

## Landscape, Seascape & Cultural Services

Shaped by nature and people over time, landscapes are the settings in which we live, work and experience life. All landscapes matter. They combine natural resources, culture and economy. Many environmental resilience and place-based planning challenges that shape our future wellbeing and prosperity are best addressed at a landscape-scale.

Landscape characteristics and qualities combine to create a distinct sense of place. Sense of place is key to understanding how we derive cultural inspiration and wellbeing from landscape. Understanding the contribution of landscape to cultural services is part of the natural resources approach.

[www.naturalresources.wales/landscape](http://www.naturalresources.wales/landscape)

## The North-West Wales Landscape

Extensive upland and coastal areas characterise the area, together with intervening lowlands and settlements. Snowdonia National Park, 'Eryri', covers the main upland spine of mountains, with further upland moors to the east, in Conwy.

Coastal areas include the Llŷn peninsula, much of which is included within the Llŷn AONB and the Isle of Anglesey, whose coast is mostly included in the Anglesey AONB.

Rural lowlands in Arfon, Dwyfor and inland Conwy contrast with a highly developed northern coast in Conwy along major transport routes.

## Distinctive landscapes and sense of place

**Snowdonia National Park**, the first and largest in Wales, is internationally known for its rugged, mountainous landscapes and dramatic views. The Park covers nine mountain ranges and Wales' 15 highest peaks, notably Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon Summit, 1085m, highest in England and Wales). Other ranges include the Carneddau, Glyderau and Moelwynion in the north, and the Rhinogydd and Cadair Idris in the south. There are numerous glacial features including sharp ridges, cirques, cliffs, lakes (including Llŷn Tegid, Wales' largest), bogs, rivers and waterfalls. It is a geologically diverse area, playing an important part in the early development of geology as science. The Park draws in many visitors who explore and admire the natural drama of the scenery but this has resulted in various 'honeypot' locations, the growth of active outdoor pursuits, and visitor management pressures.

Largely an inland landscape, the Park touches the coast at Conwy and Cardigan bays. In the latter, the three large sandy estuaries of the rivers Glaslyn/Dwryrd, Mawddach and Dyfi provide iconic scenery and the rare juxtaposition of sea inlets penetrating upland mountainous areas. Adjacent open sandy coast both in and outside the Park boundary draws many tourists but has resulted in large, incongruous caravan park estates in places.



Dwyrdd estuary, Snowdonia National Park © John Briggs

Farming (grazing) and forestry cover much of the land that is not open mountain. Small farms with stone wall field patterns overlay the topography. Steep valley sides influence main travel routes, requiring a number of high passes. There are also several large afforested areas including Dyfi, Coed-y-Brenin, Gwydir and Beddgelert Forests. These attract much recreational use today, with some woods providing additional picturesque qualities in association with their planting and management, and their setting of mountains, lakes and rivers.



Tanygrisau from Moelwyn Bach © John Briggs

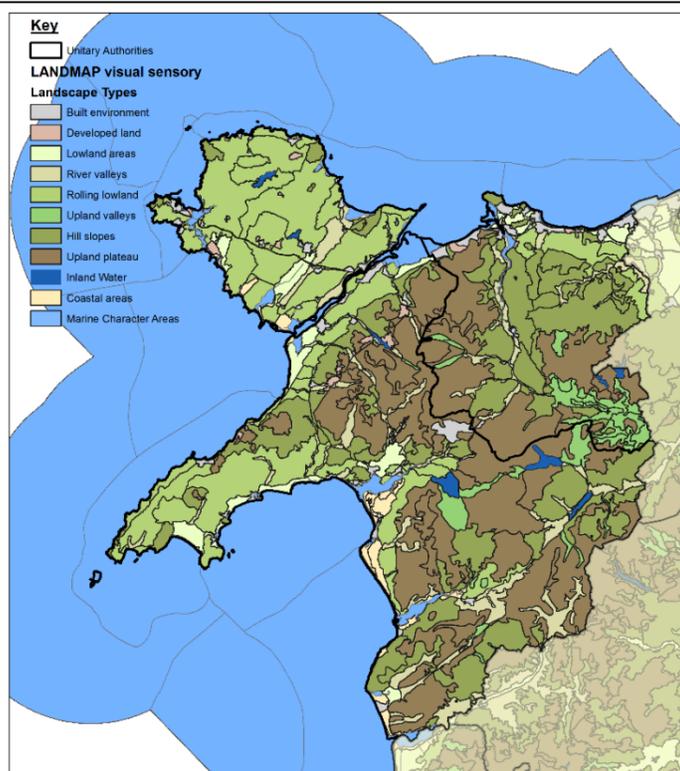
**Gwynedd** includes fringes of upland around the edges of the Park, especially where settlement and quarrying/mining have left their marks. Notably for slate, but also for lead, zinc, manganese, copper and gold, a rich quarrying and mining heritage has resulted. Major slate quarry areas with a 'landscape-scale' of activity include Penrhyn (partly still active), Dinorwic, Nantlle and Blaenau Ffestiniog. Distinctive Welsh-speaking slate mining communities are reflected in slate-mining towns such as Bethesda and Blaenau Ffestiniog as well as 'gwerin' landscapes of small-holdings such as those at Mynydd Llandegai and around Y Fron/Nebo.

Gwynedd also includes much rural lowland and coast, plus several outlying hills and mountains. The landscape of Arfon is generally pastoral but has a few landed estates including Penrhyn, Faenol and Glynllifon. The coast of Arfon is that of the incised and rapidly flowing Menai Strait, either end of which there are extensive sheltered intertidal areas at Foryd Bay and Traeth Lafan, noted for their wildlife. The small city of Bangor and the historic castle town of Caernarfon also mark each end of the Strait, and associated main roads and villages provide a sense of busyness in places, with Bangor being the regional centre. In contrast, the coast of the Llŷn peninsula is characteristically more exposed and feels more remote, especially near the tip and on Bardsey Island. Strong winds batter the cliffs and in exposed areas there are few trees, shelter being formed by clawdd (stone-faced hedgebanks) with narrow lanes and strong field patterns. Llŷn also has a spine of distinct, conical mountains, widely visible from both distant Anglesey and Meirionnydd. These mountains plunge dramatically into the sea on part of the north Llŷn coast, resulting in a remote coastline where travel routes have to deviate inland.

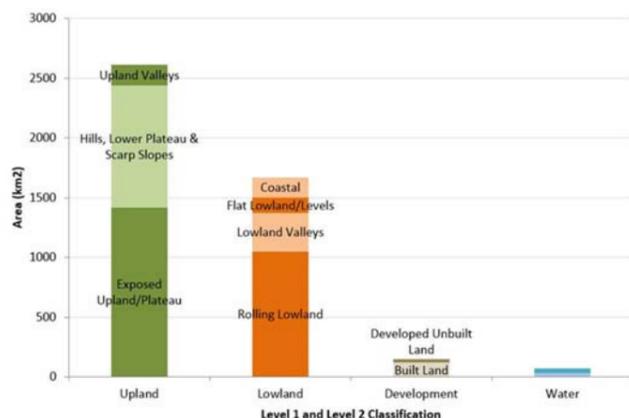
On the **Isle of Anglesey**, much of the scenic and visual distinctiveness is associated with coastal natural landforms and features, including headlands, rivers, dunes, beaches and saltmarshes. South-western coasts are more open to prevailing winds and have more windswept landscapes with larger dunes, some of which reach inland and impound lakes. Coastal views across to Great Orme, Snowdonia and the Llŷn Peninsula provide a grander scale of setting. Heaths, pastoral landscapes with craggy knolls, and low rugged hills are found more inland. The pastoral land use has retained prehistoric, medieval and post medieval influences including standing stones, irregular fieldscapes, stone walls and clawdd hedgebanks. Anglesey has comparatively few trees compared to other parts of Wales (3% cover) and much of this is contained within two large coniferous woodlands, at Newborough and Pentraeth. Small, distinct, windswept and rugged mountains exist at Holyhead and Bodafon, which stand out in longer distance views. Also, Parys Mountain is a striking upland open cast copper mine landscape of relic workings and tips and strangely coloured, exposed minerals.

## Headline characteristics

- Dramatic mountains (highest in Wales) and extensive coastal scenery with some peninsulas and islands.
- Many designated landscapes: 47% National Park (Snowdonia), 8% AONBs (Llŷn and Anglesey), 26% for nature conservation (e.g. SSSI, SPA, SAC, Ramsar, NNR, LNR, SINIC).
- 58% upland (2611km<sup>2</sup>), a third of which are exposed upland/plateau landscapes
- 37% Lowland (1671km<sup>2</sup>), two thirds being rolling
- Only 3% (national average 5.14%) is development (148 km<sup>2</sup>), much located along Conwy's northern coast. Settlement is usually along key transport routes, coastal and slate quarrying areas.
- 70km<sup>2</sup> is landscape characterised by water, with over a hundred small lakes in Snowdonia and near south-western coasts of Anglesey.
- 34% is Heritage Coast, with significant overlaps with AONB
- 4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Harlech, Caernarfon, Beaumaris and Conwy, collectively known as the 'Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd'
- 14 Registered Historic Landscapes. In Gwynedd, most of the coast and much of Llŷn, Meirionnydd and Arfon are included.
- Significant areas with mining and quarrying heritage, especially slate on Snowdonia fringes.
- Major afforested areas within uplands or near coastal dunes.
- Coastal estuaries notably Conwy, Glaslyn/Dwryrd, Mawddach and Dyfi plus Menai Strait.
- Extensive dunes and morfa, notably in Meirionnydd and western Anglesey
- Distinctive field patterns: stone walls in uplands and clawdd (stone-faced hedgebank) in Anglesey and Llŷn. Some notable areas of very small field size and ffridd in upland fringes.



## LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Types



The Menai Strait is important to the island's identity, beside which there are a number of landed estates, notably Plas Newydd. The Menai Suspension Bridge and Point Britannia form the only crossing points and offer dramatic views over the strait. Several small islands lie along the coastline, as well as Holy Island, Wales' third largest, with the major settlement and infrastructure associated with Holyhead port. It is the final landward destination for main road and rail links in Wales, on route to Ireland. Holy Island is separated by an estuary-like strait, impounded in part by 2 causeways. Formerly having an aluminium works, a tall chimney still forms a prominent landmark on the approach to Holyhead. Elsewhere in north Anglesey, prominent landmarks include Wylfa Nuclear Power Station and clusters of wind farms.

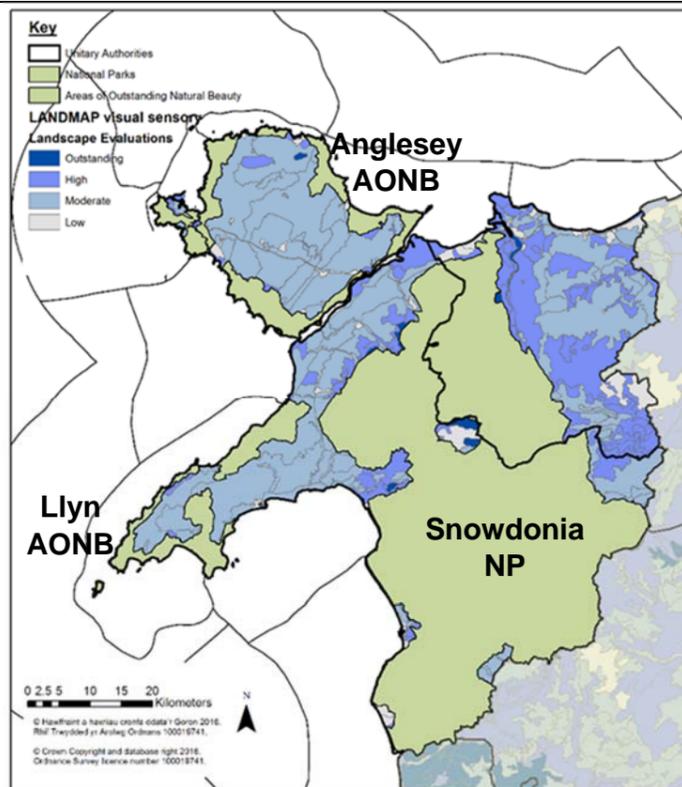
In **Conwy**, the Conwy Valley forms an abrupt eastern edge to the Carneddau mountains of Snowdonia. Upland catchments rapidly descend tumbling waters. Despite a notable flood plain, road and rail routes follow the Conwy valley. The river emerges into Conwy Bay via Wales' longest estuary, with its serpentine meanders running between rolling lowland hills, woodlands and pastures. Conwy town, at the mouth, forms a pinch point crossed by main road and rail routes for the north Wales coast. The town has a sheltered natural harbour, is a 'gateway' for visitors to Snowdonia, and is known for its historic walled town and castle. West of here, road and rail routes have tunnels and other dramatic engineering features along a spectacular section of coast formed from where the mountains of northern Snowdonia directly reach the sea: this is a distinct section like no other on these routes.

The Conwy coast is mostly developed, with much arising since the development of railways for seaside resort tourism. Resorts include Colwyn Bay with its extensive sandy beach, and historic, planned, conserved, Llandudno, the 'Queen of resorts'. Llandudno's setting between dramatic limestone headlands is part of its attraction. The largest of these, Great Orme, is used heavily by visitors while retaining a remarkable sense of undeveloped, rugged remoteness, in contrast to elsewhere on the Conwy coast.

Also in remarkable contrast is the inland hinterland of 'Y Rhos' in Conwy, whose intervening hills make for a quiet, sheltered, rural pastoral landscape that is comparatively little-known by tourists. The division from the coast is formed of hills that include classic limestone rock outcrops, notably as seen south of Llanddualas. Moving further south, the land rises to extensive rolling upland moorland around Mynyedd Hiraethog, beyond which lies the large Clocaenog Forest. From these empty moors there are wide panoramas west to the distinct shapes of the mountains of Snowdonia.

### LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Evaluation

- Over 50% of the landscape is evaluated very highly. The area includes Snowdonia National Park, the Llŷn AONB and Anglesey AONB.
- 13% (574km<sup>2</sup>) is evaluated as a **nationally outstanding** Visual & Sensory landscape, 89% of the outstanding landscapes are upland. The Mawddach estuary in Snowdonia has improved to outstanding
- 39% (1763km<sup>2</sup>) are evaluated as high, **regionally important** landscapes, 68% are upland. Landscapes evaluated as high have increased by 4% (in both upland and lowland locations)
- As a general principle of landscape resource management, we should seek to conserve and enhance outstanding and high landscapes as these contain characteristics of national and county value.
- Qualities such as tranquillity, wildness, naturalness, built heritage and cultural identity, aesthetic appreciation and recreation, are cultural services of landscape that are also valued by people and can occur across many parts of the area
- Within landscapes with lower evaluations, the key principle is enhancement that contributes to wellbeing.

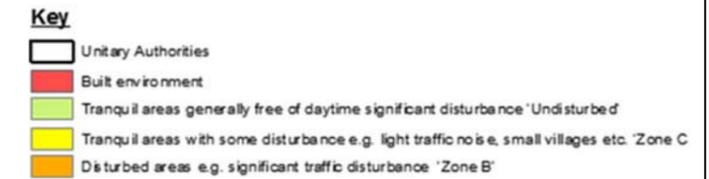
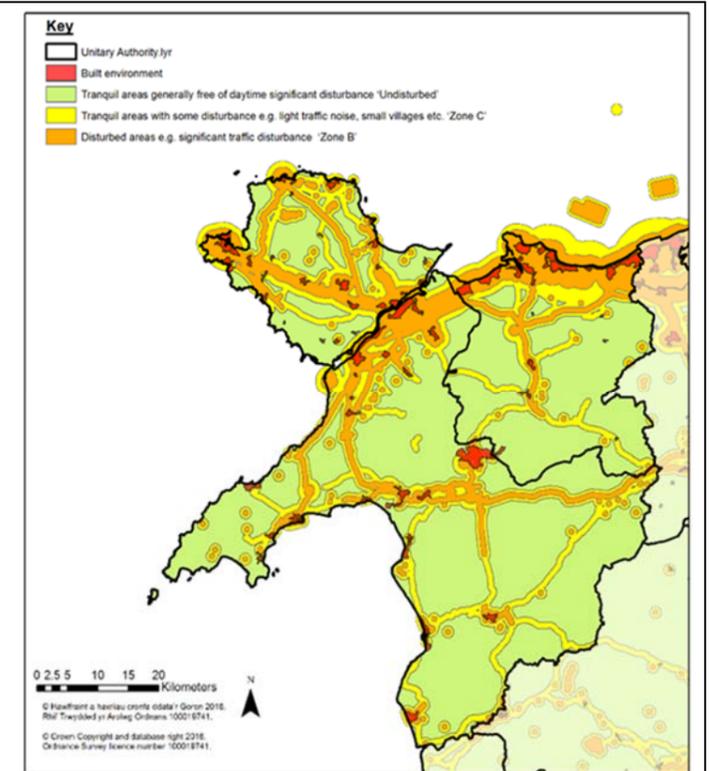


### Tranquillity

- The area includes the nationally designated landscapes Snowdonia National Park, Llŷn Peninsula AONB and Anglesey AONB
- The Berwyn Mountains form one of the two largest tranquil areas that are over 1000km<sup>2</sup> in Wales
- Part of Snowdonia National Park has International Dark Sky status
- Tranquil areas have decreased by 4% (110km<sup>2</sup>) over a 12-year period
- Losses in tranquillity are particularly associated with the North Wales coast



Llŷn peninsula from Ynys Llanddwyn, Anglesey © John Briggs



### Landscape Change

- Settlement expansion from residential areas into adjacent rural areas is especially notable along the coastal strip. Expansion of villages are mostly minor but include a few larger scale housing projects.
- There has been some small-scale expansion of business parks and trading estates, new bypasses, mining and quarrying activity. There is increased noise intrusion from Caernarfon airport
- New solar farm developments are evident as are an increase in single/small scale turbines and increasing caravan/chalet sites
- There has been positive landscape management with Partnerships in upland and coastal areas (e.g. Migneint and Carneddau). Much forestry felling and replanting is evident. Changing The distribution of habitat types and mosaics has been changing across Snowdonia although no simple pattern is apparent. While there has been grazing management there has also been an increase scrub and bracken. While successful programmes to eradicate rhododendron and the management bracken have taken place, the issues are still highly significant in some areas.
- Coastal erosion, flooding of low-lying coastal areas and marshes and recreational pressure on dunes are significant pressures on coastal landscapes and seascapes, as are man-made coastal defences in some areas (e.g. north from Barmouth).

