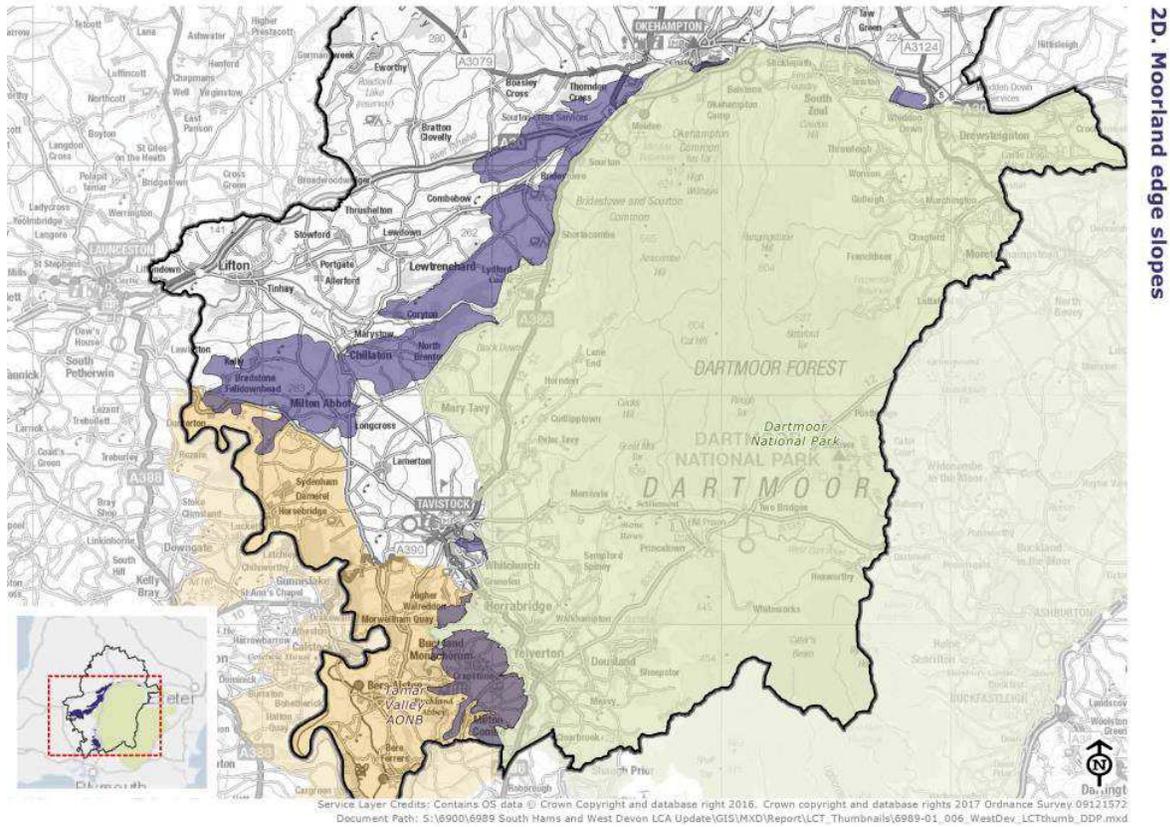


LCT 2D: Moorland Edge Slopes



2D. Moorland edge slopes

Representative photographs



Summary of location and landscape character

The LCT is found along the northern and western edges of Dartmoor National Park and extends west across the Borough to Milton Abbot.

An elevated, gently rolling landscape containing open moorland and farmland which provides an important setting and transition to the protected landscape within Dartmoor.

Landscape description

Key characteristics

Topography, geology and drainage

- Elevated land with a height of between 100m and 290m AOD. The landscape has a rolling topography with shallow stream valleys, in parts steeply sloping down from the fringes of Dartmoor.
- Underlain by bedrock geology of mudstone, sandstone and limestone creating a gently topography than the adjacent basalt of Dartmoor.
- The landscape is crossed by streams rising from springs on the higher ground and draining towards the Tavy, Tamar, Lew and Lyd rivers.

Woodland cover

- Generally sparse woodland cover except for conifer plantations along the upper slopes of the Lyd river valley and broadleaved woodland lining streams and small mixed plantations in sheltered areas.
- Fields enclosed by square-cut beech hedgebanks with some grown out sections forming characteristic mature beech tree lines on lower slopes and along roadsides.

Land use and field patterns

- Mainly sheep-grazed pastoral farmland with areas of unenclosed rough pasture on the edges of Dartmoor.
- Generally a small-scale field pattern with field boundaries based on medieval or post-medieval enclosures.

Semi-natural habitats

- Areas close to the National Park, particularly north of Lydford (e.g. Fernworthy Down and Beara Marshes) and south of Tavistock (West Down) reflect the Dartmoor character with a rich mosaic of habitats including lowland heathland, semi-improved grassland, lowland acid grassland, rush pasture, mire and patches of gorse scrub and silver birch.
- Deciduous woodlands are found along the stream valleys with Grenofen Wood and West Down SSSI designated for its lichen flora found on the trees, mainly pedunculate and sessile oaks with some birch, rowen and hazel.

Archaeology and cultural heritage

- Ancient features are found in commanding positions above the valleys, including the prehistoric hill top enclosures near Berra Tor and at Castle Park Camp and South Longridge. Buckland Monachorum has a Conservation Area.

Settlement, road pattern and rights of way

- Settlement is sparse, with little modern development and consists of hamlets and scattered historic farmsteads and cottages huddled on the slopes sheltered by trees, often found at crossroads. Settlements to the west of Yelverton are the only sizeable villages.
- Strong local vernacular of stone rubble and slate farmhouses and farm buildings some with rendered cob frontages with some 20th century bungalows.
- The A30 crosses the landscape running west from Okehampton and the A386 adjoins the LCT along its eastern boundary with the National Park with traffic and parking/picnic areas detracting from the rural tranquil feel of the area. Elsewhere the road network is limited to narrow lanes.
- There are areas of open access on the open downs and woodlands in the Lyd valley and a good network of paths including several long distance routes including the Two Castles Trail, West Devon Way and Tamar Valley Discovery Trail.

Views and perceptual qualities

- An open and often exposed landscape, with long views from higher ground across the rolling countryside of West Devon, except within the wooded folds of the shallow stream valleys. There are views to the wooded valley of the Tavy (within the Tamar Valley AONB) from the west of the LCT and spectacular views across to high moorland in Dartmoor National Park from the east of the LCT.
- A small area of the LCT to the south of the district, above the Tavy, is located within the Tamar Valley AONB which recognises the quality of this valley and water landscape, representing a classic English estuarine landscape.

Landscape Evaluation

Key landscape sensitivities

The following provides a summary of the key landscape sensitivities within this LCT:

- A remote and tranquil upland pastoral landscape with small hamlets and farms linked by narrow rural lanes;
- The role of this landscape in providing a rural setting to the nationally protected landscape of Dartmoor National Park and the Tamar Valley AONB (which forms part of the LCT);
- The historic small-scale square field pattern with beech hedges on hedge banks with mature tree lines;
- Some areas have a strong moorland character with a rich mosaic of habitats and vegetation;
- A strong local vernacular of historic stone rubble and slate farmhouses;
- The areas of open access and long distance paths which make this a popular area for recreation;
- Spectacular views across rolling farmland, up to the high moorland on Dartmoor in the east of the LCT and down to the wooded river valleys of the Tavy in the Tamar AONB in the south west.

Summary of landscape condition

The LCT retains a distinctive sense of place with scattered farmsteads set within an intricate mosaic of rolling medieval and post medieval fields and a network of winding lanes bounded by Devon hedgebanks. The LCT has strong visual links to the open moorland on Dartmoor, across the wooded slopes of the Tamar valley. Areas of arable cropping contrasts with the landscape's predominantly pastoral character. Some hedgebanks suffer from a lack of management with out-grown hedges in some locations. The unenclosed heathland reinforces the landscape's moorland character, although some have seen a decline in grazing levels resulting in a spread of bracken scrub and secondary woodland.

Forces for change

- Pressure for development on the fringes of Tavistock, Okehampton could extend into this LCT and would affect the rural character and sense of tranquillity.
- Medieval field patterns are vulnerable and can be lost with changes in land ownership and cropping.
- Continuing decline in traditional rural skills such as hedge laying and active woodland management.
- Change in tree species composition as new pests/diseases spread (particularly *phytophthora pthogens* and ash die-back (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)).
- Reduced agricultural viability of areas of lowland heathland with a decline in grazing levels leading to scrubbing up, impacting on the open character and biodiversity value.
- Climate change impacts leading to decrease in heathland due to enhanced growth rates of vegetation (bracken, gorse etc).
- Location of major road corridors on the edge of the LCT and potential for increase in traffic levels on main roads, particularly A30 and A386 likely to diminish levels of tranquillity.
- Growth in tourism and the proximity to popular visitor attractions within Dartmoor National Park and the Tamar Valley AONB which contributes to an increase in traffic and potential spread of caravan and camping sites, particularly along the A30 eroding the landscape's tranquillity.

Landscape Strategy and Guidelines

Overall Landscape Strategy

To protect the strong historic character of the Moorland Edge Slopes, where ancient sites and features are scattered across a remote rural landscape of small-scale medieval and post-medieval fields enclosed by intact Devon hedges. Manage and enhance areas of semi-natural habitat including heathlands to build resilience to climate change.

Landscape Guidelines

- Plan for the long-term **restructuring of conifer plantations** with a move towards their gradual reversion to locally indigenous broadleaf woodland, encouraging management to create and maintain a diverse age structure, to reduce the 'amenity' aspect of some recent planting.
- Pursue opportunities to extend and link **woodland and semi-natural habitats**, utilising native, climate-resistant species.
- Restore lost **Devon hedgebanks**, encouraging the development of further beech hedgerow trees and avenues. Respect any local variation in Devon bank construction and topping hedgerow species, utilising local materials where possible. Ensure that ditches and verges are managed to maximise their biodiversity potential.
- Conserve and appropriately manage and protect the integrity of **valued semi-natural habitats**, including broadleaved woodland, lowland moorland and acid grassland, rush pasture and mire including those designated as County Wildlife Sites.
- Encouraging the retention and appropriate management of areas of **rough ground and wet pasture** through livestock grazing at appropriate levels to enhance biodiversity.
- Protect and manage the landscape's **historic sites and features** including the prehistoric hill top enclosures near Berra Tor and at Castle Park Camp and South Longridge.
- Ensure **development respects the current scale of the landscape**, its underlying landform, historic field patterns and existing landscape features including trees and scattered buildings.
- Protect the landscape's **sparsely settled character** and control new development outside the existing footprints of the landscape's small historic hamlets.
- Protect the **strong local vernacular of stone and slate** with some colourwashing and thatch. New development should utilise traditional materials and building styles wherever possible. Encourage appropriate uses of rural buildings or their sympathetic conversion where appropriate.
- Seek to ensure opportunities for **access and enjoyment of the countryside** including links to the long distance routes such as the Two Castles Trail, West Devon Way and Tamar Valley Discovery Trail. Manage recreational pressure on areas close to the National Park, including picnic/parking areas along the A30.
- Protect **open views to Dartmoor** and across the West Devon countryside.
- Protect the **wider setting** the landscape provides to Dartmoor National Park and the Tamar Valley AONB. Ensure any development does not detract from the special qualities of these protected landscapes.