

Policy X: Landscape character

1) What is the policy seeking to achieve?

Stoke Gabriel Parish has a rich and valued landscape, the majority of which is nationally protected as part of the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Landscape character is a key contributor to the Parish's local distinctiveness and sense of place and is highly valued by residents and visitors alike.

A key aim for the Neighbourhood Plan is therefore to conserve and enhance landscape character in the Parish.

2) What is the evidence behind the policy?

The landscape character of Stoke Gabriel Parish is of outstanding quality and distinctiveness. An overview of the key landscape designations, characteristics and views in the Parish is presented below.

South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Approximately 70% of Stoke Gabriel Parish is covered by the nationally designated South Devon AONB. The coverage of the Parish with the AONB is highlighted in the map below:

To include map of coverage of the AONB.

AONBs were initially established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The law for AONBs was subsequently updated and enhanced by Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Act. An AONB designation protects land of nationally important landscape quality, with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.

The South Devon AONB Partnership is required to prepare and keep up to date a Management Plan¹ for the AONB. This should define the 'Special Qualities' of the AONB, which summarise the unique natural beauty for which the AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape.

The ten Special Qualities for the South Devon AONB are set out below. The landscape of Stoke Gabriel Parish encompasses at least eight of these special qualities:

- Fine, undeveloped, wild and rugged coastline
- Ria estuaries (drowned river valleys), steep combes and a network of associated watercourses
- Deeply rural rolling patchwork agricultural landscape
- Deeply incised landscape that is intimate, hidden and secretive away from the plateau tops
- Iconic wide, unspoilt and expansive panoramic views
- A landscape with a rich time depth and a wealth of historic features and cultural associations
- A breadth and depth of significant habitats, species and associated natural events
- An ancient and intricate network of winding lanes, paths and recreational routes
- Areas of high tranquillity, natural nightscapes, distinctive natural soundscapes and visible movement

¹ South Devon AONB (April 2019) South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019 - 2024

- A variety in the setting to the AONB formed by the marine environment, Plymouth City, Torbay, market and coastal towns, rural South Hams and southern Dartmoor

Landscape character types

In 2017 a Landscape Character Assessment was undertaken for the South Hams and West Devon.² This identified 23 Landscape Character Types (LCTs), with 18 identified in the South Hams.

Four of these LCTs cover Stoke Gabriel Parish. These are set out below, with a summary of the LCT and an overview of the overall landscape strategy for the landscape as proposed in the Landscape Character Assessment.

To include map of LCTs in the Parish.

Lower rolling farmed and settled valley slopes

Which area in the Parish does the LCT cover? Most of Stoke Gabriel village and the eastern part of the Parish, including Waddeton.

Summary of LCT: Elevated undulating valley slopes and rolling hills with a well wooded character cut by steep sided stream valleys.

Overall landscape strategy for the LCT: Protect the strong field patterns of this landscape, including the rich network of well-managed Devon hedgebanks. Manage the farmed landscape to enhance wildlife interest and local diversity restoring areas of relict traditional orchards. Protect the wooded character of the landscape, utilising new woodland planting to filter views of development. Maintain the sparse settlement pattern and avoiding a spread of suburban influences from larger settlements adjacent to the LCT.

River valley slopes and combes

Which area in the Parish does the LCT cover? The edge of the River Dart southwards from the Millpool

Summary of LCT: Rounded hills and steep undulating slopes overlooking the river valleys.

Overall landscape strategy for the LCT: To protect and enhance the peaceful character of the valley slopes, fringed by well-managed woodlands and fields enclosed by an intact network of species-rich Devon banks. Opportunities are sought to restore conifer plantations to broadleaves and other semi-natural habitats, creating a climate-resilient green network. New recreational spaces and infrastructure links are provided to nearby settlements

Estuaries

Which area in the Parish does the LCT cover? The River Dart and the Millpool

Summary of LCT: Dynamic landscapes which change often with tides and weather conditions. Strongly naturalistic and tranquil with semi-natural habitats that are highly important for biodiversity. Settlements are often associated with the estuaries and they form a popular destination for both land and water based activity.

Overall landscape strategy for the LCT: To protect the open character and expansive views to and from the estuary, ensuring new development on its fringes is incorporated into its landscape setting.

² LUC (2017) A Landscape Character Assessment for South Hams and West Devon

The cultural heritage and natural evolution of the estuary is conveyed through sensitive interpretation, and local communities are involved in planning for future landscape change as a result of sea level rise and changes in coastal erosion patterns. Recreational pressure and in particular water-based activity is sensitively managed to retain the secret, tranquil character of inland creeks

Upper farmed and wooded valley slopes

Which area in the Parish does the LCT cover? Aish and the northern part of the Parish

Summary of LCT: Elevated undulating valley slopes and rolling hills with a well wooded character cut by steep sided stream valleys.

Overall landscape strategy for the LCT: Protect the strong field patterns of this landscape, including the rich network of well-managed Devon hedgebanks. Manage the farmed landscape to enhance wildlife interest and local diversity restoring areas of relict tradition orchards. Protect the wooded character of the landscape, utilising new woodland planting to filter views of development. Maintain the sparse settlement pattern and avoiding a spread of suburban influences from larger settlements adjacent to the LCT.

Key landscape features

Notable landscape features in the Parish include:

- The views of the river from the Quay and the publicly accessible foreshore.
- The views of the nearly three miles of foreshore from the river – mostly pasture fields and mixed deciduous woodland, including rare “ria oaks” upstream of Mill Point.
- The extensive network of field boundaries, some of Saxon or earlier origin, constructed as stone-faced banks using local Devonian limestone or as double-faced, mortared walls, again usually of local limestone and of later construction.
- Several distinctive stone stiles at the entrance to footpaths from the public road consisting of a single, thin, vertical limestone slab with limestone steps and side pillars. Examples are at Paignton Road at the outer end of “the narrows”, Hoyle Lane and at the Galmpton end of Stoke Gabriel Road.
- Several large boulders of red Permian sandstone, the harder remains of the stratum that once overlaid the whole area and gave many fields their distinctive red/orange soil colour. One such boulder lies at the upper entrance to Higher Well Farm, another inside the entrance to Waddeton Barton farmyard. Many older walls, especially at Waddeton, contain smaller dressed stones of this material.
- The remains of the fortified Romano-British farmstead on the hilltop east of Lower Well Farm.
- The Mill Pool dam, probably of late Norman construction, which encloses the eastern portion of the creek and originally provided the base for a two-wheeled corn mill.
- Over a dozen abandoned limestone quarries, many with the remains of lime kilns.
- Hoyle Copse, a complete example of a limestone quarry with its intact lime kiln, adjacent coppice wood for fuel and paddock for the ponies that transported the stone and timber. Owned and maintained by the Parish Council and open to the public.
- The ancient yew tree in the churchyard.
- The Parish Orchard, next to the churchyard, one of the last of many cider orchards in the parish and now the venue for the revived annual Wassail.
- A lack of high voltage electricity pylons.

3) *What does the community say?*

Community consultation undertaken for the Neighbourhood Plan to date has highlighted the importance of the Parish's landscape character for both residents and visitors alike.

The landscape character of the area was identified as a central component of what makes the Parish special, with local character acting as a central draw for those living in the Parish.

A significant number of those responding to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire highlighted the need to conserve landscape character. This was linked to significant concern amongst residents that key views were being affected by incremental and uncontrolled development, leading to a loss of a sense of place and local distinctiveness.

The River Dart, the Mill Pond, woodland and the Byter Mill valley were identified by many of those responding to the questionnaire as key landscapes. Trees, hedgerows, Devon Banks and verges were identified as key parts of the Parish's landscape and villagescape which should be protected. Traditional orchards were also highlighted as a key component of local distinctiveness. This was accompanied by a desire within the community for continued and enhanced access to the landscape, and for views to the landscape to be protected from Public Rights of Way in the villages.

4) *Policy SGX: Landscape character policy*

South Devon AONB

Major development³ within the South Devon AONB will not be supported except in exceptional circumstances where it is specifically designed to meet the identified local needs of the Parish and is designed to ensure that development will not cause undue harm to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.

Development within the South Devon AONB will be expected to conserve and enhance the AONB's Special Qualities. Any developments should have regard to the South Devon AONB Management Plan 2019 – 2024 or its subsequent replacement.

Landscape character

Development proposals will be supported where it is shown by assessment that they do not have a significant detrimental effect on the characteristic landscapes of Stoke Gabriel Parish, the setting and significance of heritage assets, or on key viewpoints or vistas from and within the Parish's settlements. Development should reflect the distinctive characteristics of the Landscape Character Type within which it sits, and demonstrate how the proposal relates to its location in terms of landscape character, setting and visual effects.

To support villagescape character, development will be expected to support the provisions of Neighbourhood Plan **Policy SGX (Design)**

For major development* in the Parish, development proposals will be expected to be accompanied by an detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. This will clearly set out and demonstrate how the proposal:

- i. Avoids the widening and/or straightening of characteristic narrow, winding lanes (or demonstrates how such modification is required for road safety purposes and can be accommodated with minimal damage to landscape character)
- ii. Retains the field pattern of Devon banks and hedges and minimises damage to trees, bushes, historic features and gateposts within them
- iii. Repairs/replaces any characteristic landscape features that are affected, taking into account

³ As defined in the NPPF (2019)

the local character, having carried out a survey of all existing trees, Devon banks and hedgerows.

- iv. Retains, where present, traditional orchards
- v. Is in harmony with the undulating character of the landscape
- vi. Is appropriate to the small scale and intimacy of the landscape and preserves the sense of place
- vii. Effectively screens or blends new buildings into the shape and colour of the landscape, so as to reduce the visibility of houses from other areas of Stoke Gabriel Parish, the AONB and neighbouring parishes and provides suitable strategies for avoiding or minimising their visual impact
- viii. Outlines the use of existing and proposed landscaping and how the landscaping may look in 10 years' time.

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