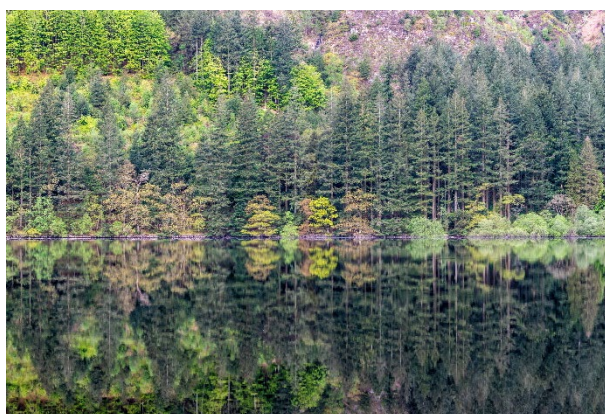
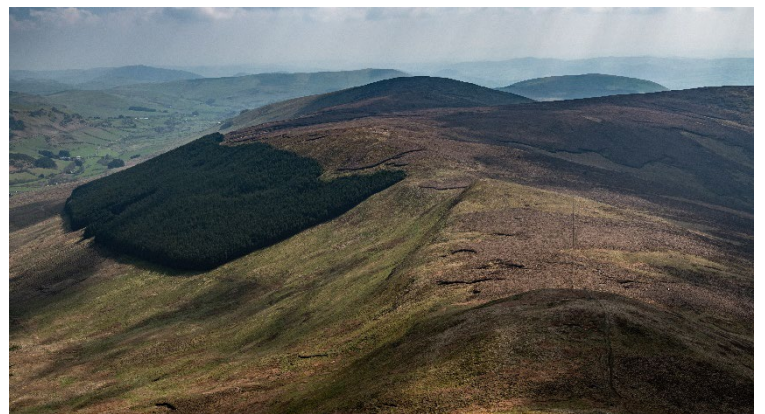


# Area of Search for a potential National Park in North-East Wales



Report No: June 2023

Author Name: Richard Sumner CMLI

Author Affiliation: NRW Lead Specialist Advisor - Landscape

## About Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales' purpose is to pursue sustainable management of natural resources. This means looking after air, land, water, wildlife, plants and soil to improve Wales' well-being, and provide a better future for everyone.

## Evidence at Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales is an evidence-based organisation. We seek to ensure that our strategy, decisions, operations and advice to Welsh Government and others are underpinned by sound and quality-assured evidence. We recognise that it is critically important to have a good understanding of our changing environment.

We will realise this vision by:

- Maintaining and developing the technical specialist skills of our staff;
- Securing our data and information;
- Having a well resourced proactive programme of evidence work;
- Continuing to review and add to our evidence to ensure it is fit for the challenges facing us; and
- Communicating our evidence in an open and transparent way.

This Evidence Report series serves as a record of work carried out by Natural Resources Wales. It also helps us to share and promote use of our evidence by others and develop future collaborations.

# Contents

About Natural Resources Wales	1
Evidence at Natural Resources Wales	1
Contents	2
List of Figures	3
List of Tables	3
Crynodeb Gweithredol	4
Executive summary	5
1.0 Introduction	6
2.0 The scope of this assessment	7
3.0 NRW's role in designating landscapes	7
4.0 A brief history of the statutory landscape designation context for this project	8
5.0 The Statutory Purpose of National Parks and other relevant policy	8
6.0 NRW assessment criteria for Natural Beauty	9
7.0 The guiding principles for defining the Area of Search	10
8.0 Refining the Area of Search	12
9.0 Recreational provision	25
10.0 Conclusion	32
Appendices	
Appendix A Factors and Indicators for Natural Beauty	34
Appendix B GIS data sets	36
Appendix C The spatial extents of the Area of Search	38

## List of Figures

Figure 1 The Area of Search

Figure 2 LANDMAP landscape attributes

Figure 3 Topography

Figure 4 Hydrology

Figure 5 Land Cover

Figure 6 Settlement and infrastructure

Figure 7 National and local sites for Landscape, Nature and Geology

Figure 8 National and local sites for Built heritage

Figure 9 Dark skies

Figure 10 Areas of Natural Beauty identified across north east Wales

Figure 11 Recreational areas

Figure 11 Recreational routes

## List of Tables

Table 1: Areas of Natural Beauty identified across north east Wales

Table 2: Recreational Activities

Table 3: Recreational Attractions



# Crynodeb Gweithredol

Mae'r adroddiad hwn yn amlinellu proses Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru wrth ddiffinio Ardal Chwilio am Barc Cenedlaethol newydd posibl yng Ngogledd-ddwyrain Cymru.

Nid ffin Parc Cenedlaethol drafft yw'r Ardal Chwilio ond yn hytrach y cam cyntaf yn y broses o gasglu tystiolaeth, wrth symud tuag at ddynodi Parc Cenedlaethol. Mae'n penderfynu ar faint yr ardal ddaearyddol y dylid canolbwyntio ac ymgynghori arni, ac ar asesiadau manwl i ddatblygu tystiolaeth sy'n angenrheidiol er mwyn cadarnhau a yw'r ardal yn bodloni meini prawf dynodi Parc Cenedlaethol a'i bod yn ddymunol dynodi.

Y man cychwyn oedd Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol (AHNE) Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy ac ardal ddaearyddol Gogledd-ddwyrain Cymru. Rydym yn nodweddu ardal y Gogledd-ddwyrain fel un sy'n cael ei diffinio gan y ffin rhwng Cymru a Lloegr i'r dwyrain; arfordir Gogledd Cymru / Aber Afon Dyfrdwy i'r gogledd; Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri i'r gorllewin; dechrau Mynyddoedd Cambria i'r de-orllewin; a gororau Cymru i'r de-ddwyrain.

Mae mapio wedi cael ei ddatblygu i'n cynorthwyo i nodi ardaloedd o harddwch naturiol gan ddefnyddio'r termau a'r priodoleddau sydd wedi eu sefydlu wrth asesu dynodiadau tirwedd statudol newydd, ledled Cymru a Lloegr. Mae'r rhain yn cael eu nodi yn NC 010 Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru - Dynodi tirwedd statudol: canllawiau gweithdrefnol 2022 ac maent yn cynnwys:

- Ansawdd y dirwedd
- Ansawdd golygfaol
- Gwylltineb cymharol
- Llonyddwch cymharol
- Nodweddion treftadaeth naturiol
- Treftadaeth ddiwylliannol

Rydym wedi defnyddio LANDMAP a data GIS arall i ddarparu tystiolaeth ofodol o dirweddau sydd o werth nodedig ar gyfer y priodoleddau hyn.

Mae LANDMAP yn gwerthuso tirwedd o fewn set ddata genedlaethol gyson, gyda sicrwydd ansawdd, ar gyfer Tirwedd Ddaearegol, Cynefinoedd Tirwedd, Gweledol a Synhwyradd, Tirwedd Hanesyddol a Thirwedd Ddiwylliannol. Er y gall gwerthuso tirwedd ddibynnu ar ganfyddiadau ac efallai y bydd yn agored i ddehongliad a dewisiadau, mae LANDMAP wedi helpu i ddarparu llinell sylfaen gyson ar gyfer dadansoddi ac mae barn broffesiynol wedi'i defnyddio wrth wneud penderfyniadau.

Nododd ein gwaith mapio ardaloedd o Harddwch Naturiol ar draws rhanbarth Gogledd-ddwyrain Cymru, o fewn a thu allan i AHNE gyfredol Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy.

Cafodd yr ardaloedd hynny, a allai, ar y cyd â'r AHNE presennol, greu llwybr parhaus a helaeth o dir, gydag ymdeimlad o hunaniaeth, cydlyniant ac undod Gogledd Ddwyrain

Cymru, eu hystyried ar gyfer eu cynnwys yn yr Ardal Chwilio. Ystyriwyd ffactorau megis effeithiau datblygu ar ansawdd a chyfanrwydd y dirwedd, dadleoli a phellter o faes astudio craidd (yr AHNE). Golygodd hyn fod yn rhaid eithrio rhai ardaloedd a chanddynt harddwch naturiol nodedig gan na ellid eu hymgorffori yn yr ardal graidd fel un llwybr parhaus o dir. Trwy'r broses hon, mireiniwyd yr Ardal Chwilio i'r graddau a ddangosir yn Ffigur 1.

Er mwyn cwrdd â gofynion Parc Cenedlaethol, cynhaliwyd dadansoddiad cychwynnol hefyd o hamdden ac atyniadau awyr agored. Mae hyn yn dangos bod cyfleoedd ar gyfer hamdden awyr agored, sy'n gysylltiedig â'r tirweddau, treftadaeth naturiol ac adeiledig, yn cael eu cynrychioli'n dda. Mae atyniadau yn y rhan ddeheuol ychydig yn fwy gwasgareddig, oherwydd ehangder ucheldiroedd y Berwyn a'u natur anghysbell. Fodd bynnag, mae cyfleoedd sylweddol ar gyfer hamdden awyr agored yn bodoli ar draws yr Ardal Chwilio gyfan.

## Executive summary

This report sets out Natural Resources Wales' process in defining an Area of Search for potential new National Park in North East Wales.

The Area of Search is not a draft National Park boundary but the first step in the evidence gathering process, in progressing towards a National Park designation. It determines the geographical extent within which to focus engagement and consultation, and detailed assessments to develop evidence necessary to confirm whether the area meets the National Park designation criteria and that it is desirable to designate.

The starting point has been the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the geographical area of North East Wales. We characterise the North East region as being defined by the Welsh/ English border to the east; the North Wales coast /Dee Estuary to the north; Eryri National Park to the west; the start of the Cambrian Mountains to the south west; and the Welsh borderlands to the south east.

Mapping has been developed to assist us identify areas of natural beauty using the terms and attributes that have established use in the assessment of new statutory landscape designations, across Wales and England. These are set out in Natural Resources Wales GN 010 - Statutory landscape designation: procedural guidance 2022 and include:

- Landscape quality
- Scenic quality
- Relative wildness
- Relative tranquillity
- Natural heritage features
- Cultural heritage

We have used LANDMAP and other GIS data to provide spatial evidence of landscapes that are of notable value for these attributes.

LANDMAP evaluates landscape within a nationally consistent, quality assured dataset for Geological Landscape, Landscape Habitats, Visual and Sensory, Historic Landscape and Cultural Landscape. Whilst the appraisal of landscape can rely on perceptions and maybe open to interpretation and preferences, LANDMAP has helped provide a consistent baseline for analysis and professional judgement has been applied in decision making.

Our mapping identified areas of Natural Beauty across the North East Wales region, within and beyond the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

Those areas that, in combination with the existing AONB, that could create a continuous and extensive tract of land, with a North East Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity, were considered for inclusion within the Area of Search. Factors such as development effects on landscape quality and integrity, dislocation and distance from the core area of study (the AONB) were considered. This resulted in some areas with notable natural beauty, that could not be incorporated into the core area as a single, continuous tract of land, were therefore necessarily excluded. Through this process, the Area of Search was refined down the extent illustrated in Figure 1.

To meet the requirements of a National Park, an initial analysis of outdoor recreation and attractions has also been carried out. This shows that opportunities for open air recreation, associated with the landscapes, natural and built heritage, is well represented. Attractions in the southern portion are slightly more dispersed, due to the extensiveness of the Berwyn uplands and their remoteness. However significant opportunities for outdoor recreation is present across the entire Area of Search.

## 1.0 Introduction

In its Programme for Government (2021-2026), Welsh Government sets out its intention to designate a new National Park in North East Wales based on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

As a result, Welsh Government has commissioned Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to evaluate the case for this designation. We (NRW) are the Welsh Government's statutory adviser on landscape and natural beauty and the designating authority for any new National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

We have established a team to lead this work which will include data and evidence gathering, and engagement with local communities and other key stakeholders. A statutory process will be followed, and after consultation, we will present a recommendation to Welsh Government based on the evidence gathered.

If there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the statutory criteria relating to Natural Beauty and opportunities for open air recreation are met, and that the area is of such national significance that National Park purposes should apply, a Designation Order will be submitted to Welsh Government. Welsh Government will then consider this and decide

whether to confirm, refuse or vary the Designation Order. If confirmed, Welsh Government will establish a new National Park in North East Wales.

## **.2.0 The scope of this assessment**

This report presents the Area of Search for a potential new National Park in north east Wales and is the first step of Stage 2 of the designation process:

Stage 1 – Pre-commencement

Stage 2 - Evidence gathering and engagement

Stage 3 - Statutory process

The Area of Search is the first step in the evidence gathering process, in progressing towards a National Park designation. It determines the geographical extent within which to focus engagement and consultation, and detailed assessments to develop evidence necessary to confirm whether the area meets the National Park designation criteria and that it is desirable to designate. If designation is shown to be appropriate, the project would then progress to Stage 3.

Evidence gathering will include a series of detailed assessments:

- The special qualities of the area;
- The forces for change affecting the special qualities and character of the area;
- The consideration of management options for the conservation and enhancement of the landscape;
- A detailed assessment of areas to explain how they meet Natural Beauty and recreation criteria;
- a proposed boundary.

This report explains the methodology and rationale used to define the proposed Area of Search (see Figure 1).

The Area of Search has evolved after first considering a much broader area of north east Wales at Stage 1. It defines an area that NRW considers to contain nationally important natural beauty, within the geographical context of Wales.

The Area of Search has no statutory status, but does confirm NRW's National Park project intent to progress work towards a new designated landscape that is larger in extent than the current Clywdian Range and Dee Valley AONB.

## **3.0 NRW's role in designating landscapes**

NRW is the statutory body responsible for the designation of new National Park or AONB designations in Wales.



The NRW Board on 22 September 2021 agreed to commence work on the pre-commencement stage and move to full implementation once full funding is confirmed by the Welsh Government. This was confirmed on 14 June 2022.

NRW is responsible for:

- Establishing the evidence-base in order to assess landscapes against the statutory designation criteria for National Park designation;
- Using this assessment to identify detailed boundaries and inform decision-making;
- Preparing a Designation Order, which lies with the Welsh Minister to confirm, amend or refuse.

## 4.0 A brief history of the statutory landscape designation context for this project

The Hobhouse Report 1947 (report of the National Parks Committee) mapped areas within England and Wales, that were recommended for consideration as National Parks and Conservation Areas (subsequently named Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The Hobhouse report at the time identified:

- The Clywdian Range  
This area was shown as a Conservation Area. The area was designated an AONB in 1985 and subsequently extended in 2011 to include the Dee Valley and northern Berwyns.
- The Berwyn  
This area was shown as a Conservation Area. It has not been designated for its Natural Beauty and recreation, but has statutory designations for its wildlife and habitats.
- Llyn Vyrnwy  
This area was shown as part Snowdonia National Park. The designation of the National Park in 1951 however excluded Llyn Vyrnwy which lies within Powys.

## 5.0 The Statutory Purpose of National Parks and other relevant policy

The purpose set out in the original National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 still applies today with some additional clarification set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

### **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949**

The purposes of a designated National Park are set out in Section 5(1):

- conserving and enhancing its natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and
- promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas by the public.

The text highlighted below in italics (our emphasis) point to key terms and definitions that inform the review of an area being considered for National Park designation.

Section 5(2) notes that a National Park must be an *extensive tract of land* which it appears to NRW that, by reason of its

(a) *natural beauty* and:

(b) the opportunities it affords for *open-air recreation*

having regard to both its *character* and its *position in relation to centres of population*, it is *especially desirable* that it is designated for National Park purposes.

Section 5(2A(a)) *Account may be taken of its wildlife and cultural heritage.*

### **The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006**

Section 99 of the NERC Act confirms that land can be considered to be of *natural beauty as a result of human intervention*. Therefore, the land-use practice of agriculture, woodland or parkland, or where physiographical features are partly as a result of human intervention in the landscape, does not mean it should be excluded from consideration as part of natural beauty

### **The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of Category V Protected areas**

The IUCN categorises UK National Parks as Category V protected landscapes. The definition given provides useful terms for identifying landscapes with the characteristics, qualities and attributes we would expect to experience in a National Park:

*“Where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other value”.*

The definition recognises these are lived-in working landscapes. They are influenced by people, but it is through a particular combination of natural and human processes that they have become distinctive in character and include important natural and cultural resources that are valued by society.

## **6.0 NRW’s assessment criteria for Natural Beauty**

There is no statutory definition of Natural Beauty, but the term is widely used to refer to landscapes of high distinctiveness, scenic quality and cultural value. Whilst this can be seen as a subjective attribute of a landscape, professional landscape analysis and evidence can be used in a structured and transparent way to explain the judgements made.

NRW’s GN 010 - Statutory landscape designation: procedural guidance 2022 sets out criteria for identifying landscapes with Natural Beauty. It has been developed in response to previous designations in the UK and provides guidance for assessing Natural Beauty

and drawing up the boundaries of statutory designated landscapes. The following terms are used to assess the presence of Natural Beauty:

- Landscape quality
- Scenic quality
- Relative wildness
- Relative tranquillity
- Natural heritage features
- Cultural heritage

There are also a number of associated factors and indicators to aid the assessment. These are set out in Appendix A Factors and Indicators for Natural Beauty.

## 7.0 The guiding principles for defining the Area of Search

Evidence that an area contains Natural Beauty of national importance is the primary factor in whether an area progresses towards designation as a National Park. The Area of Search has therefore been defined based upon the likely presence of Natural Beauty of national importance. The opportunities for open-air recreation are also analysed but this has greater bearing on whether the area under consideration potentially meets National Park or AONB designation criteria.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the European Landscape Convention put in place principles for a holistic approach to conservation, enhancement and management opportunities for landscape its natural resources and local communities. A National Park designation would support these principles through its management plan. The opportunities to deliver these principles however isn't a factor in defining the Area of Search.

The Area of Search has been defined with regard to:

- The Welsh Government's commitment to designate a new National Park in north east Wales – principally the Clywdian Range and Dee Valley AONB;
- The review of Natural Beauty across the wider extents of north east Wales (historical and contemporary);
- The statutory purpose of National Parks and clarifications set out in various Acts;
- NRW's Statutory landscape designation procedural guidance note GN010;
- Spatial extents that would lead to a new designation with a north east Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity.

Natural Beauty is a combination of natural and human influences so is not readily represented by a single source of GIS information. Decisions about the Area of Search have been assisted by collating and mapping a range of GIS information that correlates with NRW's Natural Beauty criteria, associated factors and indicators. This has included:

- LANDMAP, National Landscape Character Mapping and Area Statements;
- Protected sites - statutory and local designations or nature, landscape, historic landscapes, parks and gardens and built heritage;
- GIS data sets for elements that contribute to a finer grain mapping of Natural Beauty e.g. priority habitats – broad leaved woodland, heathland, saltmarsh, calcareous grassland etc (see Appendix B for full list of data sets).

LANDMAP GIS data sets that represented the best examples of geology, habitats, scenic quality, the presence of tranquil, wild and spiritual perceptual qualities, and historic landscapes were mapped and unioned, allowing the spatial extents and number of overlapping elements to be mapped. The higher the number of overlapping elements does not translate as meaning a higher value or quality of landscape or Natural Beauty. It does however draw attention to areas with higher likelihood of providing an experience of Natural Beauty (see Figure 2).

The mapping of spatial data by themes e.g. topography, landcover, settlement and infrastructure and protected sites for nature conservation and built heritage, added to LANDMAP mapping (see Figures 3 to 9).

From knowledge of the area and site visits, we confirm this method has helped in identifying core areas that display Natural Beauty. Attributing a national value to these areas has been done by mapping areas of Outstanding scenic quality (LANDMAP outstanding evaluation is given to areas considered to be of national value); and mapping of protected sites – where designation conveys National Value.

The mapping of settlement (urban towns and villages), developed land, wind farm landscapes, the Pre-assessed areas for wind Energy (Future Wales: the national plan 2040), national and regional grid connections and awareness of the A55's affects upon tranquility, have influenced the spatial extents of the Area of Search. Settlement and infrastructure has a strong presence in north east Wales. Factors including the spatial distribution, frequency, scale and urban/industrial forms of development can affect perceptions of landscape quality - intactness and unspoilt countryside.

Site visits were carried out to check various factors:

- To understand the visual aspects of places, the extent of views and distinctiveness;
- The effects of settlement and infrastructure on landscape integrity and the experience of Natural Beauty;
- The spatial location of areas of Natural Beauty relative to the current AONB, as to whether inclusion would support a designation with a north east Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity;
- Locating the edge of the Area of Search in relation to physical features, topography and development.

The work has been carried out by a Chartered Landscape Architect with comprehensive experience in landscape character assessment, LANDMAP, statutory landscape designations in Wales and GIS mapping.

The Area of Search has also developed through an iterative process. It has been discussed and refined following a number of internal programme meetings; presentations to the NRW Board; the NRW Designated Landscapes Programme Board and the NRW SMNR Business Board.

**It is important to clarify what the Area of Search is:**

- The Area of Search has been drawn to define an “extensive tract of land” within which Natural Beauty of potentially national importance lies;
- It is the area within which a range of detailed assessments and evidence is to be gathered to support a potential National Park designation;
- It has been drawn around landscapes that meet the natural beauty criteria, complement the current AONB and collectively contribute to creating a National Park with a north east Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity;

**It is important to clarify what the Area of Search is not**

- The Area of Search is not an assessment of Natural Beauty. Further detailed assessment is necessary to confirm this.
- The edge of the Area of Search does not signify the boundary of a new National Park. The spatial extents of the Area of Search will be informed by the detailed assessment stage.
- The Area of Search does not confer statutory designated landscape status.

## 8.0 Refining the Area of Search

Our mapping identified areas of Natural Beauty across the north east Wales region. Each area was reviewed and its potential inclusion with the Area of Search assessed.

Table 1 below lists these areas and includes a summary of their key Natural Beauty characteristics. The table also explains why some areas have not been taken forward in the Area of Search. Figure 10 accompanies this table and provides a key to the places named below.

Table 1: Areas of Natural Beauty identified across north east Wales

<p>The existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB</p>	<p>Designation conveys the presence of natural beauty. Our mapping supports this. The AONB was designated in 1985 and extended in 2011. The Area of Search includes a 1km buffer along the existing designation boundary to allow the effect of development and land use change to be reviewed. The buffer excludes settlement with predominately 20<sup>th</sup> century influences.</p>
--	---



	<b>This area forms a core component of the Area of Search.</b>
Denbighshire	
Vale of Clwyd central and east	<p>The central and eastern areas and of the Vale have a strong visual and geographical relationship with the Clywdian Range. Frequent mature oak trees and woodland within fields defined by intact hedgerows and occasional historic parks create distinctive character and perceptions of time depth. Settlement is very infrequent and tends to nestle in the landscape.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Vale of Clwyd west	<p>The western extents of the Vale have an attractive rural landscape character. This side of the vale is more influenced by settlement, roads and activity. The broad vale gently rises to the Rhos hills and Clocaenog plateau and is less distinctive compared with the Clwydian hillslopes.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that factors affecting landscape integrity and limits on distinctiveness preclude this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Pwll Glas	<p>Limestone country with a distinctive combination of rolling hills, deciduous woodland, parkland trees and limestone outcrops. An attractive and tranquil landscape with some long views to the Clwyd hills. This area includes the rural edges along the southern edge of Ruthin, where Castle Park with Ruthin castle forms an attractive gateway to the town.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Berwyn	<p>The western flanks of the Berwyn form an upland ridgeline to the Dee Valley and villages of Llandrillo and Cynwyd. The Berwyn forms a southern continuation of a chain of uplands that define the eastern edge of north</p>

	<p>Wales – Llantysillio/ Ruabon mountain and the Clwydian hills lying to the north. The Berwyn extends eastwards into Wrexham and southwards into Powys.</p> <p>The area is notable for its extensive upland moorland character with remote, wild, tranquil and spiritual qualities.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Mynydd Mynyllod	<p>This area has a remote upland hill character as a result of open unenclosed upland moorland and rough grazing. The area is of high scenic quality with far reaching views. Braich Ddu wind farm of three turbines is prominent to the north. (LANDMAP).</p> <p>Mynydd Mynyllod lies within a larger unit of gently rolling hills that form the western edge of the Dee Valley. LANDMAP appraisal for “Slopes below Mynydd Mynyllod” indicates a Moderate overall landscape evaluation.</p> <p>The Dee valley lies between the Berwyn mountains and Mynydd Mynyllod. The valley floor here has an attractive farmed, domestic and settled landscape character, but is not as distinct as adjacent areas. LANDMAP assess the area to be of Moderate overall evaluation. Natural Beauty whilst present is therefore not strongly expressed.</p> <p>LANDMAP evidence points to Natural Beauty being evident within parts of the Dee Valley and rolling hills to the west, but not consistently, or strongly expressed across the entire area.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that Natural beauty is not strongly expressed across the combined Dee valley and its western hillslopes. This precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>

Conwy	
Great Orme	<p>A dramatic coastal limestone escarpment with Heritage Coast status. This area is at considerable distance from the AONB. Coastal settlement, development and roads lie between this area and the AONB and focus of the study.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that distance from the core area of study and factors affecting landscape integrity preclude this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Conwy Valley	<p>The upper Conwy has strong character and scenic qualities associated with the tidal river Conwy and estuary, Conwy Castle and the mountains of Eryri to the west and scarp wooded hillsides to the east. This area has strong geographical and visual connection with Eryri National Park.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that distance from the core area of study precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Abergele scarp	<p>The extensive deciduous woodland along this coastal scarp, plus limestone outcrops above Abergele have strong naturalistic qualities and strongly influence sense of place and landscape quality experienced by north Wales communities and visitors travelling along the A55.</p> <p>Bodleyddan, St Asaph and major roads strongly influence the scarp and vale here.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that distance from the core area of study and factors affecting landscape integrity, precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Elwy Valley	<p>This is an attractive valley with frequent woodland. A high number of historic halls, parkland and listed buildings creating a strong sense of heritage and time depth.</p> <p>The area feels remote from towns and modern influences. Natural Beauty is present. 400kv overhead lines cross to the north, and 125kV timber pole line crosses the area -otherwise no major detractors.</p>

	<p>Views are largely contained within the valley or towards the Rhos hills making the area feel remote and separate to the Clwyds and Vale to the east. Fragmentation of landscape occurs between this area and the AONB (Denbigh, the A525 and roadside settlements) affecting landscape integrity.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that associations with the Rhos Hills and fragmentation of landscape between this area and the core study area, precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Mynydd Hiraethog	<p>This is an extensive upland moorland landscape with a strong sense of remoteness and wildness, with expansive views to the mountains of Eryri. The area has geographical, visual and sense of place associations with Eryri to the west and less so with the Clywdian Range. Landscape fragmentation to the east has taken place with the growing wind farm landscape at Clocaenog Forest.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that distance from the core area of study, closer geographical proximity to Eryri and landscape fragmentation to the east, precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Ceirw and Alwen valleys (this area extends into Denbighshire)	<p>This is a highly attractive area with a wooded traditionally farmed upland valley landscape and positive framed views of the uplands. This type of landscape is rare within the County.</p> <p>This area lies to the west of the AONB and is separated by a wide valley at the confluence of the Alwen and Dee rivers to the east of Corwen. This area whilst being attractive, is not as distinctive as the surrounding steep valleys and upland peaks. There is some landscape fragmentation with 20<sup>th</sup> C settlement and industrial influences at Clawdd Poncen.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that distance from the core area of study and landscape fragmentation to the east, precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>

Gwynedd	
Dee Valley	<p>This area includes part of Cefn Coch – one of the hills that lines the southern edge of the Dee Valley - with upland characteristics in common with the adjacent landscapes of Eryri National Park to the west and the Berwyn to the east.</p> <p>The authority boundary between Gwynedd and Denbighshire follows the skyline of Cefn Coch, subdividing this topographical unit of landscape.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that for reason of continuity in landscape landform and character between the core study area and Eryri National Park, this area should be included within the Area of Search.</b></p>

Flintshire	
Gronant Dunes	<p>The dune systems, marram grass, wetlands and native wild flowers create a wild semi-natural area with at times strong remoteness (when within the dunes) and sense of space and freedom (when on top of the dunes). The shoreline, tides and beach add to the natural dynamics.</p> <p>The area is a protected site for Turns. Talacre light house creates a strong point of visual interest. Prestatyn and Gronant hillside within the AONB form a backdrop the area to the south. Caravan parks and Point of Ayre influence elevated views from the AONB, but have little influence when on the shoreline or within the dunes.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Tre-Mostyn and Afon Y Garth Valley	<p>There are pockets of distinctive landscape influenced by the Mostyn Estate with parkland around Mostyn Hall, and the village of Whitford (the village also being a conservation area). The narrow wooded valleys that cut into the plateau here create small intimate landscapes, but have little influence on with wider landscape. These areas are somewhat dispersed</p>



	<p>amongst open farmland. The area has some visual connection with the Dee Estuary and Cheshire plain.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that landscape distinctiveness varies across the area and sense of place comes from proximity and occasional views to the Dee Estuary and beyond. The area should be precluded from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Halkyn Mountain	<p>This a rare (within North Wales) area of open common land with protected sites for grasslands and a Registered Historic Landscape. It has a semi-upland character given the extent of heath, grassland, gorse and rugged land with limestone outcrops and hummocks from historical small-scale quarrying. Scattered worker settlement is present in places. Limekilns and hillfort (Scheduled Monument) contribute to heritage. There are some major limestone quarries - some now disused and naturalising and some still active with local detracting effects. The scale of the quarries is however not immediately apparent within landscape views. Open scenic views to the Clwydian hills creates a strong sense of place. The landscape between Halkyn mountain and the Clwyds includes much tree cover and appears intact.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Northop Parklands	<p>This area comprises a wooded valley, parkland and pastoral farmland with attractive and sheltered perceptual qualities. Deciduous woodland is frequent with both irregular blocks and linear patterns.</p> <p>There are four sites on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens within relatively close proximity to each other (Halkyn Castle, Soughton Hall, Gwysaney, and Rhual) and a section of Watts Dyke (scheduled monument).</p> <p>The A55 Express Way forms the eastern edge to the Area of Search here.</p>

	<p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Nant y Fflint Valley	<p>This area is a continuation of the Northop Parklands wooded valley, but has been separated by the A55 Express Way – introducing noise and movement in the landscape. The area’s attractive valley form and fieldscapes are occasionally visible from the A55. Settlement of Flint, Connah’s quay and Shotton and major industrial development at Deeside strongly influences the wider area.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that the influence of the A55 and Deeside development on landscape integrity precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Dee Estuary	<p>The intertidal area of the Dee Estuary is a unique and expansive area of mud flats, sand banks, and saline water with distinct and intricate dendritic patterning and strong textures. It has attractive, exposed, wild and spiritual perceptual qualities and is of Outstanding scenic quality (LANDMAP).</p> <p>The settlements of Holywell, Bagillt, Flint, Connah’s Quay and Shotton line the estuary and form an almost continuous settlement edge. Deeside is the location of large scale heavy industry.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis, we conclude that distance from the AONB and the influence of development on landscape integrity precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Hope Mountain	<p>This hill and ridgeline rises above the Cheshire Plain and marks the first line of upland hills in NE Wales. The east facing scarp has an attractive mosaic of deciduous woodland and fieldscapes. The wooded hillside and wooded castle mound form a notable valley ‘gateway’ at Caergwrle. Waun y Llyn Country Park includes a disused naturalised quarry with heathland and provides expansive distant views to the AONB. The wooded Ffridd Valley draws the eye towards Ruabon Mountain and Llandegla forest within the AONB.</p>

	<p>The Clwyds along the skyline and sense of space is notable. Landscape to the immediate west and north west is however less distinctive. Development affects integrity. Landscape here has limited topographical variety or points of visual interest.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
--	---

Wrexham	
Clywedog valley	<p>This is a narrow winding river valley with strong woodland cover and iron working industrial heritage. The area is of high value for Local communities and includes a country park. The A483 corridor crosses the valley near Rhostyllen and slightly affects tranquility and unspoilt character.</p> <p>To the west of the valley - between this area and the AONB, 400kv pylons/overhead powerlines and the settlement edge of Coedpoeth affect landscape integrity. To the east, the former Plas Power Estate park has lost much of its original features to mining and land reclamation.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis, we conclude that fragmentation of landscape between this area and the core study area, precludes this area from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Erddig Estate	<p>This area of parkland, pasture, parkland trees and ornamental gardens associated with a grand house is of Outstanding value. Attractive, tranquil and spiritual perceptual qualities are present. The area is however at some distance from the existing AONB and separated by the A483 road corridor and a number of urban villages.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be precluded from the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Dee and Ceiriog valleys east of the A483	<p>The River Ceiriog and Dee meet and flow through a narrow lowland wooded valley with attractive, tranquil and remote qualities. The rivers form the boundary</p>

	<p>between Wales and England for a section here, dividing the valley. Further eastwards the River Dee flows through a more open and expansive farmed lowland levels landscape with attractive, remote, settled and tranquil qualities.</p> <p>The river floodplain here marks the transition between the Welsh and English Maelor.</p> <p>For reasons of developing a search area around landscapes that collectively contribute to a coherent extensive tract of land – with a NE Wales sense of identity and unity, we have excluded this area.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be precluded from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Fenns Moss	<p>This extensive area of low lying bogland and wetland is unique in Wales and forms the continuation of the Whixall Moss in northern Shropshire. It's protected for its heath vegetation and pioneering birch on margins.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude that due to distance from the core study area and geographical relationship with similar landscapes in England, this area should be precluded from the Area of Search.</b></p>
Ceiriog Valley	<p>This is a steep-sided valley in three parts. The upper valley is open, with views to the Berwyns; the middle section is narrow with a gorge at Pandy, then steeply sloping and wooded with a relatively small and intimate field pattern; while between Glyn Ceiriog and Chirk there is a mosaic of farms and woodland, containing the majority of the settlements in the area. The area contains the typical characteristics of a Welsh valley - relatively unspoilt, feeling remote and strongly enclosed.</p> <p>The area has attractive, tranquil, remote qualities and a strong sense of place.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Berwyn	<p>The eastern facing aspect of the Berwyn include glaciated cwms and a striking skyline, within views from</p>

	<p>the Ceiriog Valley. The area has outstanding scenic quality, remote and wild qualities (LANDMAP).</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
--	--

Powys	
The Berwyn	<p>This section of the Berwyn comprises a very broad extensive area of upland moorland plateau on the edge of the Eryri National Park (ENP). The aspect is very strongly linked topographically ENP with the moorland plateau taking on the characteristic of upland peak hinterland. Open, exposure and wide open skies dominate with heather/bilberry and rough grazing predominant and bracken growth to lower plateau sides.</p> <p>The area has attractive, tranquil, remote, wild and spiritual qualities.</p> <p>To the east, valleys and cwms cut into these uplands and form the mountain settings to Pystyll Rhoadr, the Tanat valley, Cwm Pennant and Llyn Vyrnwy.</p> <p>The Berwyn also forms a distinctive upland moorland backdrop within views from the hills around Llanfyllin, Meifod and Dolangog.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Llansilin valley and hills	<p>The area sits below the rolling hills/plateau that separates the Tanat and Ceiriog Valleys and comprises a network of small and in places intimate valleys, with some notable hills/ scarps at Gyrn Moelfre and Graig Orllwyn. Wooded hillslopes and small irregular field patterns follow the contours.</p> <p>The area has attractive, sheltered and settled qualities. Llansilin is an attractive roadside village. The Motte and Bailey at Sycharth to the south of Llansilin was the birth place of Owain Glyndwr.</p>



	<p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Tanat Valley	<p>This is a valley of three parts - with a steep side U shaped valley with some dramatic peaks (Craig Rhiwarth) and ridges to the east of Pen y Bont Fawr; with a broader valley in the area of Llanrhaedr Y Mochnant; before the valley narrows again, lined by wooded valley slopes (south) and the Llansilin Hills (north). Pen y Bont Llanerch Emyrs sits on the Welsh/ English boarder to the east and justifiably proclaims itself the gateway to the Tanat Valley. Views here are focused west wards along the valley to distant upland peaks.</p> <p>The valley lies within the Tanat Valley Register of Historic Landscapes.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Rhaeadr Valley	<p>This is a steep sided U-shaped valley of the Afon Rhaeadr which cuts into the Berwyn uplands and made particularly striking by the cascade of Pystyll Rhaeadr – the highest waterfall in Wales and one of the 'Seven Wonders' of North Wales.</p> <p>The area has distinctive landform created by the steep valley sides headed/sided in several cases by waterfalls and stream courses tumbling from the upland moorland above. The valley side slopes are a mosaic of rock exposure/rough moorland vegetation, isolated trees and patches of semi improved grazed land making a highly aesthetic overall composition. The area has attractive, remote, wild, tranquil and spiritual perceptual qualities and is of Outstanding scenic quality (LANDMAP)</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Cwm Pennant	<p>This upper section of the River Tanat, with remote and secluded character is given a separate reference here in recognition of Pennant Melangell Church – a shrine to Saint Melangell dating from the early 12th century and its Outstanding scenic quality. The valley lies within the Tanat Valley Register of Historic</p>

	<p>Landscapes. Pistyll Blaen-y-cwm lies at the head of the valley.</p> <p>It is Outstanding for its distinctive landform created by the steep valley sides headed/sided in several cases by waterfalls and stream courses tumbling from the upland moorland above. The valley side slopes are a mosaic of rock exposure/rough moorland vegetation, isolated trees and patches of semi improved grazed land making a highly aesthetic overall composition (LANDMAP).</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Llyn Vyrnwy	<p>The reservoir (whilst manmade) in combination with its steep side afforested valley has strong aesthetic, attractive, tranquil and remote perceptual qualities – creating Outstanding scenic quality (LANDMAP). The Victorian stone dam and gothic straining tower are ornate structures and create strong points of visual interest.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
Llanfyllin valley and hills	<p>This area includes narrow winding valleys enclosed by small, rounded hills with occasional scarp edges. A mosaic of woodland - both deciduous and mixed and irregular field patterns complement the landform.</p> <p>The area has attractive, sheltered and settled perceptual qualities. (LANDMAP high evaluation).</p> <p>Views from the hills are wide ranging, with the expansive scale of the Berwyn uplands drawing attention.</p> <p>Llanfyllin is a distinctive market town that still retains much of its original compact and attractive rural community nature (LANDMAP high evaluation).</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
The Vyrnwy, Banwy and Cain valleys and hills	<p>These are significant valleys / vales and contain the strategic road network across this corner of Wales. The</p>

	<p>wooded valley sides and hilltops and irregular field patterns of the Meifod Valley are of high scenic value (LANDMAP). Sections of the Banwy Valley are of Outstanding scenic quality (LANDMAP) for their high aesthetic qualities and limited intrusion by modern development.</p> <p>The valleys mark a notable break between the hill and scarp farmland with geographical proximity and visual connection to the Berwyn to the north west; the Cambrian Mountains to the south west; and the rolling farmlands and parklands of the Welsh/ English borderlands to the south east.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be included in the Area of Search.</b></p>
<p>The Guilsfield hills</p>	<p>This area of rolling farmland has pockets of notable Natural Beauty associated with hills, valley shape woodland, traditional farming and parkland. There are a number of sites on the register of Historic Parks and Gardens – most notably Powys Castle. This area is at some distance to the Berwyn. Distant views where available are orientated to the south and east giving this area a borderland sense of place.</p> <p>For reasons of developing a search area around landscapes that collectively contribute to a National Park with a north east Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity, we have excluded this area.</p> <p><b>Based upon our mapping and analysis we conclude this area should be precluded from the Area of Search.</b></p>

## 9.0 Opportunities for open air recreation

Opportunities for open air recreation, for the enjoyment of the special qualities of the area, is a key designation criteria for a National Park.

Below we have captured the range of outdoor activities and attractions that lie within the Area of Search. This is to help understand the type, range and spatial distribution of recreation opportunities. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate information that is currently available in GIS format, but does not fully capture the activities and attractions we have identified in our research. Future steps in the process will analyse whether the recreational purpose

for National Park designation is fully met, by applying criteria set out in NRW's statutory landscape designation procedural guidance.

Table 2: Recreational Activities

Activities	
General sightseeing-driving around	<p>The upland remote nature of the core area make road crossings, where available, a memorable journey with evolving views, scenic vistas and aerial views over the surrounding lowlands. This experience is available across all areas – being slightly more frequent to the north of the Vale of Llangollen.</p> <p>The main valleys are all accessible by main roads.</p> <p>There is a strong network of narrow country lanes within the rolling hill country to the south east of the Berwyns.</p>
Walking/strolling-less than an hour	<p>This type of activity is likely to take place from car parks at destination sites, picnic sites, opportunistic parking locations next to public footpaths and from villages. Opportunities are available across the area. Some of this activity will be encouraged by promoted routes.</p>
Walking (national trails and promoted trails)	<p>Long sections of Offa's Dyke and Glyndwr National Trails cross the area in the north and to the south.</p> <p>The Wales Coast Path passes through Gronant Dunes.</p> <p>The North Wales Castles Trail starts/ends in Chirk, with a long segment of the trail lying within the AONB/ Area of Search.</p> <p>The Clwydian Way roughly parallels Offa's Dyke along the Clwyds to Llangollen.</p> <p>Pilgrim Routes - There is a network routes that cross, fall largely, or partly within the Area of Search.</p> <p><b>There are a number of promoted walks in the AONB.</b> These are a selection:</p> <p>Gronant – sand dunes and habitats.</p> <p>Gop Cairn – ceremonial mound above Trelawnyd.</p> <p>Loggerheads to Moel Famau.</p> <p>Bryn Alyn.</p> <p>Coed Llandegla.</p>

	<p>The Mines, Moorland and Mountain walk – Ruabon Mountain and Cryn y Brain to the south of Coedpoeth.</p> <p>In the footsteps of the Ladies of Llangollen.</p> <p>Discovering Engineers and Artist in Llangollen.</p> <p>(these two trails are part of “Our Picturesque Landscape Project”).</p> <p>The Dee Valley Way – the hillslopes of Llantysillio mountain and then the Llangollen canal.</p> <p>The North Berwyn Way – mirrors the Dee Valley Way, following the hilltops south of the Dee Valley.</p> <p>The Chirk and River Ceiriog circular walk.</p> <p><b>There are promoted walks in the wider area of search:</b></p> <p>The Ceiriog Trail - circular walk/ mountain bike route above the valley</p> <p>The Upper Ceiriog Trail - horse riding circuit above the valley</p> <p>The Beautiful Berwyns – from Llanarmon DC (the moorlands of the upper Ceiriog Valley)</p> <p>Cadair Berwyn</p> <p>The Tegid Way – from Cynwyd to Bala (the Dee Valley and Berwyn Hillslopes)</p> <p>St Melangell Way - Llangynog to Pont Llogel (Tanat valley to the Vyrnwy valley)</p> <p>Ann Griffiths Walk - Pont Llogel to Pontrobert (Vyrnwy valley)</p>
Hill walking	<p>Much of the uplands that define the core of the area provide opportunities for hill walking via public rights of way and Open Access Land. The area provides walks along defined paths through grassland, to more challenging walks along faint or absent paths across expansive remote moorland. The highest peaks of the Berwyns are officially mountains (higher than 2,000 feet/610m). The peaks and ridges of each range of hills naturally draw walkers. There are a number of routes promoted by Denbighshire and Wrexham councils, described on the Web and in published books.</p>
Horse riding/pony trekking	<p>The Upper Ceiriog Trail is promoted for horse riding, with local stabling available.</p>



	Dyfnant Forest has opportunities for horse riding and carriage driving.
Cycling/Mountain Biking	<p>The area's lanes, passes and topographical challenges are well known to local cycle clubs, with some wider recognition of notable climbs such as Horseshoe Pass. Bwlch Y Groes lies just outside the area to the west, with one lane dropping down from the top of the pass to Llyn Vyrnwy.</p> <p>Sustrans Cycle Route 84 runs along the Dee and Chirk valleys, following a section of the Llangollen canal tow path.</p> <p>Audax long distance cycle rides include - Tour of the Berwyns, Pengwern Permanents - Severn &amp; Berwyns and Beyond the Cheshire Plains.</p> <p>The bridleways and roads used as public footpaths of the area provide opportunities for some remote and challenging mountain bike rides. Routes in the Clwyds are well represented and promoted by the website Ride the Clwyds. The Ceiriog valley has a way marked circuit around the valley as well as providing links to crossings of the Berwyn to Llandrillo. Nercwys, Moel Famau and Dyfnant forest and other NRW managed woodlands with promoted routes as well as general public access.</p> <p>One Planet Adventure at Llandegla is a trail centre, providing graded mountain bike routes within forestry.</p> <p>One Giant Leap Llangollen is a downhill mountain bike track with uplift service.</p> <p>The facility at Revolution Bike Park – Llangynog, has now closed due to major forestry works required to clear diseased larch. The site formally provided a downhill and freeride bike course of some renown.</p>
Climbing	<p>The Eglwyseg limestone escarpment between Worlds End and Trevor Rocks is the main venue for climbing in the area. Smaller esoteric sites are found in disused limestone quarries and smaller natural outcrops within the AONB.</p> <p>Pystyll Rhaeadr, Craig y Mwn and Craig Rhiwarth provide climbing in the Berwyns.</p>
Fell/ trail running	There are annual fell running events held variously in the Clwyds, Llantysillio Mountain and the Dee Valley.

	The extensive network of public rights of way and potential for long journeys offered for example by Offa's Dyke footpath are drawing ultra-running events to the area.
Water sports	The River Dee at Llangollen is a well-known white water venue for kayakers and canoeists. The Rivers Dee and Vyrnwy provide longer day tours, where access permits. Canoeing, kayaking, sailing and windsurfing takes place on Llyn Vyrnwy – with a range of other outdoor activity training available.
Boat trips	The Llangollen canal provides narrow boat day tours and hire.
Angling	Gryn Castle coarse fishing (Llanasa). Gweryd Lakes game fishing (Llanarmon yn ial). Pen y Ffirth coarse fishing (Llandegla). Llandegla game fishing. The Llangollen canal – course fishing. The Rivers Dee, Ceiriog, Tanat, Vyrnwy and Banwy Llyn Vyrnwy
Bird watching	Bird hides are provided at Gronant and by the RSBP at Llyn Vyrnwy.

Table 3: Recreational Attractions

Attractions	
Car parks, picnic sites and viewpoints	The bwlchs/passes in the Clwyds, Horseshoe Pass, are destinations for scenic drives, picnicks, café stops and short strolls.
Natural Heritage	There are several types of natural heritage site listed below:
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)	NNRs are designated for their special biological, geological, habitat or landscape value and are SSSIs. The Berwyn NNR covers 7,920 hectares (79.2 km <sup>2</sup> )

	Gronant Dunes, whilst not a NNR, is an SSSI with promoted public access.
Forest parks	Forest Parks and managed by NRW Coed Moel Famau has a carpark, natural playground and circular walks. Nercwys Forest, Ceiriog Forest and Dyfnant forest having parking and forest trails for informal recreation.
Country parks	There are four sites in northern extent of the area of search – Loggerheads Country Park, Waun y Llyn Country Park at Hope Mountain, Minera lead mine Country Park and Ty Mawr Country Park near the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.
Nature Reserves (North Wales Wildlife Sites)	There are a number of sites across the northern area managed by North Wales Wildlife Trust: Maes Hiraddug Nature Reserve (Dysreth) Aberduna Nature Reserve (Gwernymynydd in the AONB) Coed Trelynniau Nature Reserve (Rhydymwyn) Ddol Uchaf Nature Reserve (Ysceifog) Coed y Felin Nature Reserve (Hendre) Graig Wyllt Nature Reserve (Graigfechan) Coed Cilgroeslwyd Nature Reserve (Pwll glas) Minera Quarry Nature Reserve (Minera)
RSPB Nature Reserves	The Point of Ayre site and Gronant Dunes are an integral area of beach, sand dune, shingle and saltmarsh. RSPB has a comprehensive range of public information and activities at Llyn Vyrnwy.
Woodland Trust sites	These are typically small deciduous woodlands with public access. Sites within the AONB lie at Tremeirchion, Llangollen Sites within the wider Area of Search lie at Hendre, Cilcain, Llanbedr, Dolywern, Bronygarth and Moelfre.
Dark skies	Mapping shows that much of the area benefits from dark skies - the southern extents particularly due to the remoteness from major settlements.

	<p>The AONB and Llyn Vyrnwy both promote their dark skies.</p>
Built Heritage	<p>The uplands of the Clwyds, Llantysillio Mountain and Berwyn contain many prehistoric hillforts, field systems and ceremonial sites.</p> <p>The CADW Register of Historic Landscapes includes areas of the Vale of Clwyd, Vale of Llangollen, Tanat Valley and Berwyn. Areas on the register often retain field, settlement and road patterns of some age and relics of former settlement, land management, ceremonial sites and defence within the uplands.</p> <p>The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage includes notable feats of engineering within a picturesque landscape setting.</p> <p>Valle Crucis Abbey – former Cistercian Monastery.</p> <p>Chirk Castle – of medieval origin with public access managed by the National Trust.</p> <p>The ornate stone dam and gothic water starting tower of Llyn Vyrnwy are distinctive heritage features of the Victorian era.</p>
Cultural events	<p>The Llangollen International Eisteddfod is an annual event. The pavilion also hosts other major events.</p>
Sports events	<p>The Ruthin MTB Marathon takes place in the Clywdian hills.</p> <p>DeeFest is a kayaking social event that takes place at Mile End Mill Llangollen.</p> <p>The Llangollen 50km is an ultramarathon.</p> <p>One Giant Leap Llangollen is a downhill mountain bike track and hosts a stage of the National Downhill Series.</p> <p>The Llyn Vyrnwy half marathon.</p> <p>The Eryri Etape (challenging road cycling event) has been held in NE Wales, with much of the route focused around Llantysillio/ Ruabon Mountain and the Dee Valley.</p> <p>The Excalibur Marathon has been held in previous years - a challenging trail run in the Clywdian hills.</p>

## Summary of open air recreational opportunities

In overview, opportunities for open air recreation are well represented within the existing AONB and the wider Area of Search. The landscapes within the southern extents of the Area of Search provide slightly fewer and a more dispersed attractions, in part due to the Berwyn upland's influence on centres of population and access. The extensive and remote upland nature of the Berwyns with extensive areas of open access land however does provide a valuable opportunity for the public to experience wildness, solitude and escape.

Long sections of Offa's Dyke and Glyndwr National Trails cross the area, pointing to historical themes and cultural references that are of national significance to Wales. The valleys and cwms that nestle below Berwyn are accessible by road, with many having notable attractions for natural beauty, historic and cultural associations – e.g. Pystyll Rhaeadr, Tanat valley, Cwm Pennant and Llyn Vyrnwy.

Several promoted walks are developed around notable landscape and historical associations with place. Examples outside the AONB include the Beautiful Berwyns, the St Melangell Way and Ann Griffiths Walk. The AONB and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage site have both brought about a number of promoted walks, varying from short local community walks to challenging day walks with the potential to be linked for multi-day trips.

There are a number of attractions where the combination of built heritage and landscape setting create a distinctive (and in some cases unique) north east Wales sense of place. Examples include - Pontcysyllte and Chirk Aqueducts; Valle Crucis Abbey; Chirk castle; Vyrnwy dam and water tower.

Llyn Vyrnwy (managed by Severn Trent and the RSPB) has developed opportunities for quiet outdoor recreation associated with bird watching, angling, sailing, walks and dark skies. Car parks, picnic sites, visitor centre and café contribute to the attractions and visitor management.

Organised sports events have been developed around the quality of landscape experience that the area offers, with several making the most of the challenges provided by the area's mountains, crags, rivers and extensive uplands. These types of landscape also provide a draw for more general sightseeing, driving around, picnicking and short strolls.

## 10.0 Conclusion

This report sets out Natural Resources Wales' process in defining an Area of Search for a potential new National Park in north east Wales.

Our starting point has been Clywdian Range and Dee Valley AONB. Following our analysis of Natural Beauty using LANDMAP and GIS mapping across the north east Wales region, we identified a number of additional areas outside of the existing AONB.

We found that some areas have a strong geographical and visual relationship with the AONB, and/or share similar landscape characteristics. Adding these areas to the AONB started to help define a potential extensive tract of land, with a north east Wales sense of identity, cohesion and unity.

The influence of settlement and infrastructure on landscape quality and integrity was an additional factor in refining the Area of Search down the proposed spatial extents set out in Figure 1.

We have reviewed the existing outdoor activities and attractions within the Area of Search. This shows that opportunities for open air recreation - associated with the landscapes, natural and built heritage of the area is well represented within the existing AONB and the wider Area of Search. Attractions in the southern portion of the area are slightly more dispersed, due to the extensiveness of the Berwyn uplands and remoteness. Opportunities for outdoor activities are however present.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Factors and Indicators for Natural Beauty.

Factors	Sub-factors	Indicators
Scenic quality	Aesthetic appeal	Interest in terms of factors such as scale, form, patterns, enclosure, colour, texture, variety, ephemeral or seasonal interest
Factors	Sub-factors	Indicators
	Striking landform or visual interest	Striking landform types or features; memorable or unusual views; eye-catching features or landmarks
	Spiritual or emotional impact on people	Public and professional consensus that landscape is beautiful
Sense of place	Unity and distinctiveness of landscape character	Clear, distinct and recognisable landscape character
	'Bro' i.e., sense of identity or bond between people and place	Strong links perceived between communities and their landscape
Landscape quality	Intactness of the landscape	Characteristic natural and man-made elements are well represented throughout
	Condition of the landscape (insofar as this helps to deliver distinctiveness)	Landscape elements are in good condition
Integrity	Unspoilt rural character	Relatively few overt industrial or urban influences
	General lack of large-scale, visually intrusive or otherwise inharmonious development	Incongruous elements are limited, are not visually intrusive, have only localised influence, or are temporary in nature
Perceptual qualities	Relative wildness	Low degree of human influence e.g., due to extensive semi-natural vegetation; few built features; openness and exposure to the elements
	Relative tranquillity	Presence and/or perceptions of natural landscape, birdsong, peace and quiet, natural-looking woodland, stars at night, streams and/or sea, natural sounds and similar influences

Factors	Sub-factors	Indicators
		Presence of particular species that contribute to sense of relative wildness or tranquillity
		Presence of historic landscape types, elements or features that reveal time-depth or historic influence on the landscape
	Sense of remoteness and freedom	Relatively few roads or other transport routes; distant from or perceived as distant from human habitation
	Timelessness	Sense of the passing of time and a return to nature due to apparent absence of human intervention
Associations	Important associations of the landscape with people, places or events	Evidence that the landscape has associations with notable people, places or events, past or present
Artistic and cultural importance	Descriptions or expressions of the landscape through literature, painting, music or other art forms; or through language, folklore or modern media	Descriptions of the landscape in notable literature, topographical writings, or guidebooks, or significant literature inspired by the landscape
		Depiction of the landscape in art, photography, film or music, or through language or folklore
Rarity or representiveness	Rarity of the landscape as a whole or elements and features within it	Presence of a rare type of landscape or rare landscape elements or features
	Representativeness of the landscape as a whole, or elements and features within it	Presence of representative examples of a landscape type, or type of landscape element or feature
Conservation interest	Presence within the landscape of features of particular earth science, wildlife, archaeological, historical or cultural interest that add value to the landscape	Presence of geology, wildlife and/or habitats, visible archaeological remains, parkland and/or designed landscapes, settlements, buildings or other structures that contribute to scenic quality and <u>sense of place</u>
		Presence of striking or memorable geomorphological features



## Appendix B GIS data sets

### **Figure 1**

OS master  
5m Digital Elevation Model  
Local Authority Boundaries

### **Figure 2**

LANDMAP unioned information:

Outstanding and High evaluations for the following assessments:

- Geological Landscapes - Classic example
- Landscape Habitats – Priority Habitats, Significance
- Historic Landscapes – Integrity and Condition
- Visual and Sensory - Scenic Quality; Character; Wild, Tranquil, Wild, Spiritual qualities;
- Scenic quality outstanding is also mapped as an individual layer to highlight core areas likely to display NB

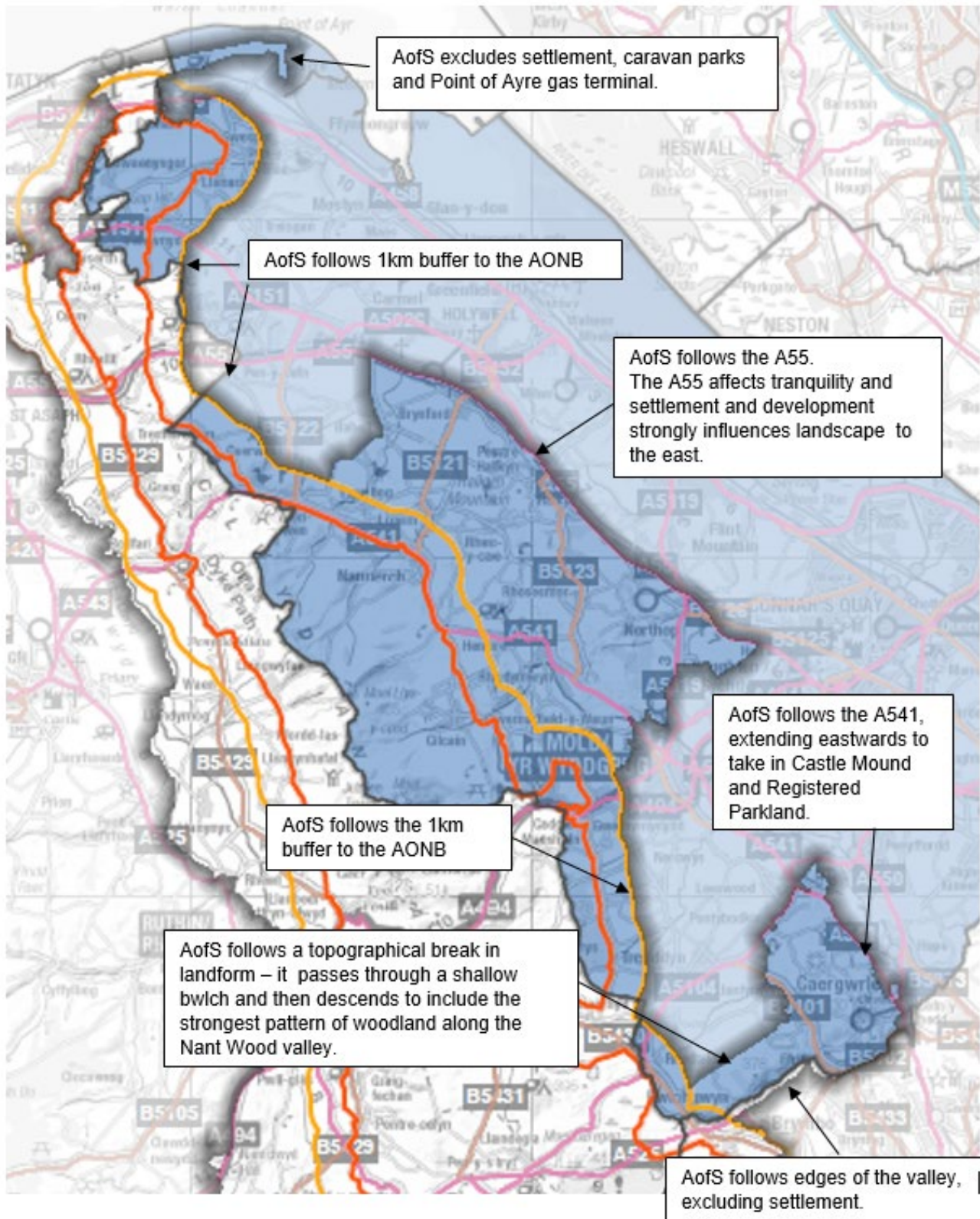
(LANDMAP 2004/5 assessment with change detection 2022)

National Landscape Character Areas  
Local Authority Boundaries



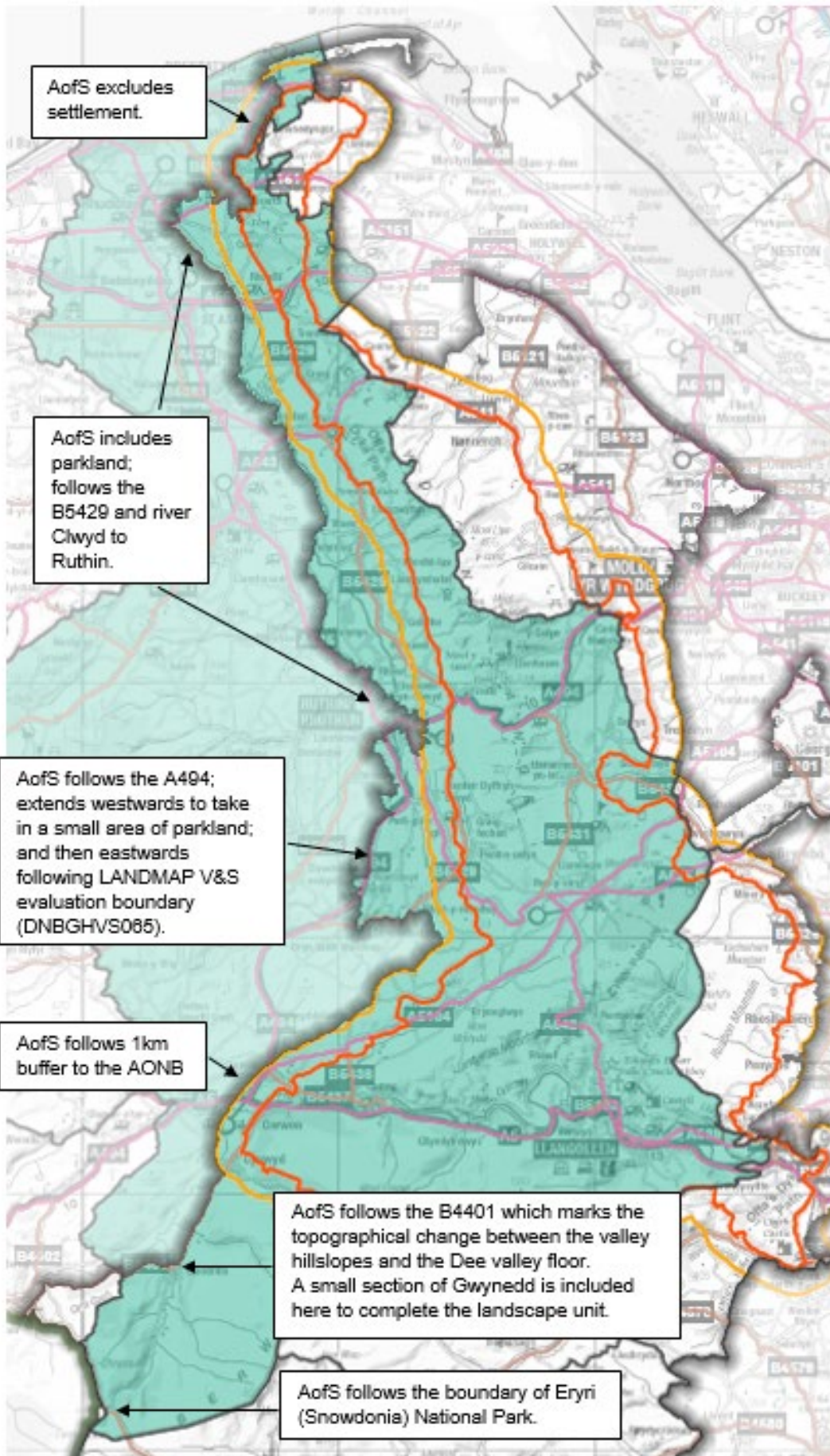
## Appendix C The spatial extents of the Area of Search

### Flintshire

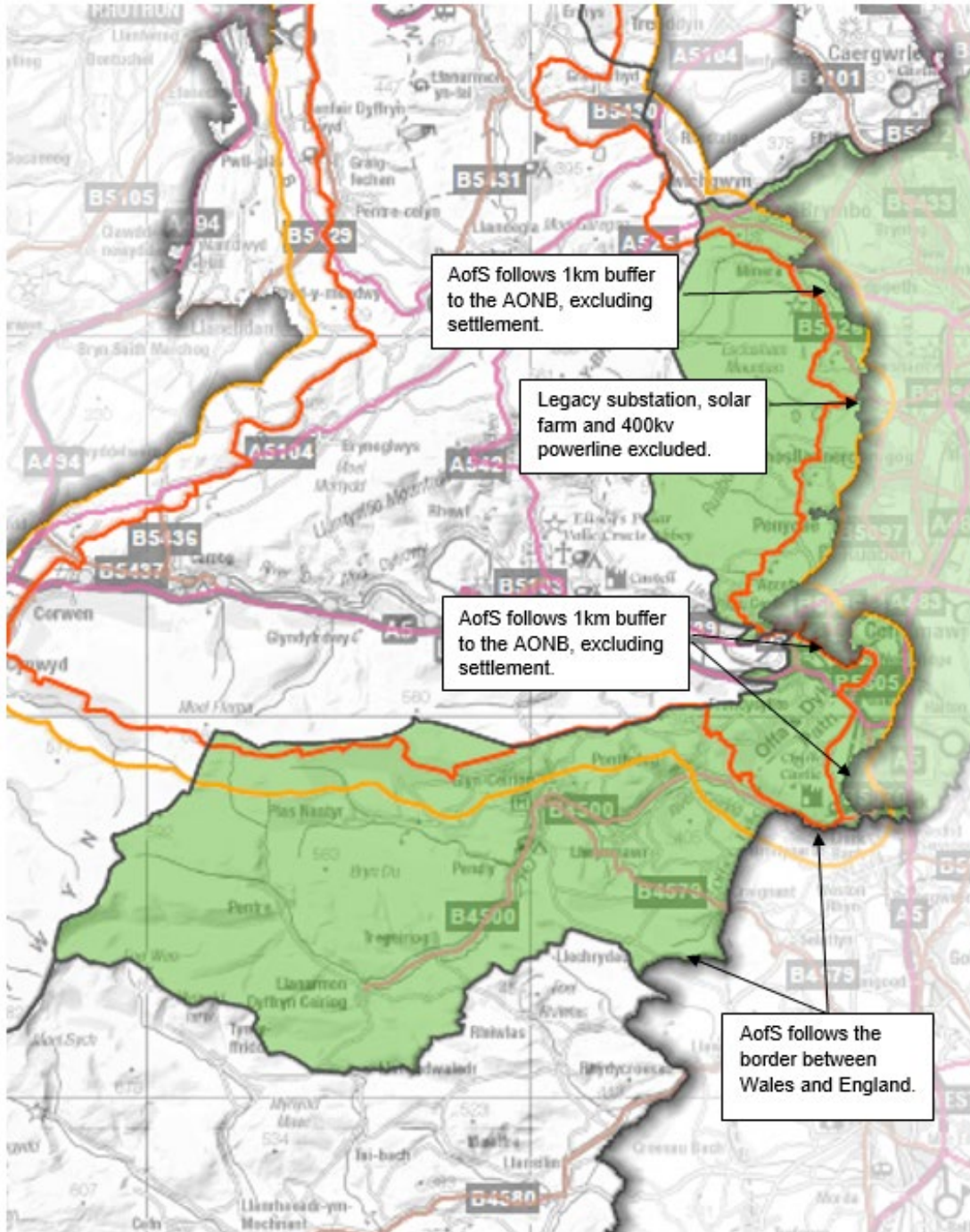




## Denbighshire and Gwynedd

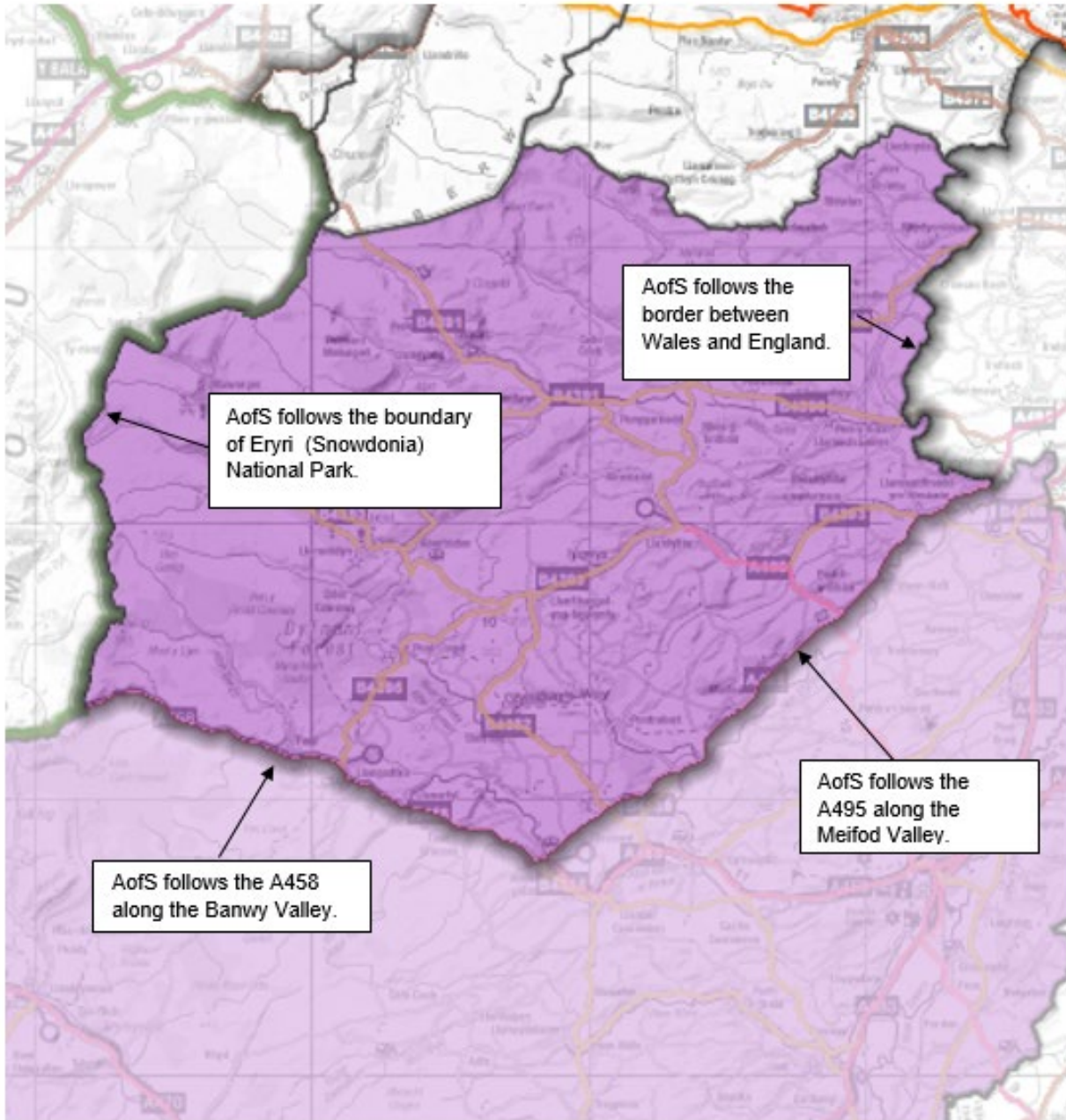


# Wrexham





## Powys



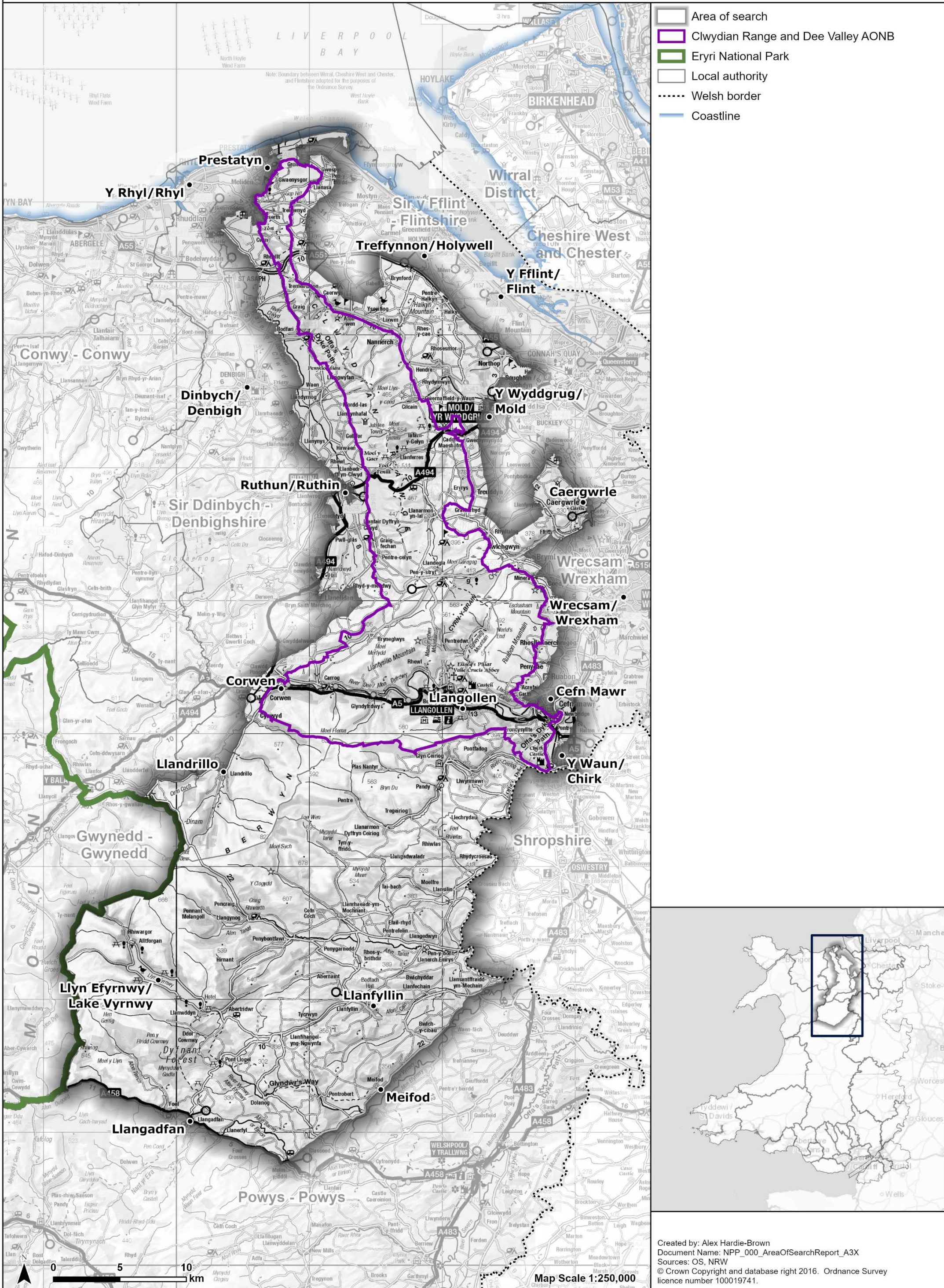
## Figures

Only Figures 1 and 2 are included within the report, to manage the document file size. Please contact [Rhaglen.Tirweddau.Dynodedig@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk](mailto:Rhaglen.Tirweddau.Dynodedig@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk) if you require the remaining figures.



# Area of Search for a Potential National Park

## Figure 1: The Area of Search



- Area of search
- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
- Eryri National Park
- Local authority
- Welsh border
- Coastline



# Area of Search for a Potential National Park

## Figure 2: LANDMAP Landscape Attributes

