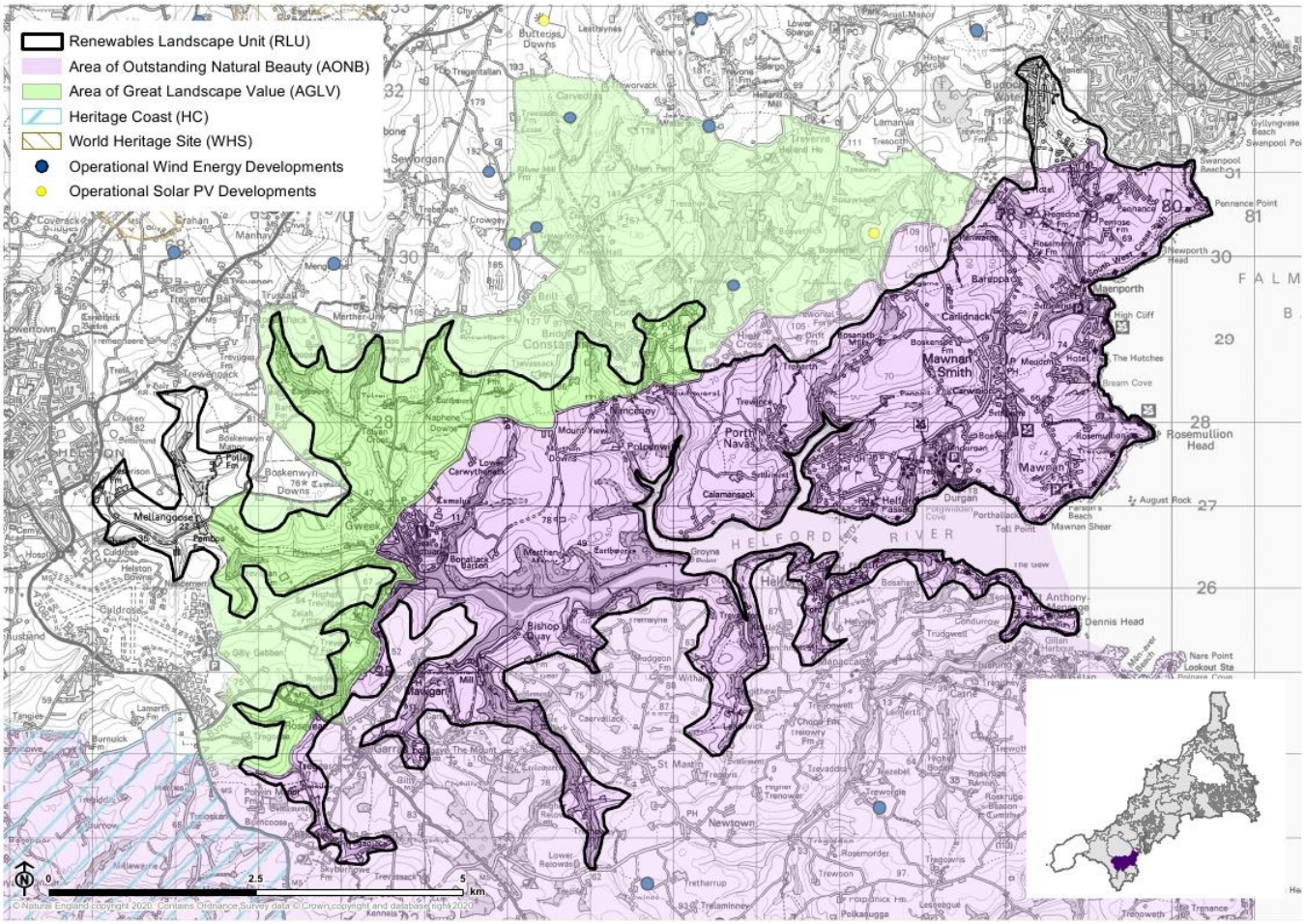
RLU 05

Cornwall CA: 09 – Helford Ria



Elevated view across Polwheveral Creek, showing prominent pastoral slopes and woodland.

View across a wooded valley with the wind farm and Earth Station on Goonhilly Downs (in RLU 03) visible on the skyline in the distance.

The coastline along the eastern edge of the RLU at Maenporth, with the headland of Pendennis Point (in RLU 09) visible in the distance.

The Helford River seen from Gweek Quay.

Landscape sensitivity assessment			
Summary of landscape value (% of RLU)			
AONB: 2,961ha (74%)	AGLV: 767ha (19%)	HC: 0ha (0%)	WHS: 0ha (0%)

Criteria	Description	Sensitivity Score	
		Wind	Solar
Landform and scale (including sense of openness/ enclosure)	■ The sheltered and broad deepwater ria of the Helford River, surrounded by a complex of small tidal creeks. ■ A landscape with many prominent visible slopes as land rises from the ria shores to form a strongly undulating series of convex hills dissected by steep, narrow valleys. ■ There are contrasting levels of enclosure – with the broad and wide body of water contrasting with the small, sheltered creeks and steep valleys clothed in woodland. ■ The landscape includes areas of open, unenclosed land along the coast and on some of the higher hills with less tree cover. ■ The coastline is open with rocky cliffs and small, narrow sandy beaches. It includes the prominent headland of Rosemullion Head. ■ This is a dramatic landscape of varying scale. Human scale features include Cornish hedges, frequent trees (including groups of Monterey Pine), boats and cottages – particularly in the valleys which have an intimate and domestic feel.	M-H	M-H
Landcover (including field and settlement patterns)	■ Landcover is more complex in the valleys with many creeks, mixed farmland (mostly pasture along the ria edges with some arable), trees, parkland estates and ornamental gardens. ■ Lower lying areas are dominated by small medieval fields defined by sinuous Cornish hedges, while higher slopes and hills have larger post-medieval fields. ■ Many areas along the Helford Estuary are designated as SSSI, for the relatively undisturbed transitions from tidal mud through saltmarsh and scrub to woodland. ■ Merthen Wood is also designated as a SSSI, being a rare example of sessile oak woodland and one of the largest remining oak woods in Cornwall. ■ Woodland and scrub line the creeks and cover valley floors and slopes, with many of these habitats designated as CWS. ■ Extensive semi-natural habitats also exist amongst farmland. ■ Settlement pattern comprises a mixture of scattered small farms, farm hamlets and occasional villages. A resort hotel and golf course is located at Helford Passage.	M	M-H
Historic landscape character	■ The HLC indicates that areas of 'Medieval Farmland' make up much of the landscape with smaller areas of 'Modern Enclosures'. ■ There are areas of 'Rough Ground' along the coast with some patches inland, as well as areas of the 'Ornamental' type associated with parkland estates. ■ There are some prehistoric features including nationally important Iron Age sites on prominent slopes, Bronze Age bowl barrows and a defended enclosure at Merthen Manor, as well as coastal hillforts on Dennis Head and Rosemullion Head. ■ Grade II registered gardens feature at Penjerrick, Glendurgan and Trebah. ■ The historic core of Helford is a conservation area.	M	M
Visual character (including skylines)	■ The small upland ridges between the creeks and the well wooded character of the steep slopes form distinctive skylines. ■ Open and elevated areas afford expansive views over the ria. ■ Distant views south feature the wind farm and Earth Station on Goonhilly Downs (RLU 03), with views north towards Roskcow Barton (in RLU 06).	M	M
Perceptual and scenic qualities	■ The majority of the RLU is located within the Cornwall AONB (and a small part in the south-west lies within the Gweek to Constantine AGLV) with the visually prominent earthworks above the estuary, ancient woodland, coastal heathland and pattern of small fields noted as special qualities. ■ This is a tranquil and strongly rural landscape with the wooded valleys conveying a sense of 'secrecy' and the open and exposed wild coastline in the east. ■ The sense of tranquillity is slightly reduced by watersports and fishing activity on the river, modern housing/ holiday home development, and the golf course.	H	H

Overall Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity: Wind Energy					
Sensitivity to new developments					
BAND A (18-25m)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND B (26-60m)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND C (61-99m)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND D (100-150m)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**

Summary of overall landscape sensitivity: Although the convex landform and simple landcover patterns on the hills to the north could indicate a lower sensitivity to wind energy development, the more complex landcover patterns, the tranquil character and the high scenic quality across much of the area heighten levels of sensitivity.

The undeveloped coast and its immediate hinterland would be highly sensitive to any wind energy development. The least sensitive parts of the RLU comprise the hills outside the AONB.

Overview of current development and associated future opportunities

There are currently no existing wind energy developments within this RLU.

Overall Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity: Solar PV Developments					
Sensitivity to new developments					
BAND A (≤5ha)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND B (>5 to 10ha)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND C (>10 to 15ha)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**
BAND D (>15 to 30ha)	**L**	**L-M**	**M**	**M-H**	**H**

Summary of landscape sensitivity: Although the enclosure created by the large amount of woodland and trees and human influence could indicate lower sensitivity to solar PV development, the presence of prominent visible slopes along the ria, pastoral character and high scenic quality heighten levels of sensitivity.

The landscape's prominent and pastoral valley slopes, and undeveloped coastal edge would be highly sensitive to solar PV development. The enclosed wooded valleys scattered throughout the RLU and larger modern fields (including around Mawnan Smith) would be less sensitive to small schemes (up to and including the lower end of Band B).

Overview of current development and associated future opportunities

There are currently no existing solar PV developments within this RLU.

Recommendations and guidance for future development within the RLU

Wind energy developments

Overall recommendations:

- Occasional single farm-based turbines up to the lower end of Band B could be considered on the hills between the valleys outside of the AONB, particularly where landform and field patterns are larger.
- The scattering of turbines across the RLU should be minimised to avoid significant cumulative impacts on landscape character.
- New turbines should not be located along the undeveloped coastal edge and its immediate hinterland.
- None of the landscape is identified as suitable for Band C or D turbines due to its sensitivities.

Strategic landscape guidance:

- Ensure that any new Band B turbines are sited well away from any Band A turbines, so that the different size classes are not seen together.
- Ensure that any new developments are similar in terms of siting, layout and relationship to key landscape characteristics, so as to present a simple image that relates clearly to landscape character[1].
- Avoid close juxtaposition of different turbine designs and heights within the same banding, aiming instead for a consistent design and height in any given area.
- Locate wind energy development away from the ria system and away from the naturalistic coastal edge – the hills between the valleys are the most suitable locations for such development.
- Avoid damage and alterations to the area's distinctive sunken lanes.
- Ensure wind energy development does not dominate or prevent the understanding and appreciation of the Iron Age defended settlements and camps on prominent slopes overlooking the Helford Ria.
- Avoid siting turbines within the HLC Types of 'Upland Rough Ground', 'Coastal Rough Ground' and 'Ornamental' parkland, which would be highly vulnerable to wind energy development.
- Consider views from local viewpoints and popular routes (e.g. the South West Coastal Path) when considering the siting and design of wind energy development in the landscape – aiming for a balanced composition where development will be visible.
- Ensure wind energy development does not adversely affect the mature woodland in the valleys, the 'secret' character of the creeks, the winding narrow lanes, or the renowned valley gardens as distinctive features of the landscape.
- Protect the factors which contribute to the scenic quality of the Cornwall AONB (particularly the prominence and skyline of earthworks above the estuary and the scale of the features identified as contributing to the interest of the landscape) - ensure choice of site and scale of development does not detract from these.

[1] For further guidance in designing multiple wind turbine developments, see Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape: Guidance. Version 3a available here.

Solar PV developments

Overall recommendations:

- There may be opportunities to locate a small number of well sited solar PV developments (up to and including the lower end of Band B) within the more sheltered and folded land, ensuring that development does not occur on the landscape's prominent and pastoral valley slopes, or along the undeveloped coastal edge. The screening provided by high hedges and woodland should be utilised.
- Minor wooded valleys across the landscape could also provide well-screened locations for Band A solar PV developments, although these should be sited within farmland, not semi-natural habitat to retain the valleys' naturalistic characteristics and habitat interest.
- None of the landscape is identified as suitable for Band C or D solar PV developments due to its sensitivities.

Strategic landscape guidance:

- The overall aim should be to make sure that solar PV developments do not become a key characteristic of the landscape (i.e. avoiding significant cumulative impacts on the RLU from multiple developments that would result in an overall change in landscape character).
- Solar PV developments should be clearly separated so that, although each development may influence the perception of the landscape at close proximity, collectively they do not have a defining influence on the overall experience of the landscape or views along the ria.
- Ensure that solar PV developments form part of the mixed farmland mosaic – rather than becoming a dominating land use.
- Aim to locate solar PV developments in dips and sheltered folds in the undulating landform of the hills where they will be less visible and therefore have less of an influence on landscape character.
- Avoid locating development on upper slopes, along undeveloped estuary edges or on the naturalistic coastal edge, maintaining the green backdrop to the ria.
- Preserve the pastoral and wooded character of the RLU.
- Prevent damage to the landscape's winding, sunken lanes.
- Avoid siting solar PV development within the HLC Types of 'Upland Rough Ground', 'Coastal Rough Ground', 'Ornamental' and 'Medieval' farmland, which would be highly vulnerable.
- Consider views from local viewpoints and popular routes (e.g. the South West Coastal Path and renowned valley gardens) when considering the siting and design of solar PV development in the landscape.
- Avoid locating solar PV development where it would be directly overlooked at close quarters, particularly side-on.
- Ensure solar PV development does not adversely affect the wooded character of the valley sides, the 'secret' character of the narrow creeks, the winding narrow lanes, or the renowned valley gardens as distinctive features of the landscape.
- Protect the factors which contribute to the scenic quality of the Cornwall AONB (particularly the ancient woodland, coastal heathland and the small-scale field pattern) - ensure choice of site and scale of development does not detract from these.