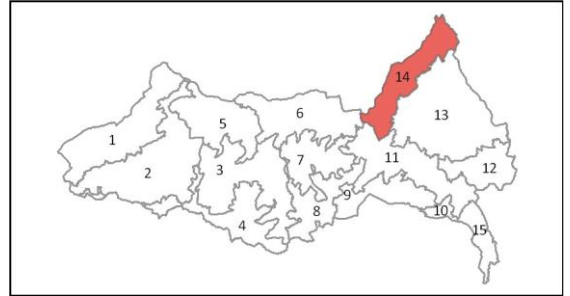


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 14: WYE VALLEY FOOTHILLS**Broad Landscape Type: LOWLANDS****Description****Location and Context**

This linear LCA lies between the northern escarpment of the Black Mountains and the northern National Park Boundary. Hay-on-Wye is located at its north-eastern end of the LCA, which contributes to the setting of the town. At its western end (near Llangors Lake) it merges with the Middle and Eastern Usk LCAs.

**Summary Description**

A series of ridges run down from the Black Mountains towards the Wye Valley, creating a series of narrow, enclosed valleys which gradually broaden out. These valleys form the basis of a strongly agricultural landscape, visually dominated by the northern scarp of the Black Mountains, with farms nestling at the heads of valleys. It is a well-wooded landscape with ancient woodlands on valley sides and alongside streams, as well as some conifer plantations. The tops of the ridges support heath habitats, and many contain prehistoric monuments. Along the northern edge of the LCA are a series of nucleated settlements (Hay-on-Wye being the largest). Llangors Lake is an important archaeological and recreation site.



Typical scene near Llanigon, showing farmland and woodland with the northern scarp of the Black Mountains

Historical Development of the Landscape

This landscape has been shaped by patterns of settlement and farming for many centuries. The earliest features are prehistoric ritual sites (including tombs) which have survived on unenclosed higher land. Hay Castle dates from the early Norman period, and there are many other Medieval features, including the famous crannog on Llangors Lake. As well as the castles, many of the villages, churches, roads, field patterns and farms date from the Medieval period. Evidence for later quarrying and industrial use of the landscape includes tramways and pottery kilns.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Underlying geology of Devonian mudstones, with older Silurian mudstones in the Wye valley. The Brownstones scarp face of the Black Mountains lies immediately to the south.
- A series of ridges and intervening valleys running from the base of the Black Mountains scarp down towards the Wye valley.
- Llangors Lake (at the southern end of the LCA) the largest natural lake in Wales, formed in a large glacial kettle hole. A series of spring-fed steep mountain streams with waterfalls flow north-west from the base of the Black Mountains scarp to the Wye Valley.
- Land use predominantly agricultural (pastoral on valley sides, with some arable on flatter land), with areas of woodland, forest and common.
- Field boundaries mostly hedged, with high hedgebanks along lanes. Field patterns irregular in valleys, but straight-edged fields on higher land indicates later enclosure.
- Extensive ancient deciduous woodland on steep valley sides and alongside streams. Some areas of coniferous forestry, and occasional parkland trees.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including mixed oak and ash woodlands, upland heath, lowland grassland, hedgerows, wetlands and reed beds.
- A rich historic landscape with a long history of settlement and defence. Archaeological sites include Neolithic chambered tombs and the early-medieval crannog (artificial island) on Llangors Lake, possibly built by Brychan, king of Brycheiniog in the 9th century.
- Norman town of Hay-on-Wye the largest settlement, at the northern tip of the LCA. A line of smaller villages follows the north-western boundary of the LCA.
- Contrasts of pattern, colour and texture between ridges and valleys, visually dominated by the Black Mountains scarp.

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

Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Black Mountains Northern fringe (O); Llangorse Lake Basin (H); Black Mountains (O); Three Cocks farmland (M); Llangorse Lake (O); Talgath (M); Hay-on-Wye (H); Wye Valley (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

Hay-on-Wye is the largest and most well-known settlement in this LCA, and its landscape setting is integral to the town’s identity and sense of place. Like the other smaller settlements in this LCA (e.g. Talgarth, Trefecca, Felindre, Llangors), Hay-on-Wye is located within the valley floor, and because it is set low in the landscape, is relatively well hidden in views from surrounding areas. The valley-floor villages are generally nucleated in form, although some (e.g. Llangors) have some modern linear development. There are historic farms scattered throughout the area, often at the heads of valleys. Barn conversions are common, as are larger modern agricultural buildings.

Key Views

This LCA forms the foreground to views north from the top of the Black Mountains scarp, and also forms the setting to the Black Mountains scarp in views looking south-east from the Wye Valley. Views within the LCA are often dominated by the Black Mountains scarp, and there are long views out across the Wye valley from high land.

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"> Scenic quality and a strong sense of place resulting from the backdrop of the Black Mountains scarp, the varied landform, and the harmonious but interesting composition of farmland, woodland and common land. 	Changes in land management and loss of landscape features associated with traditional hillfarming, e.g. common land and hedgerows. Introduction of incongruous features into the landscape.
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High landscape quality and condition, reflecting the overall good management of the land. Historic landscape patterns are generally well-preserved with few detracting influences, particularly away from the Wye Valley. 	As above
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate levels of tranquillity over much of the area, partly due to the ridged landform which creates a sense of isolation, and reduces factors (such as road noise and views to development) which detract from tranquillity. Despite being a settled landscape, much of the LCA has a strong sense of timelessness. 	Increased presence of factors detracting from tranquillity (e.g. roads; views of development)
Artistic and cultural associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many literary connections, including the annual Hay-on-Wye literary festival. The early Welsh Stanzas <i>Canu Llywarch Hen</i> may have been written at Llangors, and parts of the LCA are also within 'Kilvert Country' described in Rev. Francis Kilvert's 19th century diary. Treffecca College was an early Methodist community and educational establishment. 	
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of nature conservation sites, including heathland, woodland, grassland, wetland and geological SSSIs, and SACs at Llangors Lake and River Wye. 	Loss of extent or biodiversity of woodlands and other semi-natural habitats as a result of changing farming practices or reduced management.
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An historic landscape with a long history of settlement and defence reflected in the 	Loss of archaeological features as a result of

	<p>number and variety of Scheduled Monuments and other archaeological sites, and the inclusion of much of the area in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales. (Areas 36+58). Of particular note are the prehistoric ritual sites (including tombs such as Penywyrhod), surviving medieval field systems on higher areas, and also medieval defensive sites on lower land (including Hay Castle, and Llangors crannog).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rich built heritage (particularly in Hay-on-Wye) with Conservation Areas at Hay-on-Wye and Talgarth, historic parks and gardens, and associations with 12th century chronicler Gerald of Wales, who visited and described this area. 	<p>natural processes, erosion or damage.</p> <p>Loss or neglect of historic buildings or landscapes (particularly those in private ownership) and loss of architectural integrity due to insensitive modernisation.</p>
<p>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good network of lanes and footpaths (including the Three Rivers Ride) provides access into the landscape. There are accessible conservation sites at Park Wood, Pwll-y-wrach and Llangasty Nature Reserves. 	
<p>Recreation provision and access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied recreation opportunities, ranging from gliding, to watersports on Llangors Lake to Hay-on-Wye book festival. Hay-on-Wye is a centre for tourist accommodation, and there are also campsites and adventure centres. 	

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

The principal ecosystem services are provisioning and cultural services. Extensive lowland agricultural land provides a source of food production, with woodland areas providing a source of fuel and timber. 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. Llangors Lake and its associated recreational facilities are prominent Green Infrastructure features. Woodland areas, Park Wood and Pwll-y-wrach Nature Reserves, long distance trails and heritage features form a network of Green Infrastructure assets.



Meadow below the Black Mountains scarp.



Hay-on-Wye in its landscape setting



Llangors Lake

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

- Plantations of conifers, and disused stone extraction quarries visible in the landscape.
- Decline in traditional hillfarming and associated loss of traditional features of the agricultural landscape, e.g. replacement of stone walls or hedges with post and wire fencing.
- Intensification of agriculture resulting in large-scale agricultural buildings and alternative crops which affect the appearance of the landscape (e.g. bright yellow oil seed rape is visible over a wide area).
- Conversion of redundant agricultural buildings to domestic use.
- Lack of management of woodlands (e.g. decline in coppicing).
- Loss or damage to archaeological features and built heritage due to neglect/ poor management/ damage/ natural processes.
- Visual impacts and damage to sensitive habitats by illegal use of 4x4 vehicles and off-road motorbikes.
- Recreational influences at Llangors (boats, caravans etc.) and conflicts between different user groups (e.g. between sailing and motor boats).
- Water quality issues at Llangors Lake, including eutrophication.
- Housing demand and settlement expansion.
- Gas pipeline construction permanently affecting surface vegetation and buried archaeology.

Future

- Agricultural changes including continued modernisation (including increased scale of farm infrastructure buildings) and a decline in traditional hillfarming techniques such as grazing of common land and meadows, affecting biodiversity and the traditional appearance of the landscape.
- Future changes in agricultural grants and funding potentially affecting the maintenance of traditional landscape features such as hedgerows.
- Loss of trees and woodlands as a result of climate change, poor management and lack of replacement of veteran trees.
- Future development and settlement expansion, particularly in the Wye valley.
- Potential conflicts between demands for recreation and nature conservation at sites such as Llangors Lake.



Scarring and vegetation damage by off-road vehicles



Intensive water-based recreation at Llangors



New housing development Felindre

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To conserve and enhance this agricultural and historic landscape, retaining the quality of settings to settlements, and accommodating development and recreation sensitively without compromising its special qualities.

Agriculture is encouraged (for example through enabling modernisation to be done as sensitively as possible) and the landscapes associated with traditional hillfarming are retained and enhanced. The historic features and built/ designed heritage of the area are appropriately managed and maintained, and their settings are respected. Recreational facilities and new development are sensitively accommodated within the landscape. The area remains an attractive foreground to views from higher land, and views from within the area remain free from intrusive modern development.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect the **open upland skylines** which form the backdrop to the area.
- Protect and appropriately manage the landscape's numerous **historic and archaeological sites**.
- **Protect** (and manage) **historic features within the agricultural landscape such as hay meadows, field boundaries and narrow lanes**.
- Protect and enhance the **built heritage** of the area and the settings of settlements.

Manage

- Manage **semi-natural habitats** such as grassland, wetlands and commons to retain biodiversity, using appropriate levels of grazing.
- Manage **woodland** to improve age and species diversity, using traditional techniques (e.g. coppicing) where appropriate, and control of non-native species.
- Manage **archaeological sites** and their settings, with sensitive interpretation as appropriate.
- Manage **designed landscapes**, replacing parkland/ veteran trees to ensure their continued presence within the landscape.
- Manage **recreation** (particularly around Llangors) to minimise its impacts on the landscape and biodiversity of the area, and to minimise conflicts between different recreational users.

Plan

- Plan to **create, extend and link semi-natural habitats** such as woodland, wetlands and grassland.
- Plan to **minimise the visual impacts** on this area of any **developments within or outside the National Park boundary, ensuring that new developments are well designed and sited**.