

Landscape & Seascape

The landscape of the Dorset Coast has rightly been called its greatest natural asset. This rich and varied coast has attracted visitors down the centuries, including great artists such as Constable and Turner, all have come to Dorset to enjoy these beautiful and impressive landscapes. The challenge must be to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy Dorset's spectacular coastal scenery.

The Coastal Landscape

Anybody who has travelled along the Dorset coast must have been struck by the way in which the landscape changes every few miles. Low, wind-swept sand dunes rise to high chalk cliffs, arches and stacks stand like strange sculptures in the sea. There are sheltered, sandy beaches, a magnet for families in the summer, and the long stretch of Chesil Beach, virtually deserted throughout the year. Some of the cliffs stand rock-hard, seemingly impervious to change, others almost crumble away as you watch them. Many features of the landscape are truly impressive, the long sweep of Chesil Beach, the yellow crowned cliffs at Golden Cap, the great sea-arch at Durdle Door. It is this diversity and splendour of the coastal landscape that makes it an asset to be cared for as well as enjoyed.

What is Landscape?

Landscape is important, not just as 'scenery' but because it links culture with nature and the past with the present. It has many values, and it matters to people – it is people who create and value landscape.

[The European Landscape Convention \(ELC\)](#) definition of landscape is;



Durdle Door. Copyright: Dorset Coast Forum

“An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” (Council of Europe 2000). The Council of Europe website goes on to say; “As a reflection of European identity and diversity, the landscape is our living natural and cultural heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water.”

In order to protect the coastal landscapes, we must first understand them. It is simple to think of them in purely visual terms, the view of a particular piece of coast formed by the interaction of the geology with

the vegetation and millennia of human activities. But landscapes are far more than this, the mixture of the local topography and geology, farming and forestry practices, plant and animal life, building styles and settlement form, history and cultural associations, combine to give an area its special and unique qualities. This can be partially described visually, but for a full appreciation of a landscape, the emotional and aesthetic responses of tranquillity, grandeur, enclosure and exposure, amongst many others, need to be recognised.

A key driver behind the government's 'all landscapes matter' approach is the government ratified ELC, which came into force on 1 March 2007. The ELC is the first international convention to focus specifically on landscape. Created by the Council of Europe, the convention promotes landscape protection, management and planning, and European co-operation on landscape issues.

Landscape Character

Landscape character is defined as 'a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse'. Put simply, landscape character is that which makes an area unique and it applies across administrative

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areas. Only by paying proper regard to the existing character of our landscapes can informed and responsible decisions be made regarding their management, and sustainable future landscapes planned for.

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

LCA is an approach to understanding the differences between landscapes, and can serve as a framework for decision-making that respects local distinctiveness. It is a way of 'unpacking' the landscape and understanding how its distinctive elements contribute to sense of place. LCA is also important for the UK's implementation of the European Landscape Convention. It provides a method to identify and assess landscapes, understand landscape change, and a framework for developing landscape quality objectives in partnership with stakeholders - all specific measures of the ELC.

Seascape

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'Seascape' as a 'picture or view to the sea'. However since the UK government has signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC), some agencies have sought to relate their definition of the word 'seascape' to that for 'landscape' in the ELC, and the following complementary definition is now widely used:
'A 'seascape' is 'an area of sea, coastline and land, as perceived by people, whose character

results from the actions and interactions of land and sea, by natural and/or human factors.'

Marine Natural Areas

Marine Natural Areas are areas of sea around England each with their distinctive wildlife and underlying geology. They emphasise the importance of natural processes, the interaction between these, geology, and wildlife. They offer a framework to help us develop an ecosystem approach to managing human uses of the marine environment.

Natural England has identified six Marine Natural Areas in the UK and there are two that are of relevance to the Dorset Coast; the South Western Peninsula and the Eastern Channel. The South Western Peninsula extends from Portland Bill, all the way along the Dorset Coast to the west, and beyond into adjacent counties. The Eastern Channel extends from Portland Bill in an easterly direction to Dover. The South West Region Natural Areas identifies three areas of relevance to the Dorset Coast: Solent and Poole Bay; South Dorset Coast; and Lyme Bay.

LDA Design were commissioned to undertake a landscape and seascape assessment for the Dorset Coast, as part of the C-SCOPE project in 2010. This will be used to inform policies for a the whole coast and in particular the Marine Spatial Plan of a 1000km² Marine Management Area between Durlston Head and Portland Bill.

Europe

- [UNESCO Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site, Jurassic Coast](#)
- [European Landscape Convention](#)
- The Diploma of the Council of Europe for Protected Landscapes has been awarded to the Purbeck Heritage Coast
- EC Habitats Directive: In 1992 the European Community adopted Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. This is the means by which the Community meets its obligations as a signatory of the [Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats \(Bern Convention\)](#)
- [The Common Agricultural Policy](#) affects landscape through its effect on farming practises

National

- [DEFRA Marine and Coastal Access Act](#)
- [Natural England](#) is the government's advisor on the natural environment and provides practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England's natural wealth for the benefit of everyone
- [Environmental Stewardship](#) is an agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land. The objectives of Environmental Stewardship are to conserve wildlife (biodiversity), maintain and enhance landscape quality and character, protect the

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historic environment and natural resources, promote public access and understanding of the countryside, protect natural resources, genetic conservation and flood management

- [The Government's Planning Policy Statement 1](#) (and various other PPS) provides advice for local authorities in respect of planning matters. It outlines the protection and proper use, which ought to be given to the landscape in local development frameworks and other planning documents
- The Environment Agency prepare LEAP's and Catchment Management Plans for river systems, which take account of the protection of the local landscape
- Parliament has given the National Trust the right to declare land 'Inalienable' in order to protect its 'Natural Beauty'
- Department of Trade and Industry controls the siting of Oil and Gas drilling and production platforms
- Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food can control the deposition of structures and substances on or under the sea during construction projects ([Food and Environment Protection Act \(FEPA\) licence](#))
- Regional Spatial Strategy Environment Policy 1: Protecting and Enhancing the Region's Natural and Historic Environment - the quality, character, diversity and local distinctiveness of the natural and historic environment in the South West will be protected and enhanced, and

developments which support their positive management will be encouraged.

County

- The Purbeck and West Dorset Heritage Coasts are protected through the planning process
- The Regional Spatial Strategy (Regional) and Local Development Frameworks (District and Borough) also include policies for protecting landscape character and the AONB's, Jurassic Coast and Heritage Coast.
- Local Planning Authorities are responsible for protecting some hedgerows through the Statutory Instrument, [Hedgerow Regulations 1997](#)
- Local planning authorities identify Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Area & Areas of Local Landscape Importance which are afforded varying degrees of status through local planning policy.
- [Dorset AONB](#) was designated in 1959 under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The AONB includes approximately 150 km of coastline and stretches from Lyme Regis in the west, along the coast to Poole Harbour in the east. It covers over half of Poole Harbour, including Brownsea and the smaller islands. Outside of the harbour, the designated area ends at mean low water.

- Environment Health functions of the LPAs can also have an bearing on the coast.
- Local planning authorities can organise Village Design Statements and encourage Parish Plans which can be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance/Document status

Landscape Studies in Dorset

There have been several landscape studies that have covered all or part of the Dorset Coast. England has been divided into areas with similar landscape character, which are called National Character Areas (NCAs); previously known as Joint Character Areas (JCAs).

The Character of England Landscape, Wildlife and Cultural Features Map produced in 2005 by Natural England's with support from English Heritage, was an update to the 1996 map. This map subdivides England into 159 NCAs, it provides a picture of the differences in landscape character at the national scale. The Dorset Coast covers 7 of these areas.

The 2009 Dorset Landscape Character Assessment is a detailed assessment of the character of the county. It works within the national framework of National Character Areas, identifying variations in landscape character at a sub-regional level. The Dorset LCA updates the 1993 Assessment based on the 2002 national guidance.

The Dorset AONB Landscape Character Assessment was published in 2008 and provides an

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understanding of the qualities, elements and features that make the landscape special, how these features combine in different ways in different places to give each area its own unique character, and the strength and condition of these features and how they are changing.

West Dorset, East Dorset, Purbeck and North Dorset District Councils have all produced updated district-wide Landscape Character Assessments. Poole and Bournemouth Borough Councils have undertaken rural fringe Landscape Character Assessments. All of these individual assessments employed the same methodology as that used for the county assessment. Christchurch Borough Council produced a separate assessment in 2003, and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council is in the process of carrying out an assessment.



Swanage. Copyright: Dorset Coast Forum

Landscape & Seascape of the Dorset Coast

The landscape of the Dorset coast has long been admired, and there can be few guidebooks to Dorset, which do not include pictures and descriptions of some coastal features. Most accounts of the coastal landscape, popular as well as professional, look at one portion of the coast from another, land-based, point on the coast. There is, however, another way of looking at the coastal landscape - from the sea. This view of the coast has been described and illustrated, on nautical charts and in sailing directions, for centuries, but purely as a guide to the sailor's location.

The view out to sea, the seascape, is a vital part of the coastal landscape. It contrasts totally with the view inland or along the coast. Fixed man-made structures are absent, the only sign of human activity being a passing boat or some angled views of manmade structures such as harbours, and potentially offshore windfarms in the future. At some places the view of a distant coastline, the Isle of Wight from Purbeck or the far hills of Devon from Portland, adds another element to the view.

Although it is not a natural coastal landscape, the cliffed coast from Flag Head to Chewton Bunny has a distinct landscape which results from planting as a

part of coast defence schemes dating back to the mid 19th century.

A [Land and Seascape Assessment](#) for the Dorset coast has been carried out through the Dorset Coast Forum C-SCOPE project. This study has determined the visual capacity of Dorset's coastal environment to accommodate offshore renewables and other coastal infrastructure without negatively affecting landscape/seascape quality and experience. LDA adopted a ground-breaking approach to seascape characterisation, defining units by sectoral uses in addition to Zones of Visual Influence.

The Built Environment

The built environment must be considered within any study of the landscape and this is implicit in the ELC definition of landscape. How it is regarded depends on the scale of the landscape assessment. At a county or whole coast level, most of the villages and smaller towns can be included within landscape character areas. Poole, Christchurch and Bournemouth have produced, or are producing Townscape appraisals which define urban character areas.

Coastal settlements are vitally important elements of the landscape. Traditionally built of local materials they usually reflect the underlying geology, as much as or more than the landform itself. Travelling along the coast from Portland to Lyme Regis the colour of each village varies, depending on the stone used. It is

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important to retain this diversity, and for this reason the then Countryside Commission developed the concept of Village Design Statements, whereby local people identify the important characteristics of their village, and how these should be reflected in future development. Dorset Parish principle building stone map is also of help in promoting local distinctiveness.



Weymouth Town Centre. Copyright: Dorset Coast Forum

Caravan sites are prominent at several places along the Dorset coast. They are, perhaps, the most controversial man-made feature in the coastal landscape, being disliked by many people. However, the issue of caravan sites is unlikely to be resolved easily, as they are not only very important to the economy of the area (see Tourism topic paper), but are frequently difficult to camouflage by tree planting or similar schemes.

'Honey Pot' sites can have significant impacts and often consist of parking areas and public services/facilities. The Coastal Car Park Design Guidance can help in promoting better designs in this one area of human impact.

The potential impacts of Renewable Energy developments within the built environment and beyond need to be considered.

Designation and Protection

The whole of the Dorset coast, (except for the developed coastline at Christchurch, Poole, Bournemouth and Weymouth and the Island of Portland), was designated by Parliament as the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1957. The primary purpose was to conserve the natural beauty of the area.

In addition most of the undeveloped coast has been defined as Heritage Coast, which aims to protect unspoilt stretches of coastline from development. The Purbeck Heritage Coast was defined in 1981, and the West Dorset Heritage Coast in 1984. Since 1984 the Purbeck Heritage Coast has held the Diploma of the Council of Europe for Protected landscapes.

At a District level there are Areas of Local Landscape Importance, identified in the Local Plan and offered some status by the planning process. These often form a 'buffer' around the Heritage Coasts. These are, however, planned to be phased out in current and emerging Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).

The historic cores of most of the coastal settlements have been designated as Conservation Areas, which aim to protect not just individual buildings, but the setting as well.

A considerable part of the coastline in Purbeck and West Dorset is owned by the National Trust, which has as one of its aims the preservation of places of natural beauty. Under its 'Enterprise Neptune' initiative it has actively sought to purchase coastal properties, in order to protect the coast from unsuitable development. The Trust has the powers to declare its land 'inalienable', effectively preventing compulsory purchase for development.

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Forces for Change

There are a range of forces acting on the coastal landscapes:

- **Development**

All forms of development have considerable potential to affect the coastal landscape. The RSS and emerging LDFs emphasise the importance of the protected landscapes and of conserving and enhancing all landscapes in making planning decisions, and this is extended to Portland which is 'treated as heritage coast' for planning purposes.

Much of the coastal landscape is very open, and it is often difficult to design developments to blend in with the landscape. Offshore development, below low water mark, is outside the usual planning process, though the potential effects on the seascape could be dramatic

- **Climate Change**

Depending on which scenario is taken (from the UK Climate Change Predictions 2009), this will have a wide range of negative and positive environmental, social and economic impacts on the coast. Increased risk of flooding, e.g. from an increase in storminess and sea level rise, may cause breaches in defences, take land out of agricultural production and cause salt ingress into wetland habitat types. However this may also create habitat creation opportunities through an increase in intertidal floodplain wetlands.

Increased storminess and sea level rise together with increases in sea temperature and increased erosion will impact on a wide variety of uses along the coast including the fishing industry, tourism, harbours and shipping as well as the emergency services, agriculture and biodiversity and historic landscape character.

- **Changes in Agricultural Practices**

Most of the land along the Dorset coast is farmed, and has been for centuries. Indeed agriculture has had a major role in creating the present landscape. Changes in agricultural practices, such as converting pasture land into arable can, therefore, have a major impact. The recent legislation regarding the preservation of hedgerows has come about through concern for the loss of these landscape features. Grant schemes such as Environmental Stewardship provide money for, amongst other things, the restoration and improvement of landscape features.

- **Man-Made Erosion**

The natural erosion of the cliffs gives them their character, and frequently has little effect on the landscape. However man-made erosion is often disfiguring, and in many places a great deal of effort is put into repairing the damage caused. There can be particular problems on the chalk, owing to the whiteness of the exposed rock, for example the path across Hanbury Tout is even visible on satellite photographs!

- **Management Mechanisms**

Landscapes are always changing, they are dynamic and cannot be fixed. The changes can be sudden and dramatic, a cliff fall, or gradual, the growth of a tree. They can be natural or man made. As landscape grow and develop they can be altered. One of the aims of landscape assessment is not only to identify the important aspects of a particular landscape, but also to point out those actions that would change a landscape and those which would be needed to maintain it close to its present state. The use of Landscape Change Strategies can provide a positive planning tool which recognise the need for landscapes to evolve.

There are several ways in which money is available for positive landscape management.

- **Environmental Stewardship**

Is a mechanism whereby landowners are offered grants to enter into management agreements to enhance and conserve important landscape and habitats. The grants are targeted at particular features, one of which has been coastal landscape. Recently the hinterland of the Fleet has been the subject of a particular programme.

- **Local Environment Agency Plans and Catchment Management Plans**

These are produced by the Environment Agency and are addressed primarily at 'the problems of land, air and water, particularly in the realms of pollution

control'. These plans, which deal with the natural catchment areas of river systems, rather than artificial political boundaries, are wide-ranging and aim, amongst other things, to protect and enhance the landscape.

- **Village Design Statements**

These are promoted by Natural England but have yet to be taken up along the Dorset coast. These could provide a process whereby locally important aspects of the village's design can be protected or enhanced in future development. When complete Village Design Statements can be adopted as Supplementary Planning guidance by the local authority. Parish plans can also have an influence on how areas are managed and planned.

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