

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Location of the Brecon Beacons National Park

3.1.1 The Brecon Beacons National Park covers an area of 1347 square km (520 square miles). It lies between the industrialised valleys of South Wales and the rural countryside of Mid Wales (fig. 1). The majority of land within the National Park is in Powys Unitary Authority, but smaller areas are in Carmarthenshire, Monmouthshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen (fig. 2). The largest settlements within the National Park are Brecon and Hay-on-Wye, with other towns including Abergavenny, Pontypool, Merthyr Tydfil, Glynneath, Llandeilo and Llandovery located just outside the National Park. A more detailed map of the National Park is shown in fig.3.



Fig. 1: UK National Parks and the location of the Brecon Beacons



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Fig. 2: Unitary Authorities within the National Park

3.2 Designation of the National Park

3.2.1 The Brecon Beacons National Park was designated in 1957 on the grounds of its natural beauty and the opportunities it affords for open air recreation. Under the 1995 Environment Act, the National Park Authority has two statutory purposes and a statutory duty, namely to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park;
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities (of the Park) by the public, and
- Seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities (within the National Park) by working closely with the agencies and local authorities responsible for these matters.

3.3 Special Qualities of the National Park

3.3.1 The *Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan*¹ sets out the special qualities of the Brecon Beacons National Park. These are:

- *A National Park offering **peace and tranquillity** with opportunities for quiet enjoyment, inspiration, relaxation and spiritual renewal.*
- *A feeling of **vitality and heathfulness** that comes from enjoying the Park's fresh air, clean water, rural setting, open land and locally produced foods.*
- *A **sense of place and cultural identity** – “Welshness” – characterised by the indigenous Welsh language, religions and spiritual connections, unique customs and events, traditional foods and crafts, relatively unspoilt historic towns and villages, family farms and continued practices of traditional skills developed by local inhabitants to live and earn a living here, such as common land practices and grazing.*
- *A **sense of discovery** where people explore the Park's hidden secrets and stories such as genealogical histories, prehistoric ritual sites, relic medieval settlements, early industrial sites, local myths and legends and geological treasures from time immemorial.*
- *The park's **sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty** observed across a variety of harmoniously connected landscapes, including marvellous gorges and waterfalls, classic karst geology with caves and sink holes, contrasting glacial landforms such as cliffs and broad valleys carved from old red sandstone and prominent hilltops with extensive views in all directions.*
- *A working, living ‘patchwork’ of **contrasting patterns, colours and textures** comprising well-maintained farmed landscapes, open uplands, lakes and meandering rivers punctuated by small-scale woodlands, country lanes, hedgerows and stone walls and scattered settlements.*
- *Extensive and widespread access to the Park's **diversity of wildlife and richness of semi-natural habitats**, such as native woodlands, heathland and grassland, natural lakes and riparian habitats, ancient hedgerows, limestone pavement and blanket bogs including those of international and national importance.*
- *In the context of the UK, geographically **rugged, remote and challenging** landscapes.*
- ***Enjoyable and accessible** countryside with extensive, widespread and varied opportunities to pursue walking, cycling, fishing, water-based activities and other forms of sustainable recreation or relaxation.*
- *An **intimate sense of community**, where small, pastoral towns and villages are comparatively safe, friendly, welcoming and retain a spirit of cooperation.*

¹ *Brecon Beacons National Park Management Plan 2010-2015*, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Brecon Beacons National Park Landscape Character Assessment Fiona Fyfe Associates, August 2012

Some of these special qualities occur across the National Park whereas others are more place-specific. The Landscape Character Area descriptions in Section 7.0 help to illustrate where the special qualities listed above occur. Fig. 3 (below) shows the Brecon Beacons National Park.



Fig. 3: The Brecon Beacons National Park