CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY

Landscape Character Area Description

LCA - St Austell Bay and Luxulyan Valley

JCA

Constituent LDUs
Total 13: 1, 2, 45, 88, 196U, 197U, 201, 202U, 199U, 355, 376, 380, 414

Location
A triangular area on the south coast inland from St Austell Bay, extending north to Lanivet and north-eastwards parallel to the Fowey ria as far as Lostwithiel, wrapping around the eastern end of LCA 20 (Mid Cornwall Moors). Along the coast this Landscape Character Area extends from Duporth via Charlestown and St Austell and Par Sands to Gribbin Head and around to the edge of Fowey. Inland it includes the major settlement of St Austell, plus St Blazey and Tywardreath.

Designations
3 LDUs are partly covered by the AONB designation; 3 are covered by the Heritage Coast designation - Gribbin Head to Polperro; 2 contain SSSIs; 3 are within the WHS Luxulyan Valley and 1 within the Charlestown Leat WHS. 4 LDUs contain SMs and 4 contain CGS.

Description
Stretching out to sea out at the headland at Gribben Head this is a wedge shaped section of high plateau land lying west of the Fowey Ria (LCA 21) and wrapping around the south of Hensbarrow Downs, (LCA17). In the north, fingers of high ground, notably Helman Tor stretch out onto the low lying ground of LCA 20 (Mid Cornwall Moors). The low rocky cliffs of the coastline forming the northern and eastern side of St Austell Bay are punctured by the wide alluvial estuary at Par Beach where extensive sands have built up in the mouth of the Par River. This river with its small tributaries winds inland in a flat wide bottomed valleys that have been settled and heavily industrialised or have developed wet woodlands. Another area of alluvial plain stretches inland at Par Moor running up behind the cliffs of Carlyon Bay. The higher ground in this area is heavily built up with the urban centre of St Austell and sprawling residential areas of Carlyon Bay, St Blazey and Par while the coastal zone with long sandy beaches at the base of the cliffs is much used for recreation. At Par the deep water channel created by the river has enabled a docks complex to be developed. On the eastern sid leading to pressures of the bay there is no sand and the cliffs are higher and rocky with few sheltered coves, notably Polkerris. Inland a woodland and pastoral landscape dominates, changing to wetland between the settlements of Par and Tywardreath. One main feature is the well wooded Luxulyan Valley that has extensive relics of the mining industry.

Key Landscape Characteristics
Long well-used sandy beaches backed by vegetated dunes, cliffs and recreational infrastructure
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grading into scrub and wetlands.

Western end of coastal plain is highly developed with residential, commercial, light and heavy industry, recreation and amenity.

Strongly undulating pasture farming plateau inland with small fields with trees and small woods, and linear woodland along streams.

Urban and industrial development around St Blazey and Par.

Suburban belt on fringes of main urban area, with established country houses in mature treed grounds and scatter of residential development.

Wooded river valleys of Luxulyan and Prideaux, sparser on higher ground, associated with estates and country houses.

Luxulyan Valley mining district has high concentration of early 19th C industrial remains.

Geology and soils
Undulating hard rock of the Lower Devonian era that are mainly sandstones, siltstones and slates giving rise to shallow hard rock soils with raw sandy soils at the marine levels along the coast.

Topography and drainage
A rolling plateau heavily incised with small deep valleys acting as tributaries to the River Par in a wider central valley that drains southwards into St Austell Bay at Par. The valley bottom is heavily silted up from mining activity with the River Par having either been moved or canalised along its length leaving areas of poor drainage and marsh land. At the coast there is a large expanse of flat sandy beach which has also been added to by the mining activity in the hinterland. Apart from this area the coast is comprised of low rocky cliffs with beaches at Carlyon Bay and otherwise indented with small sandy coves. To the east of the area the high ground stretches southwards to terminate in the prominent landmark of Gribbin Head. Inland there are extensive views from the high land over the neighbouring Landscape Character Areas.

Biodiversity
The area is mostly improved grassland with some arable, with a network of Cornish hedges, mostly treeless in the open landscape. The valleys have areas of broadleaved woodland with some Upland Oakwood, and small areas of Upland Mixed Ashwoods and Lowland Mixed Deciduous, much within Ancient Woodland. Conifer plantations make up some of the woodland especially in the Luxulyan Valley and feature in areas of ornamental planting associated with estates towards the east of St Austell. There may be examples of veteran trees among the areas of Lowland Wood-Pasture and Parkland at Tregrehan and Menabilly. On the higher areas in the northern part of the LCA on the granite, are areas of rough ground with bracken, scrub and neutral grassland, and wetlands with Wet Woodland, Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture and Fens. The wetland west of Tywardreath is a silted-up former estuary, now a Local Nature Reserve, with a large area of Wet Woodland. A small area of Coastal Sand Dunes at Par Beach holds back a Saline Lagoon with Reedbeds (now a Local Nature Reserve) and links to Fens in the low-lying valley. This small but important area links to the semi-natural habitats along the narrow coastal strip of maritime cliff, neutral grassland, bracken and scrub.

Land Cover
This is an area of pastoral farmland with improved grassland and arable with trees together with extensive woodland in the larger valleys and small areas of rough ground in the valleys and in the northern part of
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the LCA. The coastal area west of Par with its sandy beaches has largely been subsumed by extensive urban development and recreational/tourism uses.

**Land Use**
The area is Anciently Enclosed Land mainly being laid down as improved pasture with some rough grazing. There are extensive areas of broadleaved woodland especially in the valleys as at Luxulyan Valley with Wet Woodland along the streams in the shallower valleys. Along the coast in the western part of the coastal area, recreation, tourism, residential development, commercial and industrial uses make up the dominating feature with docks at Par and Charlestown. The land above the cliffs at Carlyon Bay is used for a golf course. Industry has also left its mark in the valleys especially the Luxulyan valley, and one of the old china clay pits has been transformed into the Eden Project. There are parklands at Menabilly and Tregrehan.

**Field and woodland pattern**
The Landscape Character Area comprises a medieval landscape of Anciently Enclosed Land almost throughout, with an irregular pattern of fields bounded with sinuous Cornish hedges with trees. The pattern has been altered in places by the removal of boundaries during the twentieth century Around the Gribbin headland between Polkerris and the Fowey estuary the predominantly medieval field pattern runs right to the cliff edge but elsewhere along the coast the former agricultural landscape has been effaced by 20th C development. There is extensive woodland on the steep valley sides around Prideaux and Luxulyan Valley and Wet Woodland in the shallower valley north of Tywardreath.

**Settlement pattern**
Inland there are a few nucleated settlements, including medieval churchtowns at Lanlivery and Luxulyan, both of which have undergone some expansion in the twentieth century, and post-medieval roadside settlements at Lockengate on the A391 and Tywardreath Highway / Porcupine on the A390. Luxulyan’s expansion incorporated the adjoining small nineteenth -century settlement of Bridges, focused on the railway station. Nearer the coast the settlements are larger. Tywardreath is the site of a medieval priory and parish church, but was already a substantial village by the late nineteenth century, well before its twentieth century expansion. St Blazey, another medieval parochial centre, was similarly a well developed industrial settlement well before 1900; St Blazey Gate represents post-medieval linear expansion along the main east-west route. Biscoevey and Par, nearby, are small post-medieval industrial settlements on a medieval core, much expanded in the twentieth century. Charlestown was created from the late eighteenth century around a new harbour for china clay exports. The core of the urban area is St Austell, a medieval churchtown which developed as a post-medieval market centre to serve the developing nearby industrial area. It extended eastwards to link with a series of post-medieval industrial hamlets, including Mount Charles and Holmbush, and then expanded very substantially through the creation of new residential areas extending inland and to the coast. Rural settlement in the Landscape Character Area is based on dispersed farmsteads, many formerly medieval hamlets now represented by a single farm. Historic buildings are usually of vernacular design using stone, occasionally lime-washed, and slate roofs.

**Transport pattern**
The A 390 runs through urban area with the A 3082 as a link to Fowey. The main London to Penzance railway line also runs through the area with links into Par Docks and the branch line from Par to Newquay. The old line that ran between Par and Fowey has been turned into a private haul road for the china clay industry. Elsewhere in the more rural areas the roads are generally windy lanes. The Saints Way, a long distance footpath, passes through the area as well as part of the South Coast Footpath.

**Historic features**
Helman Tor is a Neolithic tor enclosure, occupied c 3500 BC. Castle Dore is a well-preserved Iron Age
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hillfort of two substantial ramparts and there is a further Iron Age enclosure at Prideaux. St Austell has one of the finest late medieval churches in Cornwall and there are further medieval churchtowns at Lanlivery, Luxulyan, St Blazey and Tywardreath, the latter also the site of a medieval priory. Charlestown was created as a port for the expanding china clay industry at the end of the 18th C, while the artificial harbour at Par, with a 1200 ft breakwater, overtook it for the export of tin, copper ore, stone and, later, china clay. It was also a major industrial focus, with a lead smelting works, brickworks, granite dressing yard and shipbuilding and repair. Par is still a working port but Charlestown is now preserved as an historic settlement and hosts a collection of period sailing vessels used for maritime films. At Gribbin Head there is a red and white striped daymark built by Trinity House in 1834 to guide shipping entering St Austell Bay and the Fowey Estuary. There are extensive remains of the mining industry, especially in the Luxulyan valley with tramways and extensive water engineering, including the Treffry viaduct which carried water in a leat as well as a tramway. The Par Canal linked the highly industrialised valley to the port. The Velvet Drive is a carriageway through the valley constructed for a local industrial family. There are a several historic houses with designed landscapes, notably Menabilly [Grade II], Tregrehan [Grade II], and Prideaux [county importance]. Openworks on the high ground above Restormel Castle are the only remaining evidence of the largest iron mine in Cornwall.

Condition
The inherent landscape character has been significantly altered over time and its current condition is mixed with fragmented ecological corridors especially along the coast between St Austell and Par. This western area is highly developed with urban and suburban development, holiday facilities and recreational/amenity areas making a major impact as opposed to the eastern side of the bay where development has not been allowed to despoil the natural beauty. Inland there is a scattering of small-scale development around villages and from farm diversification, such as barn conversions. The impact of rural housing and utilities is localised but high. Inland some relocation and displacement of farm unit sizes with accompanying seasonal changes, large-scale hedge removal and arable conversion, as well as intensive management of hedges are eroding the landscape scale and pattern Public access routes and the transport network have widespread impacts on tranquillity.

Pressures
Increased demand for recreation and tourism infrastructure, especially at Carlyon Bay leading to pressures on natural habitats.
Urban expansion along major routes.
Changes in the industrial pattern.
Expansion of rural villages.
Changes in farming and farm diversification.

Aesthetic and sensory
This is an open landscape of medium scale with narrow hidden valleys. Much of the area can be regarded as non tranquil due to influence of major urban development and sprawl. Although on the coast the recreational/amenity areas are well managed they are out of keeping with the natural environment and this has made a significant impact on the area Inland the farmed land is on the higher ground and offers a strong contrast to the deep valleys like Luxulyan with their steep wooded sides. From the higher ground there are views out over the sea.

Distinctive features
Helman Tor, a neolithic enclosure with logan stone and hut circles is a distinctive feature; St Austell Bay; sandy beaches, golf course and caravan site at Carlyon Bay and Par; Par Docks and the smoking chimneys of the clay dries; extensive wooded estate of Menabilly on eastern edge of area (associated with Daphne
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du Maurier), Luxulyan Valley and Treffry Viaduct; Daymark at Gribben Head; Eden Project; Gardens at Tregrehan and Pine Lodge; Charlestown.

Visions and objectives
A busy landscape especially on the coast and at the western end of the area where there is extensive development that is in strong contrast to the pastoral farmland of the inland eastern portion of the LCA. Although some of this part of the area has seen industrial activity in the past it is now more tranquil with the industrial remains contributing to the recreational enjoyment of the area. As there is likely to be expansion both in terms of residential and industrial development as well as the holiday industry the objective must be to promote and enhance the assets of the area in a manner that protects the areas natural beauty.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

- Develop strategy for expansion of residential and industrial development to protect important cultural and ecological sites.
- Support the provision and implementation of design guides for building and recreation.
- Support the restoration and management of ornamental and designed landscapes.
- Support the management and enhancement of Luxulyan Valley for recreational use.
- Support measures for the conservation and interpretation of archaeological sites especially industrial archaeology protecting the World Heritage Site and its setting.
- Support the use of agri-environmental schemes.
- Develop a strategy to encourage framework planting around villages and tourist attractions.