

Area of LDU within AONB: 242.12 hectares

% of LDU within AONB: 100%



Date surveyed: 24 February 2010

Survey points: SS457435, SS458433, SS456430.

Summary of landscape character

This landscape forms a steeply sloping grassy / scrubby hillside forming the backdrop to Woolacombe Bay and a transition to the downland above. The base of the slope grades into the dunes of Woolacombe Warren, which in turn back a sandy beach (two separate LDUs). The northern part of this LDU extends eastwards along a combe valley, dominated by the coastal resort of Woolacombe containing a range of leisure and tourism-related development spread along the combe slopes. The hill slope is open and exposed, evoking a sense of wildness and remoteness in contrast to the buzzing resort below. The rocky headlands of Morte Point and Baggy Point frame westward views.

LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

LANDFORM / TOPOGRAPHY

Landform description	Westward-facing steeply sloping hillside backing Woolacombe Bay, opening out in the north to join an east-west combe valley. The rounded summit of Potter’s Hill is a distinctive landform feature.
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LAND USE AND PATTERNS

Agriculture	<i>Main agricultural land use</i>	<i>Other agricultural land use(s)</i>	
	Pasture	Rough unimproved grassland / remnant heath on steep slopes. Some fields are under horsekeeping in Woolacombe.	
Field patterns and boundaries	<i>Field patterns and origins</i>	<i>Size (note variations)</i>	<i>Boundary type / description</i>
	The steep slopes backing Woolacombe Warren are unenclosed, whilst the gentler downland slopes above are characterised by post-medieval	Large open fields on the downland fringes; a smaller pattern	Stone-faced Devon hedgebanks (using local Morte stone) with low levels of topping vegetation –

	and modern regular fields, with some sinuous boundaries following earlier medieval lines. Parts of the northern combe slopes above Woolacombe include medieval fields with curving boundaries.	characterises the slopes above Woolacombe.	gorse and scrub give a wild character to lengths closer to the coast.
Other land uses (e.g. recreation)	Leisure and recreational land uses – there is a large caravan park in the north-east of the LDU, as well as one in the south at Putsborough. Hand-gliders commonly use Woolacombe Down as a launching point, passing over the slope of this LDU.		

WOODLAND AND SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS

Trees / woodland cover	<i>Size and distribution within landscape</i>	<i>Type and species(broadleaved / conifer)</i>
	There are few trees and sparse woodland cover within this exposed coastal landscape – mainly limited to low-growing patches of scrub. Shelterbelts are a frequent feature of Woolacombe. An area of woodland in the Challacombe Valley is important for biodiversity.	Wind-sculpted Monterey cypress shelterbelts are distinctive features within Woolacombe. Broadleaved woodland is found behind Potter’s Hill and in the Challacombe Valley, (part of County Wildlife Sites).
Semi-natural habitats	<i>Description and location within landscape</i>	
	The majority of the LDU’s steep westward-facing slope is designated as a County Wildlife Site on merit of its unimproved calcareous, acidic and neutral grasslands. The wooded combe slope of the Challacombe Valley is also a County Wildlife Site, supporting a mosaic of neutral grassland, gorse scrub, broadleaved woodland and marshy grassland. Patches of heathy scrub and gorse throughout provide wildlife interest to the landscape.	

SETTLEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Settlement pattern	<i>Settlement size, type, density and relationship to landscape</i>
	Settlement is concentrated in the north of the LDU – comprising the sprawling resort of Woolacombe with a range of leisure and holiday-related development. The steep hillside and downland slopes are unsettled. A small holiday park, car parking and hotel at Vention form the only development in the south of the LDU.
Transport pattern (including Public Rights of Way)	<i>Road pattern, character and relationship to settlement / landscape</i>
	The B3343 is the main road into Woolacombe, with access roads leading off to serve the settlement and its holiday parks. The steep road down Challacombe Hill runs along the northern edge of Potter’s Hill, also providing access to the town. The lower slopes of the hillside above Woolacombe Warren are traversed by the Tarka Trail (also a National Cycle Route) and parts of the South West Coast Path.

Local vernacular styles and materials	<i>Predominant traditional building materials</i>	<i>Any local variations</i>	<i>Other built features reflecting vernacular</i>
	Woolacombe is valued for its mix of Victorian and Edwardian villa-style houses and grand hotels – including gothic revival, classical, Tudor revival and renaissance. However, the majority of development in the LDU lies outside the town's Conservation Area and dates from the 20 th century.	N/A	Very distinctive stone-faced Devon banks constructed of local Morte slate. The church of St Sabinus in Woolacombe is a Grade II* Listed building, dating from the turn of the 20 th century. It is constructed of local Devonian Red Sandstone with a slate roof.

Modern development styles / materials	A range of building styles and materials are found – colourwashing is common (particularly light blue, peach, pink and white), with either grey slate or red tile roofs. Caravan parks and holiday chalets are strong features of the built environment.
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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Key historic features visible in the landscape	<i>Description</i>
	Along with St Sabinus church, there is a Grade II listed limekiln facing the coast at Vention, reflecting the coast's industrial heritage. The Historic Environment Record shows a scattering of old quarries across the landscape which provided local building stone. A lookout and arrow above Putsborough beach in the south dates from WWII.

VIEWS / PERCEPTUAL QUALITIES

Views	<i>Key views / landmark features</i>	<i>Intervisibility with LDUs</i>	
		<i>From this LDU</i>	<i>To this LDU</i>
	The sloping, elevated character of the hillside and downland above affords wide-ranging views across Woolacombe Bay. Northern views are dominated by development at Woolacombe, including a caravan park above the town within LDU 853. The telecommunications mast on Challacombe Hill is a prominent skyline feature particularly when viewed from hill summits.	385 (Woolacombe Sand) 386 (Woolacombe Warren) 578 (coast to the north-west) 897 (coast to the south-west)	385 386 578 897 402 403 853

		<p>402 (Woolacombe Down)</p> <p>403 (downland around Putsborough)</p> <p>853 (downland to the north)</p>	
<p>Perceptual qualities (description)</p>	<p>The steep hill slope and edges of the downland are wild and exposed, evoking a strong sense of tranquillity and remoteness. This contrasts with the buzzing resort of Woolacombe in the north of the LDU, which particularly comes alive during holiday periods. Users of the Tarka Trail on the lower slopes of the hillside, plus people accessing the beach and dunes from car parks within the LDU reduce levels of tranquillity at peak times.</p>		

LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS

Designation	Number	% of LDU land area
NATURE CONSERVATION		
SSSI	1	0.38%
County Wildlife Sites	3	36.13%
Listed Buildings	2 (1 grade I, 1 grade II)	

UK BAP PRIORITY HABITATS

UK BAP Priority Habitat	Area (ha)	% of LDU land area
Coastal sand dunes	0.11	0.05%
Maritime cliff and slope	133.27	55.04%

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING LANDSCAPE CONDITION

Perceptual qualities	Perceptual qualities are greatly dependent on the seasons and influx of visitors / recreational users within the LDU. Extensive tourism-related development at Woolacombe has a pervading influence on the area – eroding levels of tranquillity in the north of the LDU.
Views	The elevated, sloping landscape affords wide-ranging views across Morte Bay, framed by dramatic coastal headlands. As above – views to the north are dominated by development at Woolacombe, and the telecommunications mast on Challacombe Hill is a prominent vertical element on the skyline.
Land use	Development and recreational land uses in the north of the LDU contrast with the agricultural land and semi-natural habitats covering most of the landscape.
Field patterns	The steep slope backing Woolacombe Warren is characteristically unenclosed. Large fields emphasise the open character of the elevated downland. The survival of medieval fields on the northern edge of Woolacombe are important features of the historic environment within a built-up area.
Field boundaries	Sparse vegetation cover on Devon hedgebanks, with the presence of gorse scrub, emphasises the landscape's exposed character.
Trees and woodland	No issues noted in the field – the landscape is defined by its absence of woodland. The Monterey cypress shelterbelts in Woolacombe form distinctive features. Broadleaved woodland in the Challacombe Valley is CWS designated – and therefore assumed to be under favourable management.
Semi-natural habitats	No issues noted in the field – areas of scrub and unimproved grassland habitats within County Wildlife Site designations are assumed to be under favourable management.

Settlement and development	Development and recreational land uses dominate the northern section of the LDU, detracting from the 'wild' qualities of the coastal and downland landscape. Caravan parks are prominent in views from within the LDU and beyond (including from LDUs 386 and 402).
Local vernacular	Modern buildings on the edge of Woolacombe stand out in the muted backdrop – often being painted in bright colours.

COMMENTS ON LDU / LCT BOUNDARIES

The original LDU boundary has been tweaked to exclude the upper sand dunes of Woolacombe Warren (386). **The AONB might also wish to consider excluding the northern part of the LDU which includes development at Woolacombe. This has now been classified as part of the 4C Coastal Slopes and Combes with Settlement LCT in the North Devon & Torridge LCA (November 2010).**