

CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - Camel Estuary

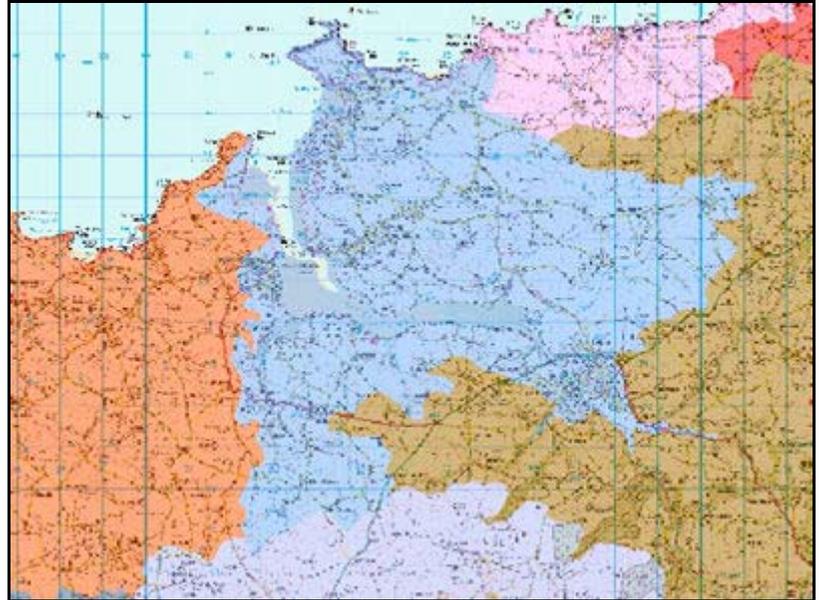
LCA No

CA34

JCA

Constituent LDUs

Total 22: 3, 29, 49, 50, 51, 71, 72, 179, 181U, 182U, 183, 184U, 185, 186, 187, 188U, 189U, 190, 191U, 193U, 195U, 359



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Location Estuary running west from Wadebridge to the sea with associated coastal plateau to the north.

Designations LDUs 50 and 179 are fully and LDUs 71, 72, 183, 186 and 359 are partly within the AONB; Heritage Coast is to north; no WHS; LDUs 4, 29, 49, 51, 71, 72, 179, 183, 184, 190 and 359 have SSSIs; 11 LDUs have SMs and 3 LDUs have CGS.

Description

This area is focussed on the low lying Camel estuary which winds its way west and then north to the Atlantic. The area is defined largely by the broad expanse of the mouth of the Camel and the short tributary streams from the surrounding higher ground that form tidal creeks where they meet the river. The landscape between the valleys is gently rolling with some areas of harder rock giving rise to the prominently rounded landforms of Cant Hill, and the Rumps and The Moulds offshore. This area is especially important for wildlife, particularly wading birds, attracted by the extensive mudflats and salt marsh in the estuary and adjacent Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh. The field pattern is medieval with a medium scale pattern generally of improved grassland and some arable with Cornish hedges the main boundary feature. This area is very open and exposed at the coast which is generally treeless with some areas of scrub, bracken, heath and sand dunes. Further inland, the area becomes more sheltered, such as around Chapel Amble where the landscape is much more intimate than at the coast, although tree cover is still largely confined to the creeks and stream valleys. Trees on Cornish hedges also become more frequent away from the coast. Settlement is dispersed with small farms. The major nucleated settlements are Wadebridge, Padstow, Rock, Trebetherick and Polzeath, although more recent, tourism related housing has altered the shape of the settlements, leading to the physical and visual coalescence of Polzeath and Trebetherick and the linear merging of Rock, Splatt, Pityme and Tredrizzick. Tourism and recreational development features strongly, particularly near the beaches.

Key Landscape Characteristics

Gently rolling, low lying, exposed open landscape around the Camel estuary.

Strongly influenced by coastal climate to the north with softer, sheltered landscape inland.

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Important wetland habitats associated with estuary, streams and coast.

Large areas of Coastal Sand Dunes.

Trees in small tributary valleys to the estuary.

Medium scale medieval field pattern with slate walls, often with exposed slate bedrock, Cornish hedges and few hedgerow trees.

Clustered settlement pattern with small farms.

Large tourist development close to the coast with dunes and beaches.

Geology and soils

The geology of the area is primarily Upper and Middle Devonian slates with some pillow lava. There is an east west trending band of dolerite, basalt and 'greenstone' which runs on the northern side of the estuary, partly expressed by Cant Hill. Soils are shallow hard rock soils generally with shallow and raw sandy soils on the coast.

Topography and drainage

The topography is characterised by its gently sloping and undulating valley sides to the Camel estuary and River Amble and the large expanse of water, over 500m wide, which weaves its way inland from the exposed coast at Polzeath to the town of Wadebridge. Where the landform meets the water there are low slate cliffs in places. The rounded form of Cant Hill is a prominent feature in the estuary. Dunes border the outer edges of the estuary at Daymer Bay and Harbour Cove. The north coast cliffs are around 80m AOD. The key features are Rumps Point and the Moulds offshore. The highest point, inland, is 109m AOD to the south where the area meets the St Breock Downs Landscape Character Area which acts as a backcloth to this coastal area.

Biodiversity

The Camel estuary has substantial areas of Intertidal Mudflats, some Coastal Saltmarsh, and high Coastal Sand Dunes behind Daymer Bay and lower ones at Harbour Cove. On the steeper slopes of Cant Hill and along the maritime cliffs from Rock to Port Quin, the stretches of scrub, bracken, heath, neutral grassland and sand dunes with significant expanses of mudflats towards Wadebridge and in the creeks form a landscape rich in diverse habitats with much of it a designated SSSI. The improved grassland and Fens forming Amble Marshes SSSI, once a large area of saltmarsh, has developed into an area described as Coastal Floodplain and Grazing Marsh, important for birds. Inland the majority of the area is pasture with a large proportion of arable. Any woodland, almost all broadleaved, is confined to the shallow valleys usually as narrow, linear strips along the small streams, and below Trelow Downs some Wet Woodland, and Upland Mixed Ashwoods. Cornish hedges on the higher areas and near the exposed coast tend to be built of slate in a herringbone pattern, providing good habitats for reptiles and invertebrates. Elm is a distinctively frequent woody species in hedges in the area, though few mature ones remain. Other hedges adjacent to arable fields can be heavily flailed and have few hedge trees, but do form a localised wildlife network. In common with LCA 19 (Trevose Head and coastal plateau), this area has a distinctly more alkaline-loving flora than in much of Cornwall.

Land Cover

Predominantly the area is farmland with very little tree cover except in the small valleys well inland. Patches of rough grassland and heath and sand dunes lie on the coast. The whole area is dominated by the

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wide river estuary with its mud flats and small side creeks. There are substantial settlements at Wadebridge, Padstow and Polzeath.

Land Use

Land use is mainly agricultural- a mix of improved grassland/pasture, arable with patches of rough grassland. The significant majority of field pattern is medieval enclosure. Settlement is a significant land use at Wadebridge, Padstow and Polzeath. Along the shores of the estuary are sandy beaches which are popular with tourists, as is the estuary for water-based recreation. In addition, north of Rock, golf courses have been developed, one over the former sand dune at St Enodoc.

Field and woodland pattern

The enclosure pattern in this landscape is predominantly based on the small medieval fields with sinuous boundaries of Anciently Enclosed Land. There are a few small patches of recently enclosed land, most notably north of Cant Hill, around Trewornan and the settlements of Padstow and Rock. The field pattern is not particularly strong due to the shallow landform and, in places, Cornish hedge and stone wall boundaries have been replaced by post and wire fencing. Woodland is also relatively more common around the estuary than in the adjacent landscape to the north and south. In the north, especially around Chapel Amble, much tree cover was lost as a result of infection from Dutch Elm Disease. Now trees are limited to the creeks and hollows, common species include willow, hawthorn, and oak. Invariably gorse is abundant. Towards the coast, woodland and hedgerow trees become less common, the coastal winds creating a landscape which is open and bare, except for thin lines of field boundaries. Conversely, the further inland the greater the number of hedgerow trees and vegetation and, as the width of the estuary narrows, the scale of the landscape becomes more intimate. The pre war development at Rock is distinguished by mature Monterey Cypress and Monterey Pine.

Settlement pattern

Rural settlement in the area is in dispersed clusters, based on a scatter of medieval farm settlements, a pattern of grey slate farmhouses and associated outbuildings, some of which have been converted to holiday homes. Wadebridge is the largest settlement and originated as a medieval market town located at the furthest downstream crossing point of the Camel utilising a central island. The waterside area is being redeveloped from commercial uses to residential. The town has grown up the valley sides and is noticeable in the wider landscape. The other main town, Padstow, developed as an important medieval port near the mouth of the estuary, although it may have earlier monastic antecedents. Although the integrity of much of its medieval core remains, it also contains many tourist developments, car parks etc. Its urban character is reflected on the other side of the estuary today by the more recent developments of Rock, Trebetherick and Polzeath. The sprawling development around these three settlements has a marked impact on the visual character and quality of this locality. The development is a direct result of demand for holiday and retirement accommodation, immediately pre- and post-war. Other settlements more inland based on medieval churchtowns are Egloshayle, much expanded in the twentieth century as an extension of Wadebridge, St Minver, St Kew and St Issey; Chapel Amble had a medieval chapel and lies at one end of the medieval crossing of the River Amble.

Transport pattern

The busy A39 bypasses Wadebridge on a high modern bridge with extensive embankments and cuttings. Downstream, the estuary serves as a barrier to north-south movement with the exception of a ferry between Padstow and Rock. From the A39 the A389 serves Padstow and lanes run north terminating at the estuary. The B3314 in turn serves the coastal settlements to the north. Lanes are sinuous and bounded by high hedges some of which end at dead ends at the estuary. The Camel Trail, popular for cyclists, runs on the bed of the old railway along the southern edge of the estuary and links Padstow with Bodmin. The South West Coastal footpath runs along the coast and running inland from Padstow is another long distance

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footpath, the Saints Way.

Historic features

There are important clusters of Bronze Age barrows on the east side of the Camel estuary at Polzeath, the Pentire promontory and on Brea Hill, the latter a local landmark beside the outer estuary. The Rumps Iron Age cliff castle lies at the seaward end of the Pentire promontory, on which there are also indications of a substantial unenclosed later prehistoric settlement. Artefact finds and air photographs suggest the possibility of late prehistoric and Roman period trading settlements on both west and east sides of the estuary. Survey and air photography have revealed a considerable number of Iron Age and Roman-period defended farmsteads (rounds) in the LCA, in some cases with traces of associated contemporary field patterns, indicating that this was an extensively settled and farmed area at this period. The present farms, established during the early medieval period, are similarly distributed. Padstow and Wadebridge are medieval towns. There are medieval churches at Padstow, St Issey, St Breock, Egloshayle, St Enodoc, St Minver and St Kew. On the outskirts of Padstow lies Prideaux Place with its small deer park and garden [Grade II*]. The bridge at Wadebridge is fifteenth century and the town also had extensive post-medieval quays. Padstow's first stone pier dates from the sixteenth century; the present harbour structures date from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The former London South Western Railway line to Wadebridge and Padstow runs along the southern side of the river and is now a cycle trail; it includes the fine three-span bridge across Little Petherick Creek. Tide mill at Sea Mills Quarries and evidence of historic embankments constructed alongside the Camel to control flooding and aid in land reclamation. There are numerous small quays on the river and its tributary creeks.

Condition

Farmland is in good condition. Ribbon development impinges to the north and settlement character has been altered due to extensive housing and tourism development.

Pressures

- Tourism pressure on coastal areas including expanding development around the coastal villages.
 - Expansion of Padstow and Wadebridge.
 - Disturbance of marine habitats from boating on the estuary.
 - Redevelopment of farm buildings as holiday homes.
 - Loss of mature evergreens around Rock area.
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Aesthetic and sensory

The estuary allows long sweeping views against the green, simple, rolling rural backcloth of the valley sides. The view is animated by boats. There are sheltered, tranquil and intimate creeks lying off the main estuary. The landscape becomes harsher towards the coast with settlements busy with tourists. There are dunes, beaches and low cliffs rising to Pentire Point which face the full force of the Atlantic as does the coast further east.

Distinctive features

Wide open river estuary of the River Camel with its sandy beaches and mudflats; distinctive shaped Brea and Cant Hills and low slate cliffs alongside the estuary; Camel Trail; Prideaux Place; A39 viaduct.

Visions and objectives

A generally unspoilt farming landscape, rather devoid of trees, around the magnificent Camel Estuary that has become a haven for tourism and recreational activities. The estuary has a high ecological value so the objective must be to conserve the estuarine habitat whilst integrating tourism and other development into the landscape.

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Planning and Land Management Guidelines

Develop a tourism and nature conservation strategy in regard to the development and use of the estuary.

Prepare guidelines for settlement expansion and development especially for the Rock area.

Encourage new planting on farmland as tree lines and small blocks giving preference to the establishment of Cornish Elm.

Prepare design guides for new development.