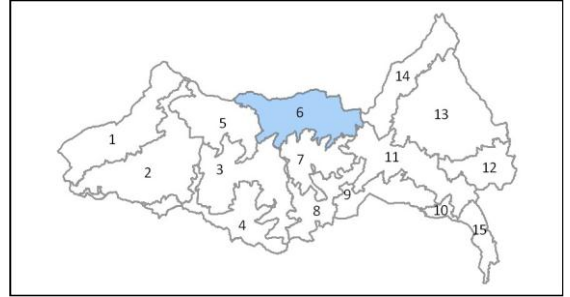


**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 6: *MIDDLE USK VALLEYS*****Broad Landscape Type: *SETTLED VALLEYS******Description*****Location and Context**

This LCA is located in the north-central part of the National Park, between the Central Beacons LCA and the National Park boundary. It includes the settlements of Brecon and Sennybridge. Its boundaries with adjacent LCAs are transitional rather than abrupt: the Western Usk Tributaries to the west and the Eastern Usk Valley and the Wye Valley foothills to the east. Its character continues northwards beyond the National Park boundary.

**Summary Description**

This is an area of transitional landscape, connecting the uplands of the Central Beacons with the lower and more settled Usk Valley. It is visually dominated by the high northern scarps of the Central Beacons which form a dramatic southern backdrop to the area. A generally pastoral agricultural landscape of green fields divided by hedgerows, its character is also locally influenced by upland heath, designed parklands, urban development, valley floodplain and transport routes. A landscape of historical strategic importance, it contains defensive sites from the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval periods, and as well as recent military use.



*View of Brecon town and the Central Beacons from Pen-y-crug Hillfort*

**Historical Development of the Landscape**

Despite its peaceful appearance, many of the surviving historic features in this landscape reflect its strategic position and its need for defence over many centuries. Such sites include Iron-Age hillforts, Roman fort, Medieval castles, mottes and town defences, and more recent military sites including the army's Welsh headquarters at Brecon. Legacies also survive from more peaceful times, including historic houses and their associated parklands from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the historic Monmouthshire and Brecon canal.

**Distinctive Characteristics**

- Underlying geology largely of red/ brown Devonian mudstones with occasional sandstones overlain by glacial deposits of clay, and fertile alluvium deposited by rivers.
- Gently undulating landform containing the valley of the River Usk, and several tributary valleys leading down from the Central Beacons. Isolated hills of harder rock are prominent in the landscape (e.g. Yr Allt and Fenni-Fach).
- River Usk flows within a broad floodplain along the northern boundary before turning south-east. Fed by a series of rocky, fast-flowing tributary streams (e.g. Tarell and Cynrig). Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal follows the River Usk south-east of Brecon
- Predominantly pastoral land use, with pockets of heathland, forestry, arable, parkland, urban and military land uses.
- Field boundaries generally hedgerows (often trimmed) enclosing semi-regular fields).
- A variety of trees, including hedgerow and riparian trees, coppice woodlands, small conifer plantations and parkland trees including veteran trees and non-native specimens.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including broadleaved woodland, dry heath/ acid grassland, neutral grassland, fen and standing water.
- Historic features from a range of periods (from prehistoric hillforts to early modern canal) but with a concentration of transport-based and defensive structures including Pen-y-crug hillfort, Y Gaer Roman fort and Medieval castles, mottes, town banks etc. Later historic parks and country houses also influence the landscape.
- The town of Brecon on a crossing point of the Usk, with its castle, cathedral (originally a priory church) colourful Georgian houses, and modern peripheral housing and industrial buildings.
- Important past and current transport corridors, including the A40, A470, and the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.
- Good recreation/ tourist infrastructure e.g. Cycle / riding trails, National Park Visitor Centre, youth hostel, B&Bs.
- Visually dominated by the Central Beacons on the southern horizon, this is a relatively open landscape with a settled, verdant feel.

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

<b>Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas</b>	Glyn Tarell and Cynrig valley (H); Clos Coed and environs (H); Cilieni Valley (M); Sennybridge (L); Usk Valley West of Brecon (H); Mynydd Bach Trecastell (H); Mynydd Illtyd (H); Forest Lodge (M); Usk Valley East of Brecon (H); Ysgir Valley (M); Honddu Valley (H); Felinfach Farmlands (M); Llanfilo Farmlands (M); Brecon (M)
<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**

This LCA contains the historic town of Brecon- an important local commercial and administrative centre, and several smaller nucleated villages including Sennybridge (with its military base), Libanus and Llanfrynach. There are also numerous hamlets and scattered farms, many of which are built in traditional materials and styles. The LCA contributes to the approaches, backdrop and setting to these settlements, which themselves influence the character of the landscape, giving it a more settled and developed feel.

**Key Views**

High points such as Pen-y-crug hillfort offer panoramic views across the LCA and the countryside to the north outside the National Park. Views south from within Brecon town towards the Central Beacons create a very strong sense of place. Many major and minor roads within the LCA also have excellent views of the Central Beacons. The area also forms the foreground to views northwards from the summits of the Central Beacons.

**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:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area</b>	<b>Sensitivities</b>
<b>Scenic quality and Sense of place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong sense of place, and high scenic quality particularly due to the visual dominance of the Central Beacons to the south.</li> </ul>	Introduction of visually-intrusive features, particularly on skylines or in locations which impact on views to or from the Central Beacons, and on the setting of Brecon.
<b>Landscape quality and integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A well-managed landscape which forms the setting to the Central Beacons and to the town of Brecon.</li> </ul>	Changes in agricultural practices resulting in loss of traditional landscape features such as hedgerows and vernacular buildings. Decline in grazing affecting common land in the Central Beacons.
<b>Perceptual qualities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Away from towns and main roads, the area has a peaceful, pastoral quality with a sense of timelessness.</li> </ul>	Insensitive development; loss of traditional hillfarming landscapes; Localised impacts of military training.
<b>Artistic and cultural associations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early cultural association with Gerald of Wales who resided at Llanddew outside Brecon. Later strong military associations.</li> </ul>	
<b>Rarity or representativeness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contains some of the most familiar and well-known views in the National Park, creating a very strong sense of local identity.</li> </ul>	As above
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designated nature conservation sites include ancient woodland (especially in river valleys) SSSIs at Nant Menasgin and Blaen-Car woods, Gyfartha meadow, Illtyd Pools (upland marsh) and the River Usk and its tributaries. The latter is also designated SAC as an example of a river running over sandstone forming a linear ecosystem with its associated habitats. Illtyd Pools is a Local Nature Reserve.</li> </ul>	Decline in management of woodland and other sites; river water quality issues.
<b>Cultural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numerous Scheduled Monuments, many of which represent the occupation and defence of this area over millennia. Much of the area is within the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales (area 58).</li> <li>Sites included on the Register of Historic</li> </ul>	Loss of archaeological sites as a result of natural processes, erosion and damage by visitors.  Loss of historic landscape

	<p>parcs and gardens include Penpont (grade II*), an early C.19<sup>th</sup> 'picturesque' park in the Usk Valley influenced by Humphrey Repton and containing some of the earliest larch trees in Britain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The attractive town of Brecon, with its castle, cathedral, bridges, historic college, Georgian buildings and 19<sup>th</sup> Century barracks. The core of the town is a Conservation Area, and there are numerous Listed Buildings.</li> </ul>	<p>features due to neglect or changes in land management (particularly sites in private ownership).</p> <p>Insensitive modernisation affecting the appearance of built heritage features.</p>
<b>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many opportunities for enjoyment of the landscape, including walking, cycling, horse riding, canoeing and boating. Many historic sites are publicly accessible (e.g. Pen-y-crug hillfort; Y Gaer Roman fort).</li> </ul>	
<b>Recreation provision and access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A popular tourist/ recreation area with good tourist infrastructure and a range of attractions including the National Park Visitor Centre, horse riding centres, canoeing launch points on the Usk, the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and towpath, the Taff Trail and the Three Rivers Ride. Accommodation includes numerous hotels, Bed and Breakfasts, campsites and a youth hostel. The area also provides access to popular walks in the Central Beacons.</li> </ul>	<p>Concentrations of recreational activities causing erosion problems and damage to historic/ environmental features.</p> <p>Informal signage and recreational development impacting on the character of the landscape.</p>

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

Principle ecosystem services include pasture and arable farming (food provisioning), woodlands and fresh water. The River Usk provides food and recreation services including fish, angling, watercraft 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. Main Green Infrastructure assets include the River Usk corridor, the extensive mix of coniferous and deciduous woodland stands, Traeth Mawr Nature Reserve, the Taff Trail, and visitor attractions including Brecon Cathedral and the Roman fort at Y Gaer.



*Pen Y Fan with farmland and parkland in the foreground*



*Penpont Parkland in the Usk Valley*



*Brecon Castle and town with the Central Beacons 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***

- Settlement expansion, particularly linear development along main roads, and spreading of Brecon town from the valley floor up on to higher land, making built development much more visible within the landscape.
- Demand for development of settlements, including low-cost housing, economic growth, efficient transport etc.
- Construction and upgrading of main roads with traffic becoming a locally visual and audible presence in the landscape.
- Telecommunications mast on Yr Allt is a prominent feature in the landscape over a wide area.
- Construction of natural gas pipeline causing permanent changes to surface vegetation and buried archaeology.
- Water flows in River Usk affected by reservoir construction, past moorland drainage (grips) and climatic variation.
- Past planting of relatively small-scale conifer plantations on steeper slopes.
- Military training, particularly in the north of the LCA.
- Hedgerow loss and replacement with post-and-wire fencing.
- Decline in traditional hillfarming, particularly in higher and more marginal parts of the LCA. Consequences on the landscape are the amalgamation of farm holdings (sometimes with new, larger-scale farm buildings), dilapidation of traditional farm buildings, poor management of hedgerows and meadows, and undergrazing of common land.
- High-quality conversions of redundant agricultural buildings to residential use.

#### ***Future***

- Continued demand for housing and other development, particularly around existing settlements in the northern part of the area.
- Continued modernisation of agriculture and a decline in traditional hillfarming techniques such as grazing of common land and meadows, affecting biodiversity and the traditional appearance of the landscape.
- Continued amalgamation of farm holdings and a need to construct larger farm buildings.
- Changes in agricultural grants and funding potentially affecting the maintenance of traditional landscape features such as hedgerows.



*Development on edge of Brecon expanding up the hillside*



*The A470 through Glyn Tarell*



*Sign for military vehicles using rural lane south of Brecon*

## Strategy

### Overall Strategy

**To retain and enhance the area's special qualities, in particular its views and historic features, ensuring that any new development is sensitively designed and accommodated within its landscape setting.**

Agriculture is viable, with farmers encouraged to use traditional land management techniques to retain and enhance landscape features and biodiversity. Iconic views to and from the Central Beacons are protected and enhanced, and historic sites, buildings and features are in good condition. The landscape impacts of new developments and military use are minimised. Visitors and local people are encouraged to enjoy the landscape through a wide variety of recreation opportunities, but without detriment to the area's special qualities.

### LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

#### Protect

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

#### Manage

- Manage **recreation** where necessary to encourage enjoyment of the landscape, but minimise its impacts on the landscape and biodiversity of the area, and also to minimise conflicts between different recreational users (e.g. canoeists and fishermen).
- Manage **farmland**, encouraging a viable farming community using traditional methods to manage traditional landscape features and enhance biodiversity.
- Manage **semi-natural habitats** such as grassland, wetlands and commons to retain biodiversity, using appropriate management and 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 where necessary.
- 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 **plantations** to enhance their biodiversity and appearance within the landscape, particularly as trees reach maturity.

#### Plan

- 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**.
- Plan to **work with military authorities** to ensure that military use has minimal impacts on the area's landscape and special qualities.
- Plan to **create, extend and link semi-natural habitats** such as woodland, wetlands and grassland.
- Plan to **encourage local communities to enjoy the landscape**, and to be actively involved in its management.