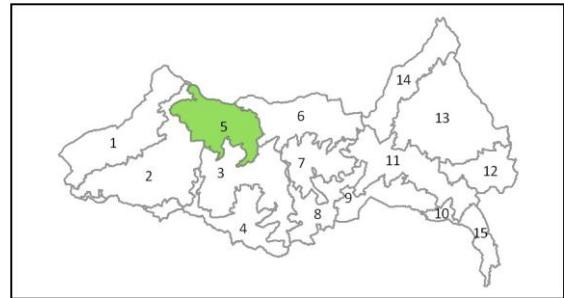


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 5: WESTERN USK TRIBUTARIES**Broad Landscape Type: UPLAND VALLEYS****Description****Location and Context**

This LCA is located towards the west of the National Park, and lies between the northern National Park boundary and the uplands of Y Mynydd Du and Fforest Fawr. It includes the village of Trecastle and the smaller settlements of Defynnog, Crai and Heol Senni. To the east is a gradual transition into the Middle Usk Valleys.

**Summary Description**

This LCA comprises the valleys and intervening ridges which connect the unenclosed moorland with the lower land of the Usk valleys. It is a pastoral landscape, less expansive than the uplands but not as intimate as other more wooded or enclosed landscapes. Irregular fields surrounded by hedges fill valley floors and lower slopes, contrasting with the open moorland above. It is strongly influenced by the surrounding uplands which form its backdrop and contribute to its high visual quality. Management through centuries of hillfarming has given the area a strong sense of time-depth with ancient farms, winding lanes, wood pasture and species-rich fields.



The Senni Valley

Historical Development of the Landscape

Although the landscape contains some prehistoric monuments, the most profound influence on its development has been centuries of traditional hill farming, with enclosed pasture on lower land and common grazing on the moorlands above. The adjacent Cnewr estate also affects the appearance of this LCA, particularly in the architecture of the estate cottages and farmhouses. Along the northern edge of the LCA runs the A40, a former coaching route, with associated settlements such as Trecastle.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Devonian mudstones, overlain by glacial deposits, and alluvium in the larger valleys.
- A series of relatively narrow valleys, the largest having glacially-eroded U-shaped profiles, whilst smaller ones are V-shaped, eroded by streams. Between the valleys are ridges of higher land.
- Meandering streams with narrow floodplains and occasional waterfalls flow into the larger but still fast-flowing River Usk. Bodies of open water include the Usk Reservoir and smaller Cray reservoir.
- Predominantly pastoral land use on improved/semi-improved grass. Also significant areas of woodland, unimproved grassland, wood pasture on valley sides and moorland on higher ground.
- Field boundaries predominantly hedges enclosing irregular fields, often grown out or replaced with post-and-wire. Flower-rich hedgebanks along roads.
- Scattered patches of ancient deciduous woodland, particularly in valley bottoms and along streams. Occasional clumps of conifers and other non-native species around farms. Larger forestry plantations in the far west.
- Semi-natural habitats of principal importance to Wales including neutral and marshy grassland, swamp, wet heath/ acid grassland mosaic and broadleaved woodland.
- Farming landscape contains many historic features, e.g. lanes, farms, bridges, field patterns etc. Also pre-historic and medieval sites and transport routes including Roman road and coaching route.
- Settlement pattern consisting of occasional nucleated villages (Trecastle, Crai, Defynnog), and scattered farms. Main roads locally influence the landscape (e.g. A40; A4067)
- Varied texture and a timeless, peaceful quality. Moderate scale between the open uplands and more enclosed and wooded farmlands. Wide views over valleys, and a strong visual connection with Fforest Fawr and Y Mynydd Du.

Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP aspect areas)

Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Upper Usk and Hyddfyer valleys (H); Senni Valley (H); Cwm Crai (H); Trecastle hinterland (M); Glasfynydd Forest (M); Usk Reservoir (H); Mynydd Wysg (M); Glasfynydd Forest (M); Fforest Fawr West (O); Fforest Fach (M); Cray Reservoir (H); Usk Valley West of Brecon (H)
Key to Landmap evaluation criteria: (O) Outstanding: of international importance. (H) High: of regional or county importance. (M) Moderate: of local importance. (L) Low: of little/no importance	

Settlements

The largest settlement in the LCA is Trecastle, situated on a major east-west route (a former coaching route and now the A40) with the remains of a medieval motte and bailey castle. Other smaller settlements include Crai and Defynnog, which has a prominent white-painted church tower, and a strong estate influence in its architecture. Farms and hamlets are scattered throughout the LCA, generally of traditional stone construction and often painted white, with some more modern farm buildings. In the eastern part of the LCA, there is more of an influence of estate architecture, particularly in the distinctive white-painted farms and cottages, often embellished with window pediments, gables etc.

Key Views

The area forms the setting to the higher areas of Fforest Fawr and Y Mynydd Du in terms of their foreground when viewed from the north, and also in views northwards from their summits. Some of the best views within LCA 5 are the long views down valleys (for example down the Senni Valley) often from near the boundaries of the LCA.

Evaluation

Special Qualities

The natural beauty and recreational factors that make this landscape special are summarised in the table below, along with examples of their sensitivities to landscape changes:

Criteria	Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area	Sensitivities
Scenic quality and Sense of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High scenic quality and a strong sense of place, resulting from the landforms, visual variety, distinctive upland backdrops and traditional pastoral management of the area. 	Introduction of large scale or incongruous features, particularly where skylines are interrupted. Decline in hillfarming affecting the traditional management and landscape features of the area.
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High landscape quality and integrity as a result of centuries of consistent agricultural management, and few incongruous features. 	As above
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A peaceful, pastoral landscape with few factors detracting from its tranquillity and timelessness. The western part is within the BBNP core dark skies area. 	As above
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This landscape typifies the traditional hillfarming landscape, centred on the relationship between enclosed valleys and the open common land above. 	As above
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of habitat sites designated SSSI, including rare examples of once-common habitats, e.g. unimproved wet pastures and fens. The River Usk is designated SSSI and SAC as an example of a river flowing over sandstone, and the associated plant and animal communities within this linear ecosystem. 	Changes in grazing patterns or improvement to grasslands could affect rare habitats.
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong sense of time-depth from built landscape features including lanes, bridges, farms and field patterns, as well as Scheduled Monuments from the Prehistoric period on higher land (cairns, barrows, standing stones and Twyn-y-Gaer hillfort) and the Medieval motte and bailey at Trecastle. 	Loss of archaeological/historic features as a result of erosion, damage, neglect or insensitive modernisation.

Opportunities for landscape enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Nature Reserve at Twyn-y-Gaer enables public access to a woodland site. 	
Recreation provision and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good network of lanes, footpaths and bridleways providing access into this attractive landscape. • 	

Contribution to Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure (refer to sections 4.6 & 4.7 for terminology)

Principal ecosystem services include provisioning and regulating services. In addition to farmland, provisioning and regulating services derive from the extensive Glasfynydd Forest and the Usk Reservoir. These features support climate and water regulation whilst providing a source of fuel and fresh water. The River Usk provides food and recreation services including fish, angling, water craft and access to water. In common with the rest of the National Park, this LCA also contributes to cultural services including spiritual enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism, and aesthetic experiences.

Main Green Infrastructure features are the forest, reservoir and river system mentioned above, which can also support recreation and leisure pursuits. Other features of note include the Twyn y Gaer Nature Reserve and historic assets.



Pastoral scene west of Trecastle with Fforest Fawr and Central Beacons in the distance.



Rushy pasture habitat and traditional hillfarm in the Hydfer Valley



Trecastle village street (now the A40) and historic coaching inn.

Forces for Change in the Landscape

Local Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications

(See also the general forces for change described in section 6.0)

Past and Present

- 20th century construction of Usk and Crai reservoirs impounding water and affecting water flows in the River Usk. Associated coniferous planting adding new features into the landscape, often with artificial straight-line boundaries.
- Construction of natural gas pipeline causing permanent changes to surface vegetation and buried archaeology.
- Construction and upgrading of roads including the A40 and A4067 with localised impacts on the area (traffic movement and noise).
- Loss of hillfarming traditions due to a lack of succession in hillfarming families. This is a particular problem in this relatively marginal farming area with small individual landholdings. Consequences on the landscape are the amalgamation of farm holdings (sometimes with new, larger-scale farm buildings), dilapidation of traditional farm buildings and poor management of hedgerows and meadows. Changes in grazing patterns on common land also affect the landscape of this LCA (see section 6.0)
- High-quality conversion of redundant agricultural buildings to residential use.
- Loss of hedgerows and replacement with post-and-wire fencing.
- New local farming initiatives can be a positive force for change e.g. Brecknock Lamb.
- Decline in traditional management of hedgerows, broadleaved woodlands and wood pasture.
- Management of coniferous plantations, particularly as trees reach maturity.
- Water quality of streams and rivers.
- Demographic changes, e.g. population decline in some hillfarming areas, but an increased demand for housing in other parts of the LCA (eg. around Trecastle).

Future

- Continued agricultural changes including loss of traditional hillfarms, farm amalgamation, new farming initiatives and changes in agri-environment schemes, all potentially affecting the traditional appearance of the landscape.
- Management of coniferous plantations, particularly following felling.
- Continued development pressure, particularly in the north of the area.



Usk Reservoir (constructed in 1955 to supply water to Swansea) and associated forestry. Viewed from the north, with Y Mynydd Du behind.



Brecknock Lamb for Marks and Spencer- an example of changing agricultural markets and positive local initiatives.



Barn in the Crai Valley, derelict as a result of changing farming practices. Many similar barns throughout the National Park have been converted to residential use.

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To maintain the traditional features and special qualities of the landscape, ensuring that any agricultural changes are as sensitive as possible to the area's landscape and habitats. Farming is supported and its viability is increased, with farmers encouraged to continue traditional hillfarming practices in their management of common land, hedgerows and meadows. The area continues to provide an attractive setting for the surrounding uplands. New development around existing settlements is sensitively accommodated into the landscape. Semi-natural habitats such as woodland and grassland sites are well managed, and archaeological/ historic features (including built heritage) are protected and well looked-after. Appropriate recreation is encouraged, and people enjoy and appreciate the landscape.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect the area's **archaeological sites**, and the **historic landscape features** such as lanes and hedgerows which contribute to the character of the area.
- Protect the area's **built heritage** ensuring that any changes (e.g. conversions of barns to residential use) are done as sensitively as possible.

Manage

- Manage **farmland** through the encouragement of a viable farming community, farming the land in a traditional way which maintains the landscape and enhances biodiversity.
- Manage **wood-pasture and common land** through encouragement of appropriate levels of grazing and other positive management practices.
- Manage **woodland** (using traditional techniques such as coppicing) to retain age and species diversity.
- Manage **wetland and grassland sites** to maximise their biodiversity, using appropriate management and grazing.
- Manage **plantations** to enhance their biodiversity, protect archaeological features and improve their appearance in the landscape, particularly as trees reach maturity.
- Manage **recreation**, encouraging people to enjoy the landscape whilst retaining its special qualities.

Plan

- Plan to **create, extend and link semi-natural habitats** within the area such as woodland, hedgerows and grasslands.
- Plan to **work with landowners** (specifically Welsh Water and Forestry Commission Wales) with regard to reservoir and forestry management.
- Plan to ensure that any **new development is well designed and well sited** within the landscape.
- Plan to retain the area's **dark skies** and reduce incidence of light pollution.