

Area of LDU within AONB: 64.0 hectares

% of LDU within AONB: 10%



Date surveyed: 25 February 2010

Survey points: SS467369, SS471354, SS474353, SS478351

Summary of landscape character

This is a flat, expansive marshy landscape of wet pasture crossed by a geometric pattern of reed-lined drainage ditches and sparse hedgerows. The LDU lies just outside of the AONB boundary, but falls within the North Devon Heritage Coast and is bounded by Braunton Burrows to the west. Its flat topography, sparse tree cover and limited built development afford long views across the landscape, including to the settlement of Braunton to the east, and the rising ridgelines of the North Devon Downs beyond. The landscape conjures up a strong sense of history, particularly owing to the survival of features such as linhayls and stone hump-back bridges telling the story of the marsh's reclamation from the sea in the early 19th century to provide rich grazing land.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

LANDFORM / TOPOGRAPHY

Landform description	Flat, expansive Broads/Fen-like marshland landscape.		
LAND USE AND PATTERNS			
Agriculture	<i>Main agricultural land use</i>	<i>Other agricultural land use(s)</i>	
	Unimproved wet pasture for livestock grazing.	Some arable fields and areas of horticulture/bulb growing (including polytunnels).	
Field patterns and boundaries	<i>Field patterns and origins</i>	<i>Size (note variations)</i>	<i>Boundary type / description</i>
	Regular post-medieval fields, including narrow strips on Braunton Marsh, laid out following the reclamation of the marshes for grazing land in the early 19 th century. Some	Medium scale, with smaller narrow strips on Braunton Marsh. The use of drainage	Drainage ditches often lined by reeds are the predominant field boundary type. Elsewhere, sparse hedgerows with few,

	modern fields surround Swanpool Marsh, where further land has recently been improved for productive agriculture.	ditches and sparse hedgerow boundaries give the impression of larger/open fields.	if any, hedgerow trees bound fields. Stone walls also form boundaries in parts.
Other land uses (e.g. recreation)	Willowfield Holiday Centre is located in the centre of the LDU, which includes a large freshwater fishing lake. The edges of Saunton Golf Course, within Braunton Burrows, intercept the western boundary of the LDU. The area also includes Swanpool Marsh Nature Reserve.		

WOODLAND AND SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS

Trees / woodland cover	<i>Size and distribution within landscape</i>	<i>Type and species(broadleaved / conifer)</i>
	The open landscape is defined by an absence of tree/woodland cover – limited to the occasional hedgerow tree. Willowfield Holiday Centre is set within wooded landscaped grounds, and Swanpool Marsh Nature Reserve includes areas of secondary woodland.	Predominantly broadleaved, with some riparian species such as willow (e.g. at Willowfield Holiday Centre).
Semi-natural habitats	<i>Description and location within landscape</i>	
	This landscape includes three SSSIs: Braunton Swanpool in the north-east, a nature reserve managed by the Wildlife Trust (an area of coastal grassland, reedbeds and marshland); Greenways & Freshmarsh, comprising two sites in the centre of the LDU (including herb-rich grazing marsh and drainage ditches supporting rare aquatic plants); and Braunton Burrows, also a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, on the western LDU boundary (valued for its extensive sand dune habitats supporting rich flora and fauna).	

SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Settlement pattern	<i>Settlement size, type, density and relationship to landscape</i>
	This open landscape is sparsely settled, with built development limited to isolated farms and cottages strung out along the straight lanes/tracks which dissect the marshes. The town of Braunton has a visual influence on views to the east.
Transport pattern (including Public Rights of Way)	<i>Road pattern, character and relationship to settlement / landscape</i>
	The marshes are crossed by a sparse network of straight, narrow and open access tracks and roads linking isolated farms and cottages. The minor roads also provide links between Braunton and car parking for Braunton Burrows and the South West Coast Path. The Tarka Trail/ South West Coast Path form the southern boundary of the LDU, running along the banks of the River Caen and Taw & Torridge Estuary.

Local vernacular styles and materials	Predominant traditional building materials	Any local variations	Other built features reflecting vernacular
	The landscape includes a scattering of linhay and other historic livestock shelters constructed of stone, often with thatched roofs.	N/A	Stone hump-back bridges crossing drainage ditches and stone walls reinforce the local vernacular.

Modern development styles / materials	The landscape includes modern farm buildings, a gas storage depot and storage sheds, often constructed of corrugated iron. Polytunnels are prominent features in the landscape, visible from a large distance.
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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Key historic features visible in the landscape	Description
	This landscape has a strong historic sense of place, with its character greatly reflecting the process of the marshes' reclamation from the sea in the early 19 th century to facilitate productive farming (the marshes were previously used for common grazing). Features such as the network of drainage ditches and sluices, 19 th century banks providing flood defences, strong geometric field pattern, stone bridges, linhay and other livestock shelters (including Grade II listed buildings) tell the story of the landscape's agricultural evolution. South Burrows Cottage, White House and Toll House are important historic buildings within the landscape.

VIEWS / PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

Views	Key views / landmark features	Intervisibility with LDUs	
		<i>From this LDU</i>	<i>To this LDU</i>
	<p>The open aspect and flat topography of the landscape afford long views, including to the town of Braunton to the east and the surrounding rising downland beyond.</p> <p>Telecommunication masts on the ridgeline to the north (Long Lane) are prominent features, whilst other detracting features on the skyline include white industrial buildings and Chivenor Airfield to the east of the LDU.</p> <p>The southern fringes of the LDU afford views across the Taw & Torridge Estuary towards settlement on its southern banks including Yelland, Instow and Appledore. Westward views are confined by the</p>	398 (the adjacent Braunton Great Field) 382 (ridgeline/cliff to the north-west) 399 (lower ridge slope to the north) 526 403 358 (from higher dunes)	398 382 399 526 403 358 (from higher dunes)

	<p>rising sand dunes of Braunton Burrows.</p>	<p>Lane)</p> <p>358 (Braunton Burrows to the west)</p>	
Perceptual qualities (description)	<p>This is a landscape with a strong sense of time depth, due to the presence of highly visible historic features relating to its use for agriculture over previous centuries. Its lack of tree cover and flat topography generate feelings of exposure – heightened in poor weather conditions. Although the landscape itself retains high levels of tranquillity, the close proximity of Braunton and views to other settlements across the Taw & Torridge Estuary serves as a reminder of the close proximity of centres of population and industry.</p>		

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Number	% of LDU land area
NATURE CONSERVATION		
SSSI	5	16.16%
SAC	1	12.39%
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT		
Listed Buildings	12 (grade II)	

UK BAP PRIORITY HABITATS

UK BAP Priority Habitat	Area (ha)	% of total LDU land area
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	366.38	56.80%
Coastal sand dunes	69.02	10.70%
Fens	23.194	3.60%
Mudflats	0.72	0.11%
Reedbeds	14.13	2.19%

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Perceptual qualities	Although the landscape itself retains high levels of tranquillity and a historic sense of place, the close proximity of Braunton and views to other settlements across the Taw & Torridge Estuary serves as a reminder of the close proximity of centres of population and industry in the modern world.
Views	Expansive views are afforded across the flat landscape and beyond – with detracting skyline features including telecommunications masts on the northern ridgeline (LDU 403) and industrial buildings and Chivenor Airfield to the east. Views westwards are defined by the sand dunes of Braunton Burrows.
Land use	Some areas of grazing marsh have been improved for intensive arable production, whilst polytunnels related to horticulture/bulb growing are prominent built structures visible from long distances. However, bulb growing is a land use long associated with the landscape (it used to be the location of probably the largest bulb growing farm in the world in the 1930s).
Field patterns	The LDU is defined by a regular, geometric pattern of 19 th century fields. Small areas of recent enclosure are found in the north, including around Swanpool Marsh.
Field boundaries	The area's historic drainage ditches are key aspects of landscape character, as are stone wall boundaries. Hedgerows are sparse with few hedgerow trees – reinforcing the exposed and open nature of the marshland landscape.
Trees and woodland	N/A – this is generally a treeless landscape.
Semi-natural habitats	Natural England currently assesses the herb-rich grazing marsh and drainage ditches of the Greenaways & Freshmarsh SSSI as in favourable condition; Braunton Burrows SSSI is in unfavourable recovering condition (requiring scrub clearance); and Braunton Swanpool SSSI's marsh and reedbed habitats are largely assessed as in favourable condition, although some areas would benefit from higher grazing levels. These are important areas of natural habitat in a

	farmed landscape.
Settlement and development	This is generally an unsettled landscape. Industrial-scale farm sheds/buildings can detract from the historic sense of place of the LDU.
Local vernacular	The rich scattering of traditional linhays and other historic agricultural structures, along with stone bridges, reinforce the local vernacular. Farmsteads and cottages include modern buildings and bungalows that do not reflect the traditional vernacular of the area.