

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a small stream with green reeds and grasses along its banks. A stone wall runs across the middle ground. Behind the wall, a paved path leads to a large house on the left with red ivy on its walls and a smaller house on the right. The background is a dense forest of trees with green and autumnal foliage.

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# Dartmoor Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

## The sensitivity of land around key settlements

Final Report  
Prepared by LUC  
July 2017

**Project Title:** Dartmoor Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

**Client:** Dartmoor National Park Authority

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## Executive summary

This Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) provides a comparative assessment of landscape quality around ten key settlements within Dartmoor National Park and determines the landscape's sensitivity to built development. It identifies the key characteristics and features which make each area of landscape sensitive, and sets out a judgement of overall sensitivity to development. This information can be used to inform the siting, design and scale of future development to ensure it respects and is well integrated with existing landscape character.

As with all assessments based upon data and information which is to a greater or lesser extent subjective, some caution is required in its interpretation. This is particularly to avoid the suggestion that certain landscape features or qualities can automatically be associated with certain sensitivities – the reality is that an assessment of landscape sensitivity is the result of a complex interplay of often unequally weighted variables (i.e. 'criteria').

The Landscape Assessment Zones are likely to contain areas of higher and lower sensitivity within them that vary from the overall sensitivity rating. It is therefore very important to take note of the explanatory text supporting the assessments, including the summary of valued attributes, as set out in the individual Landscape Assessment Zone profiles in Chapter 3. Whilst the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment results provide an initial indication of landscape sensitivity, it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement on the suitability of individual sites for a particular development or land use change. All proposals will need to be assessed on their own merits.

The Assessment provides useful guidance in respect of the consideration of individual sites, and will be of value in assessing potential options and alternatives for allocations in the local plan, and also for guiding planning applications in respect of particular sensitivities and mitigation.

At a more strategic level, the Assessment demonstrates an overall sensitivity to development of the Dartmoor landscape surrounding the main settlements. The Assessment focuses on what are likely, in planning policy terms, to be considered the most appropriate locations for development. The study is one of sensitivity, not of capacity, but what may be concluded from the assessment is that there exists a level of sensitivity in the National Park context which limits the capacity for change or growth even in its most sustainable locations. This may provide helpful evidence when considering development opportunities in a sub-regional context.

Importantly, though, the Assessment is a tool to guide decisions. It is not intended to prevent change in or around settlements in the National Park, but to recognise their sensitivity to development and assist applicants and decision makers in bringing forward good development in the most appropriate locations.

# 1 Introduction

## Background and purpose of this Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

- 1.1 Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) commissioned LUC in October 2016 to review and update the existing landscape character evidence base, culminating in an updated Landscape Character Assessment (April 2017) and this sensitivity assessment of the land around key settlements within the National Park. The Landscape Character Assessment is presented as a separate report and should be read as context to this landscape sensitivity assessment.
- 1.2 This Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) provides a comparative assessment of landscape quality around ten key settlements within Dartmoor National Park and determines the landscape's sensitivity to built development. It identifies the key characteristics and features which make each area of landscape sensitive, and sets out a judgement of overall sensitivity to development. This information can be used to inform the siting, design and scale of future development to ensure it respects and is well integrated with existing landscape character.
- 1.3 This assessment does not make judgements on the appropriateness of specific developments on individual sites (and does not consider specific development proposals where these might exist), but can provide the context for more detailed studies of individual sites. It also provides an important evidence base to support the policies and proposals within the Local Plan. In particular, the information will be used to help inform the site allocations decision making process.
- 1.4 The ten National Park settlements that form the focus of this assessment are shown at **Figure 1.1**; these are:
  - Ashburton
  - Buckfastleigh
  - Chagford
  - Horrabridge
  - Moretonhampstead
  - Princetown
  - South Brent
  - Yelverton
  - Christow
  - Mary Tavy

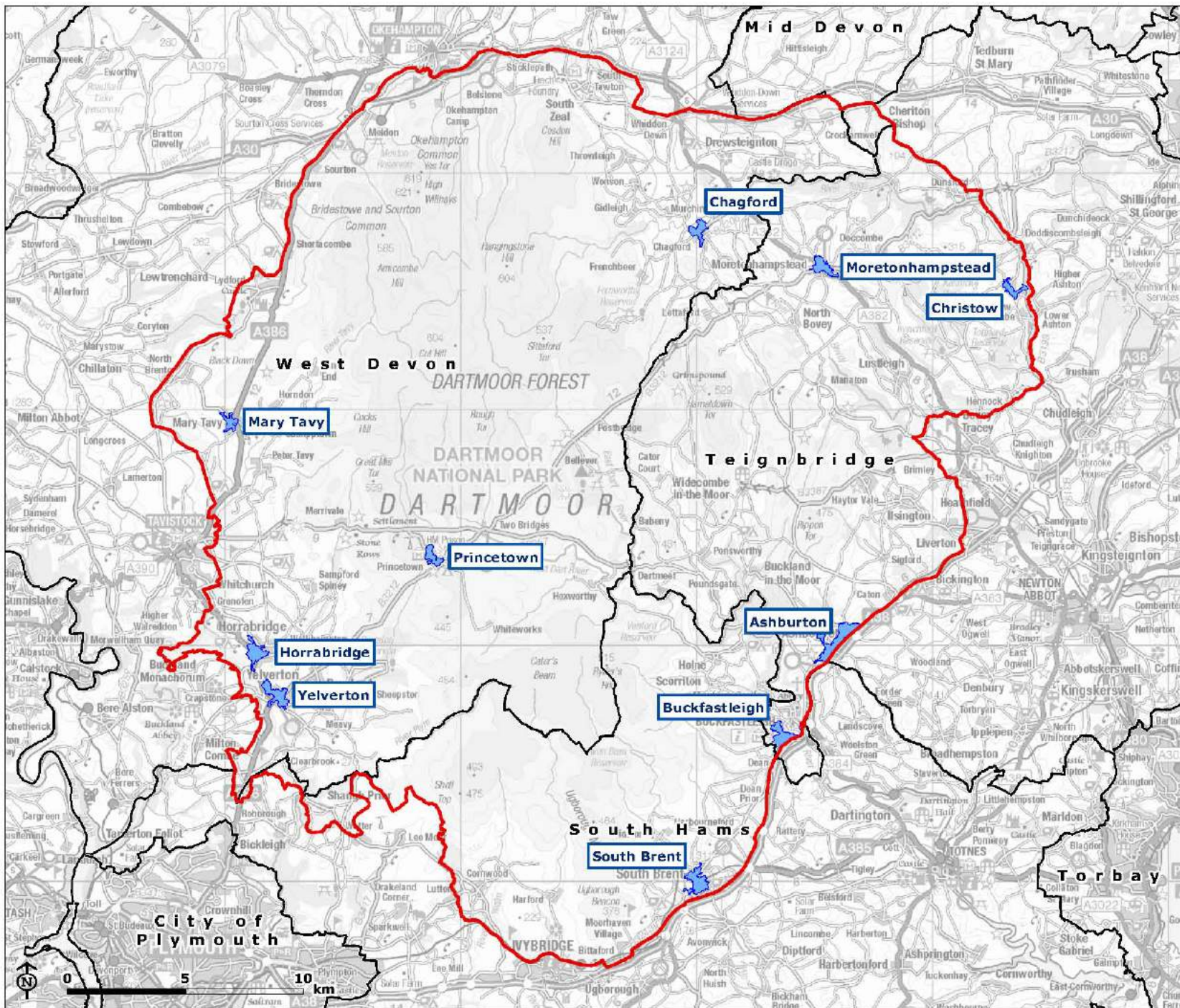
## Structure of this report

- 1.5 The remainder of this report comprises:
  - **Section 2** which presents the methodology for carrying out the LSA;
  - **Section 3** which presents a summary of the results; and
  - **Section 4** which presents the detailed landscape zone assessments for each of the ten settlements.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Dartmoor National Park

Figure 1.1: Location of Settlements Relating to the Sensitivity Assessment

- Dartmoor National Park
- District boundary
- Settlement



Source: OS, Natural England, DNPA  
Map Scale @ A4: 1:230,000



## 2 Methodology

### Defining the spatial framework for the assessment

#### Selection of key settlements

2.1 A list of key settlements for assessment was provided by DNPA based on and included the top tier of the settlement hierarchy in the adopted Local Plan; Dartmoor National Park's 'Local Centres', plus two of the larger villages designated as 'Rural Settlements'. These are listed below:

- Ashburton
- Buckfastleigh
- Chagford
- Horrabridge
- Moretonhampstead
- Princetown
- South Brent
- Yelverton

and the following ten Rural Settlements:

- Christow
- Mary Tavy

2.2 These settlements were identified as the focus for the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment due to them being the most likely locations for new development within the National Park.

#### Defining study areas for each settlement

2.3 A 500m buffer was drawn around each settlement or settlement cluster (where settlements are closer than 1km apart, as is the case at Horrabridge and Yelverton) as a starting point for defining the settlement study areas. The settlement boundaries shown for each of the eight local centres are in line with the Local Plan boundaries, which provide clarification for the application of policies by identifying, in essence, the division between the built up area of the settlement and the surrounding open countryside. In the context of the Local Plan, a settlement boundary identifies whether a site proposed for development would be within, adjoining or outside of the Local Centre. Settlement boundaries therefore support policy by preventing the encroachment of development into the open countryside<sup>1</sup>.

2.4 Boundaries for Christow and Mary Tavy were drawn to be consistent with the methodology used for settlement boundaries around local centres. The inclusion of these settlements within this study does not imply or pre-empt an alteration to policy (e.g. settlement hierarchy), but is more an indication that the study is aiming to be policy neutral (simply looking at larger settlements, rather than the local centres exclusively).

#### Identifying Landscape Assessment Zones

2.5 The settlement study areas were then sub-divided into landscape assessment zones; their boundaries informed by following:

- the boundaries of the Landscape Character Types (LCTs), as defined by the Landscape Character Assessment;

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Dartmoor National Park Authority (March 2011) *Settlement boundaries for Local Centres within Dartmoor National Park*



- changes in topography or landscape character; and/or
- the presence of natural or man-made linear features such as field boundaries, rivers, streams or roads.

The Landscape Assessment Zones were then further refined by:

- limiting the landscape zones to those areas contained within barriers to development such as rivers and major roads; and
- extending the zones where development pressures are potentially highest (for example as linear development along approach roads).

### Approach for Ashburton

- 2.6 A Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Ashburton was published in June 2013<sup>2</sup>. For compatibility, the outer boundaries of the Landscape Assessment Zones around Ashburton (within the National Park) are broadly consistent with those used in the 2013 study, noting that some of the units from the previous study have been amalgamated. Some refinements to the outer boundaries of the Landscape Assessment Zones have also been made to ensure that they follow landscape features such as roads and field boundaries – to be consistent with the other settlements covered by this study.
- 2.7 The final Landscape Assessment Zones are shown at Error! Reference source not found. and the individual assessment profiles for each, organised by settlement, are included in **Chapter 3**.

## Assessing landscape sensitivity

### Definition of 'landscape sensitivity'

- 2.8 There is currently no prescribed method for assessing landscape sensitivity. However, the *Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity* (Scottish Natural Heritage and the former Countryside Agency, 2004) is a discussion paper on landscape sensitivity and capacity and has informed LUC's approaches over the years.
- 2.9 Paragraph 4.2 of Topic Paper 6 states that:
- 'Judging landscape character sensitivity requires professional judgement about the degree to which the landscape in question is robust, in that it is able to accommodate change without adverse impacts on character. This involves making decisions about whether or not significant characteristic elements of the landscape will be liable to loss... and whether important aesthetic aspects of character will be liable to change'.*
- 2.10 In this study the following definition of sensitivity has been used, which is based on the principles set out in Topic Paper 6. It is also compliant with the third edition of the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA 3, 2013) as well as definitions used in other landscape sensitivity studies of this type:

**Landscape sensitivity is the relative extent to which the character and quality of an area (including its visual attributes) is likely to change.**

### Types of development considered

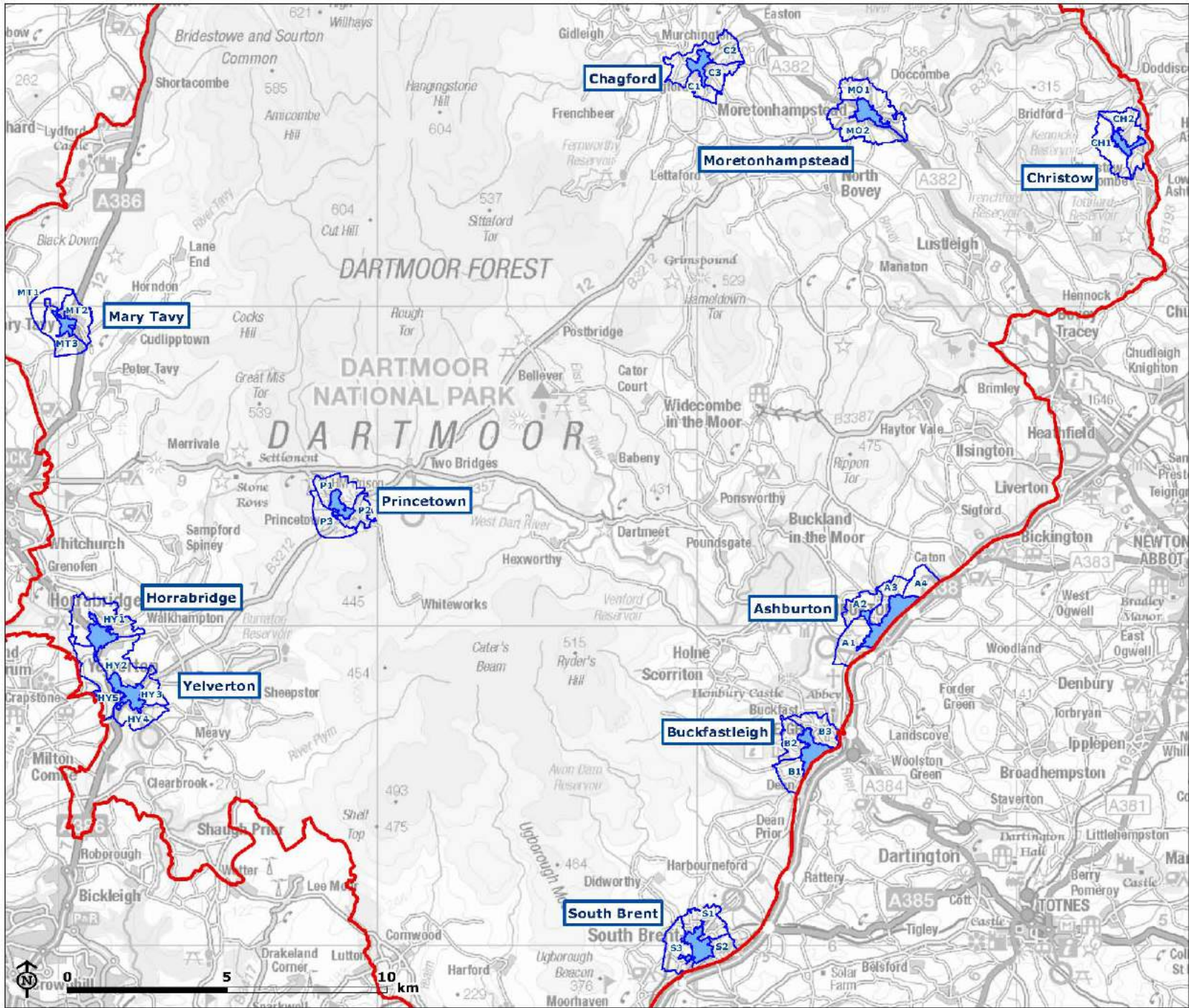
This Landscape Sensitivity Assessment considers the landscape's sensitivity to the 'principle' of built development, without knowing the specific size, type or exact location (as this would be detailed at the planning application level). This study considers the landscape's sensitivity to the most likely type of developments to come forward in Dartmoor National Park, such as small scale residential developments (2-3 storey properties) or small scale commercial development (small scale office, or single light industrial warehouses). However, the results can equally be applied to a range of 'change scenarios'.

<sup>2</sup> Ashburton Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study. June 2013. Teignbridge District Council and Dartmoor National Park Authority

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment of Dartmoor National Park

Figure 2.1: Landscape Assessment Zones

- Dartmoor National Park
- Settlement
- Landscape Assessment Zones



Source: OS, NE, LUC, DNPA  
 Map Scale @ A4: 1:170,000



## A criteria-based assessment

- 2.11 In line with the recommendations in Topic Paper 6 and NPPF, the landscape sensitivity assessment is based on an assessment of landscape character using carefully defined criteria – drawing on the experience of other similar studies in Devon (e.g. Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay) and elsewhere in the UK. Criteria selection is based on the attributes of the landscape most likely to be affected by development, and considers both 'landscape' and 'visual' aspects of sensitivity. The criteria used by this study are defined in **Table 2.1** overleaf, providing examples of the types of landscape character or features that could indicate low or high sensitivity against each.

## Making an overall judgement on levels of sensitivity

- 2.12 A five-point rating from 'low' to high' landscape sensitivity is used to illustrate overall levels of landscape sensitivity – i.e. how susceptible the character and quality of the landscape would be to change.

**Table 2.1: The five-point scale of landscape sensitivity**

Sensitivity	Definition
High	The key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are highly sensitive to change.
Moderate-high	The key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are sensitive to change.
Moderate	Some of the key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are sensitive to change.
Low-moderate	Few of the key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are sensitive to change.
Low	The key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are robust and are unlikely to be subject to change.

- 2.13 **As with all assessments based upon data and information which is to a greater or lesser extent subjective, some caution is required in its interpretation.** This is particularly to avoid the suggestion that certain landscape features or qualities can automatically be associated with certain sensitivities – the reality is that an assessment of landscape sensitivity is the result of a complex interplay of often unequally weighted variables (i.e. 'criteria').
- 2.14 Each Landscape Assessment Zone is assessed against each criterion in turn, with explanatory text indicating specific locations, features or attributes of lower or higher sensitivity. A scoring approach is not applied against each separate criterion, but an overall assessment 'rating' (using the five-point scale above) is outlined, taking account of the inter-relationships between the criteria and the specific characteristics of the Landscape Assessment Zone being assessed.

The Landscape Assessment Zones are likely to contain areas of higher and lower sensitivity within them that vary from the overall sensitivity rating. It is therefore very important to take note of the explanatory text supporting the assessments, including the summary of valued attributes, as set out in the individual Landscape Assessment Zone profiles in Chapter 3. Whilst the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment results provide an initial indication of landscape sensitivity, **it should not be interpreted as a definitive statement on the suitability of individual sites for a particular development or land use change.** All proposals will need to be assessed on their own merits.

**Table 2.2: Landscape and visual sensitivity assessment criteria**

<p><b>Topography and scale (landform and overlying landscape pattern/ features):</b> This considers the shape and scale of the landform, integrity of the landscape pattern and landscape elements in relation to the scale of potential development. <b>Please note that this criterion needs to be considered against the scale of development proposed and alongside the other criteria detailed below.</b> For example, larger scale, simple landforms are likely to be less sensitive to larger scale developments than smaller scale, enclosed landforms (where developments could appear out of scale with the underlying landform). Conversely, smaller developments may be able to be screened within enclosed landforms, therefore reducing landscape sensitivity. Existing small-scale features in the landscape in the form of existing buildings or trees will also influence the scale of development that can be accommodated in the landscape, and could equally provide a screening benefit.</p>				
Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
e.g. the landscape has flat, gently undulating or featureless landform with uniform large-scale landscape pattern and low density of overlying landscape features.		e.g. the landscape has an undulating landform and some distinct landform features; it is overlain by a mixture of small-scale and larger scale field patterns and a moderate density of small-scale landscape features.		e.g. the landscape zone has a dramatic landform or distinct landform features (such as tors) that contribute to landscape character; the area has a high density of small-scale landscape features and is overlain by a small-scale field pattern.
<p><b>Natural character:</b> This criterion considers the 'natural' qualities of the landscape zone in terms of the coverage of semi-natural habitats and valued natural features distinctive to the Dartmoor landscape (e.g. open moorland, trees, Devon hedgebanks, woodland) which could be vulnerable to loss from development.</p>				
Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
e.g. much of the landscape is intensively farmed or developed with little semi-natural habitat coverage and few valued natural features.		e.g. there are areas of valued semi-natural habitats and features found in parts of the landscape, whilst other parts are intensively farmed or developed.		e.g. large areas of the landscape are nationally or internationally designated for their nature conservation interest; there is a frequent occurrence of valued natural features across the landscape.

**Sense of time depth / historic character:** This considers the extent to which the landscape has 'time-depth' (a sense of being an historic landscape, with reference to the Devon Historic Landscape Characterisation and Dartmoor's Premier Archaeological Landscapes (PALs)) and/or the presence of heritage assets that are important to landscape character (e.g. Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings or other non-designated features described in the landscape character assessment).

Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
<i>e.g. a landscape with relatively few historic features important to the character of the area and little time depth (i.e. large coverage of fields of recent origin).</i>		<i>e.g. a landscape with some visible historic features of importance to character, and a variety of time depths.</i>		<i>e.g. a landscape with a high density of historic features important to the character of the area and strong sense of time depth (e.g. large coverage of unenclosed moorland/rough ground or medieval fields).</i>

**Visual character:** This considers the visual prominence of the Landscape Assessment Zone reflecting the extent of openness or enclosure in the landscape (due to landform or land cover), and the degree of intervisibility with the surrounding landscape and adjacent settlement - i.e. considering the extent to which potential development would be visible and/or the impact development would have on the visual setting of a settlement. It also considers the skyline character of the zone, including whether it forms a visually distinctive skyline or an important undeveloped skyline.

Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
<i>e.g. the landscape is enclosed/ visually contained and/or has a low degree of visibility from surrounding landscapes, and the area does not form a visually distinctive or important undeveloped skyline or backdrop to the settlement.</i>		<i>e.g. the landscape is semi-enclosed or has some enclosed and some open areas; it has some inter-visibility with surrounding landscapes, and may have some visually distinctive or undeveloped skylines that form part of the setting of the settlement.</i>		<i>e.g. the landscape is open and/ or has a high degree of visibility from surrounding landscapes and the settlement. It forms a visually distinctive skyline or an important undeveloped skyline.</i>

**Perceptual and experiential qualities:** This considers qualities such as rural characteristics (traditional land uses with few modern, human influences), sense of remoteness or tranquillity. Consistently high scenic value across the zone, perceived naturalness, freedom from human activity/disturbance and 'dark night skies' would all increase landscape sensitivity in relation to this criterion.

Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
<i>e.g. the area is significantly influenced by development/ human activity, where new development would not be out of character.</i>		<i>e.g. A predominantly rural landscape with occasional modern elements and human influences.</i>		<i>e.g. A tranquil or highly rural landscape, lacking strong intrusive elements. Dark night skies and a high perceived degree of tranquillity with few modern human influences and high scenic value.</i>

**Settlement pattern and edge character**

This considers the overall settlement pattern of the Landscape Assessment Zone and the edge of the settlement it lies adjacent to, considering whether development would be in accordance with the general settlement form/pattern, and how it might affect the character of the existing settlement edge.

Low sensitivity	Low-moderate sensitivity	Moderate sensitivity	Moderate-high sensitivity	High sensitivity
<i>e.g. development in the landscape would have a good relationship with the existing settlement pattern, and could integrate well with the existing settlement edge.</i>		<i>e.g. development in the landscape may be slightly at odds with the existing settlement pattern, and may adversely affect the existing settlement edge to some extent.</i>		<i>e.g. development in the landscape would have a poor relationship with the existing settlement pattern, and would adversely affect the existing settlement edge (e.g. the settlement edge may be historic and have an important relationship to the adjacent countryside). The landscape may provide an important separation function between settlements.</i>

## Sensitivity ratings in the context of National Park designation

- 2.15 The ratings for this landscape sensitivity assessment have been applied within the context of the National Park. The Dartmoor landscape is recognised for its nationally important special qualities through designation. Conserving and enhancing these special qualities, whilst responding to change and meeting the needs of the local communities, is the principal role of the National Park Authority. Relative to areas outside the National Park, the landscape is of greater importance and by virtue of its quality and designation vulnerable to inappropriate change. However it would not be appropriate to automatically assess everywhere in the National Park as 'high sensitivity' and the character and quality of the landscape in some Landscape Assessment Zones, particularly on the immediate fringes of some of the larger settlements such as Ashburton and Buckfastleigh, has been assessed as having a lower sensitivity.
- 2.16 It is also important to recognise that there are always cases where well-designed and proportioned development can be sensitively accommodated into highly sensitive landscapes and cases where poor development will result in adverse impacts even in low sensitivity landscapes.

## Structure of the Landscape Assessment Zone profiles

- 2.17 The Landscape Assessment Zone profiles in Chapter 3 are grouped by settlement (or settlement cluster in the case of Horrabridge and Yelverton). Each settlement is presented with information on its location, character and brief history of its development together with a summary of relevant valued landscape attributes, qualities and features for the study area<sup>3</sup>. This information is accompanied by a map showing the location of the settlement and its Landscape Assessment Zones in relation to its wider context. A historic OS map (dated from 1864) is also included as an indication of how the settlement has changed over the past 120 years or so. For Ashburton and Buckfastleigh, which sit tight against the boundary of the National Park, additional information on the character of the landscape beyond the National Park boundary is included (even though these areas fall under the jurisdiction of the neighbouring local planning authority). DNPA will continue to work collaboratively and co-operatively with adjoining local planning authorities to consider these areas and the wider setting of the National Park. It is important to note that the fact that the areas are not assessed in terms of sensitivity, does not necessarily deem them less sensitive to development.
- 2.18 This introduction is followed by the sensitivity profiles for each Landscape Assessment Zone found adjacent to the settlement. Each profile starts with a map showing the Landscape Assessment Zone, clearly showing its relationship to the settlement and its wider context, as well as the key designations within or adjacent to the zone that represent a constraint to development (Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, international/local landscape and conservation designations, access land and flood zones). This is accompanied by representative photographs of the Landscape Assessment Zone, including important views to and from the adjacent settlement.
- 2.19 The next section sets out a short written summary of the zone's location and landscape character context, followed by a description of the Landscape Assessment Zone against the sensitivity assessment criteria. This is followed by an evaluation of the zone's overall landscape sensitivity (using the five-point scale explained earlier in this chapter), drawing on the information from the individual criteria assessments. The evaluation includes details of locations or attributes of higher or lower sensitivity to the overall rating, where appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> Landscape attributes, qualities and features were derived from the valued attributes listed for each Landscape Character Type around each settlement (Dartmoor Landscape Character Assessment (2017)) judged to be of relevance to each settlement as well as landscape features listed within Conservation Area Appraisals.

## Summary of overall landscape sensitivity ratings

2.20 **Table 2.3** below sets out the overall landscape sensitivity ratings for each of the Landscape Assessment Zones, organised by settlement. Chapter 3 follows with the Landscape Assessment Zone profiles, also organised by settlement.

**Table 2.3: Overall landscape sensitivity rating, by Landscape Assessment Zone**

Landscape Zone	Overall landscape sensitivity rating
<b>Ashburton</b>	
A1	H
A2	H
A3	H
A4	L-M
<b>Buckfastleigh</b>	
B1	M-H
B2	H
B3	H
<b>Chagford</b>	
C1	H
C2	H
C3	H
<b>Christow</b>	
CH1	H
CH2	H
<b>Horrabridge/Yelverton</b>	
HY1	H
HY2	H
HY3	M-H
HY4	M-H
HY5	H
<b>Mary Tavy</b>	
MT1	H
MT2	H
MT3	H
<b>Moretonhampstead</b>	
MO1	H
MO2	M-H
<b>Princetown</b>	
P1	H
P2	H
P3	H
<b>South Brent</b>	
S1	H
S2	M-H
S3	H