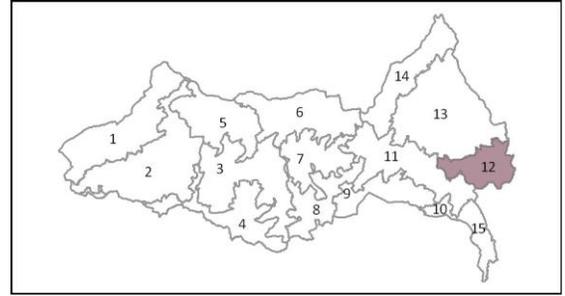


**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 12: SKIRRID AND SUGAR LOAF****Broad Landscape Type: MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS****Description****Location and Context**

This relatively small LCA is located on the eastern edge of the National Park. It comprises the land to the north of Abergavenny and forms the northern setting of the town. It includes the distinctive peaks of Sugar Loaf and Skirrid. To the north is the Black Mountains LCA, and to the west the Eastern Usk Valley.

**Summary Description**

The distinctive pointed summit of Sugar Loaf and landslip cleft of Skirrid are prominent landmarks over a wide area, including Abergavenny, the eastern end of the Usk valley and surrounding uplands. They provide popular walking routes for visitors and local people, affording panoramic views over the surrounding valleys, Somerset and the Bristol Channel, the Malvern Hills and across to the Black Mountains. Their open moorland contrasts with the surrounding lower land, which is characterised by farmland, woodland and deep flower-rich lanes.



*View of Skirrid with deep lane in the foreground*

**Historical Development of the Landscape**

This landscape contains evidence for its settlement and defence over many centuries, but with a particular concentration of Medieval sites such as churches (including St Michael's Chapel on Skirrid), inns, castles and Abergavenny Priory Deer Park. There are also two 17<sup>th</sup> gardens and their associated country houses, Prehistoric round cairns on Sugar Loaf and a prehistoric hillfort at Twyn-y-gaer.

## Distinctive Characteristics

- Lower land underlain by Devonian mudstones. Sugar Loaf's lower slopes comprised of Senni Formation sandstones, its upper slopes comprised of Brownstones and its capping Quartz Conglomerate.
- Very distinctive landforms, caused by erosion of all but the hardest rocks which are left as distinctive pyramid-shaped peaks. Post-glacial landslips have given rise to Skirrid's cleft profile. Below the peaks are steep valleys, and the wider Gavenny Valley.
- Small streams draining the uplands, flowing into the River Usk (to the west), Abergavenny Reservoir or the River Gavenny (in the east of the LCA).
- Land use predominantly agricultural in valleys (mostly pasture with some arable) and grazed moorland on higher land.
- Extensive deciduous woodlands, particularly on the lower slopes of Sugar Loaf formerly connected with the tanning industry in Abergavenny. Small coniferous plantation on Skirrid.
- Field boundaries predominantly species-rich hedgerows, with deep, flower-rich banks along valley lanes.
- Semi-natural habitats of principal importance to Wales including broadleaved woodland, dwarf shrub heath, acid and neutral grassland, neutral rock exposures.
- Historic features include defensive structures, standing buildings e.g. churches (including St Michael's Chapel on Skirrid); country houses and inns as well as landscape features (lanes, hedgebanks etc.) and prehistoric sites.
- The town of Abergavenny is just outside the LCA, but has close visual and cultural links. Within the LCA is the village of Llanvihangel Crucorney, plus other scattered hamlets and farms. The Gavenny/ Honddu Valleys are a long-standing transport corridor and today contain a main road and railway line.
- Contrast between the soft, settled, wooded valleys and the open moorland and distinctive landforms of the higher land. Vegetation provides variation in texture and seasonal colour.

## Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP Aspect Areas)

<b>Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas</b>	Sugar Loaf scarp slopes (H); Northern Hills (H); Vale of Grwyney (H); The Sugar Loaf (O); Llanvihangel Crucorney Hinterland (M); Sugar Loaf Mountain (O); Monnow Valley (H) Bettws Hill (H); Ysgryd Fawr (O);
<b>Key to Landmap evaluation criteria:</b> (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 town of Abergavenny is located adjacent to this LCA, just outside the National Park Boundary. The visual relationship between Abergavenny and this LCA is very strong, so the landscape provides a distinctive backdrop and setting for the town, and views from the LCA are visually affected by expansion or prominent development in the town. The villages of Llanvihangel Crucorney and Llangenny are within the LCA, along with other scattered farms and hamlets. Most buildings in the LCA (including some modern developments) are constructed from local stone and blend into the landscape.

## Key Views

Key views within the LCA are those from the summits of Sugar Loaf and Skirrid, which are strongly influenced by surrounding LCAs (and in the case of Skirrid, by land outside the National Park and into England). This LCA also plays an important role in the setting of Abergavenny and has a strong visual relationship with the town. It is a prominent feature in views from several surrounding LCAS.

## Evaluation

### Special Qualities

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

Criteria	Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area	Sensitivities
<b>Scenic quality and Sense of place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High scenic quality and sense of place, resulting from the composition of soft, wooded valleys and distinctive uplands. The surrounding LCAs (particularly the Black Mountains and Eastern Usk Valley) contribute to its character and views.</li> </ul>	Visually-intrusive development in surrounding areas affecting views, particularly where it extends up valley sides.
<b>Landscape quality and integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A high-quality landscape, with farmland, woodland and moorland generally well managed and in good condition.</li> </ul>	Changes in grazing management or species composition affecting moorland vegetation (e.g. bracken infestation).
<b>Perceptual qualities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long views, openness and elevation give a sense of tranquillity despite their proximity to Abergavenny and other settlements. Indeed, the presence of settlements as small elements in views from high land can enhance the viewer's sense of detachment.</li> </ul>	Loss of tranquillity as a result of visible or audible development in surrounding areas.
<b>Artistic and cultural associations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous legends explaining the unusual shape of Skirrid.</li> </ul>	
<b>Rarity or representativeness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very distinctive landforms give the surrounding area a strong sense of place.</li> </ul>	
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive ancient deciduous woodlands (including Coed y Cerrig Nations Nature Reserve) which cover the lower slopes of Sugar Loaf are designated SAC and SSSI for their woodland and wet woodland habitats. Other ancient woodland exists in valleys throughout the area. Other SSSIs include Llanvihangel Moraine, Usk bat sites (also SAC), and the tributaries of the River Usk (also SAC).</li> </ul>	Loss of woodland as a result of poor management, disease (e.g. <i>Phytophthora ramorum</i> ) or climate change.
<b>Cultural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A rich cultural landscape, including three Registered Historic Parks/ Gardens (Abergavenny Priory Deer Park, Llanfihangel Court and Trewyn 17<sup>th</sup> Century gardens), and four Scheduled Monuments, of which three are medieval sites. There are also many historic buildings, including the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Skirrid Inn and a network of deep, ancient lanes.</li> </ul>	Potential neglect of historic landscape features in private ownership. Loss of character of rural lanes through insensitive highways development or road signs.

<p><b>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skirrid and Sugar Loaf contain numerous footpaths and are very popular walks for visitors and local people. Coed y Cerrig National Nature Reserve provides public access to a wet woodland site of international importance.</li> </ul>	<p>Large numbers of visitors leading to footpath erosion, and damage to habitats and archaeological sites.</p>
<p><b>Recreation provision and access</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A high-quality recreation experience which is easily accessible from Abergavenny town and railway station. There are several campsites in the LCA, and Skirrid is the start of the Beacons Way Long Distance Route.</li> </ul>	

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

Principal ecosystem services include food production from pasture and upland rough grazing. Tributaries of the Usk provide food and recreation services including fish, angling and access to water. In common with the rest of the National Park, this LCA also contributes to cultural services such as spiritual enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism and aesthetic experiences.

Green Infrastructure assets include numerous area of woodland, and long-distance paths including Offa’s Dyke Path and Beacons Way. The Stanton and Coed y Cerrig Nature Reserves are educational and recreational features.



*Coppice trees at Coed y Cerrig wet woodland nature reserve*



*SSSI and SAC ancient woodland to south of Sugar Loaf. The medieval deer park pale runs across the centre of the picture*



*View from the summit of Sugar Loaf showing the Usk Valley and Black Mountains beyond.*

## **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**

- Past and continuing expansion of adjacent settlements, making them more prominent in views.
- Traditional use of the Gavenny- Monnow watershed (running north-south between Sugar Loaf and Skirrid) as a transport corridor. Traffic on the A465 and railway line and the A465 add dynamic elements to the landscape.
- Coniferous plantation on the western slope of Skirrid.
- Construction of prominent, large-scale agricultural buildings, and diversification of agriculture away from traditional hillfarming towards arable cropping, poultry farming, etc.
- Conversions of traditional barns to residential use.
- Spread of bracken over areas of heather moorland/ grassland, particularly on Sugar Loaf.
- Reduced diversity of moorland vegetation as a result of changing common grazing practices. See section 6.0 for more detail.
- Decline in the traditional management of woodlands.
- Damage to hedgebanks alongside roads due to increased volumes of traffic or use by wide vehicles.
- Construction of mobile phone masts.
- Pipelines including gas supply and the water main from Grwyne reservoir to Abertillery affecting surface vegetation and buries archaeology.

#### **Future**

- Continued expansion of settlements.
- Decline in traditional hillfarms, and potential changes to agri-environment schemes affecting grazing patterns and vegetation, e.g. effects and outcomes of the Glastir Common Land Element.
- Intensification of farming in valleys, including construction of large farm infrastructure buildings, and decline in management of traditional features such as hedgebanks, hay meadows, vernacular buildings etc.
- Climate change potentially affecting the environmental conditions and species diversity of woodlands and upland areas.
- Loss of woodland and trees to pests/ diseases (e.g. *Phytophthora ramorum*).
- Potential loss, neglect or damage to historic built features and parks/ gardens within the landscape, especially if in private ownership.
- Continued positive moorland management, programmes of bracken control etc.



*Cumulative effects of incremental changes: Mobile phone mast, new woodland planting and barn conversion north of Skirrid.*



*Controlling the spread of bracken is an ongoing management issue on Sugar Loaf.*



*Abergavenny has a strong visual and cultural relationship with the surrounding peaks.*

## Strategy

### Overall Strategy

**To enhance the settings of the area's distinctive landforms, ensuring that the special qualities of upland peaks and surrounding valleys are retained and enhanced.** Traditional management of upland commons, woodlands and farmland is encouraged. The historic features and landscapes of the area are maintained in good condition. Long views from high land are not affected by visually-intrusive development. Discreet visitor management enables high numbers of visitors to enjoy popular routes without damage to sensitive habitats or features.

### LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

#### Protect

- Protect the **open moorland landscape** with its **distinctive profiles** and upland habitats.
- Protect the area's long **views**, minimising visual impacts from development in surrounding areas, (including outside the National Park boundary).
- Protect the area's **network of quiet lanes** enclosed by **species-rich hedgebanks**, ensuring that their character is not lost through unsympathetic highways works or signage.
- Protect enclosed **valley landscapes** and their **traditional features** such as vernacular farm buildings, hedgerows and hay meadows.
- Protect (through appropriate management) the area's **archaeological and historical sites** and their settings.

#### Manage

- Manage areas of **upland moorland** through encouragement of appropriate levels of livestock grazing and heather management to enhance biodiversity and maintain an open moorland landscape. Encourage control of bracken infestation to prevent it dominating other moorland vegetation.
- Encourage a **viable farming community** which enables the biodiversity and traditional appearance of the landscape to be retained.
- Manage **ancient woodlands** using traditional techniques to increase age and species diversity, and remove invasive non-native species where necessary.
- Manage **valley-floor meadows** using appropriate grazing and cutting to retain their biodiversity.
- Manage **recreational pressure** (particularly on popular walking routes) in order to minimise damage to habitats, paths and archaeological features.

#### Plan

- Plan to **create, extend and link semi-natural habitats such as woodlands**, heaths and meadows.
- Plan to **minimise the impacts on views** resulting from future development and transport infrastructure.
- Plan to develop a **Park-wide visitor management strategy** to minimise impacts of visitors on popular sites, and encourage visitors to explore lesser-known parts of the National Park.