

Note – references throughout this document will be added/updated at a later date (and this note will be deleted).



East Devon Local Plan – Topic Paper – **insert number here**

Defining and Justifying Major Development in National Landscapes

June 2024 – Version 1 for Strategic Planning Committee June 2024



Contact details

Planning Policy Team
East Devon District Council
Blackdown House, Border Road
Heathpark Industrial Estate
Honiton
EX14 1EJ

Phone: 01395 516551

Email: planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/>

Front cover photograph taken from field gate to Bedlands Lane, Budleigh Salterton by planning policy team.

To request this information in an alternative format or language please phone 01395 516551 or email csc@eastdevon.gov.uk

Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Summary of National Policy	6
3	The East Devon Context	8
4	Identifying ‘Major Development’ in the National Landscapes of East Devon District.....	12
5	The ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ Assessment	13
6	Conclusion	15
7	Appendix A Extracts from Blackdown Hills Management Plan and East Devon Planning Guidance	16
8	Appendix B – A worked example of the proposed approach for determining ‘major’ development in a national landscape.	24
9	Appendix C Worked Example of Assessment of Exceptional Circumstances.....	28

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This topic paper sits behind and helps explain the content of and evolution of the Publication draft of the East Devon Local Plan.
 - 1.2 There may be new versions of this topic paper as plan making progresses to Publication and thereafter into and through plan Examination.
 - 1.3 This topic paper provides details on how ‘major’ development in a national landscape will be identified. Where allocations are considered to constitute major development, the paper also considers the factors that should be taken into account to assess whether there are any ‘exceptional circumstances’ and would be in the ‘public interest’.
 - 1.4 The paper considers the benefits of setting out guidelines for decision makers to decide whether development proposals constitute ‘major development’ in the protected landscapes within East Devon. It also puts forward options for how guidelines could be drafted and recommends a process to be followed to guide the decision maker.
 - 1.5 The paper is intended to guide the process for considering allocations as part of the East Devon Local Plan 2020 – 2040. It may also be useful for guiding decisions relating to planning applications.
-

2 Summary of National Policy

- 2.1 Paragraph 182 of the NPPF states that “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty¹ which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.”.
- 2.2 Paragraph 183 states that “When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
 - b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
 - c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”
- 2.3 A footnote in the NPPF to these paragraphs’ states that “For the purposes of paragraphs 182 and 183, whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.”
- 2.4 It should also be noted that the legislative requirements for local planning authorities in relation to national landscapes were changed by alterations to the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000) that were made by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023². Previously all ‘relevant authorities’³ had to ‘have regard’ to the specified purposes (of the national landscape), but now they must ‘seek to further the purposes’ (of the national

¹ The NPPF uses the term of ‘Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty’, which are now known as ‘National Landscapes’.

² See Section 245 of the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/25/section/245), which came into force on 26/12/2023.

³ These include a district council.

landscape). The ‘purposes’ referred to in relation to a national landscape are ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’⁴.

⁴ Section 85 (1) of the CROW Act (2000)

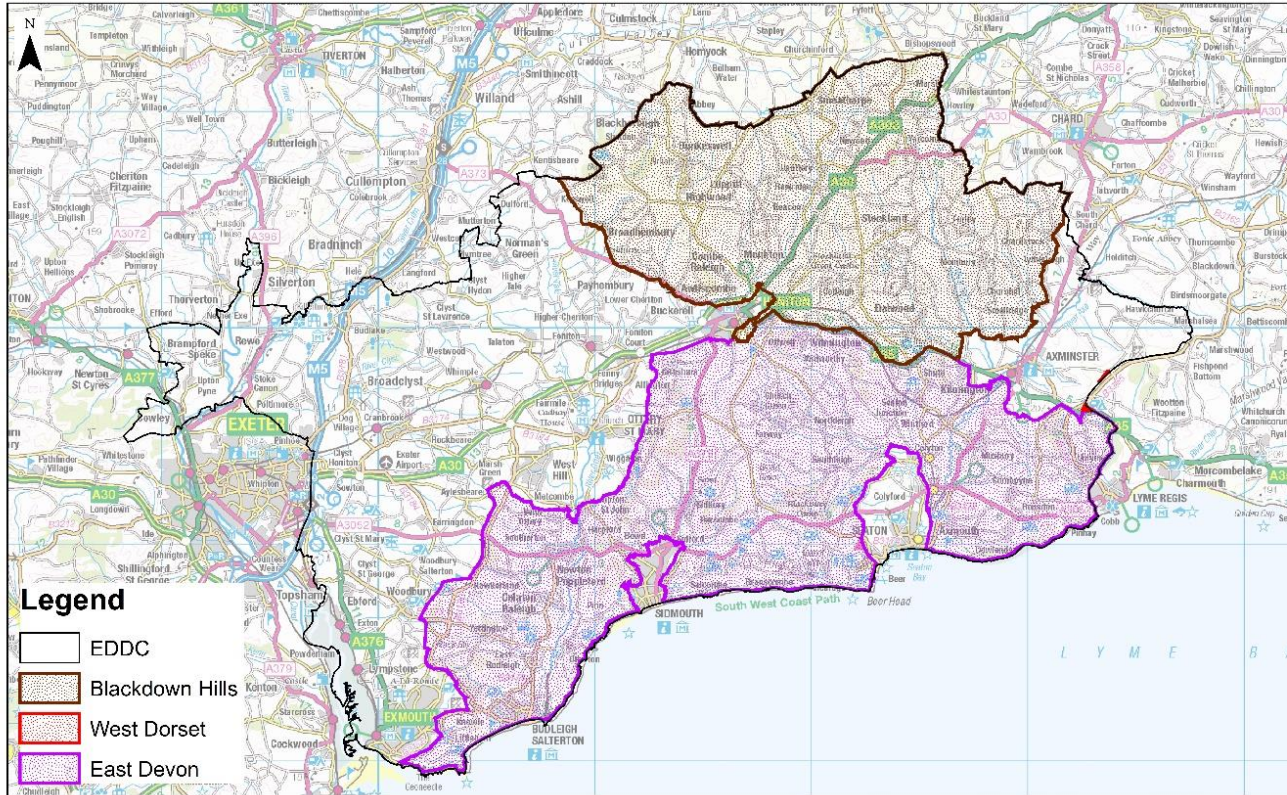
3 The East Devon Context

- 3.1 There are three separate national landscape designations in East Devon as shown on map 1:
- The East Devon National Landscape, which is wholly within the District of East Devon and has published planning guidance⁵ including how to define and assess major development.
 - The Blackdown Hills, which is mainly in East Devon but also includes parts of Mid Devon and Somerset. The Blackdown Hills Management Plan⁶ includes guidance on major development Appendix A.
 - The Dorset National Landscape, which is in the neighbouring local authority area, but includes two very small areas on the eastern border of East Devon near Raymond’s Hill, Axminster.
- 3.2 These national landscapes cover an intricate pattern of landscape character types as illustrated on Map 2.

⁵ [AONB-Planning-Guidance-Document-LOWRES.pdf](https://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk/AONB-Planning-Guidance-Document-LOWRES.pdf) ([eastdevonaonb.org.uk](https://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk))

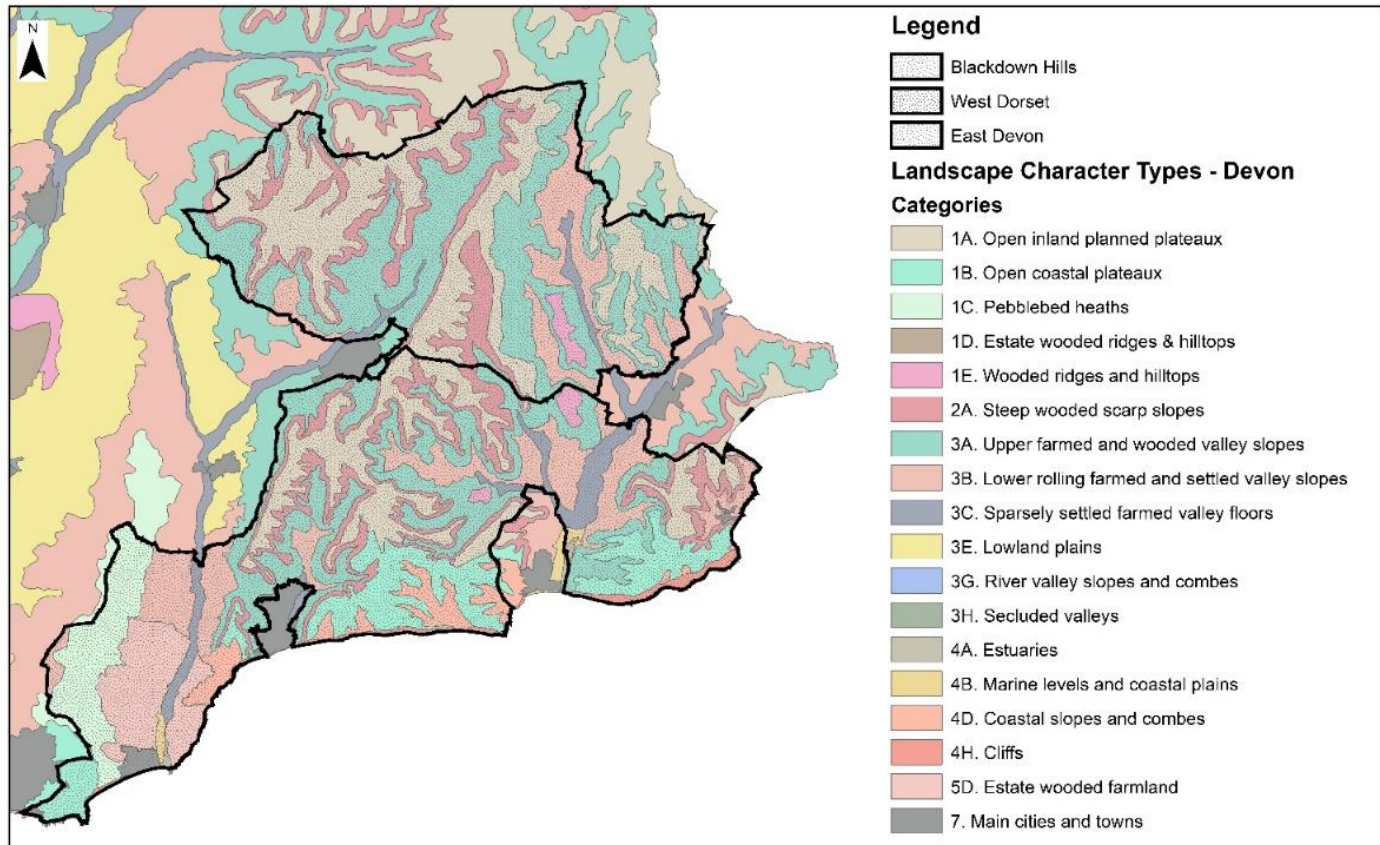
⁶ [bhaonb_management_plan_2019-24.pdf](https://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/bhaonb_management_plan_2019-24.pdf) ([blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk](https://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk))

Map 1 – Location of East Devon National Landscapes



© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey AC0000809498.

Map 2 –East Devon Landscape Character



eastdevon.gov.uk

© Crown copyright and database rights 2024 Ordnance Survey AC0000809496.

3.3 The landscape character types covered by national landscapes are:

1a Open inland planned plateaux;

1B Open coastal plateaux;

1C Pebblebed Heaths;

1E Wooded ridges and hilltops;

2A Steep wooded scarp slopes;

3A Upper farmed and wooded valley slopes;

3B Lower rolling farmland and settled valley slopes;

3C Sparsely settled farmed valley floors;

4A Estuaries;

4B Marine levels and coastal plains;

4D Coastal slopes and combes;

4H Cliffs;

5D Estate wooded farmland; and

7 Urban

4 Identifying ‘Major Development’ in the National Landscapes of East Devon District

- 4.1 The National Landscapes in East Devon have been designated to conserve and enhance their natural beauty, which arises from a combination of factors that include landscape and scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage⁷. Each National Landscape will have a different combination of factors that justify their designation that are referred to as ‘special qualities’. There is a national requirement to have a management plan for each national landscape in which its special qualities are assessed⁸. The most relevant parts of the management plans that apply in East Devon are included in Appendix A.
- 4.2 The footnote to paragraphs 182 and 183 of the NPPF states that a decision on whether a proposal constitutes major development depends in part on ‘whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated’, which involves an assessment of the ‘special qualities’ of the area. The footnote also sets out the need to consider the ‘nature, scale and setting’ of the proposal when deciding if it constitutes ‘major development’.
- 4.3 To ensure a consistency of approach, it is considered helpful for individual assessments to be guided by a ‘checklist’ of factors that take account of both national planning policy/guidance and local factors. To start with, three basic options for what could be included in any checklist were devised. These were: just using the NPPF criteria; using the NPPF criteria supplemented with some local criteria; and using the NPPF criteria plus criteria to reflect the special qualities of the national landscape affected. Worked examples of each approach were undertaken that led to a fourth approach where example 2 was adapted by adding a question about whether any of the special qualities identified in the relevant management plan were affected by the proposed development. This approach has the advantage of relative simplicity and allowing for the special qualities identified in the management plan to be properly taken into account. This approach is proposed to guide assessments of ‘major’ as part of the plan making process and a worked example is shown in Appendix B.

⁷ Areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs): designation and management - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁸ Areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs): designation and management - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

5 The ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ Assessment

- 5.1 Any site found to constitute ‘major’ development in the context of NPPF paragraph 182 will need to be tested against the criteria set out in paragraph 183 of the NPPF to determine whether there are ‘exceptional circumstances’ that would justify development in the ‘public interest’. Three tests are set out in the NPPF to help assess this:
- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
 - b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
 - c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”
- 5.2 In the context of the allocation of sites for the local plan, the first two NPPF criteria (need for the development and cost/scope for developing elsewhere) will be assessed against the spatial strategy for the plan. Policy 1 of the draft plan sets out that the spatial strategy as follows:

1. Strategic Policy – Spatial Strategy

New development will be directed towards the most sustainable locations in East Devon, consistent with the spatial strategy to:

- Focus new development on the western side of the district, including a new town and other major strategic developments close to Exeter
- Promote significant development at the Principal Centre of Exmouth and the Main Centres of Axminster, Honiton, Ottery St Mary, Seaton, and Sidmouth to serve their own needs and that of the wider surrounding areas
- Support development at the Local Centres of Broadclyst, Budleigh Salterton, Colyton, Lymptstone, and Woodbury that meets local needs and those in the immediate surroundings
- Allow limited development to meet local needs at the Service Villages of Beer, Branscombe, Broadhembury, Chardstock, Clyst St Mary, Dunkeswell, East Budleigh, Exton, Feniton, Hawkchurch, Kilmington, Musbury, Newton Poppleford, Otterton, Payhembury, Plymtree, Sidbury, Stoke Canon, Tipton St John, Uplyme, Westclyst, West Hill and Whimble.

Settlements not listed above are considered to be ‘open countryside’ for the purposes of the Local Plan, where more restrictive planning policies apply.

- 5.3 Both the Blackdown Hills and East Devon guidance advocates the assessment of alternative sites that could result in less harm to the national landscape. This approach will be taken in the context of proposed allocations in the local plan, but Policy 1 (shown above) will be taken into account in this assessment. This means that development that is broadly in accordance with Policy 1 around an individual settlement will be compared with any other suitable and available sites around that settlement. It will not require an assessment of sites that are not well related to the settlement, even if they would have a lesser impact on the special qualities of the national landscape.
- 5.4 The cumulative impact of sites that affect national landscapes will be taken into account in this assessment. For example, where there are several suitable and available sites around a Tier 4 settlement that would result in more than ‘limited development to meet local needs’, this will be taken into account when assessing the ‘need’ for the development in the context of Paragraph 183 of the NPPF.
- 5.5 The third NPPF criteria (environmental/landscape impact) will be assessed through individual site assessments made in accordance with the methodology set out for plan making⁹.
- 5.6 Any site being proposed for allocation in the local plan that has been found to constitute major development for the purposes of paragraph 182 of the NPPF (as set out in paragraph 4 of this report) will be assessed against the factors set out in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.2 of this report. The judgements made will be recorded as follows:

Major Development in a National Landscape: Assessment of Exceptional Circumstances	
Site Reference	
Need for the development. Is the scale and location of development in general accordance with the spatial strategy of the draft local plan?	Refer to Strategic Policy 1
Alternatives. Are there other sites that are well related to the relevant settlement which could result in less harm to the national landscape?	Apply a ‘sequential test’ to any suitable alternative sites.
Are there any cumulative impacts on the national landscape from other proposed allocations?	Note any additional allocations or extant planning permissions and assess their cumulative impacts.
What is the predicted landscape impact?	Summary assessment from site selection methodology.

⁹ [site-selection-methodology-v2.pdf \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

Can any detrimental impacts be mitigated?	
What is the predicted environmental impact? Can any detrimental impacts be mitigated?	Summarise relevant assessments from site selection methodology.
Are there any 'exceptional circumstances' that would justify development in the 'public interest'.	Relate to local plan.

5.7 A worked example is included in Appendix C. The same site in Dunkeswell is used for consistency but would not actually require an assessment of exceptional circumstances as it was not found to constitute 'major development'.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The identification of major development in a national landscape in the context of the NPPF is open to interpretation by decision makers to take into account local factors. This paper has considered how to interpret the NPPF in light of the particular characteristics of the national landscapes within East Devon. The method devised to assess whether individual allocations proposed as part of the local plan constitute 'major development' is considered to be thorough and robust and will ensure that a consistent approach is taken that reflects the diversity of landscapes concerned. The approach could also be used to inform decisions relating to individual planning applications.
- 6.2 The assessment of exceptional circumstances for any proposed allocations that are found to constitute major development in a national landscape needs to be considered in light of the NPPF and the strategy of the emerging East Devon Local Plan. The proposed framework for assessing the relevant issues should ensure a consistent approach so that it is clear why decisions on individual sites have been made. This should ensure that any major development proposed in a national landscape in the local plan is fully justified.

7 Appendix A Extracts from Blackdown Hills Management Plan¹⁰ and East Devon Planning Guidance¹¹

7.1 East Devon

7.2 WHAT IS MAJOR DEVELOPMENT?

7.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does not define or seek to illustrate the meaning of the phrase ‘major development’ in protected landscapes. Assessing whether a proposed development is a major development for the purposes of paragraph 172 is a matter of judgment for the local planning authority (eg East Devon District Council or Devon County Council) taking into account the proposal in question and the local context. The Local Plan for East Devon does qualify and reference ‘major’. Footnote 55 from the NPPF: “Whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account the nature, scale and setting [of the proposed development], and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined” Paragraph 172 of the NPPF is clear that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in these designated areas, irrespective of whether or not it is considered to be Major Development.⁴ It makes it clear that development could be granted, but only in exceptional circumstances and where in the public interest.

7.4 HOW TO APPLY THE TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS UNDER NPPF PARAGRAPH 172

7.5 If the decision-taker, in our case usually East Devon DC, (but could also be Devon CC or even the Secretary of State in the case of National Strategy Infrastructure Projects) has determined that development in the AONB is ‘major development’, it will assess the three criteria referred to in paragraph 172 (see page 10). The decision-taker will have regard to any other relevant considerations, and it will then undertake the weighted balancing exercise, noting that: • the presumption in favour of development has been removed because major development in AONB should normally be refused; and • great weight is to be given to the conservation of landscape and scenic beauty and • demonstration of public interest is in addition to consideration of exceptional circumstances.

7.6 THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

¹⁰ [bhaonb_management_plan_2019-24.pdf](https://blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/bhaonb_management_plan_2019-24.pdf) (blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk)

¹¹ [AONB-Planning-Guidance-Document-LOWRES.pdf](https://eastdevonaonb.org.uk/AONB-Planning-Guidance-Document-LOWRES.pdf) (eastdevonaonb.org.uk)

7.7 The assessment in NPPF paragraph 172 sub-paragraph a) should address whether there is a need for the specific development proposed, including any national considerations and the economic impact of permitting or refusing it on the local economy.

7.8 THE ALTERNATIVES ASSESSMENT

The purpose of the assessment in subparagraph b) of paragraph 172 was set out in the High Court as: ‘Its purpose is to ascertain whether an alternative site may be available so as to avoid development in the AONB. It requires other available sites in the area to be assessed, on their merits, as possible alternative locations for the proposed development’. The determining authority cannot insist that a developer provide an alternatives assessment. It is an assessment for the determining authority to carry out as decision taker. However, it is suggested that developers consider covering this for clarity and to aid the decision-making process. As a guide, assessments of alternative sites could consider the following:

- sites outside the AONB, including those outside the local planning authority’s area
- sites that would result in less harm to the AONB
- land of lesser environmental value
- alternative ways of meeting the need in some other way than through the proposed development.

7.9 Blackdown Hills

7.10 Appendix B:

7.11 Major Development Footnote 55 of the NPPF clarifies that: ‘For the purposes of paragraphs 172 [relating to protected landscapes, including AONBs] and 173 [relating to Heritage Coasts], whether a development is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined’. As such, it is not possible or appropriate to apply a blanket definition for what should be treated as major development in the Blackdown Hills AONB. Nevertheless, there are some key factors that help to define if a development is major, as outlined below. The purpose for which the Blackdown Hills AONB has been designated is to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Therefore, the judgement as to whether or not a development is major development depends, to a large degree, on whether or not the development could have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty of the AONB. As outlined in Section 3.1, natural beauty incorporates a number of criteria, including landscape quality, scenic quality, tranquillity, natural heritage and cultural heritage. Within the context of the Blackdown Hills AONB, those aspects of the AONB’s natural beauty which make the area distinctive and which are particularly valuable – the AONB’s ‘special

qualities’ - are also described in Section 3. On this basis, a development should be considered ‘major’ if, by reason of its nature, scale, location and/or setting, it could have a significant adverse impact on any of the above criteria, including the AONB’s ‘special qualities’. As well as potential impacts within the AONB, consideration should also be given to impacts on these criteria within the setting of the AONB, particularly in the context of visual impact (i.e. views into and out of the AONB) and impacts on tranquillity.

7.12 Public Interest

7.13 As outlined in paragraph 172 of the NPPF, to help inform whether there are exceptional circumstances and whether it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest, applications for such development should include an assessment of:

- a. ‘the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy’; The AONB Partnership would expect any such development proposal to be accompanied by a statement of need in the context of national and local considerations and, ideally, in the context of needs arising from within the AONB. The impacts of permitting or refusing the development should be clearly identified in respect of the local economy, ideally including that of the local communities affected. Such a statement should be based on objective assessment and clear evidence.
- b. ‘the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way’; The AONB Partnership would encourage any such development proposal to be accompanied by a report setting out a sequential approach to site selection. This should evidence the extent to which alternative sites have been assessed before the selection of sites within the AONB, and clearly identify why sites outside of the designated area could not be developed. The report should also identify and evidence why the need for the development could not be met in some other way. The report should include relevant evidence regarding the cost of developing outside the AONB. The AONB Partnership is mindful of the judicial review decision in relation to development in Cornwall AONB, which confirmed that even if there are exceptional circumstances generally, such as the need for housing, this does not necessarily equate to exceptional circumstances for a particular development because there may be alternative sites that could result in less harm to the AONB. These can be outside the local planning authority’s area. Thus the proper consideration of alternatives, (with a view to ascertaining if alternative(s) which would result in less harm to the AONB exist), is an essential component of exercising the assessments correctly.
- c. ‘any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated’. The AONB Partnership would expect any such development proposal to be accompanied by a report identifying any detrimental effects upon the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities. Such a report should relate directly to the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB as a whole as well as those

specific to the development site. Any mitigation identified to moderate these impacts should be:

- clearly detailed, in line with the duty to conserve and enhance the AONB,
- be compatible with the objectives and policies of the AONB Management Plan,
- be compatible with special qualities and local landscape character, and
- be capable of realisation through robust planning conditions or obligation.

7.14 Blackdown Hills special qualities

7.15 3.4 The Special Landscape Character

7.16 Key to the Blackdown Hills designation as an AONB is the subtle combination of four aspects of the landscape (The Blackdown Hills landscape: A landscape assessment. Countryside Commission, 1989):

7.17 **It is an isolated and unspoilt rural area** and remains relatively undisturbed by modern development and so ancient landscape features, special habitats, historical and archaeological remains have survived intact. There is a sense of stepping back in time in the winding lanes, the hidden valleys and relatively remote villages. The traditional pattern of villages, hamlets, paths and roads remains largely unchanged and there is an identifiable and characteristic vernacular, pastoral landscape.

7.18 **There is a diversity of landscape patterns and pictures.** The visual quality of the landscape is high and is derived from the complex patterns and mosaics of landscapes. Although the scenery is immensely varied, particular features are repeated. Ancient, species-rich hedgerows delineate the fields and define the character of the landscape, enclosing narrow twisting lanes. There are long views over field-patterned landscapes. The high plateau is dissected by steep valleys, supporting a patchwork of woodland and heath, and there are fine avenues of beech along the ridge. The history of medieval and parliamentary enclosures has resulted in an individual, patchwork landscape of small fields in the valleys and larger fields with straight hedges on the plateau.

7.19 **There is a unique geology.** The composition of the underlying geology of the Blackdown Hills and the adjoining East Devon AONB is unique in Britain and is one of the area's strongest unifying features. It has given rise to the distinct topography of a flat-topped plateau, sharp ridges and spring-lined valleys. The springs have created the characteristic pattern of rough grassland, mire and woodland vegetation on the valley sides. The nature of the Greensand rock has meant that plant communities are particularly diverse. Moreover, the geology has provided a local building material, chert, which is uncommon elsewhere.

7.20 It is a landscape with architectural appeal. The landscape pattern is punctuated by a wealth of small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads of architectural value and distinctive character. Devon and Somerset are recognised nationally for their fine rural architecture, but the Blackdown Hills contain a special concentration of buildings where the vernacular character is

particularly well preserved. Predominant materials are chert and cob with thatch, often now replaced by corrugated iron, or clay-tiled roofs. The appeal lies in the way in which the buildings fit so naturally into their surroundings.

7.21 Landscape quality

- A managed landscape sculpted and maintained by the stewardship of generations of those who work the land
- Undeveloped skyline of the northern scarp slope is a prominent feature in views from the Vale of Taunton and beyond
- Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows
- Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter, Culm rivers
- Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields and woodland
- A settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth containing farms and small scattered villages well related to the landscape

7.22 Scenic quality

- The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors
- Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys
- A well-wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees
- Pattern of regular, large-scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes
- Majestic avenues of beech trees along northern ridges
- Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high-hedged winding single-tracked lanes in the valleys
- Wellington Monument is a key landscape feature identifying the Blackdown Hills over a very wide area in all directions

7.23 Relative wildness

- A sense of remoteness enhanced by the exposure of the plateau and more intimate extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys
- Wide open spaces provide exposure to the elements; big sky, windswept places, contrasts of sunlight and shadow

7.24 Relative tranquillity

- Areas of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life
- Places to enjoy natural sounds; the melody of the song thrush and skylark, the call of buzzards
- Dark night-time star-filled skies contrasting with the light pollution of the surrounding towns

7.25 Natural heritage features

- One of the finest, most extensive Greensand plateau in Britain; a distinctive landform that contrasts with the surrounding lowlands to the east, north and west
- The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area
- Distinctive spring-line mires located around the upper slopes of the valleys
- The varied landscape supports a rich assemblage of wildlife including many species of bats, butterflies and meadow flowers and healthy populations of ferns, lichens, mosses and fungi
- Ancient, species-rich hedges with many hedgerow trees and flower-rich banks; colourful displays of primrose and bluebells in spring
- A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by hedgerows support a thriving dormouse population
- Streams and rivers are home to otters, lamprey and the vulnerable white-clawed crayfish

7.26 Cultural heritage

- The number and extent of well-preserved buildings in the local vernacular – chert, cob and thatch – are an important element of the landscape
- Hillforts are prominent features on the ends of the plateau ridges
- Mining remains from the once internationally significant whetstone industry and extensive evidence of iron-working



- Three World War Two airfields and their associated buildings are found on the high, flat land of the plateau
- A community with a strong sense of place closely linked to the land and its management, with a particularly strong tradition of hedge laying
- A landscape that has inspired artists from the early 20th century Camden Town Group to the Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers of today

7.27 East Devon Special qualities [AONB-Partnership-plan_lowres_final.pdf \(eastdevonaonb.org.uk\)](https://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk/AONB-Partnership-plan_lowres_final.pdf)

7.28 East Devon AONB is notable for its varied and dramatic coastal scenery; the grandeur of sheer red sandstone cliffs, intimate wooded combs and coves contrast with the stark, white chalk outcrop that punctuates the coast at Beer Head and further east, the wilderness of the undercliffs. Its special qualities do not stop at the coast. Inland, the heathland commons provide high, open and remote plateaux. Important recreationally, the heathland habitat is valuable for its flora and fauna and contrasts sharply with the lower undulating agricultural mosaic of small fields, hedgerows and woodland copse. Elevated fingers of land extend from the Blackdown Hills to the north, their height and linearity accentuated by cathedral-like beech avenues; woodlands clad their sides, flowing down steep sided goyles to infiltrate the tranquil and often intimate agricultural valleys below. This contrasts with the broad flat floodplains of the Axe and Otter which cut into the area, drawing their life from tributaries deep within the valleys of the undulating hinterland. The human engagement, use and management of this land since pre-historic times has guided the pattern and shape of the settlements, field patterns, woodland and heath, creating a landscape of significant scenic beauty that is the basis for its agricultural and tourism economy. Recreational, cultural and spiritual qualities abound, with the South West Coast Path, East Devon Way and open access land, most notably on the Pebblebed Heaths, providing extensive opportunities for open air recreation, healthy exercise, uninterrupted views or an escape to tranquillity and relative isolation. Our association with the cultural and heritage dimension of the landscape has inspired descriptive writing, poetry, art and song for generations. The Countryside Commission appraisal of the East Devon AONB (CCP442) identifies many of these associations and special qualities and has been more recently supplemented by assessments of the character of the landscape at the national, county and local level. These assessments have enabled further articulation of the special qualities and features of significance as they relate to natural beauty, which are summarised in the table on the following page. These features of significance and special qualities are axiomatic to what goes into making the natural beauty of the landscape of such high quality. Alongside the key characteristics of the landscape areas and types, they require protection, conservation and enhancement if the AONB is to retain its character and status amongst England's finest landscapes. Appendix 1 contains a table showing the links between special qualities and landscape character of the AONB.


7.29 Dorset NL special qualities are divided into landscape, wildlife, cultural connections and reading the past. [Our special qualities | Dorset National Landscape \(dorset-nl.org.uk\)](https://dorset-nl.org.uk)

8 Appendix B – Worked example for determining ‘major’ development in a national landscape.

Criteria	Assessment
Protected Landscape	Blackdown Hills
Reference	Dunk_05
Map	
Aerial map	

Nature of development*	Housing –predominantly two storey (8.5m to ridge), possibly some 2.5 storey (9m to ridge) and 3 storey (10.8m to ridge) where appropriate. Commercial/ mixed use –Office/warehouse/light industrial with associated parking.
¹² Scale of development*	43 dwellings and 0.17ha of associated employment. Dunkeswell has a population of around 1500, which equates to 717 homes. The percentage increase in the number of homes would be more than 16%.
Setting*	Edge of Dunkeswell, a village with a population of around 1500 people. The site can be seen from the south and glimpsed in long range views, but it is screened by existing development in short range views and seen in the context of adjacent housing.
Isolation**	This site adjoins the village and is bordered on two sides by a loose ribbon of 20th C dwellings.
Landscape Pattern**	Flat field adjoining housing on 2/3 sides. LCT 1A. Open inland planned plateaux.
Geology**	No distinctive features other than flatness of site and setting.
Architecture**	Little vernacular character in surrounding housing.
Landscape quality***	The landscape quality of the site is unremarkable.
Scenic quality***	The site has no scenic qualities.
Relative wildness****	The site is part of a managed and suburban landscape.
Relative tranquillity***	There are houses on three sides of the site so human activity is likely to restrict levels of tranquillity.
Natural heritage features***	There are mature trees and hedges to the site boundaries that could be retained. Two mature trees on the site frontage may be lost to provide an access.
Cultural heritage***	There is limited cultural heritage apparent on the site or within the related settlement.

¹² Scale is assessed in relation to the adjoining settlement. Number of dwellings is based on approximate 2021 population divided by an occupancy rate of 2.09. A percentage increase in dwellings of 10% or more would indicate a 'significant' increase likely to be regarded as 'major' development under this criterion, unless specific site characteristics can be shown that, in terms of the special qualities of the national landscape the increase in scale was not significant.

<p>Would any of the special qualities summarised in the Blackdown Hills management plan be affected by the proposed development? ****</p>	<p>The site comprises an agricultural field as is therefore part of the managed landscape, although the visual appreciation of this is marred by the single storey dwellings that have been built on part of the 'original' field fronting the road. There are hedgerows and trees on the site boundaries, but these are not directly linked to any semi-natural habitats.</p>
<p>Is there a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined¹³?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Photos</p> <p>Site is screened from longer views by trees and hedges.</p> <p>Site is well contained by trees and hedges and seen in the context of existing housing.</p>	
<p>Would allocation constitute major on any one criterion?</p>	<p>Yes, scale of development 16% increase in housing numbers.</p>
<p>Would allocation constitute major with any combination of criteria?</p>	<p>None of the other criteria indicate that the allocation constitutes major development.</p>
<p>Major development?</p>	<p>No, the lack of distinctive special qualities on the site, it's context on the edge of the settlement and screening mean that, despite</p>

¹³ Blackdown Hills [Management](#) Plan and extract of page 19 in Appendix 2

	the increase in scale, the site is not considered to constitute major development.
--	--

* Criteria taken from NPPF footnote

** Criteria taken from paragraph 3.4 of [management plan](#) 'The Special Landscape Character'

*** taken from Natural England [guidance](#) on meeting beauty criteria for national landscape designation

**** See paragraph 3.7 [bhaonb_management_plan_2019-24.pdf](#) (blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk)

9 Appendix C Worked Example of Assessment of Exceptional Circumstances.

Major Development in a National Landscape: Assessment of Exceptional Circumstances	
Site reference	Dunk_05
<p>Need for the development. Is the scale and location of development in general accordance with the spatial strategy of the draft local plan?</p>	<p>Dunkeswell is a ‘service village’ where limited development to meet local needs is promoted. The scale of development proposed on Dunk_05 would result in an increase in homes in the village of around 16%. Whilst this is quite a significant increase, there are very few ‘tiered settlements’ in this part of East Devon and Dunkeswell therefore serves an extensive area for ‘local need’. The scale of development is considered to be justified in this context.</p>
<p>Alternatives. Are there other sites that are well related to the relevant settlement which could result in less harm to the national landscape?</p>	<p>Two other sites that are well related to Dunkeswell passed the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment. Both sites are within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and were not considered to be suitable for allocation for a combination of factors relating to detrimental impacts on heritage assets, ecology, landscape and a poor relationship with the existing built form. The development of both of these alternative sites would be considered to be more detrimental to the national landscape.</p>
<p>Are there any cumulative impacts on the national landscape from other proposed allocations?</p>	<p>There are no other proposed allocations around Dunkeswell.</p>
<p>What is the predicted landscape impact? Can any detrimental impacts be mitigated?</p>	<p>The landscape impact is classified as ‘high medium’ due to the national landscape location. However, the site is well related to the settlement pattern, has housing on 2/3 sites and is well screened from longer views from the countryside by the flat topography and mature hedges so that any detrimental impacts could be successfully mitigated.</p>
<p>What is the predicted environmental impact?</p>	<p>In terms of ecology, the sites is identified for the Nature Recovery</p>

Can any detrimental impacts be mitigated?	Network (Grassland covering entire site). A minor adverse effect is predicted, which is not significant. Access to the site may require the removal of two mature trees. No other environmental constraints are noted.
Are there any 'exceptional circumstances' that would justify development in the 'public interest'.	Yes, the need to plan for housing to meet local needs for Dunkeswell and the surrounding rural areas.