

# CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY LANDSCAPE CHARACTER STUDY



## Landscape Character Area Description

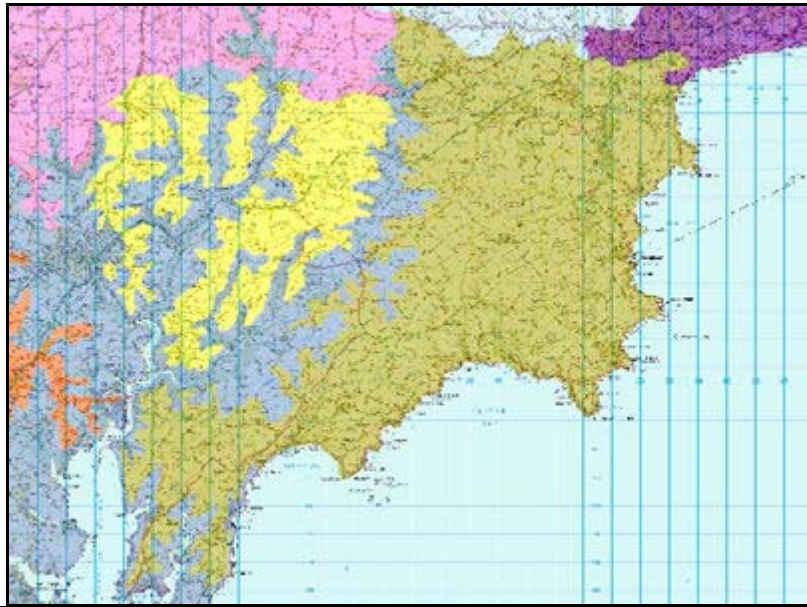
LCA - Gerrans, Veryan and Mevagissey Bays

LCA No CA40

JCA

### Constituent LDUs

Total 17: 82, 83, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 198, 200, 337, 339, 340, 341, 370, 372



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Location	The south central section of the Cornish Coast and its agricultural hinterland, extending from St Just in Roseland in the South West to the outskirts of St Austell in the North East. The coast sweeps around Gerrans Bay, Veryan Bay and Mevagissey Bay with the Fal River forming a strong inland boundary to the North West of the area.
Designations	All LDUs are at least partly in the Cornwall AONB and almost all are in the Roseland Heritage Coast. LDU200 is within the WHS Charlestown site. Nine LDUs contain SSSIs; 4 contain SACs; 4 contain CGS; 12 contain SMs.

## Description

This Landscape Character Area is comprised of a high farmland plateau bounded to the south by the sea, and to the north by the River Fal and its tributaries and the southern outskirts of St Austell. The coastline is comprised of three large and sweeping coastal bays whose rocky shores, sandy beaches and small coves are derived from their geology of Killas rocks. The coastal strip is dominated by scrub and bracken which has grown up where agriculture has retreated. Punctuating the bays are the distinctive promontory headlands of Nare Head, Dodman Point and Black Head, formed from harder bedrock extending from the elevated plateau inland. The combination of headlands, bays and cliffs give rise to spectacular coastline scenery and far-reaching views. The plateau behind the coast is a farmed landscape, intersected by stream valleys which flow to the sea in the south and into the River Fal to the north west. The stream valleys give rise to an undulating landform and a transport pattern of tight winding lanes with many blind corners that offer an intimate and sheltered character when the lanes dip into the woodland that is concentrated in the valley sides and bottoms. This is a medieval landscape of largely anciently enclosed land with fields of small to medium size and irregular shape bounded in most places by slate Cornish hedges. The size and shape of fields is variable across the area as is the extent to which the hedges have tree cover. The fertile land is a mixture of arable and pastoral farming with some parkland giving the area a domesticated feel. Settlement is sparsely distributed across the area which is dotted with small farmsteads and medieval farm hamlets, many with the prefix 'Tre', giving away their medieval origins. Some of these hamlets have expanded into larger medieval churchtowns such as Veryan, Gerrans, Philleigh and Gorran Churchtown; Tregony developed as a medieval new town adjacent to a castle and port on the Fal; Grampound was also a planted medieval settlement at a river crossing on a major east-west road

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route. Other villages to the north of the area such as Polgooth and Coombe developed due to their links with the mining industry to the north. Coastal villages are found within each of the bays, tucked into the sheltered mouths of steep-sided stream valleys. Most are former fishing villages the exception is Pentewan which developed as an industrial port but they are now all influenced by tourism to greater or lesser extents. In the northern section of this area the distant china clay tips and the industry related to Charlestown and St Austell Bay have a significant visual influence on the landscape, as do views across the Fal Estuary and the River Fal to the South and West.

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#### Key Landscape Characteristics

Large coastal bays with sandy beaches and small coves.

Coastal fishing villages located at the mouths of stream valleys.

Highly articulated cliffs and headlands.

Few inland settlements and farmsteads regularly dispersed throughout the landscape with a few larger villages.

Bracken scrub and rough ground behind cliffs on the coastal strip.

Woodland mainly located in valleys with some trees around farmsteads.

Undulating high plateau of a mixture of arable and pastoral farmland.

Ancient yet variable field pattern of medium to small irregular fields.

Steep stream valleys with associated wetland vegetation with remnant pasture or secondary or ancient woodland on slopes.

Areas of estate parkland and gardens.

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#### Geology and soils

Shallow hard rock soils over hard rock sandstones, mudstones and siltstones. Mainly Mid Devonian slates, with well drained, fertile and loamy soils. Surface deposits of alluvial clays and silts are situated at the mouths of streams with beach deposits of sand and gravel.

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#### Topography and drainage

The undulating plateau is dissected by streams creating small wooded valleys which contrast with areas of more exposed land, giving the landscape variety in topography. These streams drain into the tributary valleys of the River Fal which sweeps around the North West of the character area and South to the large coastal bays. The land comes to a full stop at high coastal cliffs which rise above sandy beaches and small coves with the prominent headlands of Nare Head, Dodman Point and Black Head resulting from harder rocks between the sandy bays.

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#### Biodiversity

Most of the Landscape Character Area is farmed with improved grassland and arable. The LCA has some areas of broadleaved woodland, especially on steep valley sides with Upland Mixed Ashwoods, Upland Oakwood (in the east part of the LCA) and Wet Woodland along the small streams and valley bottoms, some classified as Ancient Woodland. A few places have conifer plantations, with small and fragmented areas of scrub, bracken and neutral grassland on steeper slopes along the valleys. Linear woodland and Cornish hedges are valuable ecological corridors linking the semi-natural habitats, particularly in areas where hedge trees are left, and Elm is a noticeable constituent of the hedgerows in this LCA. At the head of and in the bottom of the stream valleys are areas of wetland vegetation with fragmented areas of Fen

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and Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture. This area has a high proportion of ornamental vegetation, associated with the historic parkland estates and gardens such as the Lost Gardens of Heligan and the Caerhays Estate. The LCA has a long and narrow coastal strip of maritime cliff, bracken, scrub and some neutral grassland. The beaches also contain some areas of vegetated shingle and there are Saline Lagoons at Caerhays and Pentewan. Much of the coastal strip is an SSSI, with part of the western coastal strip part of the Fal and Helford SAC.

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#### Land Cover

The LCA is mostly farmed land of improved grassland and arable with a network of Cornish hedges linking to the semi-natural habitats of woodland, scrub and bracken in the stream valleys with some woodland also in discrete areas on the plateau around farmsteads. In some areas mature trees on top of Cornish hedges give a wooded feel. There are some areas of parkland and ornamental gardens and areas of rough ground and scrub along the coastal strip.

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#### Land Use

The land use is mainly agricultural with pastoral farming with arable on medium - sized farms and on some larger estates. Land use for tourism is evident across the character area with many touring caravan sites, static caravan sites and campsites interrupting the farmed landscape. Land use for the grazing of horses is evident in some places such as the Pentewan Valley, with associated fencing, stabling and electric tape. Old engine houses surrounded by rough ground to the north around Polgooth are evidence of the former hard rock mining activity which took place here. At the coast, fishing still remains relevant in places such as Mevagissey and Portloe.

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#### Field and woodland pattern

A network of Cornish hedges with some trees define a medium-size irregular pattern in most areas, a medieval landscape of Anciently Enclosed Land. Clear examples of fossilised medieval stripfield systems are frequent and there are particularly well-preserved medieval field systems on the Dodman and adjacent to Tregony (the former town fields). There are a few minor occurrences of post-medieval enclosure, as at Nare Head and the southern tip of the Dodman. Hedges vary from low, stone hedges without shrubby vegetation, particularly along the coast or more exposed land, to broad, overgrown hedges on valley sides. An extensive area of fields bounded by modern concrete walls occurs in the Gorran High Lanes /Mevagissey hinterland, marking out the former extent of the Heligan estate, incongruous in this rural landscape. The majority of woodland in this area is congruous with the estate parkland around Heligan, Trenowth and Caerhays, and concentrated in the valleys, where it is dominated by oak and beech with sycamore and a few remaining elms. On the plateau, trees occur more frequently on Cornish hedges, as well as small groups around farm buildings. Few trees are found at the coast due to exposure and grazing pressure. Also characteristic are groups of Monterey pines.

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#### Settlement pattern

This sparsely populated area has an evenly dispersed medieval settlement pattern of farmsteads and small hamlets. Some medieval churchtowns have developed to become larger villages. Grampound and Tregony originated as planned medieval new towns and have characteristic wide streets and clock towers, reflecting their former functions as sites for markets and fairs. Few coastal villages within the three main bays are mostly tucked into small coves at the mouth of streams. Most developed as fishing settlements but Pentewan was also associated with quarrying and with the shipping out of ores and later china clay. Some coastal villages, such as Portloe, remain relatively uncommercialised while larger settlements have been altered by the increase in tourism in the area, and the need for holiday accommodation, as at Mevagissey and Gorran Haven. Sticker and Polgooth to the north-east are large villages of a semi-industrial character related to the former localised tin mining area at Polgooth, although Sticker may have earlier

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origins as a roadside settlement. Generally the buildings are still of the vernacular style and local materials, with roofs of some thatch locally and slate and walls of slate [killas], sometimes with granite quoins. The occurrence of modern bungalows on the edges of many settlements throughout the area has resulted in incremental urbanisation and a deterioration of village character in many places.

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#### Transport pattern

The transport pattern in this area is a varied one which shows how transport has developed in this area over the years. Lanes flow along the higher ridgelines of the plateau in a relatively linear fashion, following the path of least resistance along the higher ground. As the lanes descend to cross the valleys, they dip and narrow, enclosed by steep sided Cornish hedges, becoming winding with tight corners, sometimes following the valley bottom before climbing once again onto the higher ground. A real feature of the roads in this area are the large metal finger posts, painted black and white, which point the traveller in the right direction at crossroads. Some of the lanes on the higher ground have been widened and 'improved' over the years as transportation has developed, the most significant of these being the A3078 from Tregony to St Just in Roseland, the B3287 from Tregony to Hewan Water (demonstrating Tregony's function as a gateway to the area) and the B3273 which hugs the broad valley of the St Austell River between St Austell and Mevagissey. The A390 is a significant feature to the north, a wider linear and noisy road radiating from St Austell, the main link road to Truro.

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#### Historic features

The area is rich in prehistoric archaeology, including Carne (Veryan) Beacon, the largest Bronze Age burial mound in the county, and the Iron Age cliff castle on the Dodman, the largest prehistoric enclosure in Cornwall. There is another cliff castle at Black Head, in St Austell Bay, and Resugga Castle, an Iron Age hillfort, is set on a spur overlooking the confluence of the St Stephen and Fal rivers. There are numerous traces of Iron Age and Roman-period defended farmsteads (rounds), emphasising that this was a well-settled landscape at that period. The landscape is now predominantly medieval in character, with dispersed medieval settlements and historic churchtowns set around fine medieval churches. There are also many well-preserved medieval strip field systems, with those on the Dodman and the former 'town fields' of the borough of Tregony of particular significance. Tregony and Grampound are medieval 'planted' boroughs, and the latter had a castle overlooking the port of Tregony on the Fal. There were other important medieval centres at Bodrugan and Caerhays. Many medieval and post-medieval mill sites survive in stream valleys. There are several historic fishing settlements and minor ports around the coast, with significant remains of associated structures such as harbours, fish cellars and limekilns. Mining was a prominent industry to the north of the area and has influenced the historic development of the north-eastern portion of the LCA; there are extensive mining remains around Polgooth, Sticker and Coombe. Pentewan harbour was built in the eighteenth century to ship ores and later china clay; the Pentewan Railway was constructed from St Austell in 1829. Pentewan was also a centre for quarrying. Historic estates and gardens are a feature of the area with associated historic parkland and ornamental planting and grand buildings such as the Victorian castle at Caerhays.

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#### Condition

The agricultural pattern of mixed farming is largely intact and in reasonable condition although is being affected by the intensification of agriculture in some places. This is manifested in large sprawling agricultural buildings and over-intensive hedge maintenance leading to degradation of the Cornish hedges and the use of post and wire fencing, often associated with horsiculture or arable conversion. In places, the estate-style of management and planting; has resulted in the replacement of traditional field boundaries with fencing. The coastal strip is in poor condition due to lack of grazing to manage the coastal heath or coastal field pattern. There has been local change from farmland or parkland to amenity uses such as caravan sites, with consequent loss of character. Woodlands in this area are largely unmanaged

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due to their situation in the steep sided stream valleys and grazing of these woodland may be a problem. Conversely, woodlands in the parklands tend to be very highly managed. The main transport corridors interrupt tranquillity considerably in this character area, particularly in the summer months when traffic is heavy and the smaller lanes of the Roseland groan under the pressure. Where roads have been improved, cornish hedges have often been rebuilt with non-vernacular stone slate and there has been a gradual urbanisation of the area resulting from transport associated infrastructure such as metal bus stops, proliferation of signage, particularly around villages, hard kerbing of verges and road paint. The traditional fingerposts are almost all in degraded to poor condition with peeling paint and rust. Some non-vernacular rural housing development away from village cores, along linear transport routes, has resulted in increased urbanisation, erosion of rural character and the loss of tranquillity. The character of some villages, particularly those on the coast has been weakened by tourist development such the proliferation of B&Bs and holiday homes, which although usually small in scale, is having an incremental impact. This character area has strong visual relationship with its neighbours. The views of the spread of St Austell and china clay area, which do not share common characteristics, erode the tranquillity of this area. Views towards the neighbouring fall estuary are largely intact although changes have occurred in the amount of recreational boating and cruise ships operating along the Fal and in Falmouth Docks which have an effect on tranquillity.

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### Pressures

Increased urbanisation due to pressure for affordable rural housing and holiday homes.

Intensification of farming and conversion of pasture to arable or horticulture.

Tourist pressure leading to conversion of dwellings to holiday homes and conversion of farmland to amenity uses e.g. caravan sites and golf courses.

Pressure to convert non - permanent touring caravan sites for permanent accommodation and static caravan sites.

Increased car use and tourism leading to demand for more car parks and road straightening and widening.

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### Aesthetic and sensory

A very peaceful, rural landscape which has a relatively unspoilt character and few obvious build structures in the countryside. Its attractive balance of arable and pasture land use, and even woodland distribution gives it a special quality. Several large estates with important ornamental landscape contribute to the domestic and luxuriant character.

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### Distinctive features

Distinctive features within this character area include Carne Beacon and the Dodman cliff castle, the medieval urban topography of Tregony, Caerhays Castle architecture and parkland, the Lost Gardens of Heligan and the many white-painted metal fingerposts in poor condition. Portloe on Veryan Bay is a particularly attractive fishing village set amid spectacular cliff scenery; Pentewan harbour was established c 1744 for exporting china clay.

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### Visions and objectives

A tranquil and peaceful, rural landscape with dramatic unspoilt coastline which still has a sense of its roots in farming, fishing and mining. Although this area is under pressure from a number of different forces this area has still managed to largely retain its working, domesticated character. The objective for this area should be to manage these forces for change in a way which maintains the tranquillity of the coast,

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farmland and settlement and preserves the industries which give this area its sense of place.

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## Planning and Land Management Guidelines

Enhance wooded area by providing guidance on appropriate woodland management to ensure mixed age structure. Maintain stream valleys wetland and woodland habitats.

Encourage sustainable transport, considering possible park and ride schemes from St Austell and Truro and the greater use of boats and ferries as a more sustainable mode of transport.

Encourage the reduction of intensive flailing of Cornish hedges. Replace fencing with Cornish hedges of local stone and pattern.

Conserve coastal heath and coastal field patterns by re-establishing grazing on the coastal strip at appropriate stocking rates. Restrict alterations to or encroachment on distinctive medieval field patterns.

Provide guidance for change of use to equine activities that stress the need to retain field boundaries and advise on appropriate stabling style and scale.

Limit the amount of farmland to amenity use in the area and resist development which would make existing sites more permanent.

Enhance quality of amenity planting along transport corridors and where possible, use Cornish hedges as boundaries rather than tree belts.

Restrict development to existing settlements, plan for affordable housing exceptions sites that maintain the character of settlements via careful siting and the use of exemplar design that reflects the local vernacular.

Enhance local distinctiveness through programme of restoration and maintenance of metal fingerposts.

Enhance redundant industrial areas of coastal villages, avoiding urbanisation and use of non-local materials.

Maintain and provide interpretation for historic parks, houses and gardens by providing advice and links to grant aid.

Enhance the views to Charlestown. Maintain tranquility of Falmouth Harbour and the Fal River.