SCA 22: Clovelly Coast

Within the south of Bideford Bay, this is a north-facing coastline with a spectacular coastal geology including distinctive features such as Blackchurch Rock and the headland of Gallantry Bower. It comprises steep, rugged cliffs punctuated by small pebble beaches, combes and waterfalls plunging to the sea. It contains nationally and internationally designated sessile oak woodland, scrub and coastal heathland. This is a popular and well-visited stretch of coast, valued for the range of experiences it offers, its rich cultural legacy of ancient settlement, maritime trade, smuggling and traditional industries and features including well-preserved limekilns and historic designed landscapes. It is also characterised by high levels of tranquillity and a strong historic sense of place.

The SCA’s coastal area forms part of the North Devon Coast AONB and the Hartland Heritage Coast.
**Key characteristics**

**Natural / physical influences**

- **Rocky coastline with steep north-facing cliffs** rising to a maximum of 150m, punctuated by small pebble beaches, combes and waterfalls plunging to the sea.
- **Cliffs of much-folded Carboniferous sandstones and shales** of the Crackington and Bude Formations, strata running east-west, parallel to the coast, making the cliffs prone to landslips.
- **Striking geomorphological features**, including the triangular sea arch of Blackchurch Rock, waterfalls at Buck’s Mills and Beckland, and the distinctive headland of Gallantry Bower, highly visible from along the coast and out to sea.
- **Shallow seabed** shelving gently to around 10m, deepening to 20m in the west, formed of mudstone, sandstone and limestone. **Sand and muddy sediments** support shallow kelp beds.
- **Areas of biogenic reef extending out from a rocky foreshore**, interspersed by patches of sand fed by the changing tides.
- **Prominent rocky spit of The Gore** west of Clovelly; a hazard to navigation (marked on the 1795 charts), revealed at low tide. An ancient landslip; local legend names it ‘Devil’s Causeway’ - the Devil’s shovel breaking before he reached Lundy. It provides natural shelter to Clovelly harbour.
- **Cliffs cloaked in SSSI and SAC-designated sessile oak woodland**. Exposure to moist Atlantic winds sustains old and rare lichen communities; fern-rich flora characterises the wooded combes, particularly at Bucks Mills.
- **Home to important breeding colonies of seabirds**, including cormorants, shags, gannets, black-headed gulls and fulmars. The shoreline provides feeding grounds for waders at low tide, including oyster catchers.
- **Mobile sand and mud sediments**, along with kelp beds, supporting **varied fish species** including bass, herring, mackerel, pollock and black bream. Crabs, lobsters and mussel beds colonise the rocky reefs.
- **Seals, porpoises, basking sharks, dolphins and seals** frequent the area, often sighted off Clovelly.
- **Comparatively sheltered**, protected from prevailing south-westerlies by the Hartland Peninsula. Clovelly is the only safe harbour between Appledore and Boscastle (Cornwall), drying out completely at low tide.

**Cultural and social influences (past and present)**

- **Bronze Age bowl barrow at Gallantry Bower and Iron Age promontory forts** at Peppercombe Castle, Bucks Mills and Windbury Head (the latter straddling SCA 24), occupying commanding cliff-top positions.
- **Strong historic character of fishing and industrial trade at Clovelly and Buck’s Mills**, both Conservation Areas with a high concentration of Listed Buildings. Bollards formed by cannon barrels at the privately-owned village of Clovelly are said to originate from the Spanish Armada. Herrings (known as ‘silver darlings’) were particularly associated with Clovelly’s success as a fishing port.
- **Notorious smuggling area**; ‘Smugglers Cave’ found east of Clovelly harbour. The legend of the Gregg family, the ‘Clovelly cannibals’ who supposedly lived in a cave, is thought to have been spread by smugglers to frighten people away.
- **Buck’s Mills home to the Braund Society**, membership consisting of people associated with the surname Braund, once thought to originate from survivors of the Spanish Armada (now disproven). The ‘King of Bucks Mills’, Captain James Braund, built Kings Cottage in the 1830s.
- **Nursery rhyme Old King Cole** linked to Richard Cole, Lord of the Manor of Bucks, who built a quay at Buck’s Mills in 1598. Outline of the former quay, eroded away by the sea, still visible at low tide near The Gore. **Legend has it he was killed fighting pirates** near Bucks Mills in 1615.
- **Well-preserved 19th century limekilns** at Mouthmill, Clovelly and an unusually large square example at Buck’s Mills. The limestone, and in some cases coal, was imported by sea from South Wales.
- **Strong cultural links between Buck’s Mills and Lundy**, the island supplying the corn for the local mill, and the village providing a labour force for Lundy’s quarries following the 19th century decline of local herring shoals.
- **Natural beauty inspired formal landscaping and building restoration** by the Hamlyn Williams family of the Clovelly Estates in the 19th / early 20th centuries. Many formal walks with ‘designed views’ and viewpoints such as Hobby Drive, Deer Park and Gallantry Bower were laid out during this time.
- **Until the mid 20th century, paddle steamers** would bring visitors to Clovelly, landed at the harbour by small boat.
- **Fishing activity continues from Clovelly**, with a small fleet of crab/lobster potters, a trawler and recreational charter boats. The village hosts several annual maritime-related events including the Herring Festival and Lobster & Crab Festival.
- **The South West Coast Path** provides access across the cliff tops. Access to the foreshore largely restricted to Clovelly, Buck’s Mills, Mouthmill and Peppercombe.
- **Significant area of coastal land owned and managed by the National Trust; the Clovelly Estate** owns the picturesque village of Clovelly and the surrounding land.
- **Water and coast based recreational activities** including climbing, kayaking (often launching from Buck’s Mills), paddle boarding, rock pooling, crabbing and inshore fly-fishing. Clovelly attracts surfers when swells are high.
- **Royal Yacht Association sailing routes** crossing through, and a number of sightseeing and wildlife cruises pass by, often starting from Clovelly (including annual National Trust trips).
Perceptual and aesthetic influences

- **Highly tranquil seascape with a strong sense of timelessness.** Spectacular sunsets (often lighting up Lundy) and dark night skies characterise the seascape.

- **Ever-changing light conditions and a strong maritime sense of place** long provided artistic inspiration for many – including Judith Ackland and Mary Stella Edwards. Their Buck’s Mills studio cabin is now owned by the National Trust for hosting art projects.

- **Other artistic connections** include J.W.M. Turner, Rex Whistler, Albert Goodwin and local artist James Paterson. Clovelly’s literary links include Charles Kingsley, and to a lesser extent Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Susan Coolidge and Winston Graham.

- **Limited but significant glimpsed views through the woodlands**, including to Lundy, and eastwards to development at Bideford, Westward Ho! and the north-west peninsula, including Morte Point and the bright white Saunton Sands Hotel.

- **Turner’s 1824 painting Clovelly Bay takes in the iconic view** from Clovelly to Lundy, framed by Blackchurch Rock and the distinctive profile of Gallantry Bower.

- **Grade II Listed summer house above Mouth Mill**, visible from the sea, one example of several historic buildings located on the cliff edge to take in the sweeping views across Bideford Bay.

- **An overriding sense of calm and relative safety prevails.** These qualities change dramatically during northerly storms, serving as a reminder of the powerful force of the sea; waves pounding the cliffs and rocky shoreline.
Special qualities and key seascape sensitivities

The special qualities of this seascape that would be most sensitive to change include:

- Spectacular coastal geology with highly recognisable features including Blackchurch Rock and the headland of Gallantry Bower.
- Ancient sessile oak coastal woodlands with old and rare lichen communities sustained by exposure to moist Atlantic winds.
- Varied seabed habitats supporting a range of fish species and providing feeding grounds for colonies of seabirds and visiting cetaceans.
- Rich cultural legacy of ancient settlement, maritime trade, smuggling and traditional industries; features including well-preserved limekilns and historic designed coastal parkland.
- Traditional historic ports of Bucks Mills and Clovelly – the latter a working harbour still home to a small fishing fleet.
- Wide range of opportunities to experience the seascape both at sea and on land – including taking in iconic views from the SW Coast Path.
- High levels of tranquillity and a strong historic sense of place – with unfolding, ever-changing glimpsed views along the coast, Bideford Bay and out to Lundy.
### Forces for change affecting seascape character and condition

#### Coastal land / marine resource management
- Ongoing management of the cliffs’ characteristic woodland cover by the National Trust and private estates, tackling issues such as a spread of non-native species (including rhododendron) and a long-term decline in traditional management practices.
- Anecdotal evidence of a significant decline in fish stocks (due to overfishing) within the surrounding waters – particularly the large shoals of mackerel which used to be a regular sight and key to the character of the local seas.
- General lack of awareness and certainty about the marine habitats and species found within the seascape, as well as how these might be affected by current or future forces for change (including human activities and climate change).
- Potential increases in shipping in the wider Bristol Channel leading to pollution and an increase in waste/litter washed in from the sea, as well as a greater risk of major pollution incidences.

### Aquaculture and fishing
- Uncertainty over the long-term economic viability of the small fishing fleet at Clovelly (now comprising three potters and one trawler – a significant decline over the last few decades), who are much valued as part of the community, local economy and heritage of the wider area.
- Perceived conflicts between the conservation of the marine resource and the economic importance of fishing activity to the wider North Devon economy. This is being addressed across North Devon by ongoing dialogue and research by the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA), the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Natural England, the North Devon Fishermen’s Association and the North Devon Biosphere Marine Working Group.

### Access, recreation and tourism
- Increasing popularity of UK-based holidays leading to the potential for higher visitor and access demands (the historic village of Clovelly receives around 300,000 visitors per year). This could put impact on the SCA’s natural coastal and marine resources, lead to development pressures, and dilute the seascape’s high levels of relative remoteness and tranquillity.

### Other development pressures / impacts (continued over the page)
- Views to developed seascapes across Bideford Bay, including Westward Ho!, Northam, the Saunton ridgeline and the moving turbines of Fullabrook wind farm; diluting levels of remoteness and the historic sense of place associated with this SCA.
- Decline in small farms, and amalgamation and intensification into bigger enterprises leading to farm expansion on the ridgelines, with the potential to impact visually on the seaside’s rural skylines (e.g. Beckland Farm on the Hartland Plateau to the west).
- Small-scale individual wind turbines behind the coast featuring in views (including from the sea); interrupting the characteristically open, rural skylines above the naturalistic wooded cliffs.

- Ongoing national demand for alternative sources of renewable energy production, including offshore wind and tidal energy (tidal stream devices or tidal lagoons). Any future proposals harnessing the strong tidal flows associated with nearby SCAs (particularly SCA 26), may be visible from this SCA, interrupting its characteristically open, undeveloped views to Lundy.

**Natural processes and climate change**

- Landslides and unstable sections of cliff likely to increase in frequency and prevalence as a result of climate change and sea level rise. The Shoreline Management Plan describes the coastline as slowly eroding, at a rate of around ten metres over the next 50 years. A largely undefended coast, the policy stance is to continue allowing the coast to evolve naturally along much of its length, with defences maintained where they exist (e.g. at Clovelly).

- Recent landslides and storm damage at Buck’s Mills – particularly vulnerable due to its position on the ‘Sticklepath fault’ - with rising sea levels and increased frequency/severity of storm events combined with seaward earth movements. Most recently seeing the collapse of the sea wall and loss of the slipway in January 2014; repairs undertaken through funding from Torridge District Council’s Coastal Communities fund with support from the North Devon Fisheries Local Action Group. Although the Shoreline Management Policy does not include defensive work at the village, its importance as an access point to the sea (with around 40,000 visitors per year) is locally recognised.

- Coastal erosion and sea level rise likely to see the ‘squeeze’ of intertidal and coastal habitats such as the ancient oak woodlands, rocky foreshores and pockets of sandy beach. Increased rates of erosion may also threaten archaeological and geomorphological features such as coastal lime kilns, promontory forts (including Windbury Head; already eroded) and the distinctive feature of Black Church Rock.

- Change in woodland / tree species composition as new pests/diseases spread (particularly *Phytophthora* pathogens) and species intolerant of water level extremes die back.

- Impacts of climate change on characteristic habitats and tree distribution (potentially increased growth rates, accelerating the spread of scrub and trees onto open coastal heath and heritage assets), including an increased prevalence of pests and diseases.
This Visual Resource Map (VRM) provides a more detailed spatial representation of the visibility of this SCA from the surrounding land in England and Wales.

This map shows land with views to this SCA. The darker shading (blues) indicates land from where more of the SCA is visible. Lighter shades (yellows) indicate that there are views of the SCA from those locations, but they are not extensive.

Please note that the VRM is based on a bare ground model. Where an SCA encompasses land and sea, only views of areas below the HWM within the SCA have been analysed (locations above the HWM within the SCA have been excluded). Please refer to the technical report for an explanation of how these maps were generated and how they should be interpreted.