



Quantock Hills Landscape Character Assessment



Contents:

Map 1: Quantock Hills Location	3
Map 2: Quantock Hills Landscape Character types	4
Wooded and Farmed Escarpments	5
Rolling Farmland and Settled Combes	11
Open Hills	17
Lowland Hills to Coast	23
Jurassic Coast	29
Heathland Hills and Combes	33
Agricultural Foothills	40
Agricultural Foothills to Coast	45
Forested Hills and Combes	50
Wooded Combes	60
Arable Plateau	63
Greater Quantock Study Area	68

Landscape Character Areas

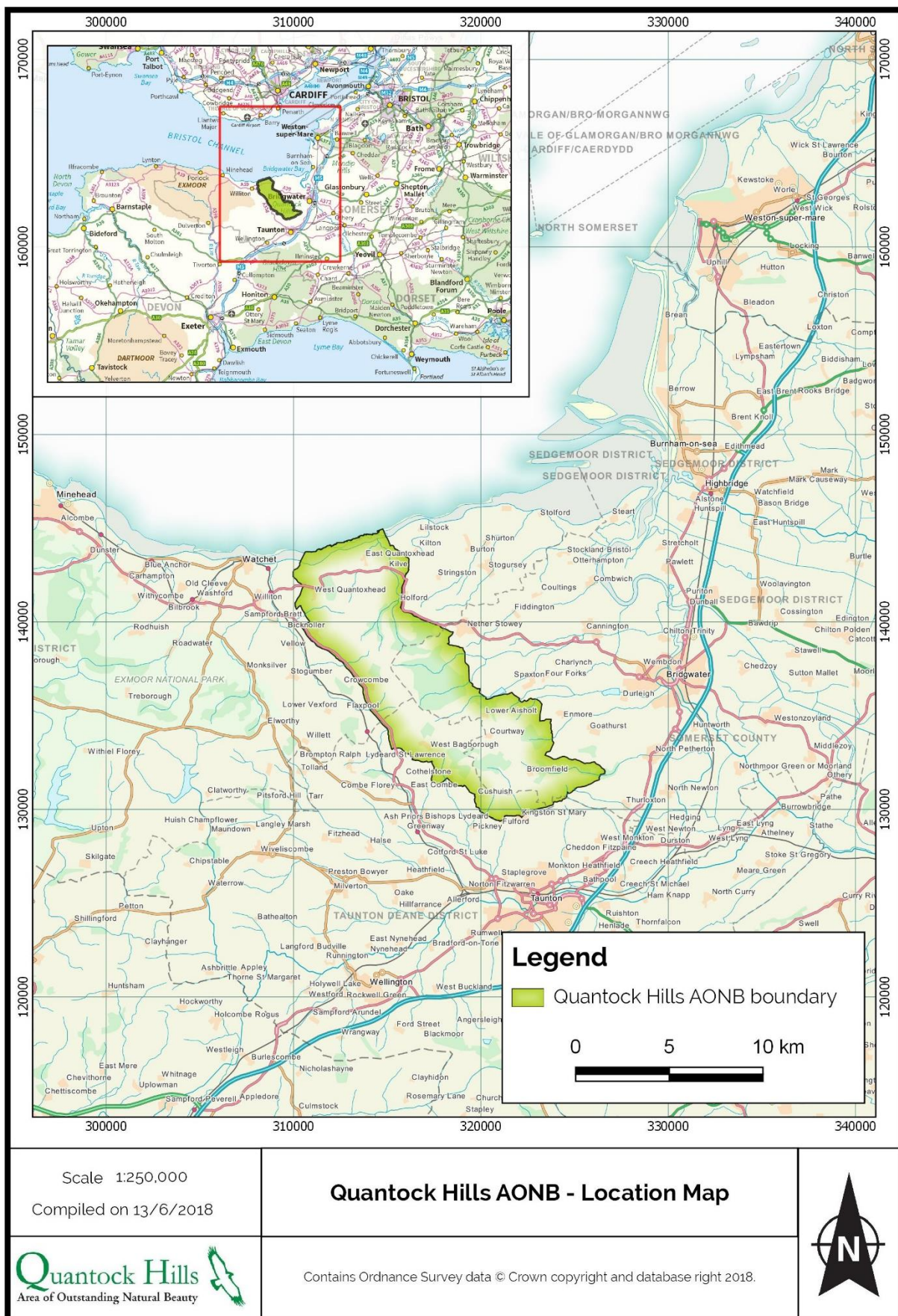
Landscape Character Areas are single unique areas which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. Each area has its own individual character and identity, even though it shares the same generic characteristics with other areas of the same type².

1 An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment (Natural England, 2014) p.54.

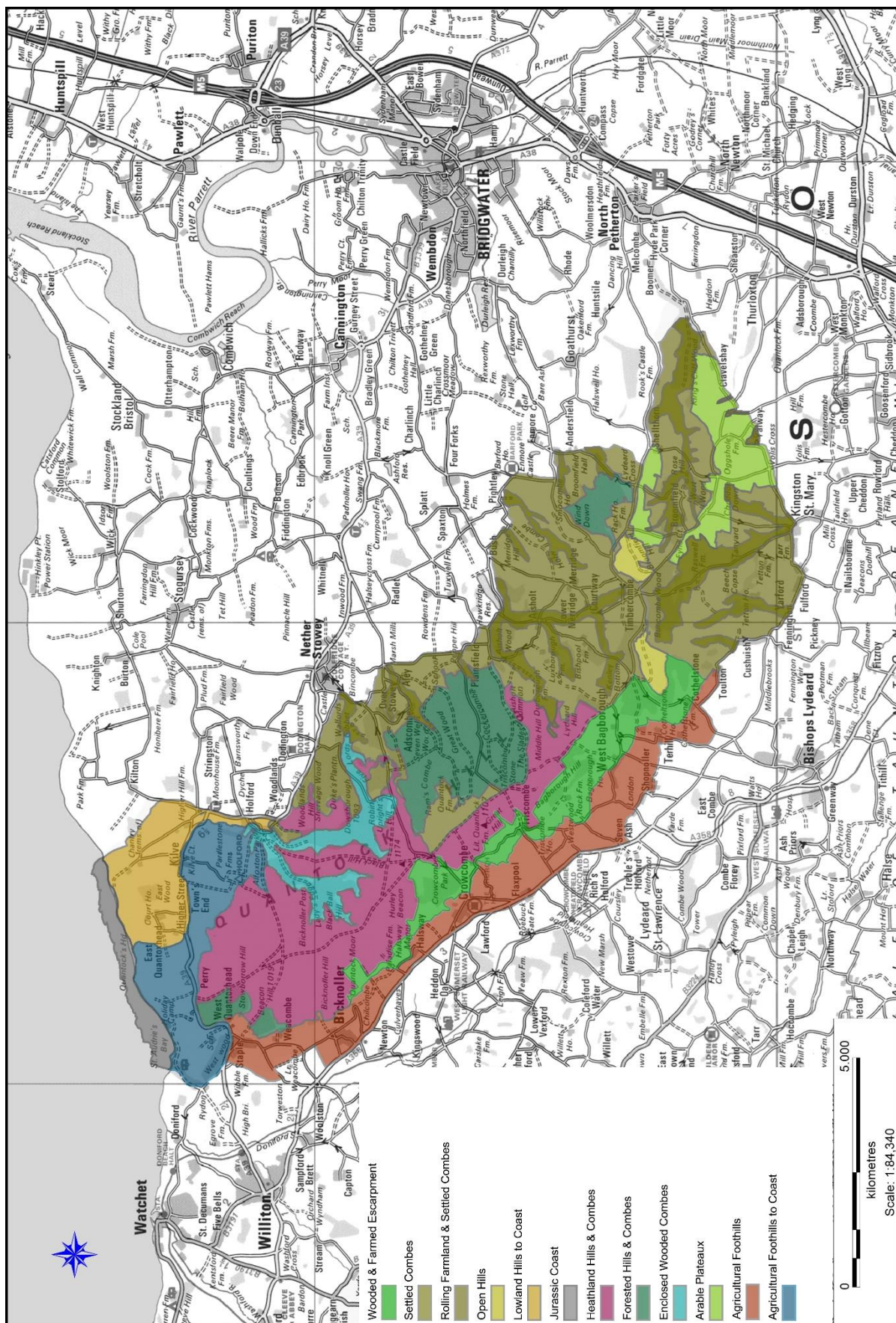
Author:	Emma-Jane Preece, Landscape Planning Officer
Check:	Chris Edwards, AONB Manager

Photos [Front cover]: Top: Rich Hill / Bottom: Adam Gerrard.

All mapping based on 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey mapping. **Map 1: Quantock Hills Location**

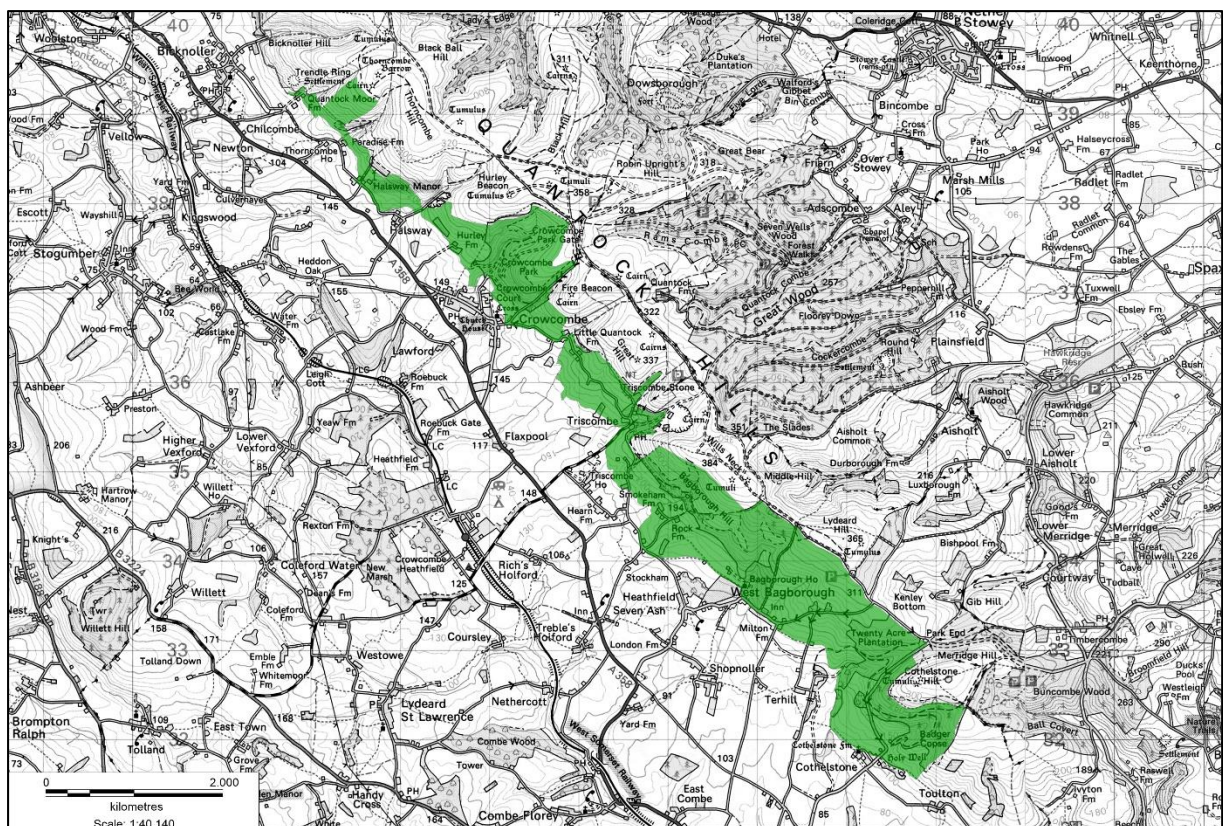


Map 2: Quantock Hills Landscape Character Types



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1. Wooded and Farmed Escarpment



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Occurring on the west side of the hills, the **Wooded and Farmed Escarpment** is easily identifiable - being the dramatic steep scarp face that separates the lower lying *Fringing Foothills* from the upland area of the *Heathland Hills and Combes*. It extends northwest to southeast from the edge of the village of Bicknoller to the edge of Cothelstone. For much of its length the scarp runs parallel to the A358.

Key Characteristics

- **Steep scarp slope** with areas cloaked in **significant amounts of dense woodland** – mixed, broadleaf and coniferous plantations.
- **Prominent open skyline with overgrown beech hedges.**
- **Dramatic landform** ascends from the adjacent, lower lying vale and, conversely, drops sharply away from areas of higher heathland.
- **Convoluting and sinuous scarp face** – streams having **carved combs into the slopes** - forming natural hollows where hamlets nestle.
- **Areas of pasture intersperse the wooded areas**, forming large areas of enclosed farmland within the dense woodland cover.
- **Significant variation in elevation** – from approximately 100m AOD reaching as high as 350m AOD in places.
- Underlain by a surface **geology of Trentishoe Grits.**
- A significant amount of the scarp **forms part of the Quantocks SSSI.**
- Settlement within the landscape is characterised by **scattered farmsteads and large country houses/estates.** Villages are focussed at the base of the slope.
- **Open areas provide extensive views** across the low-lying vale and beyond.

Description

The **Wooded and Farmed Escarpment** is a dramatic and instantly recognisable landscape defined by a steep scarp slope cut by a series of narrow steep combs and cloaked with large areas of woodland cover.

Agricultural land (predominantly hedged pasture) intersperses the woodland on some of the lower slopes - opening up the scarp to provide extensive views out across the Vale of Taunton Deane and beyond. Running parallel to, and set back from, the A358 the scarp is clearly visible from this main arterial route between Taunton and Minehead and is an impressive, eye-catching feature.

This Escarpment includes a number of historic parkland landscapes, linked to large country houses estates, that extend up and into the steeper slopes.

There are three areas of significant woodland cover across the scarp face:

- a) Bagborough Plantation - covering the upper slopes north of Bagborough House, wrapping around the bottom of Bagborough Hill and extending northwards to cover the tight valley sides at Triscombe.
- b) Crowcombe Park – mixed woodland that extends northeast through the combes above Crowcombe Court and meeting with the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape between Hurley Beacon and Crowcombe Park Gate.
- c) The western perimeter of Cothelstone Hill - flanked by a connected series of woodlands - Twenty Acre Plantation, Old Plantation and Paradise. Forming part of the Cothelstone Estate this is managed as commercial woodland.

From approximately 100m AOD, the scarp reaches a maximum height of around 350m AOD where it meets with the *Heathland Hills and Combes* surrounding the heathland surrounding the prominent trig point at Wills Neck. At Bagborough Hill, the scarp is separated from the summit by overgrown beech hedge banks. These are visual references to eighteenth and nineteenth parliamentary enclosures that historically took in upper sections of the scarp. The strong lines of now mature beech stands are a distinctive feature; forming characteristic silhouettes on the skyline. Whilst the beech hedges remain, much of the land has reverted back to rough heath and scrub - having a transitional or heathland fringe character.

Whilst it is the most notable land cover across the scarp, woodland does not provide blanket coverage, being instead interspersed with enclosed agricultural land that is predominantly given over to pasture - the steepness of the slope being unfavourable to mechanisation. The field pattern is typically characterised by small units of irregular shape that range in age (in terms of their enclosure) but date as far back to pre-17th century. These farmed areas – and the odd farmhouse - typically occur in the mid to lower reaches of the scarp with the woodland generally clinging to the upper slopes. The open, farmed areas offer commanding views across the vale below.

The scarp is cut by a series of short, narrow and steep combes, such as at Grub Bottom and Paradise. It is at the foot of these combes that settlement is typically found sheltering at the base of the scarp - as reflected in the village names of Triscombe and Crowcombe. Highways within this landscape are secondary roads and lanes that typically cut across the contours; creating dramatic ascents and descents between the low lying agricultural land and the main Quantock ridge beyond.

The *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment* is closely linked with large country or Manor houses that sit and shelter at the base of the slope – Cothelstone Manor, Crowcombe Court, Halsway Manor for example. These houses are located within the adjacent *Fringing Foothills* landscape but their historic landscape connection with the lower slopes of the scarp is evident – Medieval parks being part of the landscape at Cothelstone, Crowcombe Court and West Bagborough.

The land cover of mixed woodland, scrub and heathland found across the scarp forms the south eastern extent of The Quantocks SSSI – one of the most extensive areas of semi-natural habitat in South West England that contains a wide variety of habitats including dry dwarf-shrub heath, acidic flushes, ancient semi-natural broadleaved woodland and dense scrub.

The Wooded Escarpment is a striking and visually vulnerable landscape. It is flanked at its foot by the apron of land defined as *Fringing Foothills*, forming the northern extent of the Doniford Valley. The physical geography of this escarpment is impressive and provides a

notable sense of containment and a dramatic, steadfast backdrop to the Vale of Taunton Deane.

The previously worked quarry at Triscombe is evident in distant views – forming a large red scar in the landscape.

Evaluation

A landscape of **strong** character – the distinctive landform of steep scarp slope and open ridgeline, the dense woodland cover shrouding much of the slope, hedge-enclosed pasture, lines of mature beech stands, tight combs, and large country estates at the base of the slope all combine to form a spectacular landscape of many special qualities.

Overall the landscape appears to be in **moderate to good condition**.

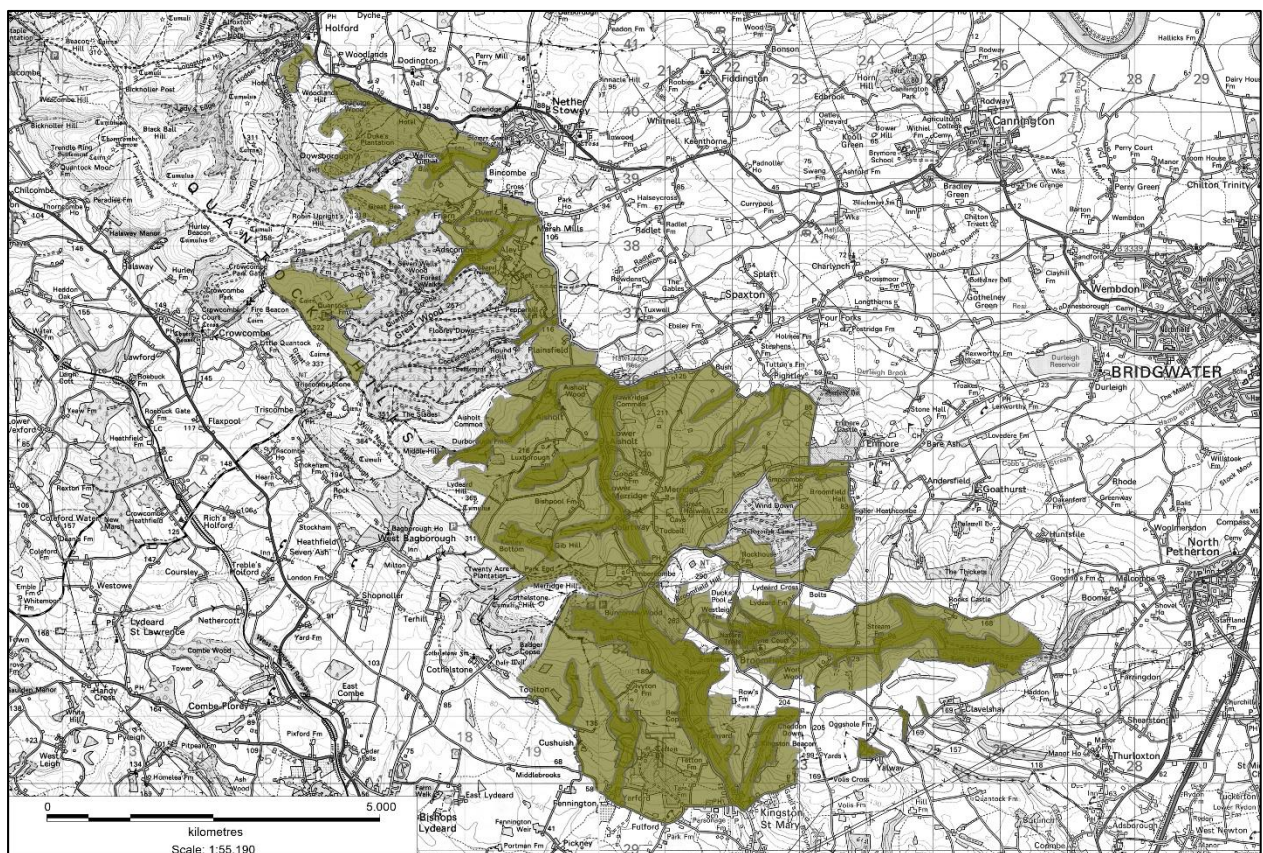
Landscape Issues

- Potential development of vertical structures such as communication masts and turbines which would break the largely uninterrupted crest of the scarp.
- Development on the open areas of the scarp (including expansion of existing farms) – additional structures (even small scale) in these visually vulnerable agricultural areas could be eye catching and visually detracting.
- Loss or decline of features of the historic parkland landscapes.
- Potential adverse change to landscape character and quality of views due to development in the lower slopes of the Vale of Taunton Deane.
- Over-maturity and loss of prominent beech trees.
- Future management of scrubby transitional heath on upper slopes.
- Features and elements associated with lower-lying landscapes (such as development in the foothills) spilling up and onto the scarp having the potential to dilute the dramatic juxtaposition and the striking contrast in character.
- Potential future quarrying at Triscombe Quarry and/or uncertainty over alternative future uses of the site.

Landscape Character Vision

The vision is to maintain the balance and simplicity of the woodland interspersed by areas of hedged pasture and the parkland landscapes of the country estates. The landscape should continue to be largely free of development (to protect the seamless, largely uninterrupted quality of the dramatic scarp face) and the open, undeveloped ridgeline should be fiercely protected.

2. Rolling Farmland and Settled Combes



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This is the landscape type covering the largest area within the Quantock Hills. Just one character area extends in the south from the edge of Toulton, as far as Kings Cliff in the east before continuing northwards to the edge of the village of Holford. The previous Landscape Character Assessment of the Quantock Hills (1997) separated the Rolling Hills from the Enclosed Combes but this current assessment has judged that these landscapes are so entwined – by the repeated patterns of their landform – that they should be viewed as one type of landscape. The interconnectedness of the hills and combes is perhaps best illustrated in north-easterly views across the landscape from Birches Corner.

Key Characteristics

- A landscape of strongly articulated **rounded hills and long low ridges** cut by **steeply incised combes**.
- **Underlying geology of slates, siltstones and sandstones** of the Devonian period.
- **Areas of woodland – broadleaved and coniferous occur** on the hills, spilling over and clothing the sides of the combes.
- Agricultural landscape given over to a mix of **pasture and arable cropping (the combes predominantly under pasture)** bounded by **mixed native hedgerows**.
- **Series of narrow lanes**, often sunken, dipping in and out of the combes and over the hills – **connecting the dispersed hamlets and villages**.
- **Small to medium field units** (the combes retaining an older, smaller field pattern of medieval and earlier enclosures).
- **Red sandstone villages, hamlets and scattered farms often** occur within the shelter of the combes.
- **Country house estates**.

Description

The younger, softer rocks of the Ilfracombe Slate and Morte Slates underlying this landscape are dissected by combes draining eastwards (forming part of the River Parrett catchment system) and southwards (forming part of the River Tone Catchment system). The combes

are typically tight with steep valley sides and often wooded particularly on the steeper upper valley sides. At Kings Cliff much of the combe woodland has been converted to coniferous plantation but there is still a large broadleaf component. The valley running north of Kingston St Mary is notably larger and more open than most of the combes and here, the transition from valley sides to farmed hills is subtle. In places the combes extend as far as the *Arable Plateaux* landscape and here, the influence of arable farming spilling over into the tops of the combes is clearly discernible.

The shelter afforded by the combes, easy access and historic utilisation of the water source has meant a long history of settlement - with houses and farms, sometimes small villages, located along the steep combe sides. Properties are typically red sandstone and painted stone (more recently render) and stone walls are common. Aisholt is characterised by the repeated use of pink paint or wash and by a number of thatched cottages. Sunken lanes and hedgebanks – often stone faced - create a sense of enclosure in the combes and this is further exaggerated where the tree canopies meet at the top to create a tunnel over the road.

Whilst the combes appear to stop at the boundary of the protected landscape, in reality they transcend this line and extend into the countryside beyond – this is perhaps most clearly illustrated at Kings Cliff. The combes are characterised predominantly by hedged pastures created by medieval and earlier enclosures.

On ascent, the combes seamlessly merge with the series of soft rounded hills and long, low ridges that create a hugely expressive, complex, organic landform of rolling hills. Whilst the previous landscape assessment described the rolling hills as predominantly having fields of permanent pasture, it is clear that the last 20 years has seen an increase in arable production; improvements in mechanisation allowing the fertile soils to be exploited for cropping. Pasture is still predominant but the continuity of a rolling green landscape that hugs and reveals the drama of the landform is now more mixed – ploughed red soils and a variety of crops creating a landscape of different textures and colour. This is particularly true of some of the more open ridges and where this landscape meets within the markedly arable plateaux to the north and south of Broomfield.

Some areas of higher ground have been converted to coniferous woodland plantation and are notable features that stand out in this landscape – Muchcare, Hawkridge Wood and the Great Wood for example (the latter not to be confused with the much larger plantation forest of the same name).

Fields are typically bounded by mixed species hedgerows. But, between the heathland landscape of Lydeard Hill and the forested landscape of Wind Down, there are a number of field boundaries characterised by stone faced beech hedge banks (of the Parliamentary Enclosures Act). These have overgrown to form large beech trees – their impressive canopy, knotted and gnarled root systems making for impressive sculptural features in the landscape.

The *Rolling Hills and Combes* landscape is crossed by a number of narrow, winding lanes that dip in and out of the combes and up over the hills. The lanes are often sunken and bounded by hedgerows (sometimes banked) and connect the scattered farmsteads and settlements that are dispersed across the landscape – Merridge, Broomfield , Over Stowey and Aisholt for example. The lanes are regularly used as a cut through across the hills to avoid congested roads in Bridgwater and Taunton.

Much of this landscape type is characterised by large Country Houses. The houses, associated cottages and gatehouses and surrounding parkland combine to create a notable sense of grand design e.g. Tetton House and Quantock Lodge with Hestercombe House and Halswell House sitting just beyond the AONB boundary.

Hilltops and ridges provide extensive views – beyond the AONB across the Severn Estuary for example and to the lower lying landscape of the Vale of Taunton Deane.

Evaluation

This is a landscape of **strong** character – the repeating pattern of steep, enclosed combes with picturesque red sandstone villages opening out to dramatic rounded hills and ridges make for quintessential Quantock country.

The condition of the landscape is variable but overall is considered to be **moderate** – the valleys are judged to be in better condition as they have been less affected by issues such as agricultural intensification which has led to a weakening of the landscape pattern through insensitive management of landscape features.

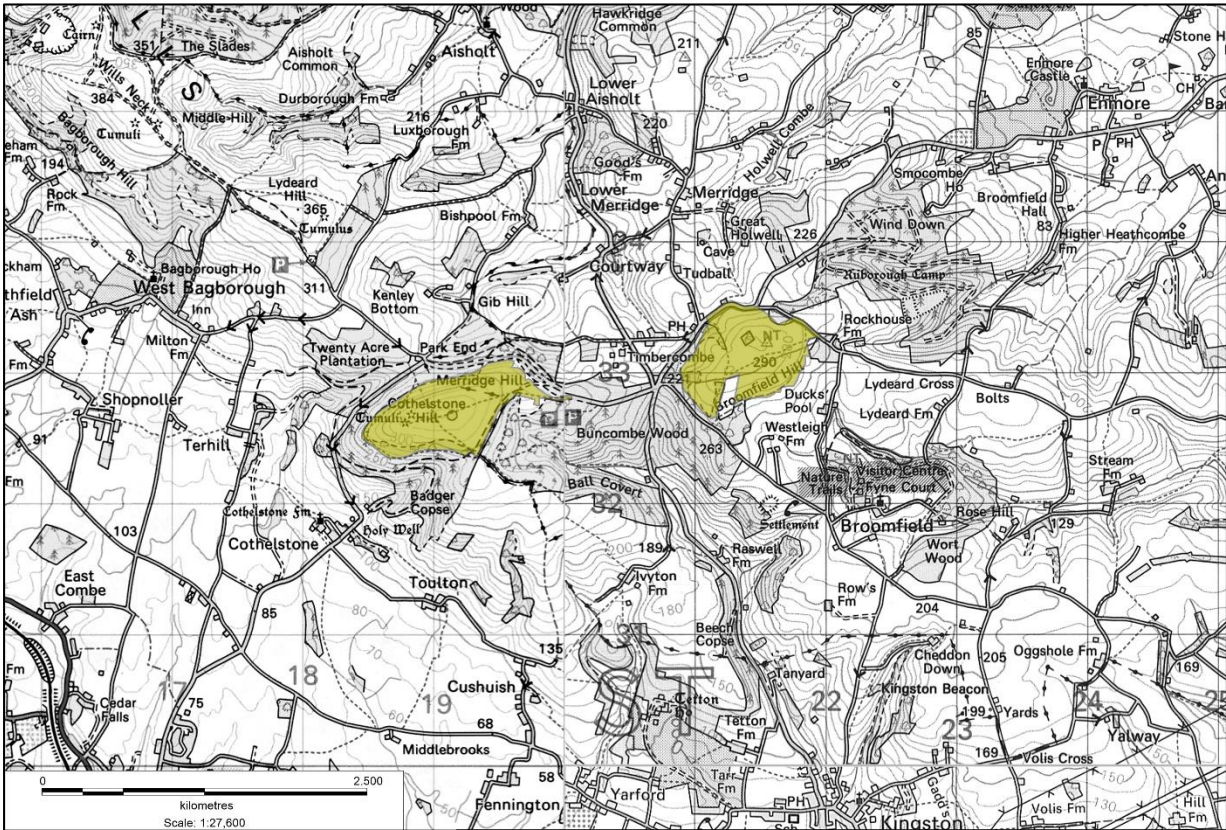
Landscape Issues

- Increasing traffic pressures (affecting tranquillity and pace) and insensitive treatment of highways e.g. kerbing, road markings and widening rural lanes detract from the rural character of the landscape.
- Insensitive development within the landscape – where inappropriate design and materials are not responding to local vernacular or landscape context.
- Localised loss of features such as beech trees and traditional orchards.
- Decline of features stone-faced hedgebanks such as at Aisholt.
- Visually vulnerable landscape – highly sensitive for example to poorly sited development (of any kind) or to insensitively designed coniferous plantation.
- Weakening of the field pattern - historic removal of hedgerow, poor management and excessive flailing of the surviving hedgerow network.
- Agricultural intensification (increased arable production) changing the pastoral character of the landscape.
- Vulnerable to potential future proposals for tall structures in the landscape such as turbines and communication masts.
- Pressures to convert traditional agricultural buildings in the landscape with schemes often not sympathetic to the agricultural history of the building and leading to changes in character through overt domestication of the landscape.

Landscape Character Vision

The vision is for a viable agricultural landscape that enhances the special qualities of its farmed history – supporting the restoration, enhancement and conservation of special features that truly define the landscape pattern, such as hedgerows, stone-face banks, sunken lanes etc. There is a need to ensure the quality of views (both internally and beyond this landscape) is not threatened by inappropriate development. Settlement within the landscape should remain sparse and dispersed with any new development responding to the sensitivities of the landform; respecting historic settlement pattern and local vernacular.

3. Open Hills



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Separate and distinct from the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape type, the **Open Hills** landscape type is a rounded hilltop, rich in archaeological interest and predominantly defined by a ground cover of unimproved grassland, interspersed with some areas of heather, bracken and low level scrub and surrounded by developing and more mature broadleaved woodland. Views are extensive and varied across surrounding lower-lying landscapes – incorporating both inland and coastal scenery. This is a landscape with a strong sense of exposure to the elements but it is not remote being a focus for recreation and offering views of obvious human activity in the landscape.

There are two Character Areas of the **Open Hills** landscape type. Although occurring relatively close to each other, these are distinct and geographically separate hills occurring within southern end of the Quantocks. Key Characteristics of the landscape are outlined below followed by a separate description for each of the two Character Areas.

Key Characteristics

- Pronounced and clearly defined **rounded open hill landscape** occurring between **260m and 332m AOD**.
- **Land cover of unimproved grassland** with areas of **bracken, dense scrub** and some **areas of heather**.
- Underlain by **Devonian geology of Leighland Slates** – comprising **slates, siltstones and sandstones** giving rise to shallow **acidic soils** exposing rock in places.
- **Expansive views** (some panoramic) – encompassing **varied inland and coastal scenery**, stretching as far as Wales.
- **Ringed successively by scrub, broadleaved woodland** and farmland at the base of the hills – the woodland restricting views out from the lower slopes.
- Significant areas of **open access land**, much used by the general public for recreation.
- **Rich archaeological history**.

Description

A: Cothelstone Hill

One of the most visited sites within the Quantock Hills, Cothelstone Hill sits between the *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment* landscape (that rises above and forms part of the Cothelstone Estate) and the *Rolling Farmland with Settled Combes*. It stands alone as a distinct rounded hill.

Cothelstone Hill is a small character area – a hilltop summit occurring between 270m and 332m AOD. Cothelstone Hill, along with Broomfield Hill, is isolated from the expansive *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape and although sharing many similar physical characteristics, does not have the same perceptual qualities – being smaller and more contained, notably less remote and not of the same strong heathland character.

This area of open access land, occurring above the *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment*, is managed by the Quantock Hills AONB Service on behalf of South West Heritage Trust. Cothelstone Hill is a much used and valued public resource. A number of public footpaths and bridleways make this a popular area for walkers, dog walkers and horse riders.

The hill has an open, rounded character with a simple land cover – unimproved grassland with areas of bracken cover and some ground-covering scrub. There is a scattering of trees and bushes on the open hill - typically hawthorn and some small oaks. Developing scrub and broadleaved woodland have established on the lower slopes and this reduces the sense of openness of the hills and limits views to the other hilltop landscapes. In spring, large areas of Cothelstone Hill are carpeted with bluebells.

One of the main characteristics of this landscape is the extensive and varied panoramic views. To the south and west there are views across the Vale of Taunton Deane to the Blackdown Hills AONB, to the Brendon Hills and wider landscape of southeast Exmoor as well as to the coast at Minehead. Looking north, there are long vistas of the Quantock Hills AONB landscape, onto Bridgwater and out to the Bristol Channel (with the islands of Steep Holm and Flat Holm clearly in view) and across to Wales and also north to the Mendip Hills.

The geometric, block structures of the reactors at Hinkley Point nuclear power station are prominent features within views.

The popularity of Cothelstone Hill has led to the provision of small scale infrastructure at the entrance to the hill. They include a car park, interpretation board, picnic tables, benches, a dog waste bin, information/signage and fencing – evoking a more of a ‘country park’ character than elsewhere in the AONB.

At the highest point of the hill, stands a clump of beech trees, contained within a partially banked circular platform. The trees are affectionately referred to as The Seven Sisters. Many have been lost over the years with only three of the original trees remaining (younger trees now making up the group). The Seven Sisters create a strong landmark and can be picked out from considerable distance – distinguishing Cothelstone Hill over a wide area. In the shade of the Seven Sisters, the small herd of Exmoor ponies grazing the hill are often found. These ponies graze the hill all year round – helping to manage the levels of scrub encroachment.

B. Broomfield Hill

Broomfield Hill is located just a short distance from Cothelstone Hill and comprises two interconnected areas. The larger area to the north (with a smaller field extending south) is all enclosed and owned by the National Trust. Previously given over to arable cropping, this northern part of the hill is now a herb-rich neutral to acid grassland managed through grazing and some rotational coppicing of gorse patches – keeping it open in character and creating a highly exposed landscape. There are very clear views to the north – across the *Rolling Farmland and Settled Combes* landscape and beyond the AONB boundary to the lower lying farmland where the River Parrett winds its course through the landscape to the Bristol Channel. The nuclear power station at Hinkley Point is prominent on the coastline. Views to the *Forested Hills and Combes* and the southern reaches of the *Heathland Hills and Coombes* are also clear. There is a trig point at 290m AOD and a water tower is positioned at the same height but is discreet being screened.

The southern area which is known as 'Broomfield Hill Common' is the unenclosed side of the hill. Although the same landscape type as Cothelstone Hill, a different approach to management and no grazing programme means that bracken, scrub and young woodland has more of an influence on the open hilltop – particularly in the west. There is a more varied land cover creating a less open character, with views out being more restricted. Much of this open hilltop is a sea of blue in the spring with vast swathes of bluebells. As with Cothelstone Hill, the lower reaches of the slopes are well wooded.

Broomfield Hill is very popular with dog walkers but whilst there is a recreational focus it is more discreet and unassuming in its character compared with Cothelstone Hill - with no car parking, interpretation boards or other facilities.

Evaluation

Both Cothelstone Hill and Broomfield Hill have a **strong** landscape character – the rounded open hill tops, the strong sense of elevation and exposure to the elements, the varied and far reaching views together create a distinctive landscape character overall.

The **visible condition** of both character areas is judged to be **moderate to good**.

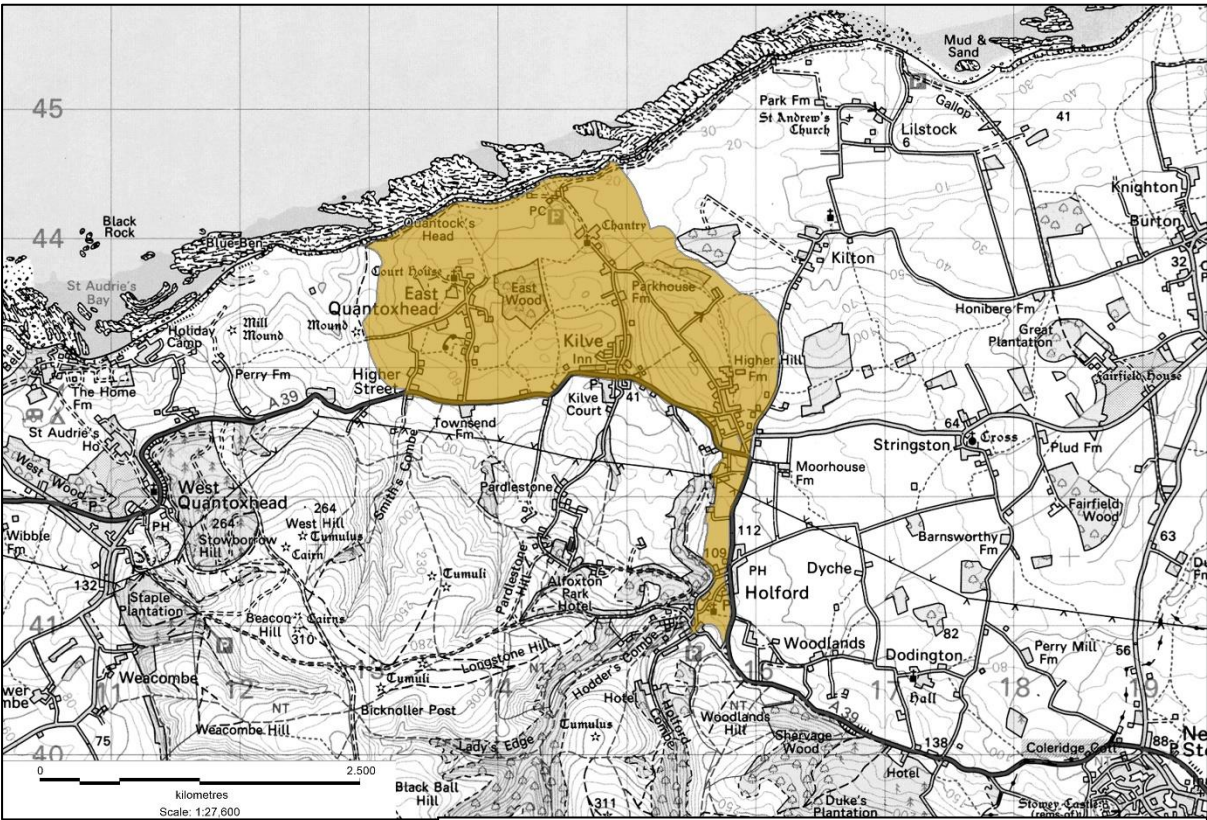
Landscape Issues

- Reduced physical condition of the landscape due to high recreational pressure. W3ED
- Visual impacts and changes to the character of the landscape due to provision of facilities to meet pressures of recreational use e.g. car parking, signage, dog bins, picnic tables – creating a country park character.
- Scrubbing up, particularly on the lower slopes (due to under grazing) leading to loss of openness and enclosing views.
- Balancing desire to keep the open character of the hilltops whilst not compromising wildlife value e.g. through loss of ground covering scrub.
- Threats to high visual amenity of the landscape through potentially significant development and/or land use change in wider agricultural landscape.
- Near-future loss of visually distinctive and locally-important landmark feature of the Seven Sisters beech clump.

Landscape Character Vision

The landscape character vision for the *Open Hills* is that the simple, open and exposed nature of the hilltops be the pervading character into the future - offering an accessible 'wilder' environment amongst the surrounding enclosed farmland, with high quality and varied views across the wider Quantock Hills and beyond.

4. Lowland Hills to Coast



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The **Lowland Hills to Coast** landscape is located in the north of the Quantock Hills. It broadly extends from Holford in the south, wrapping around to Kilve and East Quantoxhead and extending northwards until it abuts the Jurassic coast.

Key Characteristics

- Sitting immediately beyond the Quantock foothills, **this is a lower-lying farmed landscape, extending down to the cliffs** of the Jurassic Coast.
- Visually interesting and **varied landform comprising undulating terrain, rounded hilltops and areas of flat land**.
- **Elevation varies from 15m AOD** at the top of the low coastal cliffs, **reaching as high as 120m** at the base of the Quantock foothills.
- Predominantly **underlain by a surface geology of Blue Lias** (limestone mudstones and shales) repeatedly **seen in buildings and structures**.
- An overtly rural landscape defined by a **land use of arable cultivation and pasture** with fields bound by elm hedges close to the coast.
- **Varied views – inland to the dramatic heathland hills as well as out to sea**; taking in views of the Welsh Coastline and beyond.
- Kilve and East Quantoxhead are **picturesque villages** with a **timeless appeal**.
- Strong sense of **exposure to the elements** at the top of the cliffs.
- **Views of Hinkley Point power station** create a jarring interface between rural and industrial land uses.
- **Broadleaved woodland blocks and small copses** combine a well treed landscape in places.

Description

The **Lowland Hills to Coast** is somewhat transitional in character – bearing many characteristics of the higher *Fringing Foothills to Coast* landscape (with which its boundary is contiguous) yet taking on its own characteristics as it begins to merge with the coast and takes on the influence of the surrounding lowlands. This landscape type extends eastwards

– well beyond the AONB boundary; forming part of a larger area that eventually merges with the Somerset Levels and Moors.

This is a landscape with a striking variety of landscape scene. On one hand there is an immediate and strong sense of connection in views to the inland *Heathland Hills and Combes* and the *Enclosed Wooded Combes* landscapes and, on the other, a strong bias in views to the coastal landscape of Bridgwater Bay and across to Wales.

The ***Lowland Hills to Coast*** landscape has a complex topography with notable rounded hilltops giving way to undulating and flat terrain. This variation in landform is reflected in place names; lanes and farms for example being pre-fixed with ‘higher’ and ‘lower’. To the east and West of Kilve the landform is clearly rounded and hilly – reaching heights of 90m AOD at Hilltop Lane yet falling sharply away to the south of Kilve and around Holford where the land becomes very open and only gently sloping - having the appearance of being flat. Here arable cultivation is the dominant land use – extending out beyond the AONB boundary and providing open views across to the nuclear power station at Hinkley Point.

As the ***Lowland Hills to Coast*** shares characteristics in common with the adjacent foothills, the boundary between the two landscapes is less visually tangible than other character boundaries within the AONB. The A39 provides a sensible southern boundary where a break in the slope broadly coincides with the line of underlying mudstones and siltstones of the Blue Anchor Formation beyond which the Blue Lias formation (limestone interspersed with mudstones and shales) takes over from red sandstone as the surface geology. The change in underlying geology is apparent above ground – the familiarity of red sandstone buildings giving way to the grey and weathered-yellow of Blue Lias. The use of both stones together is also a feature of this landscape – at East Quantoxhead for example it is seen in boundary walls, dwellings and agricultural buildings (along with feature ammonite fossils). Building materials are more mixed than in other parts of the AONB - blue and red stone, render, thatch and slate and clay tiles occurring all together.

The key settlements within this landscape are linear villages strewn out along the roads – Kilve, East Quantoxhead and Holford are the small centres of population with a regular

scattering of farmsteads making up the majority of other built form. Holford sits further inland than the other two villages and is split across two landscapes – the lower lying dwellings falling within this landscape type whilst those extending up into Holford and Hodders Combe sit within the *Enclosed Wooded Combes* landscape type.

The Medieval settlements Kilve and East Quantoxhead are the settlements closest to the coast. Kilve is focussed on the A39 with the village also extending north along Sea Lane towards the coast. The impressive 18th century country house of Kilve Court lies to the south of the A39. East Quantoxhead comprises houses and farms along Frog Street and Higher Street – the two lanes converging at the Court House where there are rows of picturesque cottages. This imposing Grade I listed manor house occupies a prominent position on the edge of series of small hills that fall away to the flatter land extending out to the coast. The Court House, the village duck pond, the small church of St Mary's and the row of thatched cottages make for a very pleasing rural scene and there is a sense of a landscape with a slow pace of change – a rural backwater that has a timeless quality. This is also true of the landscape surrounding St Mary's church and the ruins of the early 14th Century Chantry at Kilve where there is a similar understated, quaint charm to the place.

East Quantoxhead and Kilve Pill are linked by a circular public right of way which along some of its length follows the top edge of the low cliffs. Here views along the rugged Jurassic Coast are breathtaking and the sense of exposure to the elements is strong. The South Wales coastline and to the Mendip Hills are easily identifiable. An old lime kiln ruin on the coast at East Quantoxhead is a clue to the lime burning industry common to the Quantocks Hills – the siting here on the coast because limestone was shipped across the channel from Wales.

The interesting brick and cast iron structure of the oil retort at Kilve Pill is a curiosity in the landscape and dates back to the 1920s when it was discovered that the shale beds of the North Somerset Coast were rich in oil. The retort was erected to convert shale to oil. This venture did not succeed but the structure survives as a visual link to this interesting point in Quantock history.

Parking provision and tea rooms at Kilve and East Quantoxhead reflect the appeal of the area to visitors. Kilve is the busier of the two - the low cliffs dropping away to create a gentle descent to the beach which is popular for rock pooling and fossil hunting (see Jurassic Coast).

This agricultural landscape is a mix of arable and pasture with arable production more widespread and field sizes accommodating crops becoming noticeably larger on the flatter land towards the coast. Fields are enclosed – bounded by mixed native species hedgerows with elm occurring close to the coast and blackthorn hedgerows occurring near the cliff tops. This landscape type as a whole (if you consider it stretching beyond the AONB boundary) is characterised by numerous woodland blocks and copses – as seen for example between the AONB boundary and the villages of Stogursey and Burton. A significant broadleaved ancient woodland (East Wood) occurs to the east of East Quantoxhead whilst smaller copses and swathes occur around the Court House and to the east of Sea Lane (Kilve) respectively. Although not making up a large proportion of the landscape, the repeated pattern of woodland combined with hedgerows (often not laid or cut) creates an impression of a well-treed landscape.

The A39 is the only main road in this landscape – it is a busy route between the M5, Bridgwater and seaside town of Minehead and on to Exmoor and the North Devon coast. Its influence both aurally and visually is felt in this very rural landscape.

There is a strong sense that this is a very distinct part of the Quantock Hills – it is perhaps the notable variation in building materials and the dramatic change from the lush greens, reds and purples of the inland scenery to the browns, greys and blues of the coast that makes this part of the Quantocks unique.

Evaluation

This is a landscape of **strong** character - higher hills giving way to undulating lower lying land that falls away to meet the dramatically exposed coastline. With the exception of the busy A39 cutting its route through the countryside, this is an overtly rural place with a strong connection to both the inland and coastal landscapes. The villages of Kilve and East

Quantoxhead evoke a sense of a rich history that is inextricably linked to the surrounding farmed landscape.

The visible **condition** of this landscape is judged to be **moderate**.

Landscape Issues

- Increasing influence of the A39 in the landscape e.g. highways improvements, signage and overall levels of use.
- Potential change to rural backwater character through increasing levels of recreation and tourism.
- Loss of field boundaries through more intensive agricultural practise.
- Adverse visual impacts of Hinkley Point in some views.
- Decline of historic features in the landscape e.g. The Chantry at Kilve lime kilns.

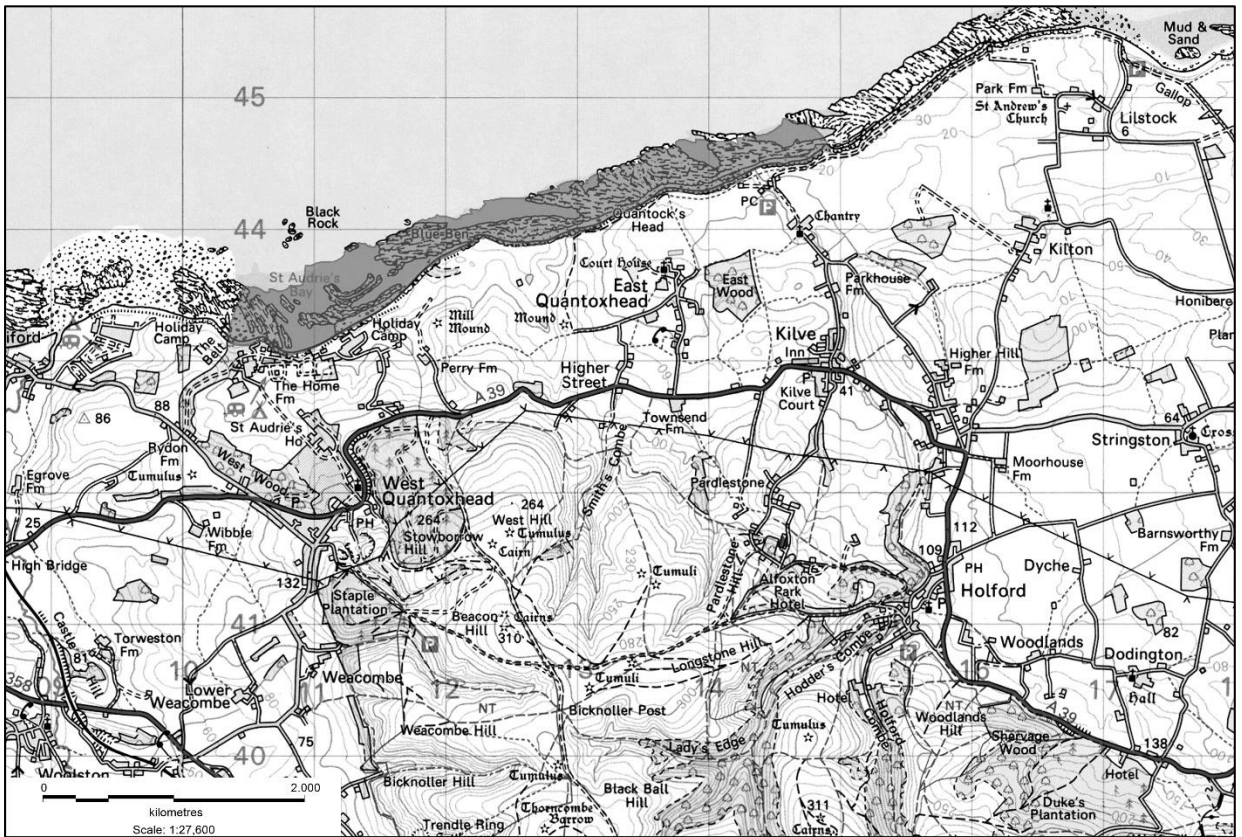
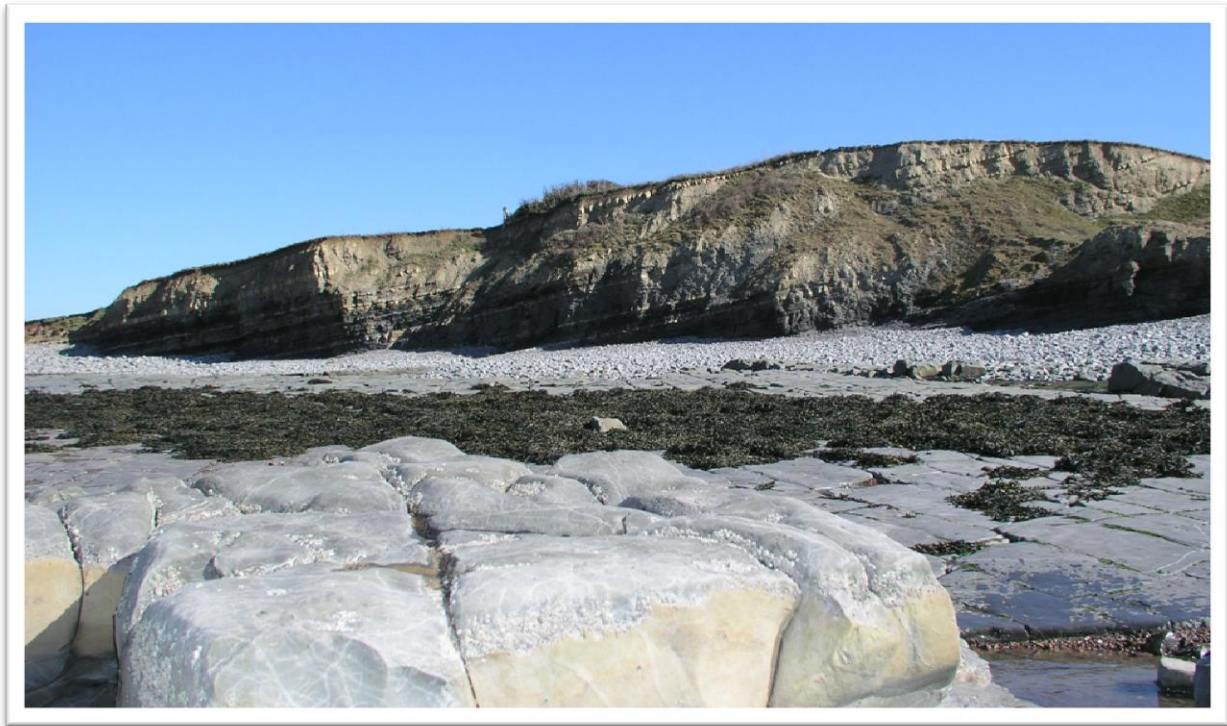
Landscape Character Vision

Overall the vision for this landscape is to **conserve** the landscape's slow-pace, viable agricultural landscape, rural backwater character and the rich history of the coastal villages and estates.

Future Management Direction (example)

There is a need to focus on landscape **enhancement** through **restoring** key landscape and archaeological features that have such a strong influence on landscape pattern, overall identity and sense of place. There is a need to sensitively manage levels of recreation and tourism to ensure the character of the landscape that people come to enjoy is not lost by the desire to increase the number and variety of visitor facilities.

5. Jurassic Coast



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Forming the northern edge of the designated landscape, the Jurassic Coast of the Quantock Hills is the foreshore landscape or intertidal zone that extends from St Audries Bay in the west to Kilve Pill in the east. At low tide the coast is a combination spectacular rocky terraces and sandy beach. This landscape type extends beyond the boundaries of the AONB – as far west as Blue Anchor and beyond Lilstock in the east.

Key Characteristics

- **Intertidal landscape** of staggered blue lias **limestone terraces** and a **sandy bay** exposed at low tide.
- Backed by **low cliffs that reveal layers of limestone** interspersed with shales.
- **Rugged, windswept and exposed** landscape with a strong sense of vulnerability to the power of the tide.
- Many **fossilised animal remains** particularly ammonites which can clearly be identified.
- Popular with visitors – **rock pooling** and **fossil hunting**.
- Strong visual connection across the Bristol to the South Wales coastline.
- **Geological SSSI** with a cliff section near East Quantoxhead identified as a world reference point in the Geological timescale.

Description

Forming part of the Jurassic Coast in Somerset that stretches from Blue Anchor to the east of the Lilstock, the section of this coastline falling within the AONB could be described as a spectacle landscape. The low cliffs at the back of the beach with their clearly identifiable layers of yellow and grey limestone (stacked with alternating, darker layers of shale) are no less dramatic on repeat visits to this rugged landscape that has an almost other-worldly appearance.

At low tide the seas reveal a breathtaking view of limestone in a series of complex sweeping terraces (with sand becoming more dominant to the west at St Audries Bay) providing not only dramatic scenery but also opportunities for recreation with rockpools and fossils

aplenty (the characteristic spiral of ammonites often seen). Views across the channel clearly reveal the South Wales coastline.

Access to the beach is via steps close to East Quantoxhead (cutting down the face of the cliffs) or straight off the green at Kilve Pill. Parking provision at Kilve Pill makes this a busy part of the coastline with some visitors coming for the sole purpose of accessing the beach and others for walking the coast path at the top of the low cliff (see *Lowland Hills to Coast*) or playing on the green. Although this is one of the busier locations within the AONB, tourism here is low-key and informal in nature. The appeal of the sandy bay at St Audries has led to the development of tourism but the development associated with this is focussed on the hills above the cliffs (see *Fringing Foothills to Coast*).

This is not just a visually striking environment but one recognised as being scientifically important – designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its nationally significant geological exposures and fossils.

This is a rugged, windswept place and the crumbling cliffs evoke a strong sense that this is a changing landscape; hugely vulnerable to the erosive powers of the sea.

Evaluation

This is a landscape of **strong** character – the striking cliffs and sweeping limestone terraces and beaches make for an instantly recognisable and dramatic landscape that has an overriding wild physical character. The visible **condition** of this landscape is judged to be **moderate**.

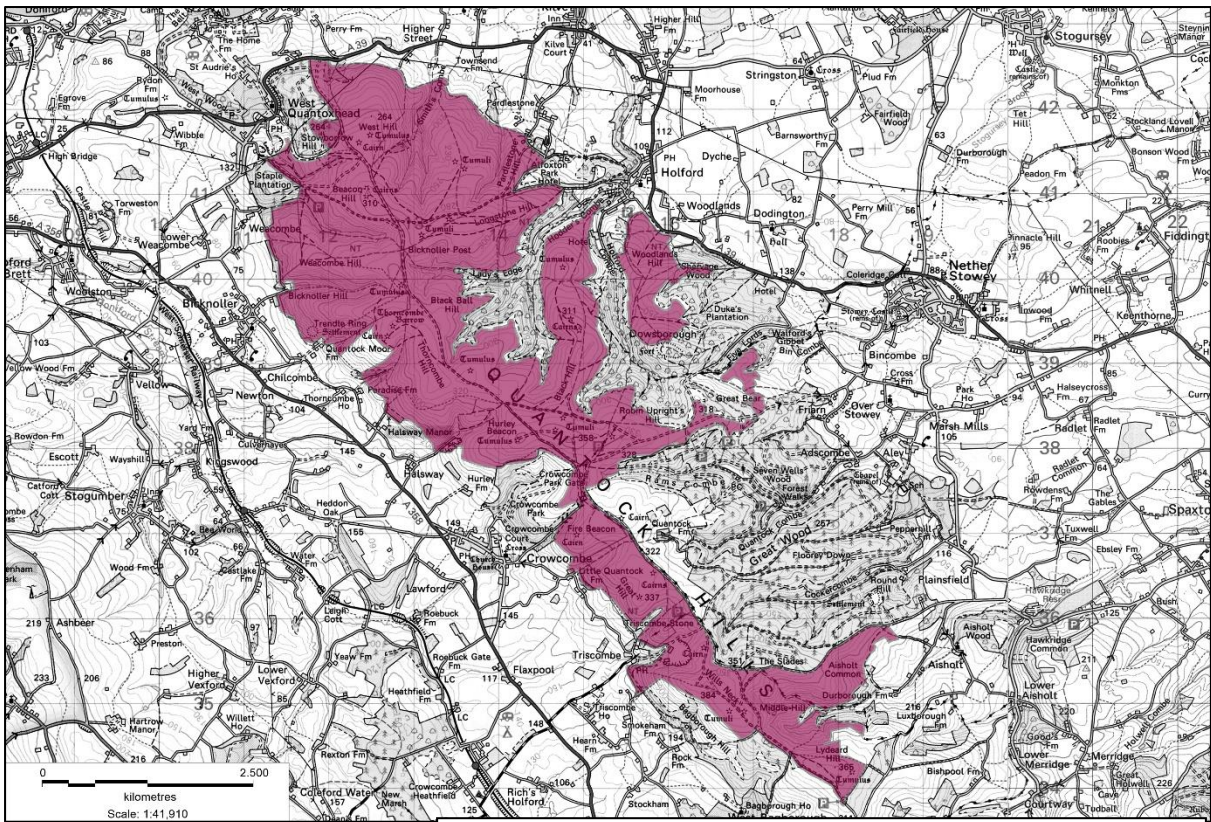
Landscape Issues

- Potential for landscape character change with tourism and recreation pressures.
- Continually eroding cliff face as well as damage caused by fossil hunting.
- Potential for increased infrastructure along the coastal cliffs to allow access to the beaches along the extended South West Coast Path.
- Litter washing up onto the beaches.

Landscape Character Vision

A rugged, wild and exposed coastline where human activity in the landscape does not detract from the physical spectacle of the place.

6. Heathland Hills and Combes



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The **Heathland Hills and Combes** landscape type is characterised by one continuous area that extends from West Hill in the north, extending out to Thorncombe Hill and Woodlands Hill (west and east respectively), narrowing to a pinch point at Crowcombe Park Gate before extending to the southeast across Great Hill and on to Aisholt Common and Lydeard Hill at its southernmost point.

Key Characteristics

- **Open exposed** landscape defined by **heathland land cover** (with areas of heather (ling, bell heather and cross-leaved heath), gorse, grasses, bracken, bilberry and scrub).
- **Dramatic landform** of an **undulating plateau dissected by open combes** (carved from the watercourses of issuing springs) creating a strongly articulated landscape of **sinuous hills, ridges and valleys**.
- Typically **occurring above 300m AOD** (reaching 385m AOD at the landscape's highest point) and falling away to as low as 150m AOD as the combes meet with the surrounding foothills.
- The heathland is underlain by **sandstone, shales, and siltstones** of the Trentishoe Grits (of Devonian period) that form part of the Hangman Sandstone formation.
- **Rare upland and lowland heath habitats** - much designated as a SSSI. Together with the adjacent upland oak woods, this landscape forms one of the most extensive areas of semi-natural habitat in the south west.
- **Archaeologically rich** – including Bronze Age ritual landscapes, Iron Age fortifications and former medieval enclosures.
- **Perceived as a large scale landscape** that engenders a sense of **physical challenge** and **remoteness** although never far from settlement and human activity.
- **Extensive views** (many panoramic) both inland and to the coast.
- Predominantly **managed as common land** with low levels of grazing stock including sheep and ponies.
- **Wild red deer** are synonymous with this landscape.
- **Beech hedgebanks**, created by Parliamentary enclosure, are now linear strips of mature beech trees and are a distinctive boundary feature in places.

- A landscape of mixed recreational use – **walking, cycling and country pursuits.**

Description

The large scale, seasonally heather-clad **Heathland Hills and Combes** is an inspirational, awe-inspiring landscape that is widely cited throughout history in literature and art. Forming the bulk of the AONB upland, this is perhaps the most distinctive and best recognised landscape of the Quantock Hills – for many the open heathy hilltops and combes *are* the Quantocks and are prized by walkers, horse riders, mountain bikers and those engaged in country pursuits e.g. stag hunting. The heathland landscape is also much used by those who wish to purely sit and enjoy the many and varied views. The seasonal displays of deep purple heather and bright yellow gorse create dramatic colour and rich textures that are a spectacle from within the landscape and in views towards it.

Springs issuing in this upland plateau have carved a series of plunging, open combes through the landscape – such as Vinny Combe, Weacombe and Bicknoller Combe. These radiate out from the hilltop summits into the foothills; dissecting the plateau to create a visually complex but repeating landform of broad rounded hills, narrow ridges and valleys. These sinuous and connected landforms, combined with their elevation, allow for far-reaching views - across surrounding low-lying farmland and beyond; taking in seascape views (across the Severn Estuary to Wales) and inland views - the Mendip Hills, the Blackdown Hills, and Exmoor being immediately apparent such that there is a strong visual and terrestrial link to other upland landscapes.

Elevation of the hills and combes varies from as high as 385m AOD (Wills Neck – the highest point within the AONB) to 150m AOD where the combes meet with the surrounding farmland. Climbing up the combes from the foothills, the upland plateau reveals itself dramatically – opening up to offer broad vistas and panoramic views. Looking down through the Combes, views are channelled and this has historically been exploited to make the most of the fine scenery afforded – at Vinny Combe for example the church of St Etheldreda was sited on a rise at the foot of the Combe for the church to be prominent feature with the sea beyond.

The open and elevated hills, their exposure to the elements and the wide skies evoke a perceived sense of expanse, solitude and physical challenge which is more akin to much larger moorland landscapes. This apparent sense of remoteness and isolation is not the reality – the central plateau of the heathland being rarely more than a kilometre from the enclosed and settled farmland of the foothills below. This is nonetheless an exposed landscape whose relationship with the elements directly influences its character – changing from seemingly comfortable and safe on a clear sunny day to a hostile, even threatening, environment when the fog, rain or snow comes down.

It is the heathland plateau that forms the distinctive open Quantock ridgeline and this has stayed free from modern infrastructure such as turbines or masts – the unbroken ridge providing an unchanging and constant backdrop to people's lives. The perceived 'wild' character of the heathland is strikingly juxtaposed to the tamed, managed farmland of the surrounding low-lying hinterland.

Red deer are synonymous with this landscape – the roaring of the males during the rutting season at dawn and dusk heightening the sense of 'closeness to nature' that is central to the human experience of the heathland. The heathland is rich in wildlife.

Although perceptually a natural landscape, the summits and combes would have been cloaked with forest, however bronze-age barrows and other sites requiring visibility show that large hilltop areas were cleared in prehistoric times. The landscape is now managed as heathland with woodland now restricted to some combes and the eastern hill flanks. Most of the area is common land - grazed by commoners' ponies and sheep (and cattle) and often referred to as 'the common'. Grazing alone is not sufficient to manage and sustain the heathland cover and swaling (heather burning) in the winter months is a very visual reminder of the requirement for ongoing heathland management through human intervention. The removal of extensive areas of invasive rhododendron in recent years has given a renewed appreciation for the landform revealed through vegetation clearance. This is an archaeologically-rich landscape and the presence of barrows and cairns in the landscape are clear references to its importance as a historic ritual landscape during the

Bronze Age from about 4000 years ago. Other earthworks are also evident, such as the Iron-age enclosure of Trendle Ring. The archaeology of the landscape is explored more fully below.

There is a strong visual link between the heathland landscapes and the *Forested Hills and Combes* – the dense mixed woodland of Great Wood and Seven Wells Wood visible on the horizon from much of the more southerly heathland landscape. The forest edges are a dense dark contrast to the open undulating heath and the juxtaposition of the two landscapes illustrate that, whilst sharing the same physical conditions, differences in land use and land management have created two visually very different landscape types. Views from the heathland of the expanding urban areas surrounding the Quantock Hills – Taunton, Minehead and Bridgwater - and to notable structures such as the currently expanding nuclear power station at Hinkley Point are clear reminders that the Quantock Hills is a little-populated island landscape – removed from, yet vulnerable to, the effects of concentrated human activity.

Beech hedgebanks and mature beech trees are distinctive features on the southern edge of the plateau (the old drove road an obvious example where the stone-faced banks bursting at the seams by mature beech standards are noteworthy features in the landscape as well as important historic references) and occasional clumps of Scots Pine draw the eye within a landscape of largely ground-hugging vegetation.

There is little in the way of large infrastructural features in the *Open Heathland* landscape although pylon lines crossing at West Hill do detract from the essentially uninterrupted landscape. Car parks or parking areas and the infrastructure associated with these e.g. interpretation boards, gated entrances and parking control measures such as bollards are marked features in the landscape and, whilst making the landscape more accessible, the sense of ‘country park’ character in places is evident – diluting to some degree the seemingly natural and rugged environment for which the Heathland is recognised and valued.

Evaluation

A landscape of **strong** character – the distinctive heather-clad hills, ridges and combes are recognised as synonymous with the Quantock Hills and, for many, as the defining landscape of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The moorland character, the perceived sense of remoteness, the rich archaeological history, the wild red deer and the strong visual relationship with the surrounding lowland landscapes makes this a highly characteristic, instantly recognisable landscape.

In 2009, 71% of the main Quantock SSSI failed to meet the Government condition target of ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ but there has been a significant turnaround with recent surveys (up to July 2013) showing 92% of the SSSI meeting these targets. The **visible condition** of the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape type is **variable** with some areas in good condition and others in a poorer state. Areas of recreational pressure are evident – erosion around car parks for example as well as tracks cut across the plateau are very apparent in places.

Landscape Issues

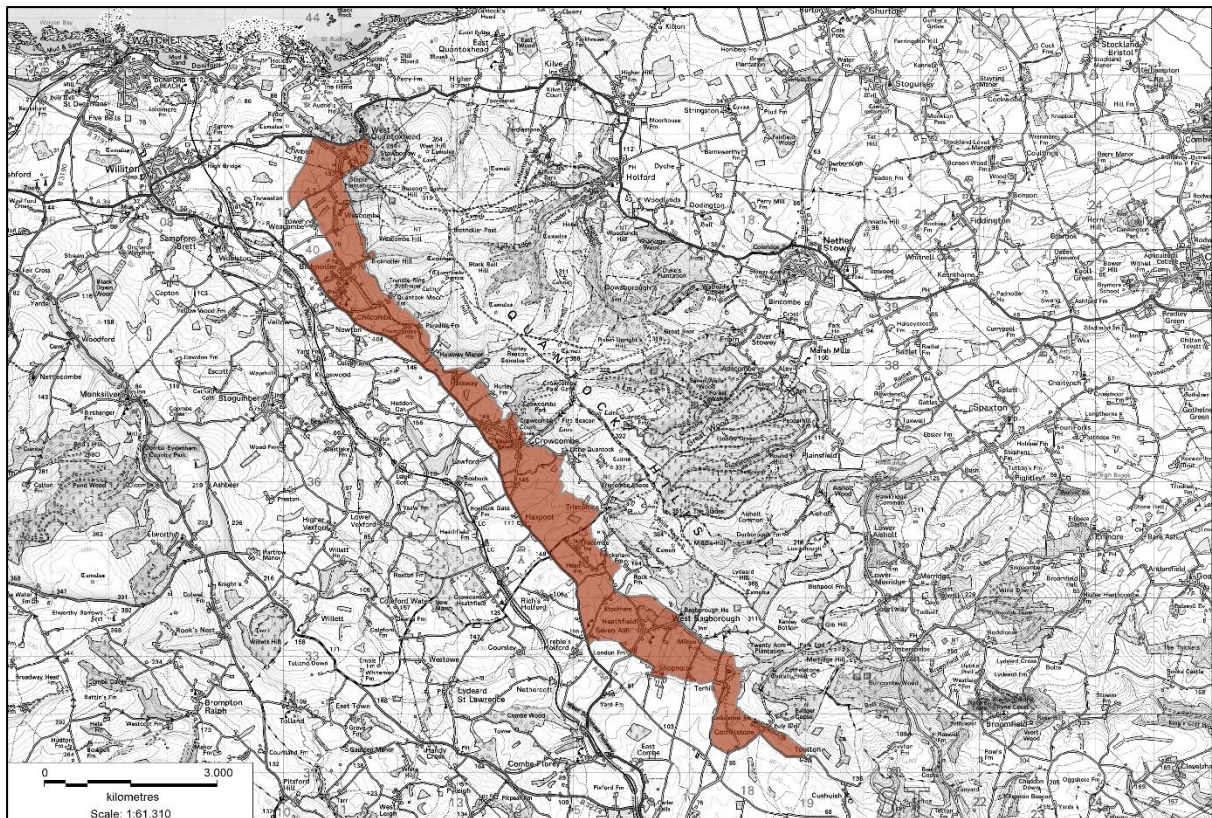
- Declining physical condition of the landscape due to recreational pressure e.g. damage to heathland vegetation, archaeological features and scarring of the landscape where tracks are cut by off road vehicles, walkers, horse and bike riders.
- Reduced sense of wilderness character due to provision of facilities to meet pressures of recreational use e.g. car parking, interpretation boards, bollards.
- Scrubbing up of some areas of the common due to undergrazing – reducing open nature of the hills and changing the character of the landscape in both close and long distance views.
- Threats to high visual amenity of the landscape (and remote character) through potentially significant development and/or land use change in wider lowland landscape.
- Loss of mature beech trees and hedgebanks.
- Potential for development of communication infrastructure/masts on the main ridge; threatening the open nature of the hilltop.

- Reduced sense of wilderness due to increasing amounts of development in lower lying landscapes.
- Reduced sense of wilderness due to use of the hills for recreation.

Landscape Character Vision

The vision for the *Heathland Hills and Combes* is to ensure the characteristically wild and seemingly remote moorland character remains inherent to this large scale landscape and that it's wildlife-rich, simple, open and exposed character pervades into the future to continue to offer awe-inspiring, big scale views across the wider Quantock landscape and beyond.

7. Agricultural Foothills



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Forming the upper reaches of one side of the Doniford Valley, this landscape is characterised by an apron of enclosed agricultural land, predominantly pasture, that sits beneath the pronounced *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment* and the *Heathland Hills and Combes*. The evenly sloping ground is undulating; cut by a number of small streams that issue from steep combes above, running through this landscape and forming shallow depressions across the farmland.

A distinction is made between this landscape and that of the *Fringing Farmed Foothills to Coast*. Whilst both landscapes share key characteristics, the differentiation in character is largely due to the surrounding landscapes that impart different influences on them both. The *Fringing Farmed Foothills to Coast* is greatly influenced by its position next to the sea. The *Fringing Farmed Foothills* by comparison is an inland landscape whose influences are taken from the wider Doniford Valley and the Brendon Hills beyond.

There is just one Character Area belonging to the Fringing Farmed Foothills. It forms the bulk of the southwestern edge of the Hills; stretching from the hamlet of Toulton to the village of West Quantoxhead.

Key Characteristics

- Forming the upper reaches of one side of the valley surrounding the Doniford Stream, this is a **narrow apron of enclosed agricultural land** at the foot of the *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment*.
- **Gently undulating, even slope cut by a number of small streams** running from the combes above.
- Underlying geology of **Keuper Marls and Upper Sandstone** giving rise to well drained soils.
- **Elevation ranges from as low approximately 90m** (e.g. at Cothelstone) **to around 225m AOD** (abutting the edge of the wooded scarp).
- Defined by an agricultural land use – **laid primarily to pasture** – with **fields defined by native hedgerow boundaries**.

- Varied field pattern – **sinuous fields to the west to more geometric fields to the east** (reflecting the change from older to more recent enclosure).
- Dominated by the adjacent ***Wooded and Farmed Escarpment*** that forms an impressive backdrop.
- Settled landscape comprising the village of **West Bagborough (Conservation Area) and West Quantoxhead**, with a series of **farms and individual properties scattered across the slope enjoying views over the vale**.
- A number of **prominent country houses**, some with surrounding parkland, evoking a sense of formal design in the landscape.

Description

This landscape is defined by a relatively narrow band of land with an even but gently undulating slope; where streams issuing from higher ground to the north and east run through this landscape forming shallow depressions. This band of agricultural land skirts the edge of the steep *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment* which forms an impressive, physically prominent backdrop that dominates views from the opposite side of the valley.

At the base of the adjacent scarp, the *Fringing Farmed Foothills* reach a height of 225m AOD but descend as low as 90m AOD where they comfortably merge with the landscape of the vale.

The geology of the landscape is defined by Keuper Marls to the west, changing to a surface geology of Upper Sandstone in the east). The geology of the area gives rise to well drained, coarse loamy soils. These are soils are typically associated with a land use of stock rearing and dairying which are typical across the landscape (along with horse keeping).

Fields are medium to small in size. Within the western half of the landscape, the fields are more organic in form and represent an enclosure pattern dating between the 17th and 18th centuries. To the east, between West Bagborough and Cothelstone, the fields are more geometric in shape - characterised by an ancient enclosure pattern that was modified

between the 17th and 19th centuries. The fields within this agricultural fringe landscape are noticeably smaller in size than those of the adjacent vale.

This is a settled landscape – containing West Quantoxhead and the Conservation Areas of West Bagborough and Cothelstone and as well as a number of farms and individual properties, dotted over the open slope and taking advantage of the southerly views across the vale. Red sandstone with a mix of slate and clay tiled roofs characterise the majority of traditional buildings. There are modern properties within the landscape that are atypical of the local vernacular. Whilst some modern developments detract from the general character of the landscape for the most part they are not intrusive.

Large country houses/manor houses have a significant influence on the character of the landscape. The listed building and large country house of Bagborough House (with its surrounding parkland landscape) forms part of the West Bagborough Conservation Area. To the east is the listed building of Cothelstone Manor with its surrounding gardens, pleasure grounds and park. Cothelstone Park contains a listed lodge house, a lake and number of mature specimen trees. In the west is Triscombe House, just south of the hamlet of Triscombe. Weacombe Estate is located near West Quantoxhead. These four large properties/estates and their surrounding parklands exert a sense of grand design on the landscape and are typical of the landscapes skirting the edge of the ‘hills’; occupying a prime position to exploit views out across the rolling farmland beyond.

This landscape is crossed by a number of secondary roads that generally run north to south linking the area with the wider AONB landscape to the north and the vale to the south. Although not remote, this is a landscape with a strong rural character and a notable sense of tranquillity in places, although this is reduced where the landscape borders the A358.

Evaluation

Although a transitional landscape – marking the change from vale to heathland and escarpment landscapes, the combination of enclosed farmland, limited development, large country houses, and quality views across to Exmoor makes for a landscape of strong character overall.

The visible **condition** of this landscape is judged to be **moderate to good**.

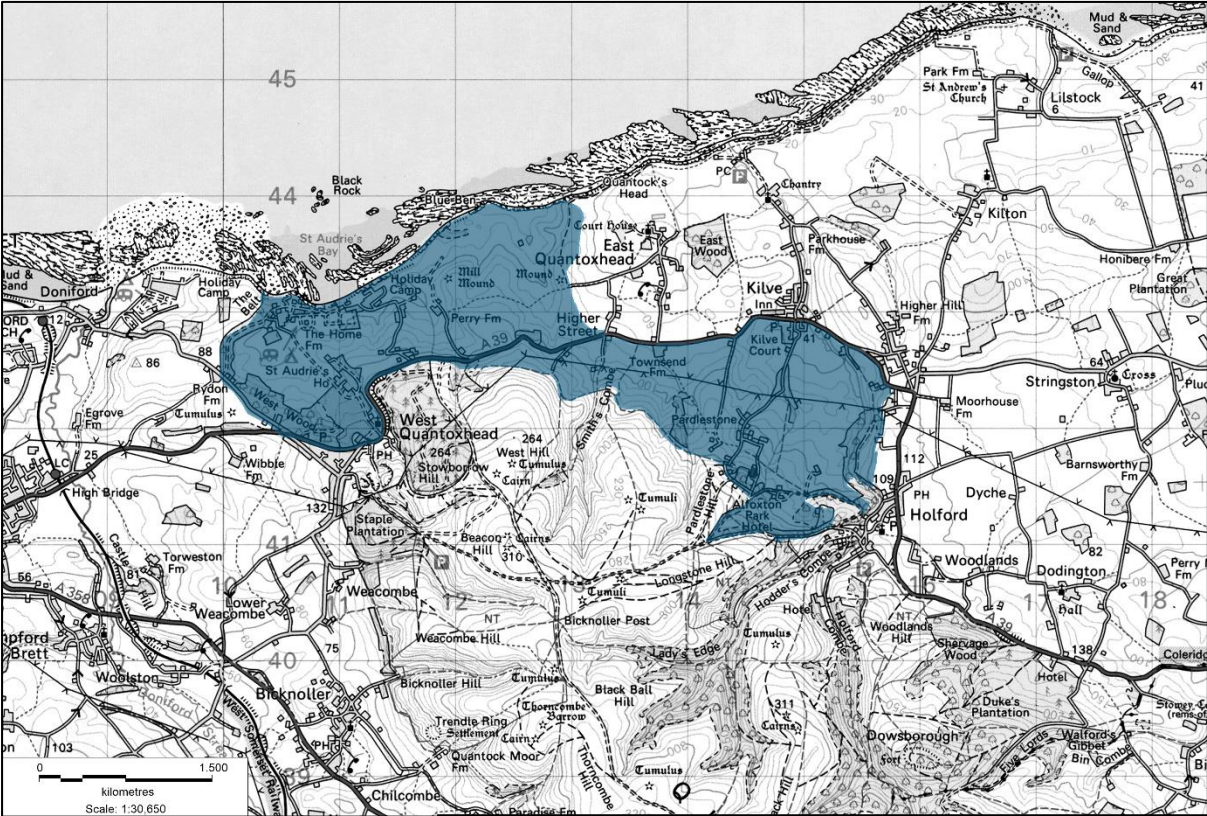
Landscape Issues

- Pressure of the A358 where it borders the landscape - signage, highways infrastructure, lighting etc threatening the rural character of the landscape.
- Conversion of pasture to arable cultivation.
- Conversion of agricultural buildings to domestic property.
- Potential future in-field solar energy developments in the adjacent 'unprotected' landscape of the Doniford Valley – threatening both the character and quality of views.
- Change of use of agricultural land to horse keeping and associated landscape issues of 'horsiculture'

Landscape Character Vision

The vision for the future is of a landscape whose overriding character is a mixed farming landscape bound by dense hedgerows (and hedgerow trees) interspersed with small woods, small villages, country houses and limited development. The striking contrast between this farmed landscape and the dramatic scarp backdrop should continue to be a spectacle as should the high quality views across the Doniford Valley to the Brendons.

8. Agricultural Foothills to Coast



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Bearing many of the characteristics that define the landscape of the *Fringing Foothills* landscape type, this landscape is nonetheless separate and distinct – occurring on the northern side of the upland heath; wrapping around the heathland hills and sweeping right down to meet with the Jurassic coast. It is the influence of the sea and shore that defines this as a separate landscape type; being very different when compared with the landlocked *Fringing Foothills* that by contrast takes its influence from the surrounding Doniford Valley and Brendon Hills.

Key Characteristics

- **Dramatic views** – inland to the **backdrop of purple heather-clad hills** of the upland heath and, contrastingly **out to sea**.
- **Undulating landform** created where watercourse from springs issuing on the hills have carved a series of small valleys with intervening ridges.
- Elevation ranges from approximately **140m AOD at the base of the heathland hills** to as low as **30m AOD at the top of the coastal cliffs**.
- Land use **of mixed farming with pasture typically focussed** in smaller fields on more challenging terrain closer to the adjacent heathland.
- **The arterial route of the A39** carrying traffic to and from Minehead and beyond to the north Devon cuts through the rural landscape.
- **Designed parkland landscapes** around large country houses/manors.
- Modern day recreational land uses in the form of **holiday villages (campsites) on the coast**. **Swathes of woodland** predominantly occurring **on the higher slopes**.
- Underlain by a **surface geology of red sandstone** of the Mercia Mudstone Group – mudstone, siltstones and sandstones.

Description

The ***Fringing Foothills to Coast*** is a landscape of great variety within a relatively small area. These foothills provide a dramatic transition between the inland landscape of the prominent heathland hills (to the south) and the contrasting rugged landscape of the Jurassic Coast (to the north). The foothills also abut the *Lowland Hills to Coast* landscape type – the change in character here being notably subtle but the *Fringing Foothills* being of a higher elevation.

This landscape is closely linked to the *Fringing Foothills* landscape which forms part of the wider Doniford Valley. Although the two landscapes share a contiguous boundary they have different characters due to the influence of their adjacent landscapes – the *Fringing Foothills* being focussed around the Doniford Valley and Brendon Hills beyond whilst this landscape is strongly influenced by its juxtaposition with the coast. So, although the physical and human influences of the landscape are largely the same, they feel markedly different.

This is a landscape with three main land uses – farming, designed parkland surrounding large country houses and modern recreational landscape in the form of holiday villages along the coast.

Where arable production dominates there has been historic enlargement of fields with the loss of hedgerows, for example in the area to the south of Townsend Farm. This is an enclosed landscape of native hedgerows. Areas of land are given over to pasture and typically occur within small field units on higher ground, where the challenging terrain is unsuited to mechanisation (around Pardlestone Lane for example). Large country houses or manors and their surrounding landscapes make a notable contribution to landscape character – Kilve Court, Alfoxton Park and St Audries Park all imparting a designed influence on the landscape. St Audries is the largest and most significant – the Grade II listed house located within 112 ha (of which 105 is designed parkland). West Wood and Aldergrove Copse form a significant swathe of woodland running from the coast up to the A39 at West Quantoxhead.

Modern recreational land use has a strong influence on landscape character in the form of holiday villages with camping, static caravans and other accommodation. Whilst these cover a large part of the land adjacent to the coast, their presence is mainly felt through advertising along the A39. Their position to the north of St Audries (with Home farm holiday village forming part of the designed landscape of St Audries) means that they are largely hidden from public view with only private roads leading down to the coast. The holiday parks are visible in offshore views back inland.

There are no settlements within this landscape; development being limited to scattered farms.

Evaluation

Although a transitional landscape – marking the change from upland heath to coast, the combination of a strongly articulated landform, limited development, large country houses and historic parkland, and exposed coast creates a landscape of strong character.

The visible **condition** of this landscape is judged to be **moderate**. Hedgerow pattern is weak in places and the parkland at St Audries is on the English Heritage at risk register.

Landscape Issues

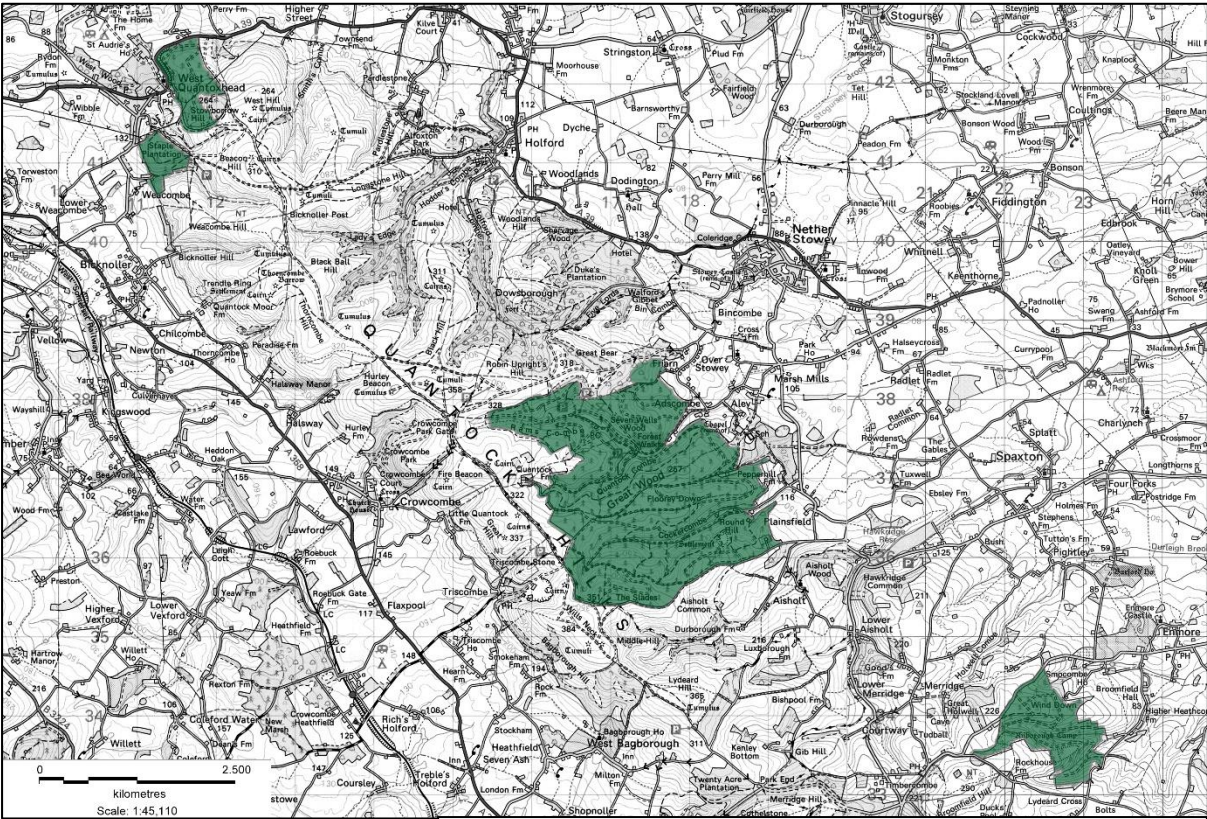
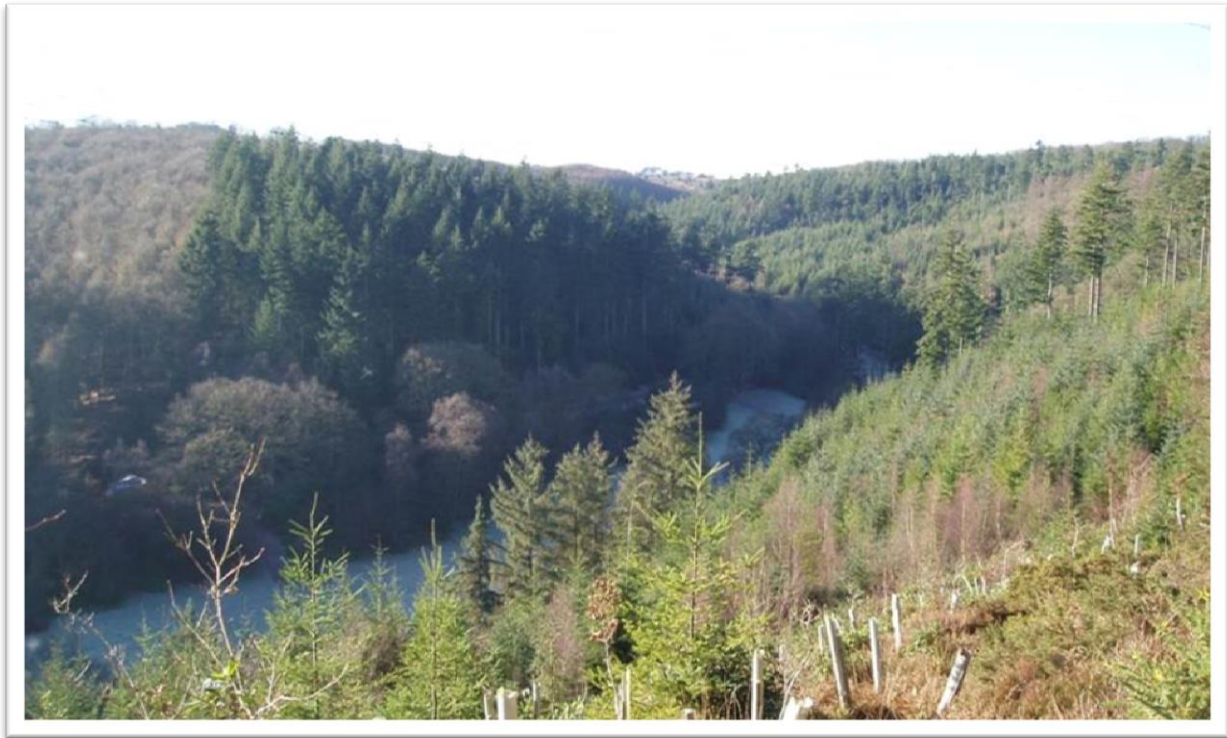
- Pressure along the coast with potential for increased advertising/expansion of holiday parks.
- Potential for further conversion to arable production on steep slopes currently given over to pasture.
- Large agricultural buildings being incongruous features in the landscape.
- Change of use of agricultural land to horse keeping and associated landscape issues of 'horsiculture'.
- Highway and infrastructure improvements and traffic management along the A39 – increasing its aural and visual influence in the landscape.

For issues related to the coastal edge see ***Jurassic Coast***.

Landscape Character Vision

The vision for the future is of a landscape whose overriding character is a mixed farming landscape bound by dense hedgerows (and hedgerow trees) interspersed with small woods and scattered settlement. The simple yet striking contrast between the farmland and adjacent heathland and the quality of coastal views should be protected.

9. Forested Hills and Combes



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The **Forested Hills and Combes** landscape type occurs in four areas of high ground within the AONB. Three of the four areas about the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape type; having an immediate and very marked interface with the open heath.

Key Characteristics

- A landscape dominated by productive **conifer plantation**, interspersed with **broadleaf woodland**.
- Occurring amongst a **setting of heathland and farmland** on areas of mid to high ground (approximately 115m AOD at St Audries to 320m AOD at Great Wood).
- Blanket forest often disguises the **dramatic landform** which is characterised by **hills and ridges that drop away into deep combes**.
- Underlain by a **geology of sandstones, shales and slates**. Managed by the Forestry Commission and the National Trust, the forests are a **focus for recreation** as well as **timber production**.
- **Significant archaeological value** with a number of scheduled monuments occurring within the forest.
- **Beech hedgebanks** of various stages of maturity and condition within and on the edges of the forests.
- Influence of the surrounding heathland and farmland strongly felt in **open views at the edge of the forests**.
- **Transient forest** – timber felling and extraction making previously treed and enclosed landscapes instantly open and exposed.

Landscape Type Description

Dominated by coniferous plantation the **Forested Hills and Combes** occur in prominent locations on mid to high ground and are clearly discernible in many Quantock views (both internal and external). In places, where they breach the horizon, they form notable dark edges on the skyline; the geometric conifer-tops often in stark contrast with the rounded, organic forms and more muted hues of the wider Quantock landscape. It would be wrong however to assume that this forest landscape is solely defined by conifer blocks.

Broadleaved woodland is a key component of this landscape type – with native and

naturalised species making up almost 30% of the forests managed by the Forestry Commission land (Quantock Forest)¹ with concentrations typical where soils are richer such as in the valley bottoms. Larch is also a key species². Areas of open space and numerous tracks and public rights of way make this a landscape valued for its opportunities for low key recreation – typically walking, running, cycling and horse riding.

These areas of commercial forest make up a significant proportion of the AONB. This means that whilst heathland hills and rolling farmland are perhaps more commonly regarded as quintessential Quantock landscapes, the eye catching appearance of the forests, their prominent positions and the large areas they cover makes them a significant contributor to the character of this nationally protected landscape.

Management of the forest by clear felling for timber extraction has meant this is a changeable landscape (transient forest) - previously tree-covered areas are quickly cleared to reveal an open and exposed landscape that has an instant impact on perceptual character. Clear felling operations are reducing as timber extraction (through a management system of continuous cover) is increasing. So, whilst clear-felling operations are set to continue into the future, the immediate and dramatic change to the landscape should lessen as there is an increased focus on thinning and selective extraction.

The tree cover of the forests significantly disguises the drama of the underlying landform - characterised by the hills and ridges of the upland plateau - that falls away into deep combs. The forests also hide a number of nationally significant archaeological sites. The forest edges offer commanding views across heathland and farmland.

¹ This figure is inclusive of two additional Forestry Commission forests (Goathurst and Kings Cliff) that are not part of the landscape types listed above and which have the highest relative proportion of broadleaves and excludes Staple Plantation which does form part of this landscape type but is owned by the National Trust.

² Significant removal of larch has occurred in some areas due to the threat of *Phytophthora ramorum*.

Character Area Descriptions

There are four distinct areas characterised as the ***Forested Hills and Combes*** landscape type. These are:

- Great Wood;
- Wind Down;
- St Audries; and
- Staple Plantation

Great Wood

By far the largest and best known of the ***Forested Hills and Combes*** is Great Wood, covering an area of 629 hectares. Occupying a central position within the protected landscape, Great Wood is made up of three main west-east combes (Ramscombe, Quantock Combe and Cockercombe) which together create a strongly articulated landscape of tight, deep valleys and ridges. The streams in these combes are fed by springs – issuing within and on the western edge of the forest - which form part of the River Parrett catchment. Keepers Combe is a lesser combe, occurring in the east of Great Wood.

Of the four character areas, Great Wood (along with St Audries) has the greatest proportion of conifer cover – Douglas fir and Sitka spruce – with broadleaf woodland comprising beech and oak with ash, sycamore and birch. The current Quantock Forest Management Plan clearly states that there will be a ‘significant transformation’ over the coming decades as the focus is for native broadleaves to dominate the woodland of Great Wood.

Great Wood was planted in the 1920s on the site of an ancient woodland known to have existed since Saxon times. Whilst it is dominated by conifer plantation, Great Wood is significantly more than a commercial forest - recreation, in particular, is central to its use and overall character. Most notably the valley bottom at Ramscombe has a strong recreational focus – the stream bank frequently covered with people barbequing and picnicking alongside the water. A series of pay and display car parks, a toilet block and a number of interpretation panels and information signs evoke a sense of a landscape that is purposefully and actively managed for public enjoyment. In the busy spring and summer

months Great Wood is a hive of activity and is a destination point in the Quantocks for local people and visitors alike.

The timber extraction tracks and the many public rights of way provide an all ability trail, promoted by the Forestry Commission for a wide range of users – walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Great Wood is especially popular with mountain bikers who create off-track downhill routes through the forest³. Approximately 10% of Great Wood is made up of open land – dedicated open space, deer lawns, forests rides and temporary open space in areas of extraction and felling.

Moving along the extraction tracks, the link to the surrounding upland heath landscape is clear – with the forest edges and rides characterised by heathland regeneration and scrub. The outcropping heather and bilberry gives a definitive connection to the underlying physical conditions that are shared by these visually very different landscape types.

The scheduled monument of Plainsfield Camp hillfort is in the southeast of the forest, one of four hillside enclosures surviving within the AONB. It is enclosed by a massive bank and ditch and although previously covered with trees, it is now open and offers extensive views across the Levels and onto the Mendip Hills. The scheduled Monument of Dead Woman's ditch is also within Great Wood – in the northwest. Unlike Plainsfield Camp this cross—dyke is covered with trees and is difficult to discern in the landscape. The current Quantock Forest Management Plan (Forestry Commission) states that its exact location is not known.

Beech hedgebanks are a feature of the northern and southern boundaries of Great Wood and these create an impressive edge to the forest where it meets the open heath such as at Aisholt Common. There are outcropping areas of rhododendron in the forest but targeted rhododendron clearance has taken place in recent years in Cockercombe and Ramscombe primarily to reduce the risk of infectious disease being spread (by removing rhododendron as a host species to *Phytophthora ramorum*).

There has been a significant amount of clear felling at The Slades - adjacent to Aisholt Common - to encourage heathland regeneration and species such as nightjar. Whilst the area has been cleared, regeneration of Sitka Spruce is occurring at the site.

Wind Down

Wind Down is the most southerly character area belonging to the *Forested Hills and Combes* landscape type.

Wind Down is surrounded by enclosed farmland and is believed to have once formed part of the Enmore Estate (linked to the previous Enmore Castle) that historically held a mix of productive woodland; most of which has long since been cleared. Wind Down is leased by the Forestry Commission and whilst it is not promoted or managed as a site for recreation, the tracks and paths through the forest are popular with dog walkers, runners and horse riders.

Two tributary streams running west to east have carved steep valleys through the landscape at Wind Down and, as with the streams of Great Wood, these form part of the River Parrett catchment. The land falls dramatically away from the access tracks in places, creating a visually interesting and challenging terrain.

Hidden within the woodland at Wind Down is the Scheduled Monument of Ruborough Camp which was probably constructed between 600 and 300 BC. It may have had a number of functions – defended settlement, keeping stock, trading, ritual and warfare (Riley, 2006). It is one of three hilltop camps within the Quantock Hills (the others being Dowsborough Camp and the incomplete enclosure at Bicknoller). Ruborough Camp sits on a northeastwardly projecting spur of a ridge that extends into Wind Down from the open hilltop landscape of Broomfield Hill. This spur overlooks much of the eastern foothills landscape of the Quantocks and the wider River Parrett Catchment extending across the Somerset Levels – with views to the Polden Hills and Mendip Hills. Ruborough Camp is cloaked in woodland and this not only disguises its presence but also the striking physical character of its location and the sheer scale of the earthworks (Riley, 2006).

Wind Down is a mixed woodland of broadleaf and conifer plantation. Significant areas of larch have been cleared recently due to *Phytophthora ramorum*. Beech hedgebanks are a feature at Wind Down – both within the forest and around the edges.

Where views out of the forest are possible they are extensive – across foothills of the Quantocks, to the Severn estuary and across to Wales and, inland, looking east across the Levels to the Polden and Mendip Hills beyond. Because of its prominent position Wind Down is identifiable from considerable distance in views towards the hills.

St Audries

Once forming part of the wider Quantoxhead Estate - as a deer park - St Audries (or 'Deer Park') characterises the northern end of the 'hills'; between the open heath of West Hill, Vinny Combe and Beacon Hill. It is less than a kilometre from the coast at St Audries Bay – rising steeply to the south of the main A39 and having a northwesterly aspect, the heavily treed landscape falling away from Stowborough Hill towards the coast.

St Audries is less mixed in its cover than the other forested areas – being predominantly conifer. The woodland of St Audries is prominent in views from the settled and farmed landscape to the west. It is also prominent in views from the south. Here, there is a conspicuous interface between landscape character types as dark conifer abuts the open heathland. Recently an area around Stowborough Hill in the far southeast of the landscape has been clear felled. The intention is for this area to remain permanently open – providing a visually more sensitive transition to the surrounding heath.

A notable feature of this woodland is the iron boundary fence, encompassing the southern, eastern and western woodland boundaries it forms a clear visual reference to its historic connection with the St Audries estate.

Staple Plantation

Staple Plantation is owned and managed by the National Trust. This forest has for many years provided a strong backdrop to West Quantoxhead and Weacombe – having an easterly aspect and being visually prominent in views from the west. At the time of writing

the site has been clear felled due to its large larch content and the need to slow down the impact and spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* with which the woodland was infected. This combined with the loss of a large proportion of the site's Douglas Fir (through windblow) led to the decision to clear the site. It has now been replanted with Rowan, Scots Pine, Sessile Oak and Birch but is very much a young woodland.

n.b. There are other areas of forest that are not categorised within this landscape type because they have been subsumed and described as part of other landscape types as appropriate e.g. Buncombe Wood and Twenty Acre Plantation form part of the wider *Wooded and Farmed Escarpment* and smaller forest blocks such as Muchcare and Hawkrig Wood are features within the wider landscape of *The Rolling Farmland and Settled Combes*.

3 The Forestry Commission have a policy to manage and inspect wild trails – these are downhill routes that cut through the forest and are predominantly used by mountain bikers. They are constantly being adapted (typically using fallen timber within the forest) by those seeking a challenging downhill mountain bike experience.

Evaluation

This is a landscape type of **strong character**. The forests are instantly recognisable landscapes that occupy prominent, elevated positions within the Quantocks. The striking, blanket coverage of conifer (and to a lesser extent broadleaved woodland) largely disguises physical features of the landscape e.g. the natural and dramatic topography and archaeological features. There is a strong sense of connection to the wider 'designed' landscape in some cases with the presence of beech hedgebanks and features typical of local estates (such as the presence of Lodge houses on the forest edges and iron fencing such as that found at St Audries).

The forest landscapes are perceived to be in **good** condition generally as they are under active forestry management. Nonetheless there are features within the forest that are in a poorer state of repair – such as the Schedule Monuments at risk. In places where clear felling has occurred for the purpose of heathland restoration, the landscape is very much in a state of transition with varying degrees of restoration success.

Landscape Issues

- Impact of dark forest blocks often jarring against the muted tones and softer, rounded forms of the wider Quantock landscape.
- Condition of archaeological features occurring in the forest - some are nationally important and fundamental to an holistic understanding of human use of the Quantock landscape.
- Condition of and visibility and access to landscape features that are important visual clues to historic use of the forests e.g. where they formed part of wider estate landscapes – beech hedgebanks, veteran trees, iron parkland fencing etc.
- Potential for low key recreational activities within the forest expanding to larger leisure opportunities with an increase in facilities to support such use (e.g. accommodation, cafes, bike hire) that could change the character of the Quantock forests by reducing tranquillity through overt people presence and activity - particularly relevant to Great Wood.
- The practice of clear felling will continue to have landscape and visual impacts within the AONB – often affecting the character of views from considerable distance. This threat is heightened through an increase in tree disease such as *Phytophthora ramorum* leading to clear fell areas in addition to those planned for timber crop.
- Inconsistent results of clear felling for open space (heathland regeneration).

Landscape Character Vision

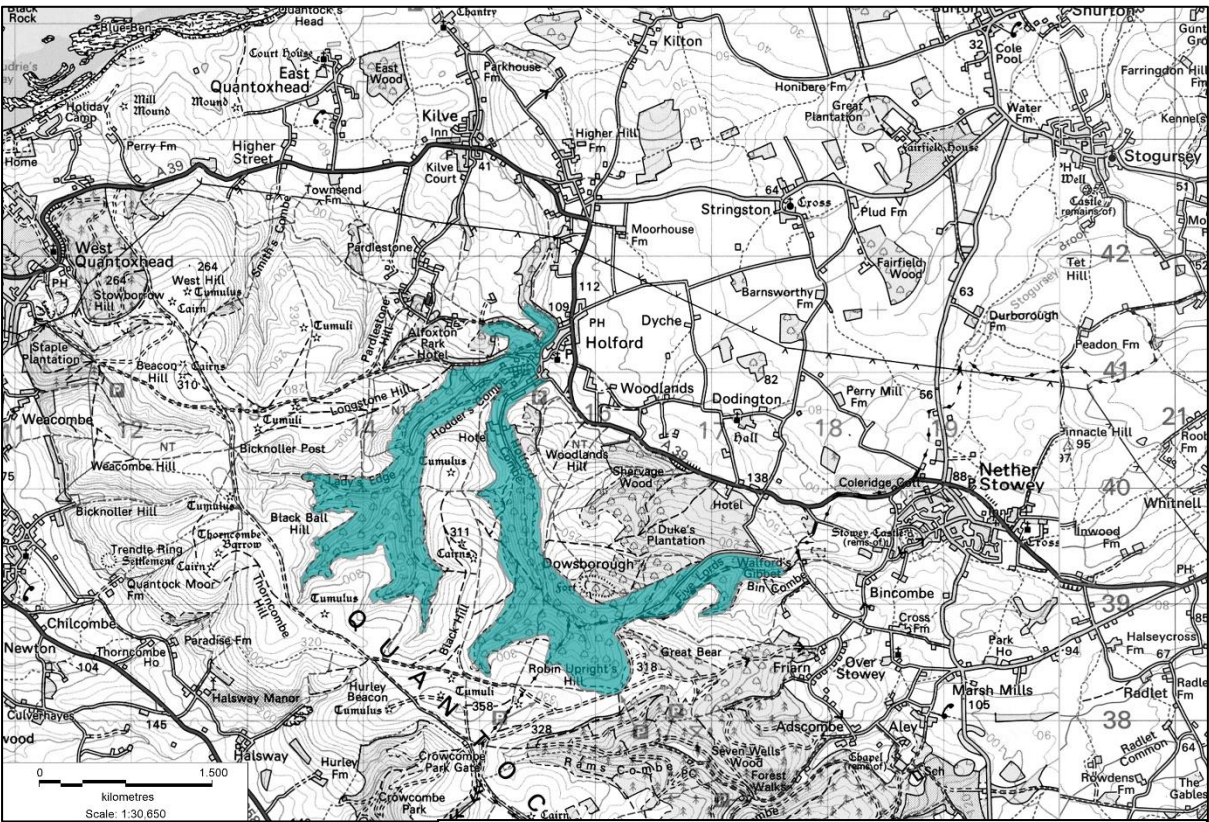
The vision is for the **Forested Hills and Combes** landscape, is for this landscape type to continue to become better visually assimilated into the wider Quantock landscape - having a more varied woodland species composition and improved integration with the surrounding open heathland and farmland.

Future Management Direction (example)

Future management of the **Forested Hills and Combes** should be to **conserve** the opportunities for low impact recreation within the context of the commercial forest and **enhance** (improve) the management balance between timber production and other uses including increased biodiversity value, improved visual integration of the forest with the wider landscape, diversity of the forest species composition and exploring future

opportunities for the creation and management of open space (heathland restoration) better linked with the surrounding heathland. There is a recognised need to **enhance** the condition of culturally significant landscape features such as the nationally important Scheduled Monuments.

10. Wooded Combes



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The **Wooded Combes** landscape type occurs in one area of the AONB. This landscape type comprises a series of small combes, forming two valley systems that carve their way through the northern common area of the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape type and converge at the village of Holford, just off the A39.

Key Characteristics

- A landscape characterised by a **series of small, deep narrow combes** that together form two valley systems.
- Occurring at a height of **between 300m AOD** (where the top of the combes drop away from the open common) and descending **to approximately 140m** at Holford.
- **Steep valley sides** cloaked in woodland, **dominated by Western Sessile Oak**.
- **An intricate, hidden, enclosed landscape** in contrast to the adjacent open heath.
- The **twisted, sculpted forms of the Sessile Oak** characterise this ancient wooded landscape.
- From the *Heathland Hills and Combes* landscape type, the **combes are visibly striking green fingers cutting through the heath**.
- **Small streams** tumbling through the combes provide a moist environment teaming with **ferns, mosses and sedges**.
- A landscape of **significant conservation value** – forming part of **The Quantocks SSSI and Exmoor and Quantock Oakwood SAC**.
- Grazed by commoners' stock (predominantly sheep) creating **wood-pasture landscape in parts**.
- A **popular area for recreation** – horse riders, walkers, mountain bikers making the most of the **rights of way and paths cutting across the valley sides**.

Description

Two separate collections of spring fed streams emerging on the northern common have created a number of small combes that converge to form two valley systems (Holford Combe and Hodders Combe) that are separated by the open heathland hills at Higher Hare Knap and Lower Hare Knap. The two valley systems converge at the village of Holford, at

which point the deep and distinctivecombe landscape gives way to the more open landscape of the farmed foothills.

The combes are dominated by Western Sessile Oak woodland. The domed crown, twisted trunks and radiating branches of these moss, fern and lichen-covered, long-lived trees evoke a strong sense of an ancient landscape with an almost other-worldly or folklore quality. The trees are varied in their habit with many having been subject to years of coppicing – the wood traditionally being used for charcoal making and the bark for tanning.

The Sessile Oak has a relatively open canopy which allows light through to the woodland floor creating magnificent displays of colours and textures that are a world away from the character of the adjacent open heathland yet no less inspiring. At the woodland edges the exposed location of the trees is apparent – being gnarled and sculpted by the Atlantic winds.

The streams that have carved this landscape create a lush environment on the valley floors where there are mosses and ferns and sedges aplenty in the moist, shady conditions. Alder woodland is dominant alongside the streams.

The combes are a haven for walkers, bike and horse riders and wildlife watchers. Many use car parking provision at Holford to walk up through the Wooded Combes to directly access the open heathland. Emerging from the enclosed wooded landscape to the vast, open heath is a striking experience – the heathland's large scale being in marked contrast to the intricate, secret landscape of the combes. Commoners' rights mean the valleys are grazed by stock (predominantly sheep) moving into the combes from the open heath and creating a wood-pasture landscape.

This is a landscape of significant conservation value – forming part of the Quantocks SSSI and the Exmoor and Quantock Oak Woods SAC.

Evaluation

The **Wooded Combes** feel like a secret, mysterious Quantock landscape. The deep, enclosed topography of the combes and the Sessile Oak woodland combine to create a highly distinctive landscape of **strong character**. It is an intricate place of great visual diversity, huge wildlife value and recreational opportunities.

The **Enclosed Wooded Combes** landscapes is perceived to be in **moderate** condition.

Landscape Issues

- Inconsistent approaches to woodland management – some overgrazing and a dense canopy in places resulting in a lack of woodland regeneration.
- Vulnerability of the landscape to the impacts of recreation (horses, bikes, walkers, off-road vehicle use) along the network of rights of way through the combes.
- Rhododendron invasion.

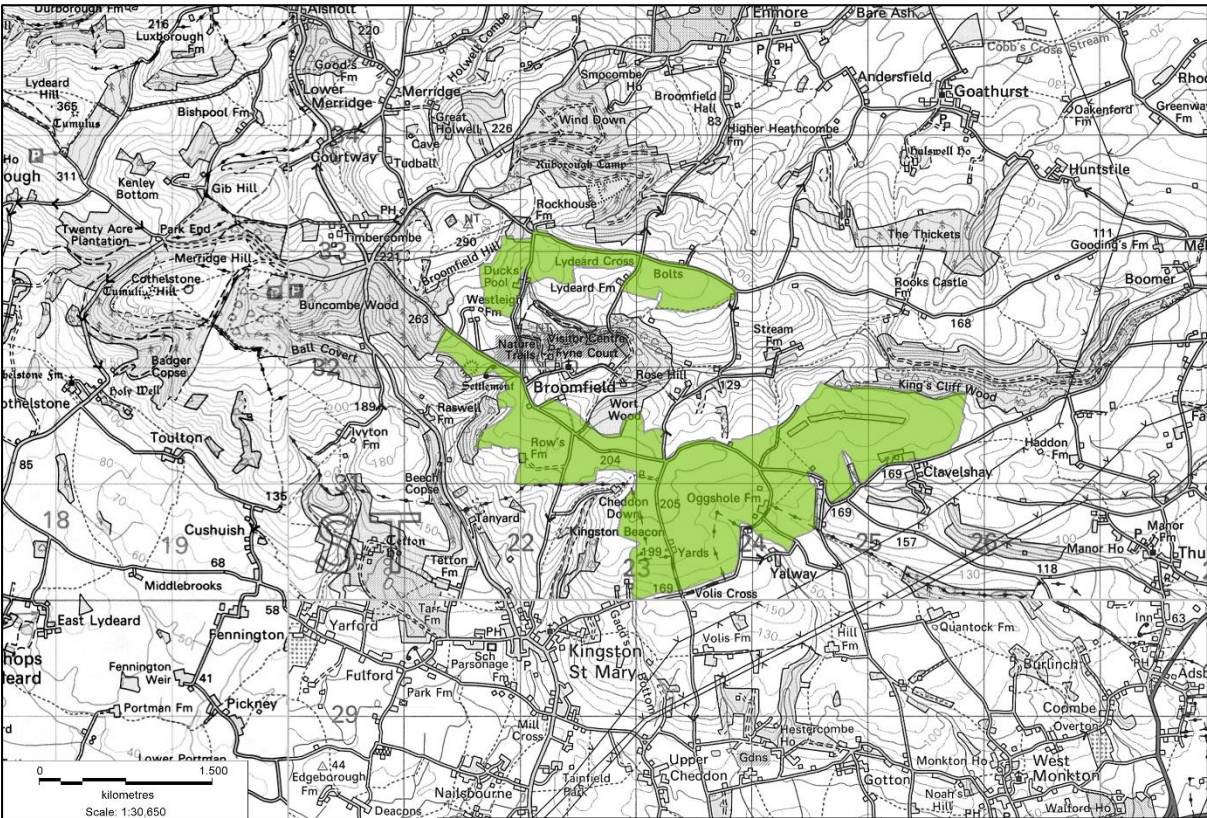
Landscape Character Vision

The vision is to retain the small-scale, intricate and ancient character of the combes where the Sessile Oak woodland is in active, sensitive woodland management. The landscape continues to provide low-level, informal recreation that does not detract from the almost hidden or secret landscape character offered by the combes, which should continue to be in striking contrast to the adjacent open heath.

Future Management Direction (example)

Future management should be to **conserve** the very special woodland cover of the landscape by focussing on **enhancing** woodland management approaches to improve conditions for wildlife and for natural regeneration. Future Management should also focus on woodland containment within the combes – to ensure the dramatic contrast between wooded combe and open heath is conserved and to protect the open heath from woodland edge expansion onto the heathland.

11. Arable Plateau



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The **Arable Plateau** landscape type occurs in the southeast of the Quantock Hills and represents the higher areas of land that rise above, and are markedly distinct from, the *Farmed Hills with Settled Combes*. The hilltop and plateau landform has a simple character; being more open and consistently arable in its land use compared with the smaller scale, undulating landscape of the *Farmed Hills with Settled Combes*. The larger, geometric fields of the plateau, under arable cultivation, have created a landscape much characterised by intensive farming practice.

Key Characteristics

- Elevated **hilltops and undulating plateau landform** typically occurring around the 200m AOD mark (reaching as high as 228m AOD and as low as 165m AOD).
- **Devonian geology of Leighland Slates (slates, siltstones and sandstones) and Morte Slates** (grey lustrous slate with outcropping areas of sandstone).
- **Farmed landscape characterised almost exclusively by** arable production.
- **Large geometric fields** whose boundaries are typically defined by **short flailed and gappy native hedgerows** with **few hedgerow trees**.
- An **exposed and open landscape** evoking a **sense of large scale**.
- A **simple landscape with few focal points**.
- **Largely unsettled** – farms typically occurring within the more sheltered landscape of the adjacent rolling farmland.
- Some **extensive views** from the plateau edges.

There are two small areas belonging to the **Arable Plateau** landscape type. Occurring very close to each other (to the north and south of the village of Broomfield) they are separated by a valley and ridge. They are not of sufficient size or geographical separation to warrant individual descriptions.

Description

This Landscape Type occurs within the southeast of the Quantock Hills and represents the higher areas of landscape that rise out of and above the *Rolling Hills with Settled Combes* landscape Type. The two areas of the **Arable Plateau** are separated from the

aforementioned landscape due to its distinct ridge and plateau landform and by its consistent arable land use. Although not dramatic, there is a notable change in landscape character from the complex landform of rolling hills and enclosed valleys to the simple, elevated, open plateau.

This is a landscape dominated by arable cropping. The historic operation of grubbing up hedges is no better illustrated than here on the plateau where old hedgerows have had to make way for intensive farming practice. Some old tree standards mark historic field boundaries but these are for the most part indistinguishable. These large fields are bounded by native hedgerows that, due to there being no requirement for stock proofing, have in places been flailed so short as to provide little definition to the field boundaries. In many places the hedgerows fail to exist – with large gappy sections a repeating occurrence. Hedgerow trees are noticeably few and the lack of tree cover makes for a perceptually more uniform, emptier landscape with few distinctive features compared with its surroundings. The desire to operate large agricultural machinery has meant that field entrances have been significantly widened.

Viewing experiences on the Plateau vary. Within the plateau views are largely contained to the plateau itself whilst on the plateau edge, views are far reaching over the lower-lying farmed Quantock landscape and beyond – taking in a wide variety of landscape scene. Settlement is very limited, comprising just two farms with conversion of some the associated agricultural buildings into residential properties.

In places, the lanes running through the landscape act as busy rat runs at particular times of the day – Volis Hill for example which cuts down to the suburban edge of Taunton, where wide grass verges aligning the lane have allowed for informal passing places to establish.

Evaluation

This is a landscape of **moderate character**. The landform and elevation (and the views enjoyed as a result) are distinctive features of this landscape type. However, intensive farming practices on the plateau and the lack of landscape elements (such as hedgerow

trees or strong hedgerow networks) undermine these characteristics; diluting the landscape pattern because of the **poor** state of repair thereby reducing the quality of the landscape overall.

Landscape Issues

- Intensive farming practices for arable production has reduced diversity and texture in the landscape; creating a visually poor countryside compared with other areas of the AONB. NB these practices are spilling over into the adjacent landscape of the *Rolling Farmland and Settled Combes*.
- Deterioration of the landscape pattern through over-flailing and, in places, historic loss of hedgerow boundaries, widening of field entrances and general lack of hedgerow and in-field trees.
- Traffic pressures along Volis Hill - acting as a rat run for traffic cutting up/down over the hills resulting in damage to the wide roadside grass verges and the development of informal passing places.
- Anti-social behaviour - fly tipping and littering - along Volis Hill is a common sight.
- Potential pressures for more agricultural buildings which if poorly sited would be visually jarring in this open and exposed landscape.
- Potential pressure for tall structures on the plateau (such as communication masts and turbines) that could break the open ridge.
- Future conversion of isolated agricultural buildings to residential properties.
- Soil erosion and surface run-off - exacerbated when flash flooding occurs after periods of relative drought.

Landscape Character Vision

The vision is of a viable but less intensively farmed and more ecologically-rich landscape that is sensitively managed with fields divided by a strong network of mixed native hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees.

Future Management Direction (example)

When looking at the AONB as a whole, this landscape type is judged to be fairing worst in terms of landscape quality and there is a need to work with landowners towards **landscape enhancement** overall - to focus on **restoring** the landscape features, most obviously through improving the structure, condition and future management of hedgerows (and hedgerow trees) that will strengthen the pattern and visual integrity of the landscape.

Landscape Partnership Bid

Greater Quantock Study Area

The area of search fully adopts the desk study phase of the accepted, best practice Landscape Character Assessment approach. It builds on the Landscape Character Assessment work currently being undertaken as an essential baseline framework document for the Phase 1 bid process leading to a principle guiding document for landscape change and management across the AONB in support of the primary purpose to conserve and enhance the protected landscape.

The purpose of extending the area beyond the boundary of the designated landscape is to ensure that landscapes exhibiting and sharing key characteristics or special qualities with the protected landscape (or indeed those landscapes with different character but sharing a physical, visual or perceptual connection with the hills) are considered as part of a wider Quantock Country. This offers a more holistic appreciation for the designated landscape and its neighbouring hinterlands.

Legend (map 3) Quantock Hills
Landscape Character types with similar landscape types beyond the AONB Boundary.

Wooded Farmed Escarpment		
Settled Combes		Ext Area Settled Combes
Rolling Farmland & Settled Combes		Ext Area Settled Foothills
Open Hills		
Lowland Hills to Coast		Ext Area Lowland Hills to Coast
Jurassic Coast		Ext Area Jurassic Coast
Heathland Hills & Combes		
Forested Hills & Combes		
Enclosed Wooded Combes		
Arable Plateaux		
Agricultural Foothills		Doniford Valley
Agricultural Foothills to Coast		Ext Area Agricultural Foothills to Coast
		Ext Area Quantock Foothills

This is a detailed map of the Bristol area, showing the city of Bristol and surrounding regions. The map is color-coded to show different administrative areas or districts. The city of Bristol is in the center, with the River Avon flowing through it. Surrounding areas include North Somerset to the north, South Gloucestershire to the south, and parts of Gloucestershire to the west. The map includes numerous place names, roads, and a scale bar indicating 0 to 5,000 metres.

Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme – Proposed scheme area.

Lowland Hills to Coast

The **Lowland Hills to Coast** landscape is located in the north of the Quantock Hills and is somewhat transitional in character – bearing many characteristics of the higher *Fringing Foothills (with Coast)* landscape (with which its boundary is contiguous) yet taking on its own personality as it begins to merge with the coast and takes on the influence of the surrounding lowlands.

This landscape type extends eastwards – well beyond the AONB boundary; forming part of a larger area that eventually meets with the Somerset Levels and Moors. It forms part of the landscape identified in Sedgemoor’s Landscape Assessment and Countryside Design Summary (2003) as Lowland Hills (Character Area: Stockland Hills). Within the West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment this area is identified as The Quantock Vale (Eastern Lowlands).

Fringing Foothills to Coast

Bearing many of the characteristics that define the landscape of the *Fringing Foothills* landscape type, this landscape is nonetheless separate and distinct from it – occurring on the northern side of the upland heath landscape - wrapping around the heathland hills and sweeping right down to meet with the Jurassic coast. It is the influence of the sea and shore that defines this as a separate landscape type being very different when compared with the landlocked *Fringing Foothills* which by contrast influence from surrounding landscapes is taken from the Doniford Valley and Brendon Hills as opposed to the coast.

This landscape extends beyond the AONB boundary to include the area west of St Audries, including the area around the coast at Doniford. It is identified in the West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment as forming part of the *North East Quantock Agricultural Fringe* which closely corresponds with the boundaries drawn for the Quantock Hills LCA.

Agricultural Valley Fringe

An enclosed agricultural landscape, predominantly pasture, forming an apron of land that defines much of the western boundary of the AONB. It forms the foothills to the adjacent and pronounced landscapes of the *Wooded Escarpment* and the *Heathland Hills and Combes*. This landscape separates these 'upland' Quantock landscapes from the low-lying vale of the AONB hinterland. The sloping landform is undulating as it is cut by a number of small streams that issue from steep combes above (as well as some springs within this landscape) - running through this landscape to form shallow depressions across the farmland. Small villages sit at the foot of the looming scarp and hills beyond, strung along the watercourses. It forms the edge of the fertile vale surrounding the Doniford Stream that cuts a course beyond, but parallel to, the AONB boundary. It blends very gradually with the rich farmland of the Vale of Taunton Deane but its visual relationship with the upland of the Quantock Hills is easily defined and much more dramatic.

This LCA forms part of the wider valley system focussed around the Doniford River. This Character Area as identified in the West Somerset LCA (1999) as the Doniford Valley and is the landscape that separated the Quantock Hills from the Brendon Hills and Exmoor National Park. It forms a part of the large area identified in the Taunton Deane LCA (2011) as The Farmed and Settled High Vale.

Farmed and Settled Vale

This is a character area that is contiguous with parts of the AONB boundary - a Quantock foothills landscape that wraps around and abuts sections of southern end of the hills. It forms part of a wider vale landscape surrounding the urban centres of Taunton and Bridgwater.

This landscape is identified in both the Sedgemoor Countryside Design Summary and the Taunton Deane Landscape Character Assessment as Lowland Hills (Quantock Foothills) and Settled and Farmed High Vale (Quantock Fringe and West Vale) respectively.

Jurassic Coast

Forming the northern edge of the designated landscape, the Jurassic Coast of the Quantock Hills is the foreshore landscape or intertidal zone that extends from St Audries Bay in the west to Kilve Pill

in the east. At low tide the coast is a combination spectacular rocky terraces and sandy beach. This landscape type extends beyond the boundaries of the AONB – as far west as Blue Anchor and beyond Lulstock in the east.