

Landscape, Seascape and Cultural Services

Shaped by nature and people over time, landscapes are the settings in which we live, work and experience life. All landscapes matter. They combine natural resources, culture and economy. Many environmental resilience and place-based planning challenges that shape our future wellbeing and prosperity are best addressed at a landscape-scale.

Landscape characteristics and qualities combine to create a distinct sense of place. Sense of place is key to understanding how we derive cultural inspiration and wellbeing from landscape. Understanding the contribution of landscape to cultural services is part of the natural resources approach.

www.naturalresources.wales/landscape

The Mid-Wales Landscape

A very large rural area with regional scale remote uplands and mountains, coastline, reservoirs and borderlands contributing to its identity. The area encompasses part of the Brecon Beacons, the highest mountain range in Southern Britain, and a substantial part of the Brecon Beacons National Park. The Cambrian Mountains form an upland spine that divides mid Wales and continues northwards to the Berwyns. The rivers Severn, Wye, Usk and Teifi flow through the area, punctuated by historic towns, villages and castles. Tranquil, undulating rural farmland dominates the hills and deep, often wooded, valleys that descend to the rugged Ceredigion coastline and coastal resort towns. Moors, forests and deep reservoir valleys are associated with the extensive wilder uplands

Headline Characteristics

- Strong contrasts across the area from settled farmed valleys, to sinuous light reflecting reservoirs, wilder exposed, tranquil and unpopulated uplands and dramatic coastal edge with expansive seascape views.
- Over 81% of the area are upland landscapes with over half characterised as exposed, remote and tranquil
- 13% of the area is within a National Park and 44% is Heritage Coast. Wales' only UNESCO Biosphere, the Dyfi Valley, is partly included
- Lowland landscapes account for 17%, characterised by traditional farmland in the lower hills and valleys
- Development is limited with less than 1% of the area classified as development (national average 5.14%)
- Characterised by large areas of high, exposed upland moorland & blanket bog, scattered areas of heath and large forestry plantations; enclosed farmland on hillslopes, valleys and lowlands; oak and ash woodlands along steep valleys
- Much of the area retains historic influences and interest and there are 10 Registered Historic Landscapes
- Many examples of historic castles, towns and villages, hillforts and industrial features in the valleys and lowlands, with prehistoric remains in the uplands
- Reservoirs within remote and wild valleys of the Cambrian and Berwyn uplands
- Spectacular coastline of rocky cliffs, sandy bays and estuaries
- Source of the rivers Severn, Teifi & Wye which flow through the area.
- Picturesque landscapes of the Montgomery canal Special Area of Conservation
- Cors Caron and Cors Fochno are rare raised bogs with a wild, natural appearance

Distinctive landscapes and sense of place

The Brecon Beacons and Black Mountains form an extensive chain of exposed upland ridges and moorland plateau with dramatic north facing peaks and crags and smooth expanses of south facing moors. Together with parts of the Usk & Wye Valleys and limestone uplands to the south and waterfall country of the narrow, wooded upper Tawe, Neath and its tributaries, they form the substantial part of the **Brecon Beacons National Park**. Much of the park is also a Dark Skies Reserve, the Fforest Fawr UNESCO Global Geopark partially covers the south of the area.

These places are tranquil, wild and remote with expansive views and are popular for outdoor recreation. Reservoirs to the south provide a visitor focus and scenic views. The historic landscape of the Middle Usk Valley includes Llangorse Lake, a rare natural lake lined with trees, pasture and reeds, sitting within a rising bowl landform.

Historic castles, towns and villages, hillforts and industrial features such as tramways and the Brecon and Monmouthshire Canal are features of the valleys. The Usk Valley is broad downstream of Brecon, narrow and wooded upstream to Carmarthenshire, picturesque and tranquil away from main roads. The historic landscape of the Middle Wye includes medieval settlements such as Hay on Wye.

Within **Powys** to the north of the National Park, the peaceful valleys of the Epynt Plateau are a rich mosaic of pasture fields, woodlands and fast-flowing streams.

The Wye Valley south of Builth Wells is an unspoilt area with scenic quality and strong character derived from the varied topography, steep slopes, rock outcrops, mature woodland and pastoral mosaic. This is enjoyed by travellers on the A470 which gives the area importance.

The Radnorshire Hills comprises areas of open moorland, forestry and upland grazing with dramatic long ranging views over smooth rolling hills and sheltered valleys of traditional farmland. A very rural area with qualities of timelessness and tranquillity, occasionally interrupted by windfarms.

Long Mountain and Cordon Hill form prominent upland landforms and sense of place to the edge of the Shropshire Hills.

The Vale of Montgomery historic landscape crosses the Welsh-English border and comprises traditional rolling farmland of the vale and hills with attractive, tranquil, safe, settled qualities. Offa's Dyke scheduled monument and National Trail passes through from north to south and the River Severn forms a broad floodplain north of Montgomery on its journey from the Plynlimon uplands to the west, through the historic landscape of the Caerws Basin, with its Iron Age and Roman features, north eastwards towards the English border.

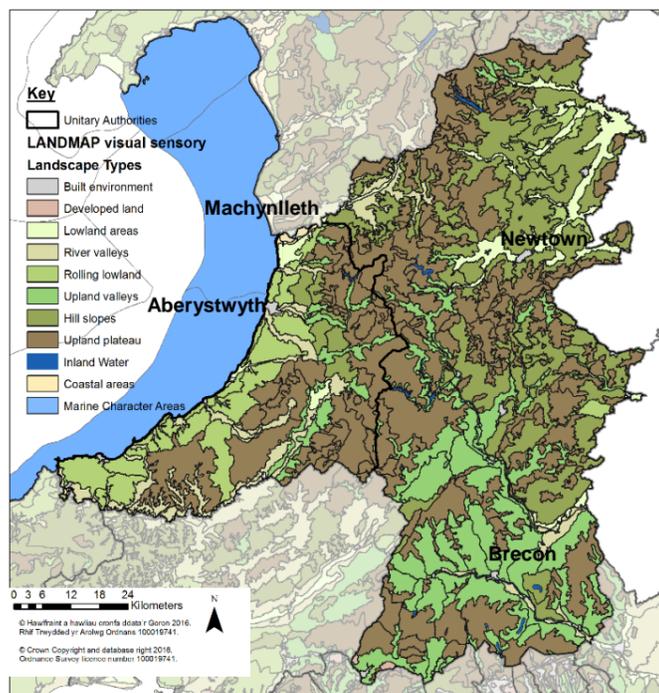
The Berwyn moorland plateau to the north encloses the historic landscape of the Tanat Valley, including distinct tributary valleys containing the dramatic and scenic Pistyll Rhaeadr (the highest waterfall in Wales) and craggy peak of Craig Rhiwarth. The area provides attractive, exposed, invigorating and wild qualities, with strong cultural identity in its historic hillforts, farming, mining and quarrying and St Melangell's Church. South of the Tanat lies the deep Vyrnwy valley with its large reservoir, a popular recreational area, and beyond forests and moorland with occasional windfarms slope down to the Dyfi Valley to the west.

The fringes of the Cambrian Mountains include the distinctive Plynlimon Moorlands, conifer forests and historic landscapes of the Clywedog and Elan Valley with its complex of reservoirs. The moorlands are exposed and wild with long distance dramatic views of Snowdonia; the reservoirs sinuous linking water bodies within dramatic valleys complemented by striking dams, popular for scenic recreation, wildlife watching and fishing. The upper Irfon forms a dramatic upland valley where it cuts through the Tywi Forest at the border with Ceredigion.

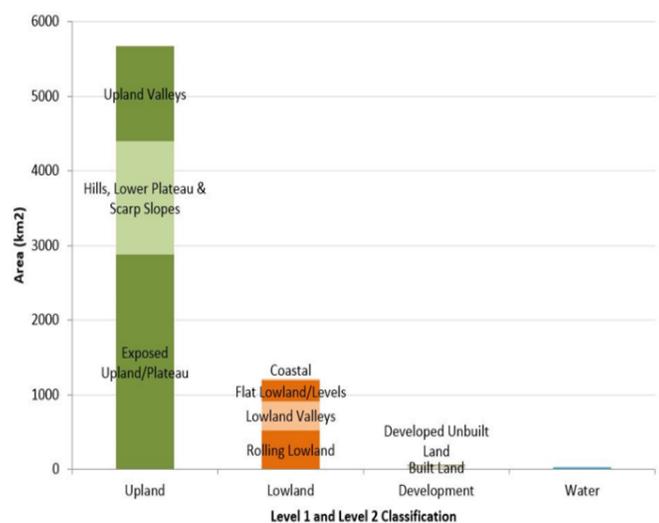
The main spine of the Cambrian Mountains run north-south along the eastern edge of **Ceredigion**, with much of the area included in the Upland Ceredigion historic landscape, important for prehistoric and mining features. The area includes the rocky summits of Plynlimon and is a remote, wild, expansive area of rugged moorland and blanket bog with dramatic scarp slopes along western fringes. Popular as a tourism/recreational resource, it includes Nant y Moch reservoir, areas of forestry and occasional windfarms.

To the north, the wild and highly distinctive estuary of the Dyfi Biosphere gives way to attractive rhythmically rolling landform to the east, forming the border with Snowdonia to the north.

Artists valley and Afon Ceulanin valley cut into the Cambrian Mountains. The former is distinctive for its deciduous woodland, intimacy, waterfalls and historic features, the latter for its open upland character.



LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Types



The deep, oak wooded valleys of the Vale of Rheidol and Ystwyth flow west to the coast. The Vale of Rheidol becomes a wild and spectacular gorge at Devils Bridge, with outcrops, waterfalls and cascades. The Rheidol Railway provides access for visitors and an evolving experience, in places perched dramatically above the valley floor.

The Ystwyth valley is a dramatic V-shaped valley providing an exciting crossing point to the Elan Valley in Powys. Lead mining and the Hafod estate historic parkland provide a sense of history and visitor interest.

Teifi Pools are a remote and attractive collection of small natural pools and reservoirs at the upper reaches of the Teifi amongst rugged open moorland. Long ranging panoramic views extend to the coast lowlands and across the Cambrian Mountains. The River Teifi flows past the historic Strata Florida Abbey into the expansive bog at Cors Caron, near Tregaron. The bog is a rare lowland wetland mosaic forming an attractive, wild, natural area. The historic University town of Lampeter lies on the Teifi and narrow valleys with historic woollen mills form tributaries. The Lower Teifi Valley retains a strong pattern of post medieval fields and estate dominated landscape where it forms the border with Pembrokeshire.

Llyn Brianne reservoir and its extensive forestry at the upper reaches of the River Tywi lie close to the border with Carmarthenshire.

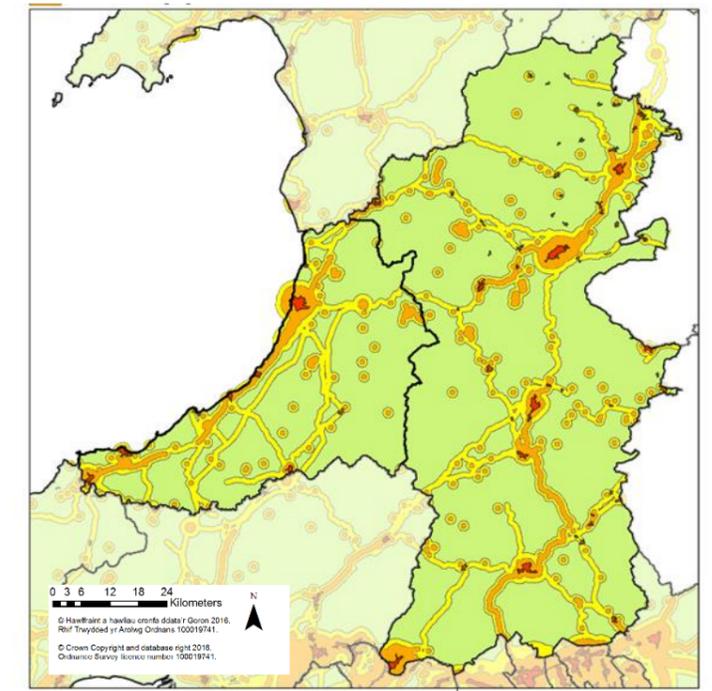
The Cardigan Bay cliffs form rugged and in places dramatic towering cliffs with occasional sandy bays below. Cardigan Island lies to the south. The coastline provides expansive sea views across Cardigan Bay with wild, remote and spiritual qualities. Narrow, deep wooded valleys lead to the coast and historic towns and resorts such as Aberystwyth and Cardigan and the Wales Coast Path provide tourism and recreation.

Tranquillity

- Large areas of tranquil landscape away from the road network, main towns and wind farms
- The southern Cambrian Mountains is one of the two largest tranquil areas in Wales over 1000km²
- The Brecon Beacons National Park and Elan Valley have International Dark Sky status
- Tranquil areas have decreased by 9% over a 12-year period. Despite the considerable loss of 488km² tranquil landscapes, over 5,200km² of tranquil landscapes remained in 2009

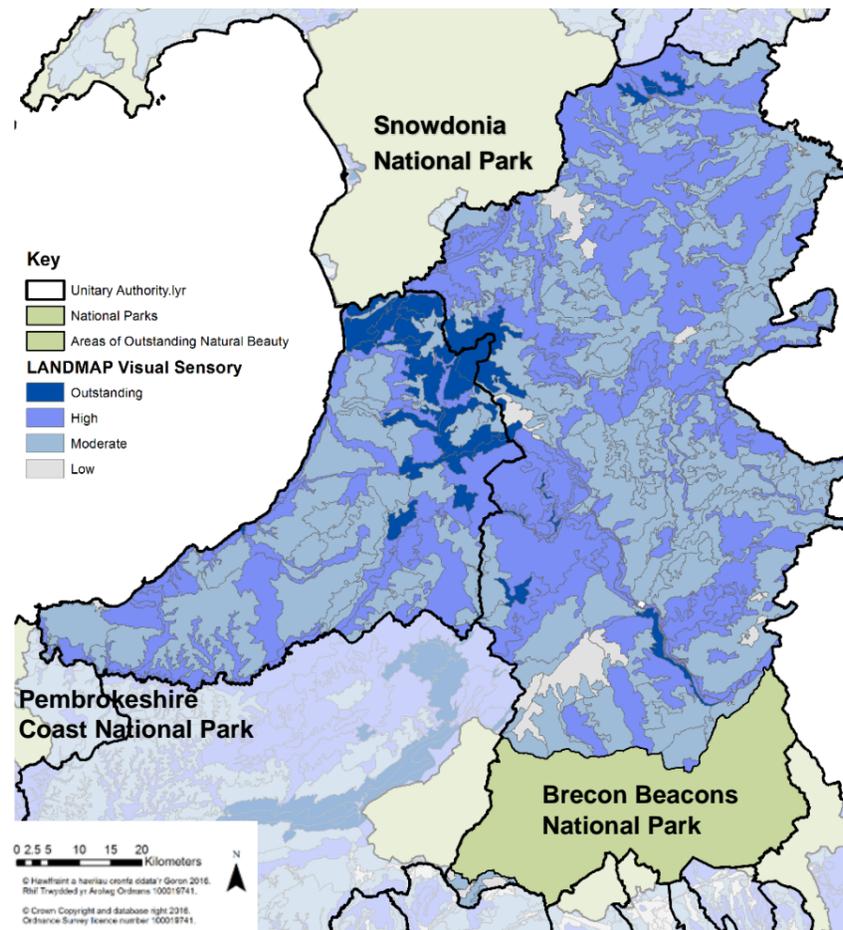
Key

- Unitary Authorities
- Built environment
- Tranquil areas generally free of daytime significant disturbance 'Undisturbed'
- Tranquil areas with some disturbance e.g. light traffic noise, small villages etc. 'Zone C'
- Disturbed areas e.g. significant traffic disturbance 'Zone B'



LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Evaluation

- 11% (758km²) of this Area Statement area is evaluated as a **nationally outstanding** visual & sensory landscape, 90% of the outstanding landscapes are upland
- 41% (2,886km²) are evaluated as **high, regionally important** landscapes, 80% are upland
- As a general principle of landscape resource management, we should seek to conserve and enhance outstanding and high landscapes as these contain characteristics of national and county value.
- Qualities such as tranquillity, wildness, naturalness, built heritage and cultural identity, aesthetic appreciation and recreation, are cultural services of landscape that are also valued by people and can occur across many parts of the area
- Within landscapes of lower quality the general principle is to enhance landscapes to contribute to wellbeing



Landscape Change

- Small scale (<1km²) increases in development within greenfield and undeveloped built land, mostly from expansion to settlements
- Increasing commercial development, landscape scale road improvements and mining and reclamation works
- Increasing large poultry units, large dairy farms and agricultural sheds
- Increasing impacts from coastal and inland caravan sites, changed seascape from Borth sea defences
- Increased cumulative and visual impacts from single turbines, windfarms and solar developments
- Tranquillity affected by MOD at Aberporth and activities like Harness Racing race track
- Broadleaved trees have replaced conifers on prominent valleys sides, near main roads, recreational facilities and routes. Felling due to Phytophthora and Chalara have also changed the forest landscape, particularly on NRW managed sites
- Changing upland vegetation is evident on plateau tops of the Cambrian Mountains and diversity in the Berwyn uplands. Encroachment of bracken onto moorland is evident on the main Brecon Beacon and Black Mountain peaks. The reduction in mosaic habitats in Brecknockshire indicates it is becoming generally less diverse. Decreasing bog cover in Ceredigion as acid grassland encroaches.
- Positive improvements such as from landscape partnership schemes and projects (Machynlleth Town, Severn Valley, Elan Links)

