



BRECON BEACONS  
NATIONAL PARK

# Landscape and Development

## Supplementary Planning Guidance

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority June 2014



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# I. Introduction

## I.1 Purpose of the Guidance

- I.1.1 This is the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's Supplementary Planning Guidance relating to landscape and development. It is one of a series of documents which provides supporting information on the implementation of the National Park Authority's adopted Local Development Plan.
- I.1.2 The National Park was designated as a protected landscape in 1957 on the grounds of its natural beauty and the opportunities it offers for open air recreation. The Park spans an area of 520 square miles and within those boundaries lies a diverse and remarkable range of landscape types of exceptional value. Today the area is recognised as a living working landscape, one that has been shaped by the interaction of man with the land through history. This interaction between man's needs and the natural landform poses some of the most significant challenges to the management of a protected landscape.
- I.1.3 The National Park Authority seeks to ensure a sustainable future for our communities and this special landscape by seeking to manage the scale of landscape change posed by development. We do this by expecting the highest standards of design from all new development, including careful consideration of siting and position within the landscape. Through this level of scrutiny, the Authority is able to ensure that no development occurs which could compromise the integrity of the area's natural beauty. With this in mind, this guidance has been prepared to provide detail on how landscape character within the Brecon Beacons National Park may be conserved and enhanced through the planning process. It forms a practical tool for prospective applicants to help guide and shape high-quality landscape responsive design as befits the exceptional landscape of the National Park.
- I.1.4 This guidance has been informed by a detailed Landscape Character Assessment ('the LCA') of the National Park undertaken by Fiona Fyfe Associates in August 2012. The LCA includes character area profiles for distinct areas across the park which are appended to this guidance document and will form the basis upon which the landscape impact of development is assessed. Further explanation of the LCA is set out in Section 4 of this guidance document and the full document can be viewed on the Authority's website.

## I.2 Scope of the Guidance

- I.2.1 This guidance has been endorsed by the National Park Authority for use as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This means that the content of this document forms material considerations in the validation and determination of all relevant planning applications.

The National Park Authority has also determined to utilise this guidance in the consideration of fringe developments (i.e. those developments located outside, yet in close proximity to the National Park administrative area) where the proposal is of a scale and significance that may impact on the landscape quality of the National Park.

## 2. Landscape

### 2.1 What is Landscape?

2.1.1 Landscape is the perceptual experience of being within the environment that surrounds us. It is as much a sensory experience as it is a physical one. Accordingly the European Landscape Convention describes Landscape as:

*An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*

2.1.2 This holistic approach encompasses natural landscape factors (e.g. geology, geomorphology, ecology), cultural factors (e.g. archaeology, settlement) and perceptual and aesthetic qualities (e.g. colour, tranquillity, ruggedness). Figure 1 below illustrates how these various components make up the landscape

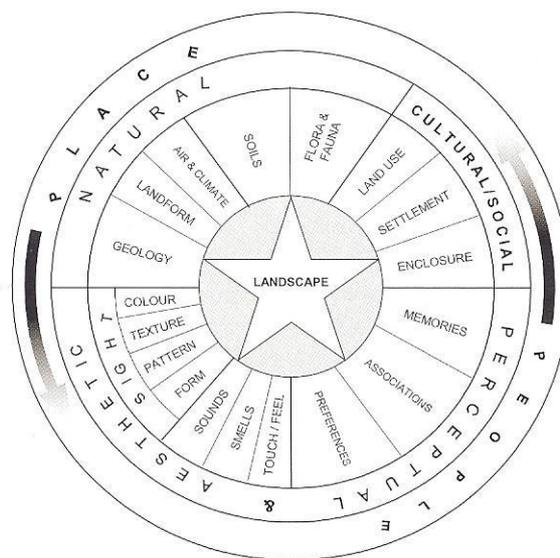


Figure 1 Landscape Components

## **2.2 Why Consider Landscape?**

- 2.2.1 Recent research undertaken by Natural England sets out that well-looked after and highly-valued landscapes are essential to social well-being and an economically healthy society (Landscape: Beyond the View, NE 2012). By giving due consideration to landscape form and function, we can manage what is unique and of value whilst utilising its resource to ensure high-quality living for current and future generations.
- 2.2.3 Development that responds to landscape setting will ultimately feel right to its end users. Development which does not give due consideration to its environment will undoubtedly produce a negative and unappealing space.

## **2.3 What is Landscape Character?**

- 2.3.1 Landscape character can be defined as the distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that make one landscape different from another (rather than better or worse). In broad terms, we can easily recognise that the experience of mountain landscape is different from coastal scenes. Landscape character defines what it is about these environments that make them different. It is a tool for identifying and describing variation in landscape character, highlighting the unique combinations of elements and features that make each landscape distinctive. Landscape character assessment, importantly for this SPG, provides a tool that can assist in managing change within the landscape.

## 3. Policy Context

### 3.1 Planning Policy

3.1.1 Development occurs within a landscape setting, and as such, a key way to manage landscape change is through the planning system. Landscapes and development are considered at all levels of Planning Policy. This Supplementary Planning Guidance seeks to provide practical guidance for developers on the implementation of legislation and policy in relation to landscape impact within and on the fringes of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

### 3.2 National Park Designation

3.2.1 The Brecon Beacons National Park is designated for its landscape quality. The current legislative framework is the Environment Act 1995, under which the Authority has two statutory purposes to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park;
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the National Park by the public.

The National Park also has a statutory duty to:

- Seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities.

3.2.2 Protection of the National Park is not just the preserve of the National Park Authority. Section 62(2) of the Environment Act sets out that any relevant Authority shall have regard to National Park purposes when performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in the National Park. Relevant Authorities include public bodies, government departments, local authorities and statutory undertakers.

3.2.3 In accordance with the Sandford principle, in circumstances where there is irreconcilable conflict between the National Park's two statutory purposes, then the duty to conserve the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park takes precedence.

### 3.3 National Policy

3.3.1 National Planning Policy is set out in the Welsh Government's *Planning Policy Wales* (at time of writing Version 6<sup>th</sup> Edition 2014) (hereafter referred to as 'PPW'). PPW, Chapter 5 sets out the Welsh Government's objective for the conservation and improvement of Wales' natural heritage through the conservation of landscape and biodiversity (5.1.2). PPW confirms that through their statutory designation, National Parks are afforded the highest status of protection from inappropriate developments. As such, development plan

policies and development management decisions within National Parks should give great weight to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these areas (5.3.6).

3.3.2 PPW, Chapter 6 also highlights the importance of consideration and protection of historic landscapes in the planning decision-making process, and; in particular parks and gardens and their settings included in the 'Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales'.

3.3.3 It is recognised that statutory designation does not necessarily prohibit development, but it is essential that the impact of development proposals on the protected natural heritage is fully assessed. This includes assessing detrimental impacts on the landscape and how they may be moderated (PPW, paragraphs 5.5.5 and 5.5.6).

3.3.4 LANDMAP is the formally-adopted approach for landscape assessments in Wales and Natural Resources Wales is the statutory advisor on landscape planning issues.

### 3.4 Local Policy

3.4.1 One of the key means by which the NPA fulfils its statutory function is through the management of appropriate development. All applications within the National Park are, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning act 1990 (as amended), considered against the policies of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority's *Local Development Plan 2007-2022* adopted December 2013 ('the LDP'). Whereas the LDP integrates landscape protection throughout all policy and strategy, key policies which this guidance supplements are:

- Policy 1 Appropriate Development in the National Park; and
- Strategic Policy 3 Environmental Protection

These are set out below. This SPG is also relevant to many other LDP policies; these are listed in Appendix I

#### **Policy 1 Appropriate Development in the National Park**

**All proposals for development or change of use of land or buildings in the National Park must comply with the following criteria, where they are relevant to the proposal:**

- i) the scale, form, design, layout, density, intensity of use and use of materials will be appropriate to the surroundings and will maintain or enhance the quality and character of the Park's Natural Beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and built environment;**

- ii) the proposed development is integrated into the landscape to the satisfaction of the NPA through planting and appropriate management of native species or through the construction of appropriate boundary features;
- iii) the proposed development does not have an unacceptable impact on the economic, social, cultural and linguistic vitality and identity of any community, either in its own right or through cumulative impact.
- iv) the proposed development promotes opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of bio/geodiversity through appropriate design and landscaping.
- v) the proposed development is within 400m of an area of accessible natural green-space.

### **SP3 Environmental Protection – Strategic Policy**

**All proposals for development or change of use of land or buildings in the National Park must demonstrate that the proposed development does not have an unacceptable impact on, nor detract from, or prevent the enjoyment of;**

- a) the special qualities of the National Park as identified in the National Park Management Plan<sup>1</sup>.
- b) ecology and biodiversity assets both within and beyond designated sites (see Policies 6, 7 and 8)
- c) the water environment (see Policy 11)
- d) geodiversity, including the Fforest Fawr European Geopark
- e) cultural and historic heritage, including Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, Registered Historic Parks Gardens and Historic Landscapes, (see Conserving the Historic Environment below)
- f) the character of the built heritage, including listed buildings, conservation areas and archaeological features (see Conserving the Historic Environment Below).
- h) the important network of public open space and recreation facilities (See also SP15 and supporting detailed policies).
- i) soil and air quality (see Policy 13 and 14).
- j) Agricultural Land of Grade 1, 2, 3a

### **3.5 Dark Skies Status**

- 3.5.1 The National Park Area is an International Dark Skies Reserve, which means that the Authority intends to preserve our night skies, reduce energy wastage, help protect nocturnal wildlife and increase awareness of astronomy. As such the Authority seeks to ensure that all future development considers its impact on the night time landscape. Guidance is currently in draft in relation to how development can be designed to limit impacts from obtrusive lighting. The NPA has produced guidance in relation to development and lighting schemes. Please refer to our website for more information.

## 4. Landscape Character Assessment

### 4.1 The Landscape Character Assessment of the Brecon Beacons National Park

4.1.1 In August 2012 the National Park Authority commissioned Fiona Fyfe Associates to undertake Landscape Character Assessment of the National Park area. Utilising CCW's LANDMAP GIS system as well as field-based observations, the Landscape Character Assessment identified five broad landscape types within the National Park:

- Upland;
- Upland Valleys;
- Settled Valleys;
- Lowlands; and
- Mountains and Valleys.

4.1.2 Within these landscape types, fifteen Landscape Character Areas were identified as shown on the map below. Each one has its own character, identity and sense of place derived from the particular combinations of natural and cultural elements within it. The Landscape Character Areas within the Brecon Beacons National Park are:

LCA 1: Towy Valley Foothills

LCA 2: Y Mynydd Du (the Black Mountain)

LCA 3: Fforest Fawr

LCA 4: Waterfall Country and Southern Valleys

LCA 5: Western Usk Tributaries

LCA 6: Middle Usk Valleys

LCA 7: Central Beacons

LCA 8: Talybont and Taff Reservoir Valleys

LCA 9: Mynyddoedd Llangatwg and Llangynidr

LCA 10: Clydach Gorge

LCA 11: Eastern Usk Valley

LCA 12: Skirrid and Sugar Loaf

LCA 13: The Black Mountains

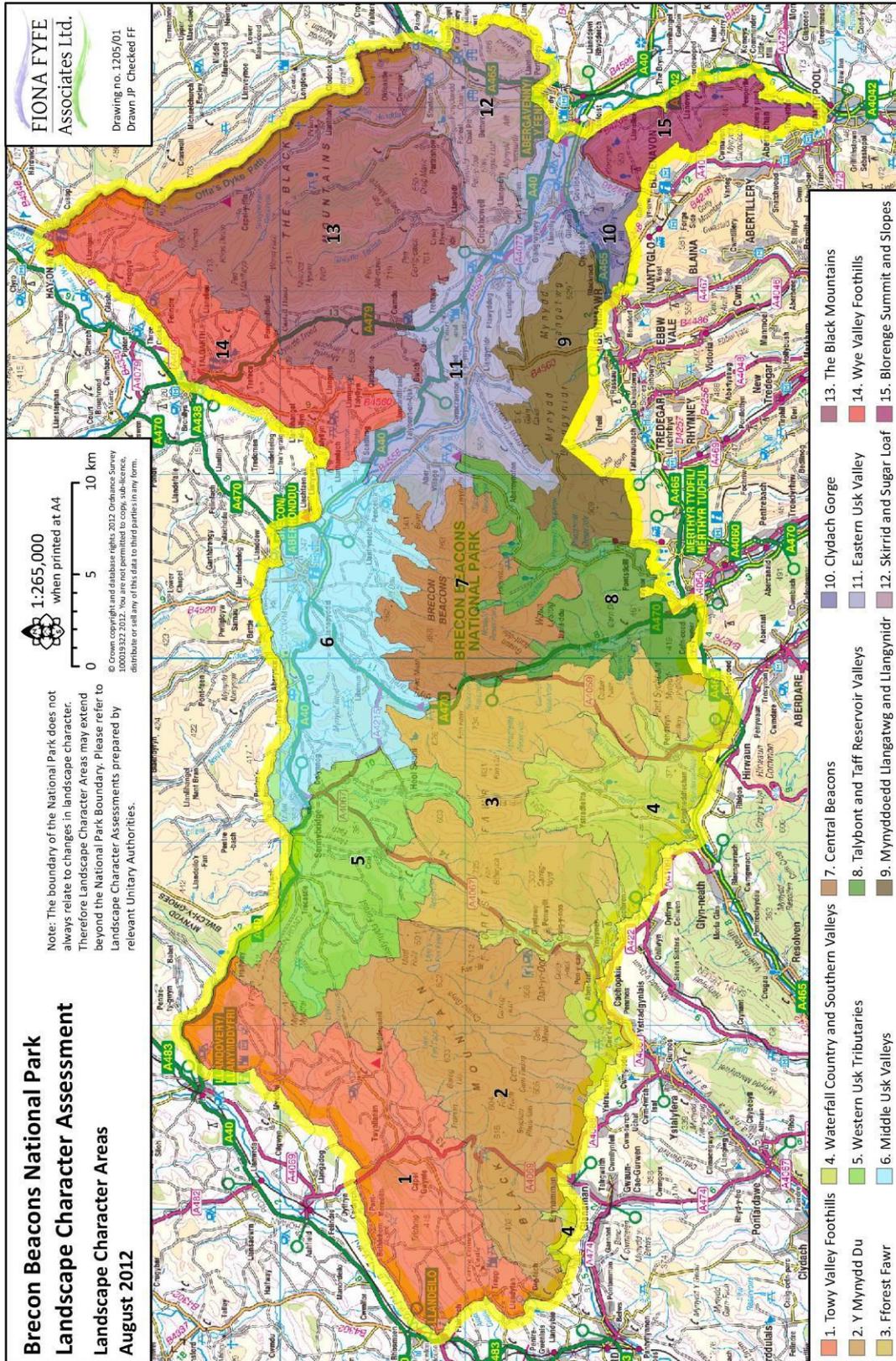
LCA 14: Wye Valley Foothills

LCA 15: Bloreng Summit and Slopes

4.1.3 Profiles have been developed for each of the fifteen Landscape Character Areas described in terms of its location and context; historical development; distinctive characteristics; LANDMAP components; settlements; key views; special qualities; sensitivities; contributions to ecosystem services and Green Infrastructure and forces for landscape change. Each landscape character area profile ends with a management strategy and a recommended management guideline to protect and strengthen its landscape character.

Landscape Character Assessment thereby provides an additional tool for assessing impacts and facilitating the conservation and enhancement of landscapes in the National Park.

- 4.1.4 The detailed Landscape Character Area profiles are set out at Appendix 3 of this document and should be referred to in determining which Landscape Character Area your development lies within and/or may have an impact upon.
- 4.1.5 The NPA is currently developing an online GIS based system which will allow applicants to determine the Landscape Character Area their proposal is located within. It is hoped that this will be available September 2014.



## 5. Landscape and Development

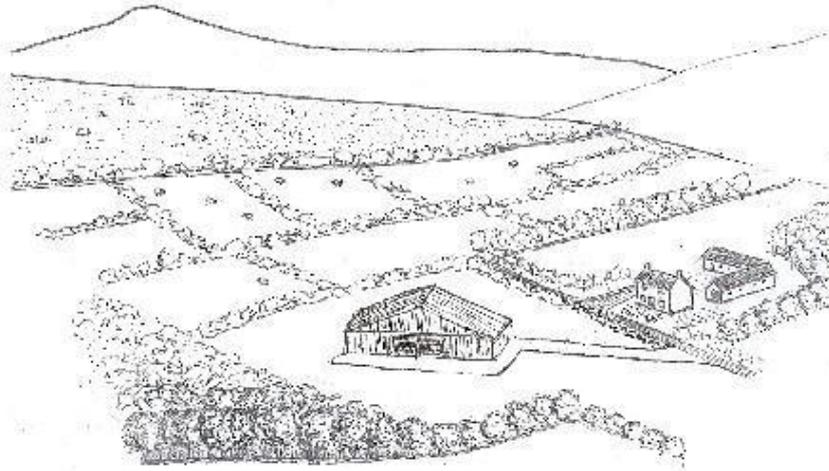
### 5.1 Landscape in the Design Process

- 5.1.1 Good design should be inextricably linked with landscape context. Design that responds to the landscape can enhance landscape character. Design that has no bearing on the landscape will negatively impact on the experience of the landscape and result in unsuccessful and unusable space. An understanding of landscape character is fundamental to the design process and should form the starting point within any development scheme. Detailed assessment of the Brecon Beacons National Park landscape character is set out at appendix 3 of this document
- 5.1.2 Applicants and/or developers are encouraged to assess the impact of their development on the particular landscape character area within which it lies. Where a particular site lies on or near the boundary of another character area, or where potential visual impacts are wide ranging, the impact of the development on all relevant character areas must also be considered.
- 5.1.3 In particular proposals should be reviewed against the strategy for the relevant landscape character area and demonstrate how proposals have been informed and responded to the Landscape Character Assessment in any supporting planning application documentation (e.g. Design and Access Statement, Supporting Planning Statement).
- 5.1.4 The following set of questions may assist in addressing landscape character when initiating the design process. In answering these questions it is important to think about potential cumulative impacts from existing development, when taken in combination with the proposal.
- i) Is the type, scale or form of development likely to result in a visible change to the site and its locality, individually or cumulatively with existing development?
  - ii) Would the development directly impact upon any distinctive characteristics, individually or cumulatively?
  - iii) Would development or land use conflict with or support the area's strategy, individually or cumulatively?
  - iv) What changes to the development have been incorporated to mitigate against potential landscape impact?
  - v) How would the proposal conserve and/or enhance the Landscape Character Area?
- 5.1.5 The National Park Authority will only be able to support applications which result in positive impacts on the defined characteristics of an LCA. Therefore it is essential that in

considering the above questions, applicants must address the scheme's design to ensure positive outcomes from the outset. Applicants are advised to follow the process map at section 5.3 below.

- 5.1.6 Fig. 2 shows a hypothetical example illustrating how landscape character considerations can be applied to an agricultural development. In the original application, the new barn is visually intrusive in the landscape and results in the loss of a traditional barn, historic field boundaries and their associated biodiversity. However, by taking landscape character issues into consideration at the design stage, the barn can be incorporated into the landscape in a more subtle manner, without loss of historic landscape features and with enhanced biodiversity links. Although the example given is for an agricultural building, the method works for other types, scales and locations of development.

ORIGINAL PROPOSAL FOR NEW AGRICULTURAL BUILDING



MODIFIED PROPOSAL FOR NEW AGRICULTURAL BUILDING,  
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT LANDSCAPE CHARACTER SPG

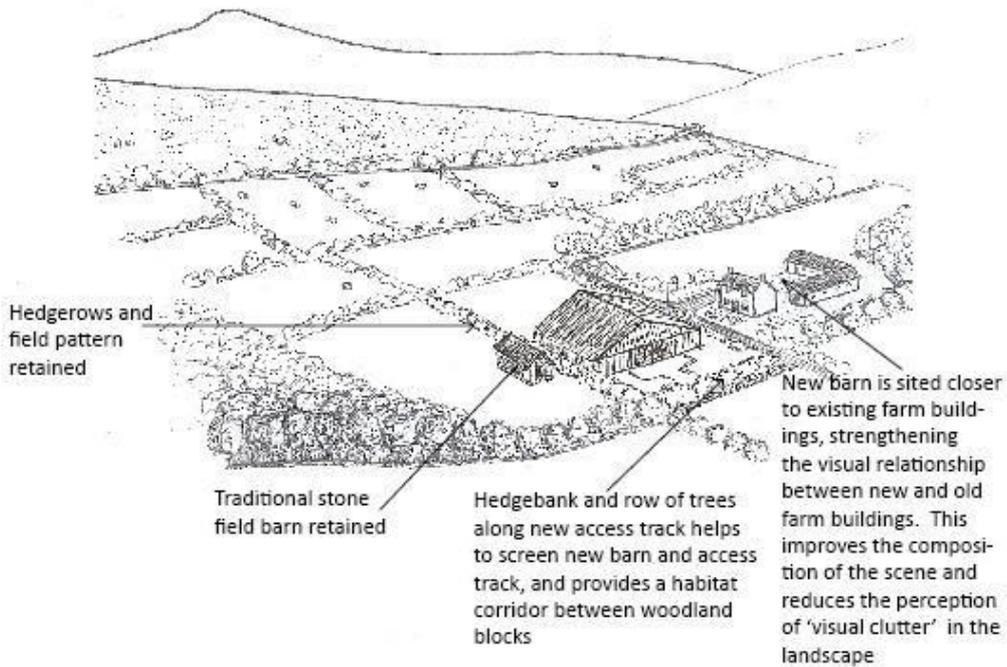


Figure 2 Appropriate design in the landscape

## 5.2 Ensuring Appropriate Development

5.2.1 In accordance with Policies I and SP3 of the LDP, all development within the National Park must be designed to ensure no negative impacts on the natural beauty of the area.

5.2.2 The following outlines some of the general landscape considerations the National Park Authority will employ when assessing planning applications. Applicants are reminded that when assessing their proposal for landscape impacts that due consideration should be made to the cumulative impacts derived in combination from other developments in the area:

- i) Is the development sympathetic to the surrounding area in terms of scale, size, form, density, location, layout, symmetry, quality and suitability of materials, aspect, microclimate and density of building/land use and the space between buildings?
- ii) Are key landscape features protected, eg trees, hedgerows and other vegetation and adequately integrated into the development proposal?
- iii) Is there the potential to create new landscape features that blend in with the existing defined landscape character?
- iv) How will the new development form a built environment that enhances distinctive landscape character?
- v) Does the proposal maintain characteristic land cover? Does it respond to the natural contours and textures of the landscape, whilst maintaining its ecological and cultural value?
- vi) How does the scheme encourage the creation/management of 'mosaic landscapes' through the restoration of a variety of semi-natural habitats?
- vii) Does the development cause significant harm to important views into, out of or across settlements and open countryside?
- viii) Will the proposal support improved land management through, for example, the utilisation of sustainable farming techniques?
- ix) Are nature conservation features protected and enhanced and are provisions made for their future management?
- x) Does the proposal compromise identified tranquillity areas through, for example, inappropriate lighting schemes, or incompatible development (eg noise generating proposals)?
- xi) Does the proposal impact local geology, soil type and drainage?

5.2.3 The impacts of development on the landscape can sometimes be suitably mitigated to create a development that blends in with its surroundings. Such mitigation measures should be incorporated within a development scheme at the outset and pre-application discussion with Planning Officers is encouraged to discuss possible options. The National Park Authority will ensure that such mitigation and/or enhancement measures are secured by way of planning conditions and planning obligations.

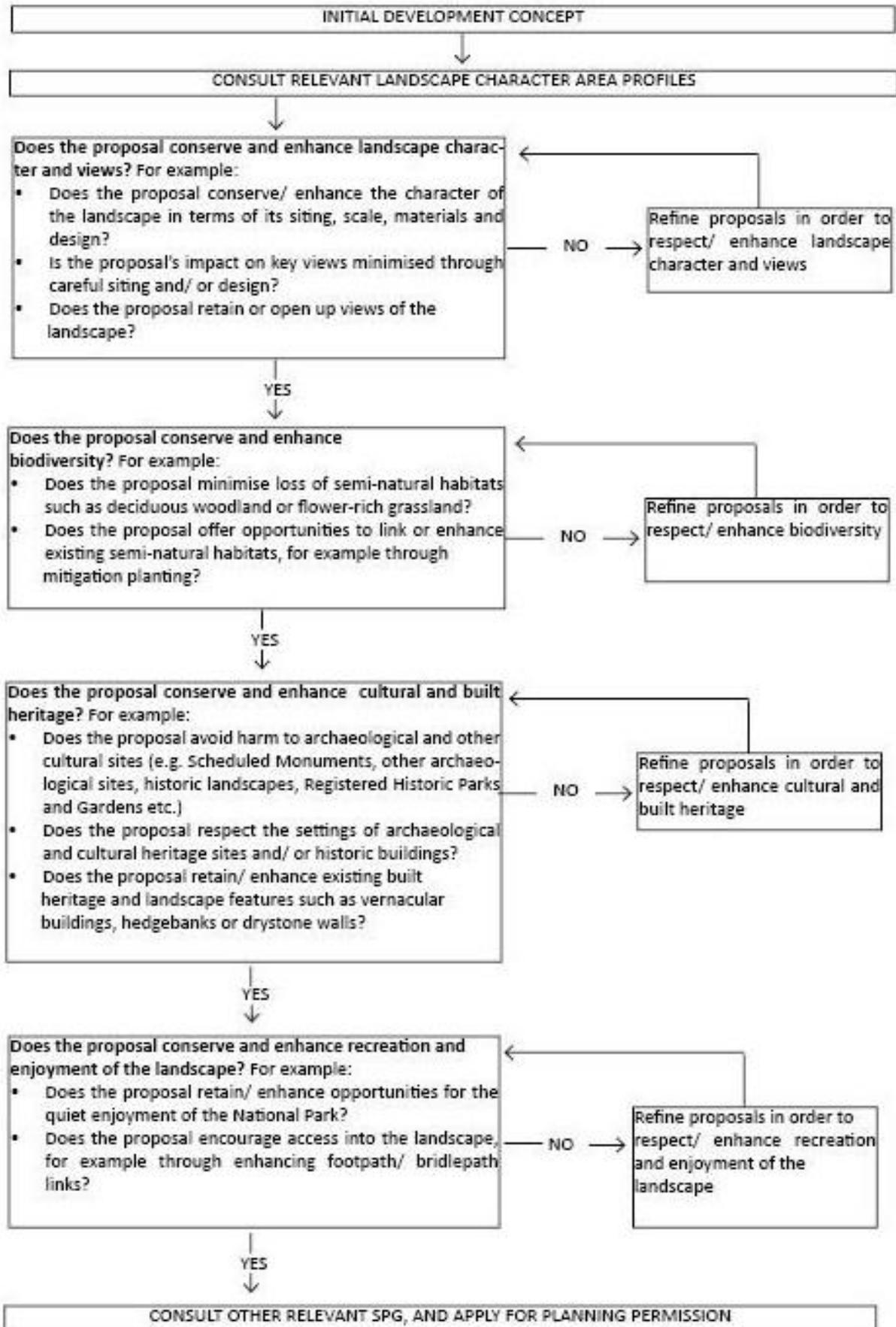
5.2.4 Where detailed landscape and visual assessment are considered necessary, applicants are advised to consult best practice guidance as provided in *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* (Third Edition), Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013)

### **5.3 Process Map**

5.3.1 Figure 3 below sets out a process map for applicants to follow to ensure that development proposals take landscape character into due consideration.

5.3.2 Applicants are encouraged to discuss any development scheme with the planning department prior to the submission of a planning application. For further details of the pre-application advice process please refer to the Authority's Pre-Application Planning Advice Charges Guidance Note available on the website.

5.3.3 Applicants are also advised to review the information contained within the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Planning Advice Note 'Landscape Schemes' prior to the submission of a planning application.



# Appendix I

## Relevant Local Development Plan Policies

- SPI National Park Policy
- SP2 Major Development in the National Park – Strategic Policy
- SP3 Environmental Protection – Strategic Policy
- SP5 Housing
- Policy 3 Sites of European Importance
- Policy 4 Sites of National Importance
- Policy 5 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Policy 6 Biodiversity and Development
- Policy 7 Protected and Important Wild Species
- Policy 8 Trees and Development
- Policy 9: Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees
- Policy 12 Light Pollution
- Policy 15: Listed Buildings
- Policy 16: Demolition of Listed Buildings
- Policy 17: The Setting of Listed Buildings
- Policy 18: Protection of Buildings of Local Importance
- Policy 19: Development affecting Conservation Areas
- Policy 20: Historic Parks and Gardens
- Policy 21: Historic Landscapes
- Policy 22: Areas of Archaeological Evaluation
- SP9 Renewable Energy
- B LPI Brecon Appropriate Development
- K LPI Key Settlement Appropriate Development
- S LP2 Settlements Appropriate Development

- LGS LP2 Limited Growth Settlements Appropriate Development
- E LPI Community Sustainability Edge of Settlement Exceptions
- CYD LPI Enabling Appropriate Development
- Policy 25 Renovation of Former Dwellings in the Countryside
- Policy 26 Demolition and Replacement of Dwellings
- Policy 27 House Extensions and Ancillary Buildings
- SP6 Affordable Housing
- Policy 31 Sites for Gypsies and Travellers
- SPI2 Economic Wellbeing
- Policy 35 Employment Generating Development
- Policy 36 Enabling B Use Class Employment Use outside Settlement Boundaries and Settlement Extents
- Policy 38 Farm Diversification
- Policy 39 Equestrian Facilities
- Policy 40 Storage of Caravans
- Policy 41 New Farm and Forestry Buildings
- SPI4 Sustainable Tourism
- Policy 45 New Buildings for Holiday Accommodation
- Policy 46 Non-permanent Holiday Accommodation
- Policy 47 New or Extended Sites for Touring Caravans, Camper Vans and Tents
- Policy 48 New or Extended Outdoor Activity Centres
- Policy 53 Planning Obligations
- SPI6 Sustainable Infrastructure
- Policy 54 Power-lines and Pipelines
- Policy 55 Telecommunications
- Policy 56: Water and Sewage Supply for New Development
- Policy 58 Sustainable Drainage Systems

- Policy 59 Impacts of Traffic
- SPI7 Sustainable Transport
- Policy 64 Composting
- Policy 65 Mineral Safeguarding
- Policy 66 Borrow Pits
- Policy 67 Recycled, Secondary and Waste Materials

## Appendix 2

### Glossary of Terms

**Aspects** – A theme or layer of landscape information. There are five different Aspects assessed in LANDMPS, these are Geological, Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Visual and Sensory, Historic Landscape, Cultural Landscape

**Aspect Area** – A discrete geographic area of relatively homogenous character identified within a particular aspect. In GIS it is represented by a single polygon.

**Character** – Distinct, recognizable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that make one landscape different from another (rather than better or worse).

**Element** – Physical component of the landscape that may be vested with significance, both in terms of aesthetic value, and cultural meaning (eg hedge, tree, road)

**Enhancement** – actions required to improve the character of an area (eg restoration)

**Feature** – Distinctive or prominent element within a character area

**Geographical Information System (GIS)** – A digital collection of data which displays information in a spatial form

**LANDMAP** – Landmap is a GIS based landscape resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated into a nationally consistent data set for more information see <http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landmap>

**Landscape Character Area (LCA)** A distinct geographic area displaying a relatively consistent pattern of elements in the landscape so as to form a homogenous whole.

**Landscape Character Assessment** – the assessment of the landscape to define areas of homogenous type into unique character areas.

**Local Development Plan (LDP)** – Statutory development plan for the area, setting out strategic and detailed planning policies for the National Park area. All planning applications within the Brecon Beacons National Park are determined against the policies of the LDP.

**Planning Obligations** also known as Section 106 agreements under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), are benefits that may be in kind or take the form of financial contributions. Section 106 agreements are legally binding undertakings which seek to ensure that development is acceptable, by securing contributions to offset negative consequences of development.

**Planning Policy Wales (PPW)** Overarching policy guidance produced by the Welsh Government. Sets out National planning objectives and policy.

**Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)** Guidance produced to provide detailed

information on the implementation of specific policies or policy area.