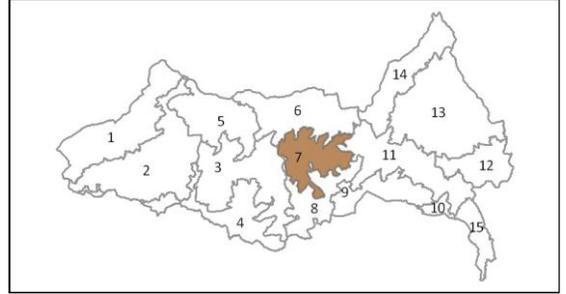


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 7: *CENTRAL BEACONS***Broad Landscape Type: *UPLANDS******Description*****Location and Context**

The Central Beacons LCA is located in the centre of the National Park, and includes Pen y Fan, its highest point. The Uplands continue westwards into the Fforest Fawr LCA, whilst to the north and east are the Middle and Eastern Usk Settled Valleys. To the south are the Talybont and Taff Reservoir Valleys.

**Summary Description**

The dramatic sandstone crags which form the northern face of this LCA are one of the most distinctive and iconic features of the National Park, and form the setting to the town of Brecon and its surroundings. As the highest land in the National Park, the Central Beacons have spectacular views in all directions and provide popular walking routes. It has a sense of being at the heart of the National Park, detached from the more developed areas to the north and south.



Craig Cwn Sere and Cribyn from Bwlch Duwynt

Historical Development of the Landscape

This landscape illustrates human interaction with the landscape over a very long period of time, from clearance of the land in prehistoric times, to the WW2 remains and military memorials of the 20th century. One of the primary influences on this landscape has been the changing patterns of grazing over many centuries, often by hefted flocks of local breeds of sheep and cattle.

Distinctive Characteristics

- Geology of Devonian Senni and Brownstones Formations, highly visible in the northern scarp. Covering of plateau beds on the highest land gives the ridges a flat-topped appearance.
- A glacially-sculpted landscape with a dramatic northern scarp, below a line of dramatic peaks including Pen y Fan (the highest point in the Brecon Beacons at 886m ASL). A series of horseshoe-shaped valleys radiate out from the centre, with a gradual slope downward to the south.
- Fast-flowing streams (fed from springs or upland bogs) radiate out from this central point. The source of the River Taff is in this LCA. Small glacial lake at Llyn Cwm Llŵch below Corn Du.
- Land use almost entirely open grazing on unenclosed common land.
- An open landscape, with trees limited to small patches of wood pasture on sheltered valley sides, although there are views across the adjacent plantations of the Talybont and Taff Reservoir Valleys.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including marshy grassland, montane heath, modified blanket bogs, and dry heath/acid grassland mosaic.
- A range of historic features, including abandoned settlements to 20th century artefacts including pill box, tank traps and military memorials. Relatively few prehistoric sites compared to other LCAs.
- Very little settlement or other development within this LCA. However, views from the area encompass the surrounding settled landscape. The A470 follows the western boundary of the LCA.
- An open, expansive landscape with a sense of airy spaciousness and of being ‘on the top’. The simple texture of the vegetation contrasts with the rough, stripy appearance of the crags. A dramatic, repeating pattern of triangular-shaped faces on the northern scarp, and lines of flat-topped ridges extending into the distance to the east and west.

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

Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Brecon Beacons (O)
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

There is very little settlement within this LCA, although the remains of former settlements can be seen at the periphery of the area. The high peaks of the Central Beacons LCA contribute to the distinctive settings of lower-lying settlements, particularly Brecon.

Key Views

Panoramic views in all directions from summits and a sense of being ‘on top of the world’, whilst experiencing the full east-west extent of the Brecon Beacons. This LCA also forms the backdrop to views from adjacent uplands and valleys.

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"> An iconic landscape which forms the centre of the Brecon Beacons National Park. It has exceptionally high scenic quality and a strong sense of place resulting from its elevation, dramatic and distinctive topography, and panoramic views. 	Introduction of incongruous features into the landscape which affect perceptions of tranquillity, remoteness and relative wildness. These can include recreational infrastructure e.g. car parks, waymarkers, paved paths.
Landscape quality and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An extensive and generally well-managed area of open, undeveloped landscape of high quality, which forms some of the highest land in southern Britain. 	Concentrations of people can also reduce the sense of tranquillity.
Perceptual qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High levels of tranquillity due to the landscape's openness, perceived naturalness, low noise and dark skies (the LCA is within the BBNP core dark skies area). There are few detracting features in terms of human development, but the numbers of people present on paths and summits can reduce the sense of tranquillity. The combination of inaccessibility, landform and absence of settlement gives the central part of the LCA a sense of remoteness. These qualities, combined with its sense of openness and exposure also create a sense of relative wildness, particularly when contrasted with the settled valleys to the north. The landscape can become hostile in poor weather conditions. 	<p>Development within or outside the LCA which impacts on views from summits (particularly on the lower land which forms the LCA's northern setting, and on the summits of the east-west ridge of the Brecon Beacons).</p> <p>As this open, exposed landscape is higher than its surroundings, it forms the horizon in views from many surrounding areas. It is therefore particularly sensitive to the introduction of features on its skylines (e.g trees, telecommunications masts) which would be prominent in views from a wide area.</p>
Artistic and cultural associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visited by Tudor chronicler John Leyland (1506-52) who distinguishes between 'Arture's hille- the top or highest of the peaks' (probably Pen y Fan) and Banne Brekeniawk- the Brecon Beacons. 	
Rarity or representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The northern scarp of the Central Beacons, with its triangular crags, is an iconic symbol for the Brecon Beacons National Park, and contains rare plant species. 	
Natural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of importance for nature conservation, containing a very extensive SSSI (with smaller areas also designated SAC) 	Changes in land management, e.g. changes in grazing levels affecting the composition of moorland vegetation.

	designated for their moorland and cliff habitats. Crags and wet flushes contain a number of rare plants including Arctic alpine plants, bog orchids and Hawkweeds unique to the Brecon Beacons. Relict soil deposits enable the reconstruction of past environments.	Damage to fragile habitats through intense recreational use. Changes in environmental conditions (e.g. air and water quality) and water retention affecting surface vegetation, geological exposures and cave systems.
Cultural heritage features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorials within the landscape include the Tommy Jones Obelisk and a discreet military memorial near the summit of Pen y Fan. There are also aeroplane crash sites. Scheduled Monuments include abandoned settlements from the prehistoric and medieval periods, and a Roman road crosses the area north-south. It also has a notable absence of prehistoric ceremonial sites compared with the slightly lower surrounding upland areas. 	Loss/ damage to archaeological features through natural processes and erosion by visitors.
Opportunities for landscape enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main summits and ridges are exceptionally popular walking routes with stunning views. The summit of Pen y Fan is relatively accessible, being an hour's walk from the A470 on a well-made path. 	The popularity of the area for recreation can lead to footpath and habitat erosion, and also reduce the sense of tranquillity and remoteness which visitors come to seek
Recreation provision and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good recreation infrastructure in terms of car parks, paths, Beacons Way etc. providing access into the landscape. 	

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

Principal ecosystem services include provisioning through rough grazing and fresh water supply, and regulation and supporting services through deep peat, organic soils and water regulation. 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. There is potential for electricity generation through high head micro-hydro schemes. Main Green Infrastructure assets include the Beacons Way and open access to uplands.



View north from Corn Du.



Corn Du Brownstones scarp.



The Central Beacons from Libanus

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 reservoirs and planting of forests in adjacent LCAs, affecting views from the area, particularly towards the south.
- Development in surrounding areas (e.g. roads, built development) affecting views from the LCA and reducing its special qualities of tranquillity and dark night skies.
- Loss of habitat variation and ecological resilience as a result of changes in common grazing practices (See section 6.0 for more detail) ,
- Historic air pollution and acid rain, and ongoing nitrogen deposition caused ecological degradation of upland habitats, particularly peat bogs, affecting biodiversity and the water flows in underlying cave systems.
- Bracken encroachment on side slopes.
- Denudation of peat bogs as a result of pollution, acid rain and land management.
- Current reduction in grazing numbers as a result of a decline in traditional hillfarming and common grazing.
- Recreational pressure e.g. path erosion, litter, demand for car parking.
- Pressure to waymark and/or pave popular routes, potentially reducing the area's feeling of wildness and remoteness.

Future

- Continued recreational pressure, and issues of path erosion, car parking etc.
- Loss of 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.
- Positive moorland management improving vegetation diversity and improving the condition of the moorland, including peat bogs.
- Visual impacts associated with the management/ clearance of forestry plantations in adjacent LCAs.
- Developments in adjacent LCAs or beyond the National Park boundary which may affect the views and special qualities of this area, including tranquillity and dark night skies.
- Climate change potentially affecting environmental conditions and upland vegetation.



Path erosion on the summit of Pen y Fan, revealing the underlying sandstone.



Bags of stone (dropped by helicopter) for pitching the popular path to Corn Du from Storey Arms.



20th century forestry plantations and reservoirs have dramatically changed views to the south.

Strategy

Overall Strategy

To protect the area's open, undeveloped, dramatic and tranquil landscapes, and enhance its special qualities. Recreation is encouraged, but discreetly managed to minimise its environmental and visual impacts. Appropriate levels of grazing and other land management techniques are encouraged to improve the area's biodiversity and upland habitats. Historic and cultural features within the landscape are protected where necessary. Views out from the LCA are unaffected by visually-intrusive development.

LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

Protect

- Protect the **undeveloped character of the landscape**, and its qualities of **remoteness, tranquillity and dark night skies**.
- Protect the **open moorland landscape**, avoiding the development of vertical structures, the planting of trees and inappropriate path construction methods.
- Protect the area's **geological and geomorphological features**, and its rare habitats and species.
- Protect and enhance valuable **moorland habitats**.
- Protect (through appropriate management) the **archaeological and cultural features** and their settings where appropriate.
- Protect **expansive views** across the LCA and into adjacent areas, paying special regard to the adjacent lowlands and the uninterrupted ridges which extend to the east and west.

Manage

- Manage and enhance **upland habitats**, retaining and increasing the area's biodiversity.
- Manage **wetland** sites such as blanket bog to increase carbon sequestration and water storage capacity, reducing impacts of water flows on cave and river systems and potentially reducing downstream flooding.
- Manage **common grazing land** through the encouragement of a viable grazing regime which supports traditional hillfarming practices, encourages biodiversity and retains an open moorland landscape.
- Manage **recreational pressure** (e.g. footpath erosion) to minimise its visual impacts and damage to sensitive habitats. Minimise impacts of recreation on **perceptions of remoteness and tranquillity**.

Plan

- Plan to retain the area's **dark skies** and reduce incidence of light pollution.
- Plan for the **creation, extension and linking of traditional moorland habitats**, e.g. heather moorland, blanket bog and heath. Reduce the overall area of acid grassland through encouragement of heather regeneration (whilst maintaining a mosaic of habitats for ground nesting birds and to retain species diversity).
- Plan to **manage recreation strategically** across the National Park, encouraging visitors to explore areas beyond the popular 'honeypot' sites and summits.