

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - Lower Tamar and Tavy Valleys

LCA No

CA27

JCA

Constituent LDUs

Total 4: 39, 40, 89, 330 (T03, T15, T19)



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Location Narrow band on western edge of Tamar from northern edge of Saltash to South Hooe Farm, including Kingsmill Lake.

Designations 3 LDUs are completely covered by the AONB designation (Tamar Valley), and another partly covered; all 4 Cornish LDUs contain SSSIs. 5 LDUs contain SPAs and 5 contain SACs; 1 LDU contains SMs site.

Description

Intertidal zone and estuary land margins of rivers Tamar and Tavy upstream from Tamar Bridge to South Hooe Farm including Kingsmill Lake on western shore, lightly confined by low landform and vegetation in adjoining Landscape Character Area 29 (Middle Tamar Valley). Large-scale open unenclosed and unsettled land, with Intertidal Mudflats, Coastal Saltmarsh, Reedbeds, Fens, Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh and small areas of pastoral farmland. Occasional small farms and riverside quays. Low-lying areas are subject to inundation by sea in storm conditions. These are areas of intense amenity/recreational use especially in southern part, mostly water based.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Unsettled intertidal zones of lower river valleys.

Extensive fens, coastal floodplain and grazing marsh.

Pastoral farmland and rough grazing above high tideline with little arable.

Unspoilt and remote upper reaches of the river.

Light scatter of isolated farms, but predominantly unsettled.

Active and disused old quays offering access to the river; remains of historic riverside industrial activity and navigation facilities.

River Tamar is major influence.

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Geology and soils

Marine levels with sandy raw soils and rock outcrops. Alluvial soils of lower tributary valleys.

Topography and drainage

Flat, dominated by the tidal cycle.

Biodiversity

The narrow Landscape Character Area along the river Tamar includes extensive areas of Intertidal Mudflats, Coastal Saltmarsh, Reedbeds, and Fens in the lower-lying areas, and small areas of broadleaved woodland, Lowland Heathland and scrub on higher parts of the LCA, mostly on steeper slopes. Together with Fens and other wetland habitats, flatter areas of the neutral and improved grassland close to the river have been identified as Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh. Some land is under arable or horticultural use. The wetland habitats associated with the estuary are internationally important bird wintering sites and much of the area within the LCA is a SAC (Plymouth Sound and Estuaries). The habitats in the LCA closely follows and links to the adjacent habitats in LCA 26 (East Cornwall and Tamar Moorland Fringe) and LCA 29 (Middle Tamar Valley).

Land Cover

The LCA is mostly the estuary of the river Tamar with its associated intertidal habitats and associated wetland. The farmed areas are pastoral with improved and unimproved grassland or arable with horticultural use, with small areas of broadleaved woodland, scrub or scattered trees.

Land Use

Pastoral farmland, with pockets of former and current market gardening activity.

Field and woodland pattern

Where it exists along the edge of the floodplain, the field pattern is of medieval enclosure and there is no significant woodland. Important line of hedgerow trees between intertidal zone and farmland above.

Settlement pattern

Generally unsettled with occasional small farms. River-associated settlements are situated above the floodplain and include Cargreen and Landulph.

Transport pattern

Formerly accessible mainly by river, this area has a maze of very narrow, winding lanes heavily enclosed by tall Cornish hedges with hedgerows and trees, giving it a very secretive feel away from the open river.

Historic features

Most of the historic features are associated with communication and transport. The most visible is the Royal Albert Bridge (1859), Brunel's masterpiece, carrying the Great Western Railway over the Tamar into Cornwall, which lies just to the south of the Landscape Character Area. An early twentieth century railway viaduct crosses the river at Calstock and there are medieval bridges at Gunnislake and Horsebridge and an historic fording point near Latchley; various ferries operated on the lower reaches of the river. There are numerous quays along the river, including important examples at Cotehele and Calstock, and there are intact picturesque examples around Kingsmill Lake - Moditonham Quay. These quays served both agricultural settlements bordering the river and the wide range of riverside industries. These included mining and associated processing, quarrying, tide mills, bone mills and manure works, and limekilns. The river was partly canalised below the highest tidal point just downstream from Gunnislake, with remains of a weir, canal channel, docks or winding points and a riverside towpath. Riverside embankments to defend

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adjacent agricultural land against flooding, or created as part of land reclamation from former tidal mudflats, also survive in places. Some medieval riverside settlements as at Clifton and Lower Hampt and a medieval chapel at Cotehele.

Condition

Electricity pylons dominate the view striding across the Tamar south of Cargreen. The intertidal zone receives little management. There is evidence of lack of grazing in some marginal areas, and increased scrub and bracken. Invasive plant species dominate some riparian areas. Increased use of polytunnels for market gardening e.g. Cargreen.

Pressures

Development-housing and building restoration.

Pressures arising from increasing recreational use of the upper estuary especially at Cargreen.

Aesthetic and sensory

Secret mix of wetland habitats and winding river reaches reached only via maze of winding lanes enclosed by tall Cornish hedges, with amazing views along the river from the valley sides above. Some mining relics, but completely integrated into landscape. Estuary views ever changing with the tidal cycle, and the play of light on water and mud contributes to the sense of place.

Distinctive features

The winding ribbon of river with wetland habitats alongside, contrasts with the well managed farmland on the valley slopes. Similarly, the Intimacy of confined routes approaching the estuary contrast with the wide open expanses of mud and water at the waters edge. Rural remoteness contrasts with views over the water towards Plymouth.

Visions and objectives

Maintain the unique estuarine landscape character of this area. Maintain the unique estuarine landscape character of this area.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

Protect internationally designated habitats from development.

Conserve former quays and mine sites.

Enforce restrictions on high speed vessels using river.

Conserve open landscape character of grazing marshes by controlling scrub and bracken encroachment.

Conserve unsettled landscape character by resisting all applications for waterside development, including large scale housing and marina-type developments.

Conserve farmland landscape character through encouraging take up of agri-environment schemes and support for revival of market gardening and traditional orchards.

Investigate capacity of this area for sustainable tourism.

Investigate undergrounding of power lines.

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY

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