

mid devon

landscape character assessment

October 2011





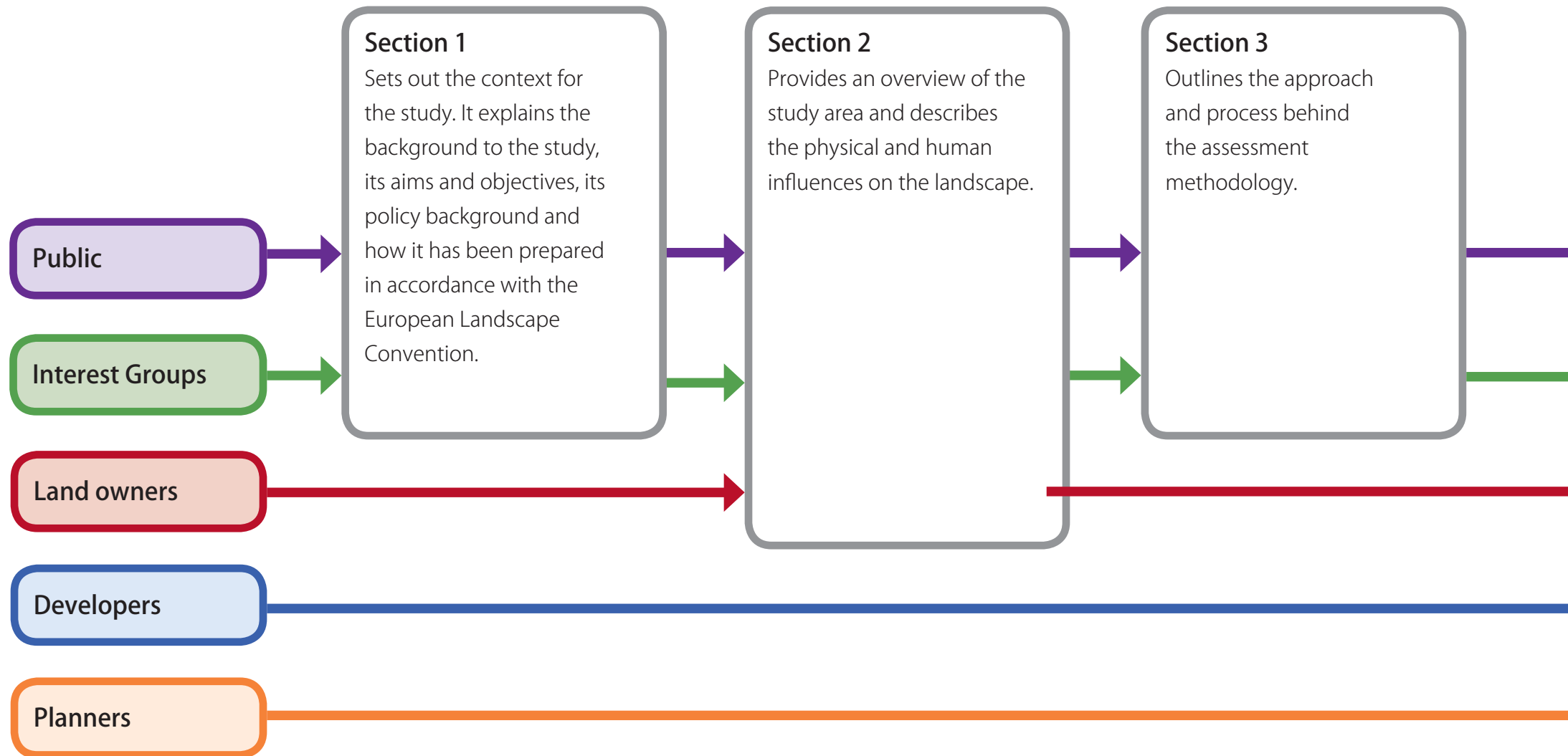
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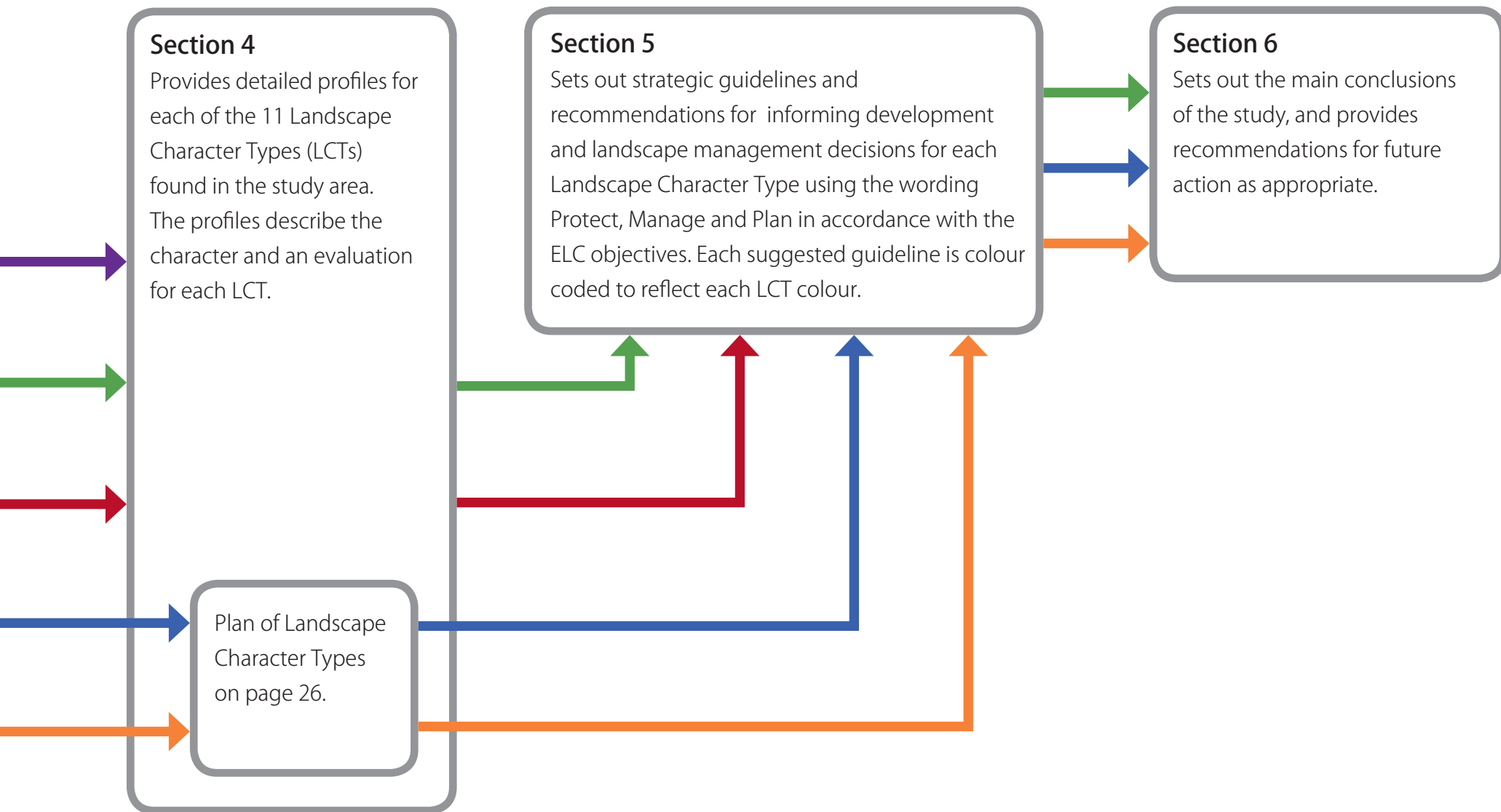
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how to use this document







1. introduction

Background

The quality and variety of the landscape quality of Mid Devon is an invaluable resource and one of our greatest assets. Protecting and enhancing the special character of the landscape that contributes towards local identity and distinctiveness is an important part of the planning process and essential to quality of life. Landscape Character Assessment is a useful tool in identifying the special qualities that give a landscape its sense of place. Recognised by Government and promoted by Natural England, it can aid the planning, design and management of a landscape.

Mid Devon District Council has undertaken this Landscape Character Assessment, to ensure the compatibility with assessments undertaken by adjoining authorities and with the Devon Land Description Units. This updated assessment supersedes the earlier Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment produced in 2007. The study area encompasses the landscape within Mid Devon District. However, where landscape character extends across the study area's boundary into adjoining districts, the assessments of adjacent authorities have been taken into consideration to ensure consistency.

The district of Mid Devon covers an area of 353 square miles (914 sq km) in the heartland of Devon (figure 1.1, page 9). It lies between Dartmoor, Exmoor and the Blackdown Hills. From the centre of the district, the coasts of North and South Devon are each about 30 miles away. Tiverton is the main town within the district, with three smaller market towns of Cullompton, Crediton and Bampton.

The study area is predominantly rural and an important resource centrally positioned between the Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks and the Blackdown Hills Area Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Mid Devon landscape with its rolling hills, and unspoilt farming countryside has a sense of continuity which gives a distinctive character to the landscape.

The Mid Devon district forms the heart of the Devon countryside, linked to the south coast by the River Exe with its beautiful valley and surrounds. The intricate course of the River Exe is the most defining landscape feature in Mid Devon, providing a continuous thread flowing from the north extremities of the district right down to the south near Thorverton. To the far east of the district the Blackdown Hills with unique geology and isolated unspoilt scenery are a distinctive diverse rural landscape. The Culm Valley and its environs to the east, is a low lying flat prosperous agricultural area, with great soil fertility. The north and northwest of the district is a high flattish landscape with a rather unsheltered windswept appearance, formed by the Culm Measures, so called for its underlying thin bed of coal known locally as 'Culm'. The farming hinterland to the north of Crediton, often referred to as the Mid Devon farming belt, has all the typical elements that make up the distinctive Devon landscape, with its varied and beautiful patchwork of irregular shaped fields with green pastures.

Purpose of the assessment

The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the landscape of the study area, to describe variations in the landscape character resulting in guidance for its future development and landscape management.

Landscape Character Assessment is a tool for identifying the features which give a locality its sense of place, to help understand what the landscape is like today, how it came to be like that, and how it may change in the future as an aid to decision making.

The main objectives of the assessment are:

- to provide a tool for decision making in the development management process;
- to inform planning policy formation;
- to guide landscape management decisions;
- to form part of the evidence base for the Development Management Development Plan Document and subsequent policy documents.

This assessment has been produced in conjunction with a Town and Village Character Assessment for Mid Devon which also adopts a similar methodology.



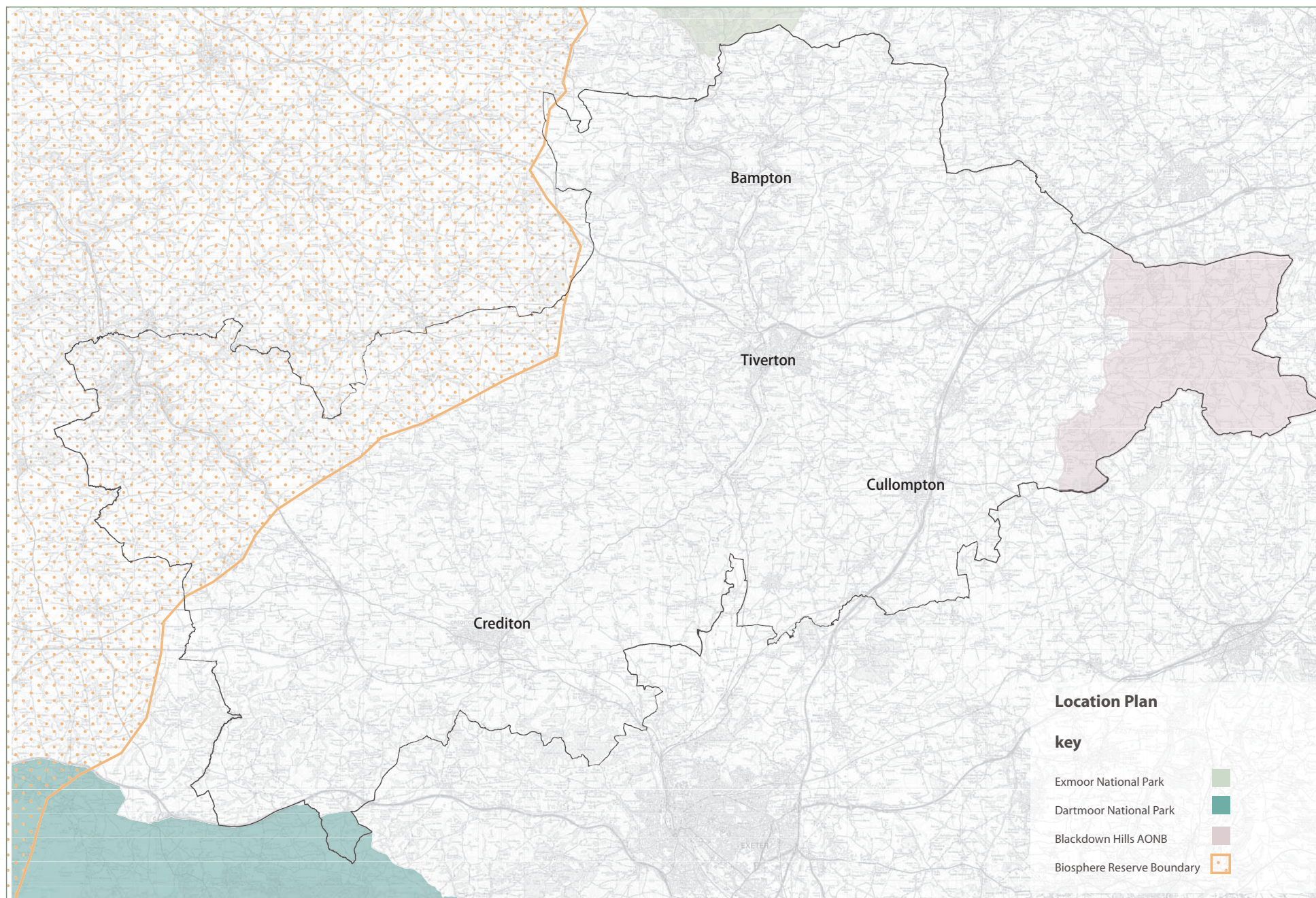


Figure 1.1: Location Plan

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Policy Context

National policy

Nationally, guidance in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) advocates the use of tools such as Landscape Character Assessments to help guide appropriately sited and designed development. Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable Development) reinforces the need to understand the character and quality of an area in order to make good judgements about how to preserve and enhance it. Planning Policy Statement 1: (Climate Change Supplement) sets out how planning should contribute to reducing emissions and stabilising climate change (mitigation) and take into account the unavoidable consequences (adaptation).

Local Plan 2006

Since 2006, a number of the Local Plan policies have been superseded or replaced, primarily through the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2007 and the Allocations and Infrastructure Development Plan Document in 2010. A Development Management Development Plan Document will complete this process and replace the Local Plan. In the meantime, the following remaining policies as listed below are considered relevant to this assessment: Strategy policies: S5, S6, S9 and Environment policies: ENV1, ENV2, ENV4, ENV5, ENV6, ENV7, ENV10, ENV14, ENV15, ENV16, ENV17.

Mid Devon Core Strategy 2007

The following policies from the Core Strategy are considered to be of particular relevance: COR1 Sustainable Communities, COR2 Local Distinctiveness, COR5 Climate Change, COR9 Access, COR11 Flooding, COR17 Villages and COR18 Countryside.

Other Work

A Green Infrastructure Strategy is currently being prepared and is planned to be finalised early 2012. A Town and Village Character Assessment for Mid Devon is also nearing completion, to be finalised in 2012.

The European Landscape Convention

The Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment has been prepared in accordance with the articles of the European Landscape Convention. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) came into force in the UK in March 2007 and is the first international treaty to address the protection, management and planning of landscapes. Developed and agreed through the Council of Europe (CoE), adoption of the Convention is voluntary by participatory national governments.

Defra has charged Natural England with leading the implementation of the European Landscape Convention in England, working in partnership with English Heritage. The general purpose of the convention is to encourage public authorities to adopt policies and measures at local, regional, national and international level for protecting, managing and planning landscapes throughout Europe.

The Mid Devon Landscape Character Assessment will continue to ensure the implementation of the ELC within Devon. The descriptions of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) provide information regarding landscape change, a strategy for the future and set landscape guidelines (equivalent to the ELC's landscape objectives) for the district's distinctive landscapes. The aim of the assessment is to reaffirm the importance of the landscape and guide future work to protect, manage and plan the landscapes of Mid Devon.

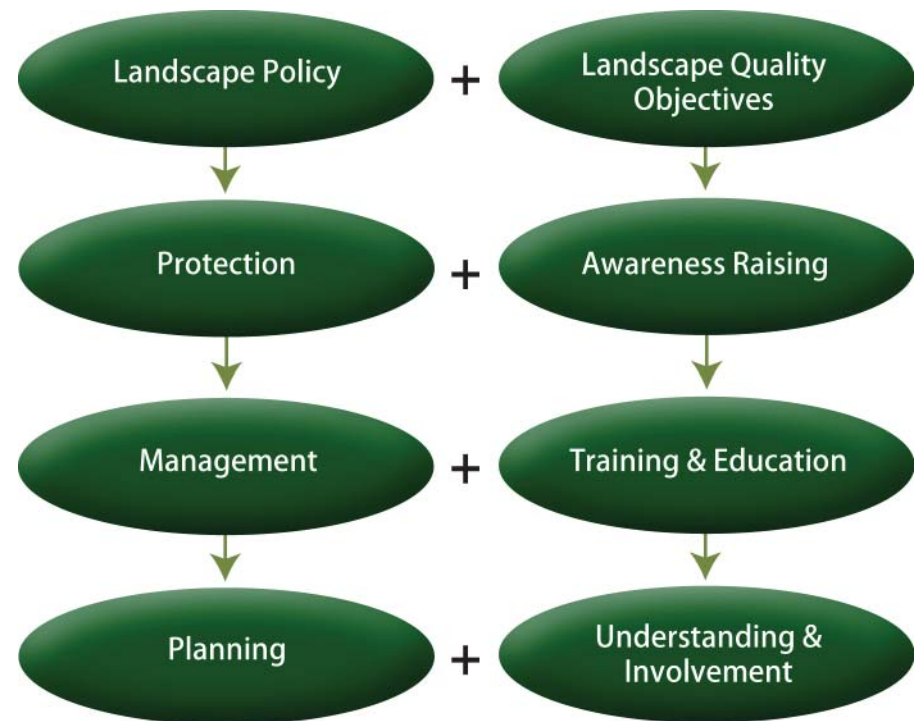


Figure 1.2: The practical steps needed to implement the European Landscape Convention