geology, topography, hydrology, biodiversity human interaction with it – our historic marks as well our daily use of the land. Landscape is dynamic, evolving as human use and natural processes continue.

The European Landscape Convention, to which the UK is a signatory, defines landscape as “part of the land, as perceived by local people or visitors, which evolves through time as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings.”

If this chapter concentrates on visual character, it is because other areas of this plan tackle the issues relating to landscape’s building blocks (for example wildlife or built heritage).

DESIGNATIONS

Dorset AONB

The plan area is entirely within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated in 1959. Alongside National Parks, AONBs make up England’s finest landscapes and are protected in the national interest: both designations hold the same level of landscape protection.

AONBs and National Parks are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949). The purposes of the AONB designation were updated and confirmed by the Countryside Commission in 1991 as follows:

- The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The entirety of this plan should demonstrate that the purposes for designation have been recognised in the plan-making process and that its outcomes seek to conserve and enhance the area’s special qualities. These are the local definition of ‘natural beauty’ which also encompasses built heritage, and are described fully in the Dorset AONB Management plan.

In brief they are:

- Contrast and diversity of fine landscapes, including an largely undeveloped coastline and striking sequences of beautiful countryside unique in Britain.
- Wildlife of international and national significance
- The landscape is a ‘living textbook’ from which 8,000 years of human interactions can be read, alongside the Jurassic Coast revealing the story of 185 million years of Earth history.
- A rich legacy of cultural associations and a thriving creative sector. Novelists, poets, painters and many more artists have been inspired by this landscape over the years.

West Dorset Heritage Coast

While not strictly a designation, the Heritage Coast definition applies to part of the plan area, roughly to the south of the A35 west of the River Brit, and south of Burton Road to the East. An area around West Bay and the river is excluded.

Heritage Coasts are coastal areas, of both land and sea, which are of exceptional or very good scenic quality and largely undeveloped, which should be conserved to maintain those characteristics. They were first proposed in the 1970s; the West Dorset Heritage Coast being defined in 1984. In the 1970s, Government accepted the objectives for defined areas of Heritage Coast, it rejected any new statutory designation, preferring that the existing designation of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (which overlapped strongly with the proposed Heritage Coasts) should be used instead.

Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site

While not strictly a landscape designation, this World Heritage Site occupies most of the plan area's coastline from cliff top to mean low water. Only West Beach and West Bay Harbour are excluded. It is unique in being England's only natural world heritage site. It is internationally recognised for its geology and geomorphology, as well as its contribution to geological sciences. This is known as its Outstanding Universal Value.

Other Designations

The following are not landscape designations *per se*, but are areas of natural or semi-natural habitat which add to the area's rich natural beauty.

The plan area includes parts of the West Dorset Coast **Site of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI), notified and protected for its biodiversity and geology. Much of this SSSI is internationally recognised as a **Special Area for Conservation** (SAC) for those qualities.

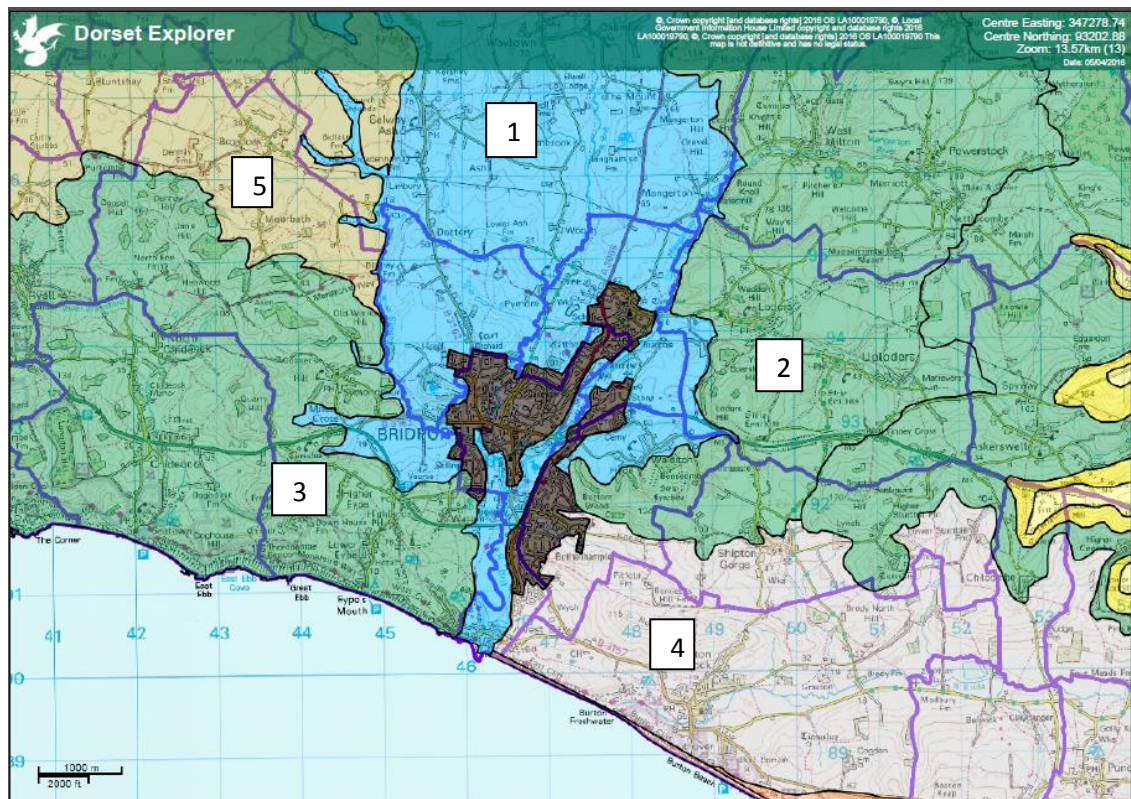
Adjoining the coast and out to sea is the Lyme Bay **candidate Marine Special Area for Conservation**, designated for its important marine habitats.

There are numerous locally-designated **Sites of Nature Conservation Interest** (SNCI) which are areas of habitats and species of local importance. While the sites themselves have no statutory protection they are recognised in the Local Plan.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Landscape is described in terms of character. The Plan area comprises parts of the following Landscape Character Areas (LCA) as described in the County, AONB and West Dorset assessments:

[the following management and planning guidelines are taken from the Dorset AONB LCA; highlighted are those most relevant in my mind to the Plan Area. Yellow as relevant to policy; green as most relevant to 'wishlist'. I'd propose that these are appended rather than being core introductory text, but are here in full for your info & discussion]



1. Brit Valley – undulating river valley

AONB Landscape guidelines: The overall management objective for the area should be to conserve the open floodplains, wet woodlands and damp meadows with enhancement and restoration of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Protect the surrounding open rural countryside from further intrusive development.

Planning guidelines

- Where appropriate, encourage the planting of small scale community woodlands to reduce the visual impact of the urban area, taking an integrated approach to increase access, nature conservation and greenspace provision.
- Conserve and enhance important open skylines.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.
- Protect verges along winding lanes and conserve characteristic finger posts and furniture.
- Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance local character and are sited away from open views and skylines. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.
- Promote the use of locally sourced stone in new developments. Any planting should reflect local character, using appropriate native species. Conserve the pattern of tight knit nucleated villages.
- Ensure farm diversification projects do not have a negative impact on local character.

Management guidelines

- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular pastoral fields and narrow lanes interspersed with irregular patches of woodland.
- Replant hedgerow sections where historical loss has taken place and plant new hedgerow trees.
- Enhance woodland management, particularly coppice woodlands with small scale planting of broadleaves along valley sides. Protect the character of important open skylines from future planting.

- Ensure conservation of low impact grassland.
- Remove poplars in open locations.
- Promote restoration of orchards and parkland landscapes.
- Encourage maintenance of species rich hedgerows, particularly along the valley floors and replant any gaps where necessary.
- Protect watercourses and associated wildlife from soil erosion and the effects of diffuse pollution.
- Consider screening views to intrusive agricultural buildings and settlement edges through planting new small scale broadleaved woodlands.

2. Powerstock Hills – wooded hills

3. Chideock Hills – wooded hills

AONB Landscape Guidelines: The overall objective for the Wooded Hills should be to conserve the intimate, undeveloped and pastoral appearance and protect the wooded character. Ongoing protection of hedgerows, rural lanes, small scale pastures, open skylines and settlement character are important considerations.

Planning guidelines

- Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance the local character and are sited away from open views and skylines. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.
- Promote the use of locally sourced stone in new developments. Any planting should reflect local character, using appropriate native species. Conserve the pattern of tight knit villages.
- Prevent further expansion of caravan parks in sensitive locations and promote enhanced management of existing sites.
- Maintain undeveloped character and resist intrusive developments on sensitive hillside locations.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape. Protect hedgebanks along winding lanes and conserve characteristic finger posts and furniture.
- Consider screening views to intrusive agricultural buildings and settlement edges through planting new small scale broadleaved woodlands.
- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular piecemeal enclosures, assarts and strip fields. Protect patterns of strip lynchets and their setting.

Management guidelines

- Conserve the ancient pattern of small irregular piecemeal enclosures, assarts and strip fields.
- Protect the wooded character and enhance woodland management with small scale planting of broadleaves along valley sides. Protect the character of important open skylines from future planting.
- Conserve and enhance permanent grassland and prevent loss to agricultural improvement and damage to wildlife and archaeological features. Promote low impact grassland management.
- Conserve existing orchards and promote new establishment.
- Encourage maintenance of species rich hedgerows and trees, particularly along the valley floors and replant any gaps where necessary. Resist use of post and wire.
- Manage the retreat of coastal landscapes and associated coastal corridor.
- Restore important patches of heathland through phased conifer felling and introduce grazing regimes.

4. Bride Valley – clay valley

AONB Landscape Guidelines: The overall objective should be to conserve and restore the intimate patterns of grasslands, woodlands, field boundaries and nucleated settlements.

Planning guidelines

- Encourage small scale broadleaved planting around existing settlements and farmsteads to reduce the visual impact of intrusive developments.
- Conserve the pattern of tight knit nucleated villages, use of local limestones and views of key landmarks such as church spires.
- Ensure farm diversification projects do not have a negative impact of local character.
- Ensure pylons, masts and other vertical elements are carefully sited and the number restricted to avoid visual clutter and interruption of important skylines.
- Promote the under-grounding of small powerlines in open, sensitive locations.
- Ensure new agricultural dwellings and barns enhance the local character and are sited away from open views and skylines. Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.
- Encourage the use of native planting in any landscape scheme associated with new development and consider removal of unsympathetic species, such as the leylandii screening hedges that stand out in the landscape.
- Conserve the intimate character of rural lanes and open character towards the coast.
- Remove excessive signage and seek alternatives to infrastructure associated with urban development and out of scale traffic management schemes.
- Reduce the impact of car parks and other visitor based development through sensitive signage and improved management.

Management guidelines

- Restore and enhance the condition of existing small broadleaved woodlands.
- Consider extending wet woodland on the valley floor, particularly around existing settlements and farmsteads.
- Encourage low impact grazing and conservation of permanent pastures including calcareous grassland and wet grasslands to protect wildlife and historic features.
- Enhance management of arable farmland to create a wildlife-rich habitat supporting farmland birds and arable flora. This will include retaining areas of fallow land, maintaining an unploughed margin around fields and the introduction of conservation headlands.
- Reduce the intensity of farming practices around important sensitive habitats.
- Encourage maintenance and restoration of boundaries, particularly dense hedgerows and banks along the valley floors and stonewalls towards the higher ground.
- Protect and enhance watercourses and associated wildlife from soil erosion and the effects of diffuse pollution.
- Encourage grazing on the chalk and limestone ridges to reduce scrub encroachment on important grasslands.
- Maintain and enhance the sweeping views of the coast.

5. Marshwood Vale – clay vale

AONB Landscape Guidelines: The overall objective is to conserve the patterns that contribute to the rural, tranquil landscape of winding lanes and small scattered settlements. Restore elements in decline such as the hedgerows and hedgerow trees and narrow corridors of wet woodlands.

Planning guidelines

- Conserve the pattern of small settlements and associated surrounding woodlands.
- Resist any development that would destroy the visual unity of the undeveloped vale, ensuring scale and materials enhance local character.
- Minimise small scale incremental change such as signage, fencing or improvements to the road network which could change the rural peaceful character of the landscape.

- Conserve the sense of rural tranquillity and views of surrounding summits.
- Consider screening views to intrusive agricultural buildings and small village edges through planting new small scale broadleaved woodlands.
- Conserve the character of rural roads and enhancement of hedge banks and traditional finger posts.
- Encourage the restoration of traditional barns and farm buildings.

Management guidelines

- Encourage maintenance and enhancement of boundaries, particularly along the vale and replant any gaps where necessary.
- Plant new hedgerow oaks at regular intervals.
- Restore stream side habitats and wet woodlands and consider extending wet woodland, particularly around existing settlements and farmsteads.
- Conserve and enhance management of neutral unimproved meadows and encourage restoration where appropriate.
- Protect watercourses and associated wildlife from soil erosion and the effects of diffuse pollution.
- Encourage restoration of traditional orchards.
- Restore and manage pollard trees.
- Protect the consistent pattern of regular enclosures and surviving strip and open fields.
- Restore remaining coppice woodlands around the vale edge.

KEY REFERENCES

Dorset AONB Management Plan 2014-2019

<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/the-dorset-aonb/management-plan>

World Heritage Management Plan 2014-2019

<http://jurassiccoast.org/documents-category/management-plan/>

Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidance

<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/landscapework/landscape-character>

West Dorset Landscape Character Assessment

<https://www.dorsetforyou.com/landscapecharacter/west>

POLICY STATEMENTS TO CONSIDER

- SPECIFIC TO VIEWS/OPEN SPACE

Protect important open spaces which provide separation between the plan area's settlements (or conserve & enhance important open spaces)

To be defined (and the extent should be mapped) but include Watton Hill, Allington Hill, Happy Island, Hyde parkland and associated fields (Walditch), green gap between West Road/West Allington & main village of Symondsburry, Asker's meadows,

Protect important views connecting town and countryside

Views to be defined & mapped for the plan, but include West St view towards Quarr Hill, East St towards Loders Hill, etc

- BUILT HERITAGE / TRANSPORT

Promote the use of traditional materials in construction projects

Promote tranquil rural roads (consider if 'quiet lanes' or blanket speed restrictions are appropriate: they're good for the road user's safety but can create degrading clutter)