
Identification of the special qualities of the area of search for a potential new National Park in North East Wales

Report for Natural Resources Wales

Craggatak Consulting
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Contents

Executive summary	iii
1. Purpose of this report	1
The Area of Search	1
Brief	2
Methodology	2
2. Background	3
3. Desk study outputs	4
4. Workshop outputs.....	17
In-person workshops	17
On-line workshops.....	19
5. Emerging Special Qualities.....	21
Checklist for comprehensiveness.....	21
Standalone qualities	22
Findings.....	22
Stakeholder consultation	23
Proposed Special Qualities	23

Next steps	27
Bibliography.....	28
Appendices.....	30
Appendix 1: Criteria for evaluation of a candidate area	31
Appendix 2: The Special Qualities of other designated landscapes	32
Appendix 3: Programme for the in-person workshops.....	34
Appendix 4: Programme for the on-line workshops.....	36
Appendix 5: Test for a comprehensive set of Special Qualities.....	37
Figure 1: Area of Search	1
Figure 2: Methodology.....	2
Figure 3: The two components of Special Qualities	5
Figure 4: Hobhouse Report map (source likely to be CCW).....	6
Figure 5: Landscape attributes in the Area of Search	8
Table 1: Special Qualities and Features of the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.....	14
Table 2: Special Qualities of Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park.....	15
Table 3: Checklist for comprehensiveness.....	21
Table 4: Special Qualities found in the Area of Search	23

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Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a study to identify the special qualities found within an 'Area of Search' for a new national park in North East Wales. The Welsh Government made a commitment in its Programme for Government 2021-2026 to designate a new National Park in North East Wales, based on the Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol (AoHNE) Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

There is a long history of considering the area for National Park designation, starting in 1945 with a report by John Dower. This led to the establishment of the Hobhouse committee that reported in 1947. As well as recommending the designation of the Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park, the committee also identified the following sites in our current area of search as Conservation Areas (now known as AoHNEs or AONBs):

- Clwydian Range
- Berwyn
- Plynlimon
- Clun & Radnor Forests

Our approach followed guidance developed for Scottish Natural Heritage. We used desk studies and ran three interactive bilingual workshops. For Natural Resources Wales to designate a landscape there must be evidence of outstanding natural beauty. If the area meets that test, and if there is further evidence of opportunities for quiet recreation, then that designation may be as a National Park. The evaluation criteria embrace distinctive characteristics and key features, which together gives an area its 'Special Qualities'.

We considered a range of reports and websites for past decisions and supporting evidence. These included Area Statements, National Landscape Character Assessments, LANDMAP and any landscape assessments or strategies produced by the local authorities. We captured references to perceptions of landscape and cultural associations. These were edited to give a common expression to terms that in turn became wordle diagrams. The exercise is subjective but it is a means of quickly comparing many documents, each written in different styles for different purposes.

Extensive views are the dominant characteristic, followed closely by tranquillity and remoteness. But cultural associations, Welshness, sense of place and scenic are also strong characteristics. Recreation, scheduled monuments and dark night skies rate highly as features. Tourism, historic and heritage assets, wildlife and the old extraction industries are also important features.

There is one designated landscape within the Area of Search, the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB; and another abutting the area, the Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park. When writing a management plan for a designated landscape, the starting point is generally the consideration of the area's special qualities and the forces that may affect them. Their published special qualities are used to test for the completeness of any new list. We also considered how the qualities are presented for each of the areas.

During our review of published material, we collected references to the cultural associations, artists and features (including contemporary) within the Area of Search. In addition, we spoke to artists and galleries who suggested items.

There were two in-person workshops held to engage public sector staff, other strategic stakeholders and specialists, and third sector organisations. The venues were:

- Llangollen Town Hall – 21 September 2023
- Llanfyllin: Public Institute Committee – 22 September 2023

An on-line workshop was held on the 23rd October 2023 with participants representing a wider range of interests than in the in-person workshops. Using maps as collection sheets, we logged the suggested distinctive characteristics, key features and common themes against the sub-regions of the Area of Search.

Taking our findings from the literature review, cultural association study and workshop findings, we propose a range of special qualities grouped under six headings:

- AN INSPIRING SPACE THAT PROMOTES MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
- A PLACE WITH COHESIVE COMMUNITIES AND DISTINCTIVE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS
- A STORY OF HUMAN INTERACTION WITH THE LANDSCAPE OVER MILLENNIA
- A HOME TO INTERNATIONALLY AND LOCALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES AND HABITATS
- A DISTINCTIVE, COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING LANDSCAPE
- A LANDSCAPE PROVIDING BENEFITS BEYOND ITS BORDERS

We present evidence to justify the inclusion of each special quality set out under these headings. And we ensure that the proposed Special Qualities embrace the full scope and range of potential qualities by testing against a list of generic attributes.

Those who had contributed to our study were invited to a special qualities on-line feedback session held on the 5th December 2023. Responses indicate the special quality themes and supporting evidence presented at the feedback session are clear and supported. There were no concerns raised about the approach. Additional information was submitted that:

- Adds to and strengthens the baseline information already captured;
- Recommends other notable places to be recorded for parity;
- Recommends the value of nature, iconic protected species, and linkages to the Biodiversity Deep dive and Forces for Change work be referred to;
- Comments on how recreation opportunity and potential can grow a community, which over time becomes part of the local identity and character of a place. This then becomes a draw for other likeminded people;
- Recreation opportunity and provision needs to be managed to work within the landscape capacity of the locality. Examples of activity providers are given. Potential for future case studies here, to understand good practice.

We made revisions in the light of these comments and submitted our final text to Natural Resources Wales.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1. To present the findings of a study to identify the special qualities found within an 'Area of Search' in North East Wales, defined by Natural Resources Wales (Natural Resources Wales 2023a).

The Area of Search

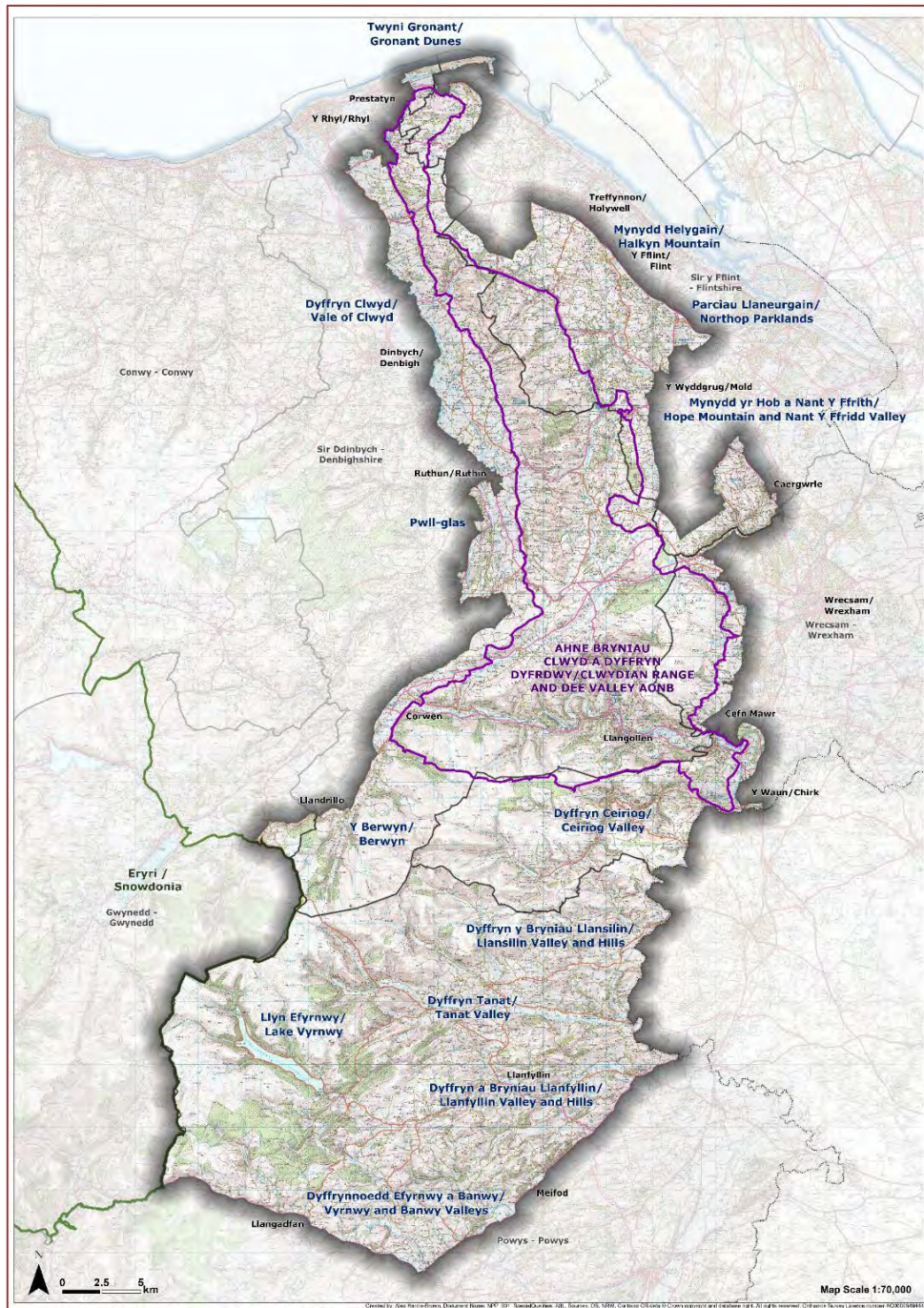


Figure 1: Area of Search

Brief

1.2. To report on the identification of special qualities to include:

- a review of a wide range of relevant data and evidence, including SoNaRR and Area Statements, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Procedural guidance, Hobhouse Report 1947, NRW's Area of Search report;
- a review of the designation history & consultation reports and landscape character of the Area of Search, including LANDMAP;
- identification of the special qualities of the Area of Search through facilitated workshops;
- comparison of the character and special qualities of the Area of Search with those set out in the Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol (AoHNE) Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan; and
- a comparison of the character and special qualities of the Area of Search with those set out in the other nationally designated Welsh landscapes.

Methodology

1.3. There are few authoritative guides for identifying special qualities. We follow that developed by Scottish Natural Heritage (see David Tyldesley and Associates 2007, Scottish Natural Heritage 2008, and Scottish Natural Heritage 2010). The commission required desk studies and interactive workshops. There was no time to conduct our own visual assessment but we did spend a day on a visualisation tour across the whole Area of Search.

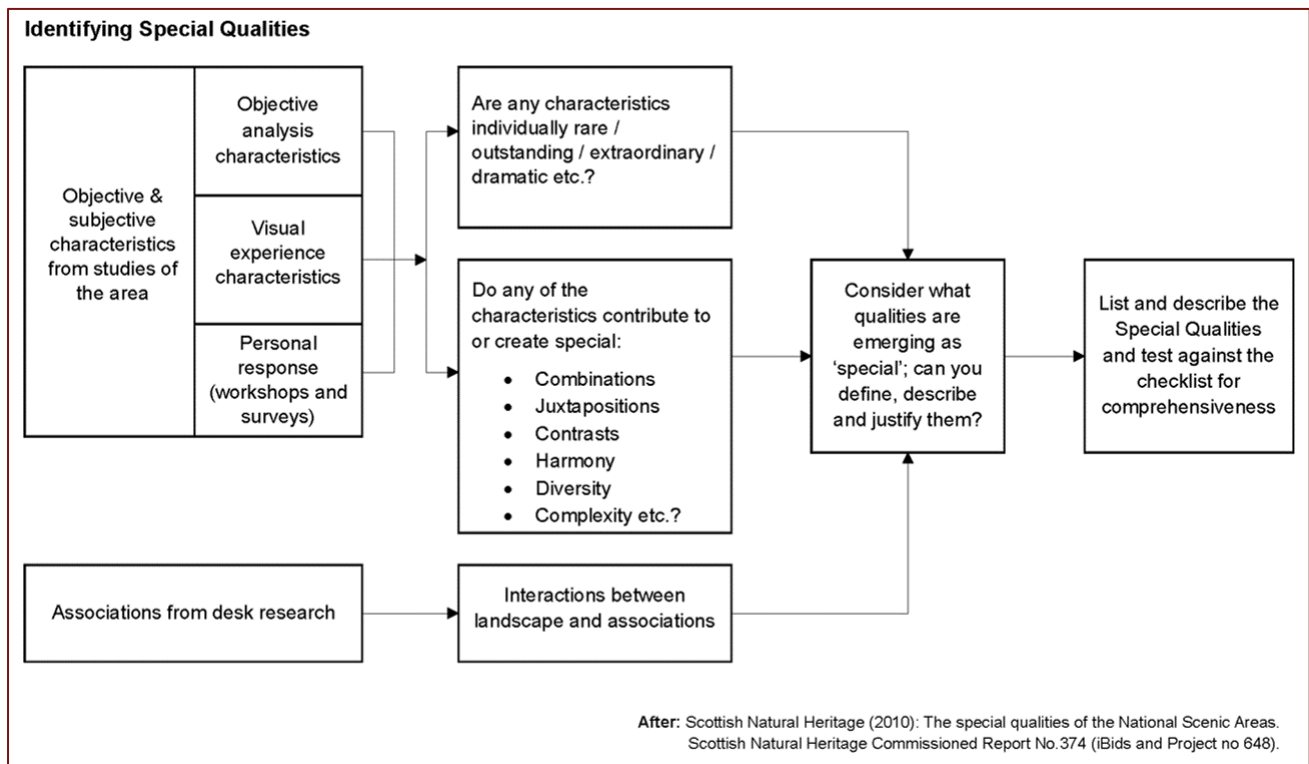


Figure 2: Methodology

- 1.4. We identified and reviewed a range of reports and websites for past decisions and supporting evidence, including the NE Wales Area Statement, the relevant National Landscape Character Assessments, LANDMAP and any landscape assessments or strategies produced by the local authorities. Using professional judgement, we searched through these documents and captured references to perceptions of landscape and cultural associations. We then edited similar words to give a common expression (e.g., we list Welshness for the different expressions of Welsh), combined them in one list of key words and created wordle diagrams¹. We did this for each grouping of documents, and then also as a summary of all the reports. This exercise is subjective but the output does not determine any decisions. It is a means of quickly comparing many documents, each written in different styles for different purposes.
- 1.5. Though many cultural landscape associations are in the literature, we also contacted local cultural galleries and spoke to local people about how the area is portrayed in art, music and words. With the help of Denbighshire County Council, we were able to exchange notes with the many artists currently working with the 'Our Picturesque Landscape' project, running in the Dee Valley.
- 1.6. We designed and ran three interactive bilingual workshops for local authority representatives and other strategic stakeholders. Two were in person and one was virtual. The workshops were our prime means of identifying people's reactions to the landscape. We encouraged people to express the reactions of all their senses, not just visual. Before the workshops, we asked David Sheil of the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and Emyr Williams of the Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park to set out their area's special qualities and explain their derivation.
- 1.7. As we were unable to conduct our own visual assessment, we interviewed the NRW Lead Specialist Advisor, who had made an extensive field study of the area. We noted the discipline he had followed and considered the factors used to identify the Area of Search. In addition, Simon Kitchin of Landscape Photography UK² gave us open access to a large photographic survey of the Area of Search specially commissioned by NRW. These images proved very informative.
- 1.8. We presented our draft findings to the NRW Project Team. They offered suggestions for additions, based upon the source materials set out in the annexes to the report. Building on our approach, they also suggested topics for further research associated with cultural associations set out in Annex 1. Before finalising our text, we presented our findings to all those who have contributed to our study, via an on-line meeting, and took account of their responses.
- 1.9. Finally, we present our draft findings to the NRW Project Team, note their response, and confirm our report.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Welsh Government made a commitment in its Programme for Government 2021-2026 to designate a new National Park in northeast Wales based on the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB (Welsh Government 2021). Natural Resources Wales is the Welsh Government's principal adviser on the sustainable management of the environment and its natural resources. It is responsible for designating areas of national

¹ Using <http://edwordle.net/create.html>

² <https://www.landscapephotographyuk.com/>

value, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. It has published procedural guidance setting out the statutory process for designation (Natural Resources Wales 2022). There are three distinct stages for the consideration of any proposal to designate a landscape:

- Stage 1 – Pre-commencement
- Stage 2 – Evidence gathering and engagement
- Stage 3 – Statutory designation process

- 2.2. Following an initial screening assessment, NRW prepared an Area of Search Report (Natural Resources Wales 2023a). It is evidence based and allows for engagement with statutory consultees, the public and stakeholders. NRW held pre-commencement meetings with all local authorities that the designation of a new National Park might affect, key politicians and other key stakeholders, including the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.
- 2.3. NRW is now gathering evidence and engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. It is seeking evidence of the special qualities that lie within the Area of Search, and of the forces for change that might influence those qualities. This will help inform the decision on whether any land within the Area of Search meets the statutory criteria within the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.
- 2.4. The decision on a National Park designation will be based on an assessment of factors that relate directly to natural beauty and opportunities afforded for open air recreation. However, the process will also reflect the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources principles, the Welsh Government's wellbeing goals (Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015), and NRW's corporate plan objectives (Natural Resources Wales 2023b). There will also be a focus on nature recovery and climate adaptation and mitigation.

3. Desk study outputs

- 3.1. The primary test for this work is NRW's procedural guidance GN010 (Natural Resources Wales 2022). This sets out the criteria for evaluation of a candidate area and are summarised in Appendix 1. For NRW to designate a landscape there must be evidence of outstanding natural beauty. If the area meets that test, and if there is further evidence of opportunities for quiet recreation, then that designation may be as a National Park.
- 3.2. NRW's criteria embrace *distinctive characteristics* and *key features*. The expression of these characteristics and features gives an area its 'Special Qualities'.

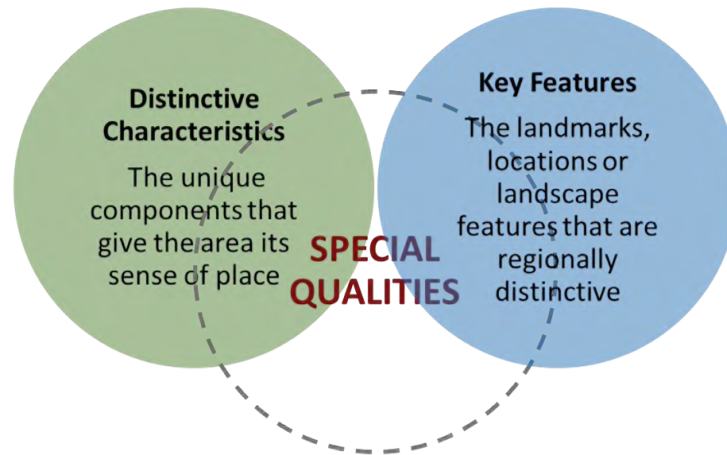


Figure 3: The two components of Special Qualities
After King, I.; Martin, J. (2021)

As confirmed by the Scottish methodology (Scottish Natural Heritage 2010), the identification of the distinctive characteristics is generally subjective whilst for the key features it is more often objective. Any area can have valued qualities, they will not necessarily be rare qualities, but simply what makes an area important and valued. It is often the combination of qualities that is special. And a particular combination can make them significant (David Tyldesley and Associates 2007). Once there is a description of the Special Qualities, they are filtered through the natural beauty criteria shown in Appendix 1 to test whether a designated landscape can be justified. If the recreation criteria are satisfied, then that designation may be as a national park.

Dower Report

- 3.3. John Dower was requested to study the problems relating to the establishment of National Parks in England and Wales. It was published in 1945 for information and as a basis for discussion. In paragraph 10, Dower list twelve reserves for possible future National Parks, of which four are listed as a priority. Of the remaining eight, there are three areas that have a link to the Area of Search:
- Merioneth Coast and Mountains (including the Berwyns);
 - Plynlimon; and
 - Radnor and Clun Forests.
- 3.4. These were to be a part of the reserve from which further National Parks or extensions of existing Parks, not necessarily corresponding precisely to the unit areas as listed, could progressively be drawn, as policy, finance and administrative capacity allowed (Dower J. 1945).

Hobhouse Report

3.5. The National Parks Committee (England and Wales) was appointed in July 1945 to consider the proposals for areas to be selected as National Parks and make recommendations. That committee reported in 1947. On page 12 paragraph 44 it notes that “as the National Parks scheme cannot include all areas requiring special conservation treatment, it is an important corollary to our main proposals that special measures should be applied to safeguard landscape beauty and to encourage its enjoyment in all those other areas which, though they satisfy the essential requirements of a National Park in scenic quality, are not included in our selection”. It suggested (on page 121 – Appendix C) that the designation of the following sites in our current area of search as Conservation Areas (now known as AoHNEs / AONBs):

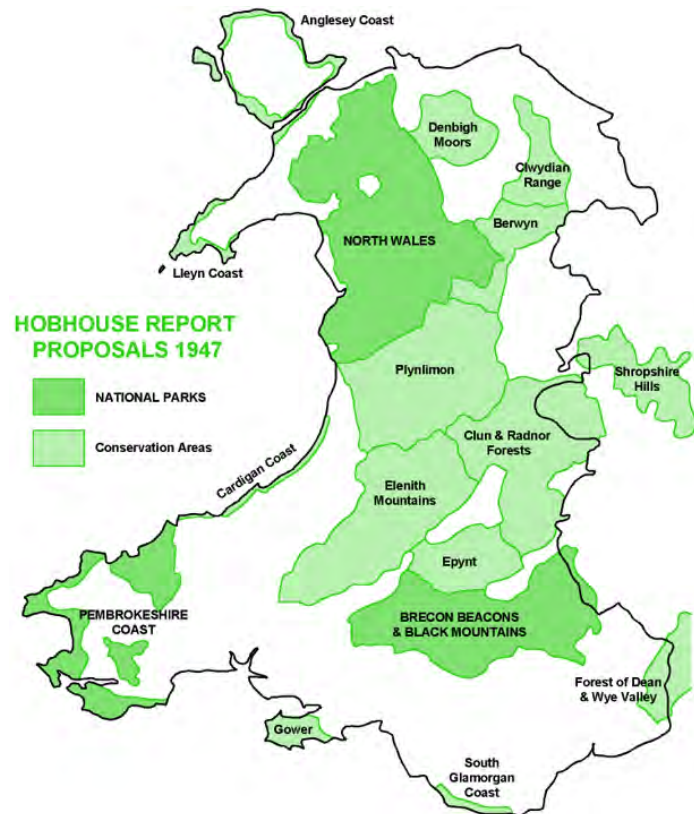


Figure 4: Hobhouse Report map (source likely to be CCW)

- Clwydian Range
- Berwyn
- Plynlimon
- Clun & Radnor Forests

3.6. Hobhouse does give some informative insights into the perceptions of North Wales at that time. From page 89 – “Unfortunately the towns and villages of North Wales have little architectural merit, but modern painters have found something to admire in the square uncompromising chapels, often two or three to a small village, which stand as monuments to Victorian piety....Local life is vigorous and the arts flourish as they do in few parts of England; moreover the increasing use of the Welsh language does much to safeguard the special flavour of local culture. There is also in many of the remote communities a happy sense of values, and social standing and public regard are based less on wealth and possessions than on the gifts and talents of the individual – especially a fine and well-trained singing voice, or a flair for poetry, oratory or dramatic art. The North Welsh, with their strong local pride, never consider a new-comer as anything but a stranger, but the visitor need not expect a chilly reception, for there is a strong tradition of hospitality”.

3.7. And page 91 – “The scenic grandeur of North Wales provides an unfailing attraction for the motorist and full attention must be given to his needs, by providing parking and picnic places at suitable points, camping sites for the motor caravanner, and well-designed restaurants for refreshment at places of popular resort” (Hobhouse Committee 1947).

Landscape assessments

- 3.8. Landscape assessments are a good starting point to the process of defining special qualities, indeed there are probably no other widely available tools to inform the process at an appropriate level. Landscape Character Assessment is the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape. They identify and explain the combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinct from one another by mapping and describing Landscape Character Types and Areas. Such assessments are relatively value-free and concerned with identifying, classifying and describing areas of distinctive character. They form an evidence baseline. The associated description of the distinctive characteristics suggests how people perceive and experience the landscape (Swanwick C. 2002). Though they may point towards an area's special qualities they do not define them. We bear this in mind when considering these documents. However, it is possible to identify references to the perceptions of landscape and the cultural associations. We can use these to ensure the outputs from consultation on Special Qualities are comprehensive and with no obvious omissions.
- 3.9. NRW uses a set of complementary studies that describe the Welsh landscape. These are:
- a. LANDMAP
 - b. National Landscape Character Areas
 - c. Area Statements

All landscape character assessments in Wales start with reference to LANDMAP, the landscape evidence baseline. Area Statements build on National Landscape Character Areas information.

LANDMAP

- 3.10. LANDMAP stands for "Landscape Assessment and Decision-Making Process". It 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.
- 3.11. LANDMAP therefore offers a very detailed and widely accessible inventory of landscape topographical and geomorphological characteristics, and human or cultural influences thereon, across Wales. However, it does not seek to afford value to discreet landscape components. Whilst offering a broad and consistent assessment of landscape characteristics, it does not embrace stakeholder opinion (David Tyldesley and Associates 2007).
- 3.12. NRW developed mapping to help identify areas of natural beauty using the terms and attributes that have established use in the assessment of new statutory landscape designations and include:
- Landscape quality
 - Scenic quality
 - Relative wildness
 - Relative tranquillity
 - Natural heritage features
 - Cultural heritage

Using LANDMAP (and other GIS data), NRW found spatial evidence of landscapes that are of notable value for these attributes. Those areas that, in combination with the existing AoHNE / AONB, 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 (Natural Resources Wales 2023a).

3.13. The study examined a series of landscape attributes across the area and plotted them as layers on the maps. Within the Area of Search, there are considerable tracts of land with outstanding scenic qualities and where many defined landscape attributes are met. This suggests where to look for any Special Qualities but the tool does not identify those qualities.

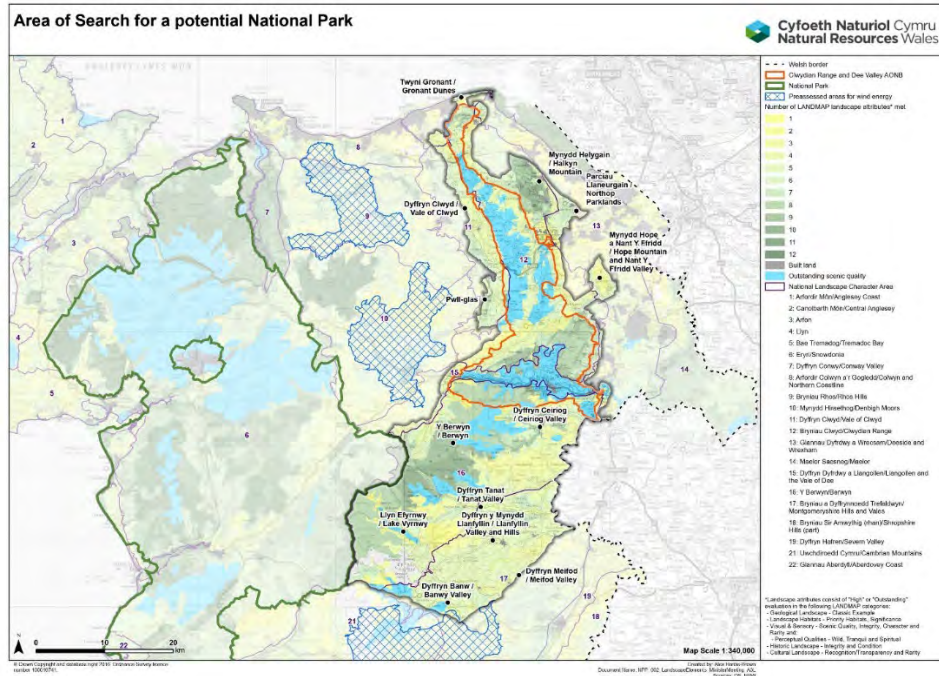


Figure 5: Landscape attributes in the Area of Search

National Landscape Character Areas

3.14. National Landscape Character Areas (NLCAs) are at a broad landscape scale across Wales. They give a summary description and list of key characteristics linked to regional identity. There are short narratives capturing visual, geological, habitat, historic and cultural influences. They provide key information for promoting and celebrating regional landscapes.

3.15. There are 48 National Landscape Character Areas in Wales³. The Area of Search lies across seven of them:

- NLCA08 North Wales Coast
- NLCA11 Vale of Clwyd
- NLCA12 Clwydian Range
- NLCA13 Deeside and Wrexham
- NLCA15 Vale of Llangollen and Dee Valley
- NLCA16 Berwyn
- NLCA17 Montgomeryshire Hills and Vales

³ <https://naturalresources.wales/evidence-and-data/maps/nlca/?lang=en>

- 3.16. By searching through these documents, we captured references to the perceptions of landscape and the cultural associations for each NLCA. We then edited similar words to give a common expression (e.g., we list Welshness for the different expressions of Welsh), combined them in one list of key words and created the following wordle diagram:



Size of text is determined by the number of mentions. The dominant words are clear to see.

- 3.17. From the combined NLCA documents, we find that the most prominent word associations are:
- cultural associations
 - quietness
 - tranquillity

Followed by:

- Welshness
- sense of place
- remote
- gateway to North Wales
- language
- undeveloped

However, it is the combination of all the terms in the diagram that will determine the Special Qualities.

Area Statement for North East Wales (2018)

- 3.18. Area Statements outline the key challenges facing a particular locality, what can be done to meet those challenges, and how natural resources can be better managed for the benefit of future generations. The area is described as a predominately quiet, traditional and attractive rural area. It does not set out Special Qualities but it does give headline characteristics.
- 3.19. It suggests there is a strong borderland character formed by the chain of hills and upland plateau that rises from the Cheshire plain. There are wild and tranquil qualities associated with the coastline at, for example, the Gronant dunes, Halkyn Mountain, Llantysillio and Ruabon Mountain. The Berwyn Mountains enclose the Ceiriog Valley to the south west where hill farming and Welsh identity is strong. These areas are visually distinctive, tranquil, remote and wild.

3.20. It has many distinctive landforms, such as Moel yr Parc, Moel Arthur, Moel Famau, Dinas Bran, Eglwyseg escarpment, Ruabon Mountain, etc., and dramatic accessible escarpments near Prestatyn, the Vale of Clwyd and Llangollen, above Minera and the highest point of the Berwyn ridge at Cadair Berwyn. The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site is designated for its spectacular aqueduct crossings and feat of engineering in a topographically challenging location. And the Registered Historic Landscapes recognise the strong diverse cultural influences of prehistoric remains, medieval farming, defences, estate lands, houses and gardens, religious establishments, extractive and processing industrial activity within the contemporary landscape. (Natural Resources Wales 2018a)

Area Statement for Mid Wales (2018)

3.21. The area is described as a very large rural area with regional scale remote uplands and mountains, coastline, reservoirs and borderlands contributing to its identity. Only a small part of this area affects the area of search. This is a part of the Berwyns that lie along the northern edge.

3.22. The Berwyn moorland plateau encloses the historic landscape of the Tanat Valley, including distinct tributary valleys containing the dramatic and scenic Pistyll Rhaeadr (the highest waterfall in Wales) and craggy peak of Craig Rhiwarth. The area provides attractive, exposed, invigorating and wild qualities, with strong cultural identity in its historic hillforts, farming, mining and quarrying and St Melangell's Church. South of the Tanat lies the deep Vyrnwy valley with its large reservoir, a popular recreational area, and beyond forests and moorland. There are strong contrasts across the area from settled farmed valleys, to sinuous light reflecting reservoirs, wilder exposed, tranquil and unpopulated uplands. (Natural Resources Wales 2018b)

Other Landscape Character Assessments

3.23. Denbighshire and Flintshire Councils do not produce their own landscape character assessments, they use LANDMAP.

3.24. **Wrexham County Borough Council** uses supplementary planning guidance to interpret its LANDMAP data with the identification of 27 different Landscape Character Areas.

3.25. Each Landscape Character Area is described in a discrete document with concise information for the visual, geology, ecology, history, and cultural aspects within the area. There is information on:

- the landscape character detailing its landform, features, openness or enclosure;
- an indication of important qualities or attributes;
- its location within the authority, relationship with other landscape types both within the authority and beyond;
- the key characteristics of visual, geology, ecology, history, and cultural character;
- landscape sensitivity in relation to the pressures and threats upon landscape; and
- management aims and guidelines to achieve the management strategy for the area.

3.26. The most relevant character areas are:

- LCA 1a Berwyn Mountain
- LCA 1b Ruabon and Esclusham Mountain
- LCAs 2&3 Berwyn Foothills & Ceiriog Forest
- LCA 4 Ceiriog Valley
- LCA 5a Chirk Estate to Froncysyllte

- LCA 5b Eastern Slopes of Ruabon Mountain
- LCA 6 Minera - Gwynfryn – Bwlchgwyn
- LCA 7a Chirk
- LCA 7b Cefn Mawr
- LCA 9d Dee Valley, Froncysyllte to Newbridge

3.27. We captured references to the perceptions of landscape and the cultural associations for each LCA, combined them in one list and created the following wordle diagram:



We find that the most prominent word associations are:

- long-distance views
- recreation
- tranquillity
- archaeology
- remote
- high wildlife value

3.28. **Gwynedd Council** uses the landscape strategies for Anglesey and Gwynedd published in 1999 that were updated in 2012. Only a small part is within the area of search, namely Landscape Character Area 12 Llandderfel, on the eastern edge of the Arenig Uplands. The assessment focusses on design issues but it does state that this character area includes the natural and historically strategic route corridor of the upper Dee Valley, which includes important sites from the Roman and medieval period. Around Sarnau is an historic landscape of irregular fields and woods little changed since the 19th century.

3.29. **Powys County Council** has a Landscape Character Assessment produced by Land Use Consultants in 2022. It shows 61 Character Areas across the County, of which we considered 11, namely:

- LCA 1: Berwyn Foothills
- LCA 2: Berwyn Mountains
- LCA 3: Llanrhaeadr
- LCA 4: Llyn Efyrynwy
- LCA 5: Dyfnant Forest/Llanbrynmair Moors
- LCA 6: Tanat Valley
- LCA 7: Llanfyllin Farmlands
- LCA 8: Severn Farmlands
- LCA 9: Pont Llogel
- LCA 12: Tregynon
- LCA 14: Banwy Valley

Some of these areas are only partly in the Area of Search. We captured references to the perceptions of landscape and the cultural associations for each LCA, combined them in one list, and created the following wordle diagram:



We find that the most prominent word associations are:

- views
- scheduled monuments
- dark night skies
- tranquillity
- remoteness
- listed buildings
- medieval

Summary of LCA findings

- 3.30. The wordle pictures for each of the documents above appear to show a contrasting understanding of the area's qualities. This is not surprising. There is no consistent approach to these studies, each has a particular purpose in mind and there are subtle differences between them. It is not a simple matter to compare their outputs.
- 3.31. However, by combining the key words from all the studies we can build up a picture that gives us some sense of the regional perception and experience of the landscape. There was a need to edit the word list to ensure the common expression of terms. This created the following wordle diagram:



This shows a more balanced picture. Extensive views are the dominant characteristic, followed closely by tranquillity and remoteness. But cultural associations, Welshness, sense of place and scenic are also strong characteristics. Recreation, scheduled monuments and dark night skies rate highly as features. Tourism, historic and heritage assets, wildlife and the old extraction industries are also important features.

Published Special Qualities

3.32. When writing a management plan for a designated landscape, the starting point is generally the consideration of the area’s special qualities and the forces that may affect them. There is one designated landscape within the area, the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, and another abutting the area, the Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park. Both publish their special qualities.

AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB

3.33. The current AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 sets out the area’s Special Qualities and Features, in Section 5. We reproduce them in Table 1.

Table 1: Special Qualities and Features of the AoHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy / Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB

Landscape Character and Quality	Tranquillity	Tranquillity is associated with an atmosphere of calm and stillness; peace and quiet; and with dark night skies.
	Remoteness and Wildness, Space and Freedom	Remoteness and wildness are associated with a feeling of trepidation and sometimes even danger. The sublime.
		Space and freedom are related to access to the landscape and the uninterrupted and extensive views from the high places within it.
		Bro and the link between communities and their landscape. A sense of belonging and attachment to the landscape.
Habitats and Wildlife	Heather Moorland and Rolling ridges	The dramatic moorland ridges of the central Clwydian Range, expansive Llandegla and Ruabon Moors, Llantysilio and North Berwyn.
	Broadleaved Woodlands and Veteran Trees	Bishops Wood, Cwm and Wheeler Valley. Ash dominated Alyn Valley woods and the small copses of the upper Alyn and upland oak woods of the Dee Valley.
	River Valleys and the River Dee	The dramatic and powerful River Dee contrasted with the smaller twisting and winding River Alyn and River Wheeler. The Clwyd catchment which flows from the Clwydian Range.
	Limestone Grasslands, Cliffs and Screes	Graig Fawr, Loggerheads and Bryn Alyn – Llanarmon yn Ial and the spectacular Eglwyseg Escarpment.
Historic Environment	Historic Settlement and Archaeology	Historic settlement patterns and conservation areas. The diverse patterns and features in the landscape left by previous generations.
	Industrial Features and the World Heritage Site	Limestone quarrying and lead mining, slate quarries and associated tramways and workings – the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and canal, Horseshoe Falls.
	Historic Defence Features	The dramatic chain of Iron Age Hillforts of the Clwydian Range, Castell Dinas Brân, Chirk Castle and medieval Motte and Baileys at Tomen y Rhodwydd, Tomen y Faedre and Glyndwr's Mount, Carrog. Prehistoric funerary and rituals.
	Small historic features	Often unlisted or scheduled a rich mixture of small historic features that are an important part of the rich cultural layer of the landscape – wells, pumps, boundary stones, way markers, milk stands and K6 telephone boxes
	Traditional boundaries	Drystone walls and hedges reflecting traditional skills and artisanry and often reflecting local styles and geology.
Access Recreation and Tourism	Iconic Visitor and Cultural Attractions	Sites that have helped to shape the identity of the AONB as a visitor destination- Loggerheads, Moel Famau, Castell Dinas Brân, Valle Crucis Abbey, the Horseshoe Pass, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Horseshoe Falls.

	The Offa's Dyke National Trail and Promoted Routes	Stretching from Prestatyn Hillside in the North to Llangollen in the South, the National Trail makes the AONB particularly accessible. The Dee Valley Way, North Berwyn Way and a network of community paths. Together with extensive areas of Access Land the landscape of the AONB is particularly accessible.
Culture and People	The Built Environment	The villages and towns, hamlets and scattered settlements.
	People and Communities	A rich mix of culture and strong sense of community – the facilities and services that are essential to sustaining rural life. Welsh language and rural traditions.

- 3.34. David Sheil, the AoHNE / AONB Area Manager, states that this list has evolved over the years following a wide consultation at the start of each management planning cycle. In 2009, extensive consultation with local communities, public bodies and agencies with an interest in the area's management was undertaken to define the special qualities and features of the AoHNE / AONB (Merfyn Williams Associates 2006 /2007). There was similar work in 2011 during the process of extending the AoHNE / AONB to include the Dee Valley (Craggatak Consulting 2012).
- 3.35. As a part of the stakeholder engagement process for the 2020-2025 Management Plan, core stakeholders and community consultees were asked whether they thought the existing list of special qualities and features was still relevant and reflective of the AoHNE / AONB in the present day.

Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park

- 3.36. Eryri's current Partnership Plan sets out nine special qualities. There is a very detailed description for each quality and this is supported by relevant facts and a list of special places where the quality can be experienced⁴. These qualities are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Special Qualities of Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park

1. Diverse landscape	Diverse, high-quality landscapes and seascapes within a small geographic area, ranging from coast to rolling uplands to rugged mountains for which Snowdonia is famed.
2. Community Cohesion	A robust sense of community identity, cohesion, continuity and inclusivity combine to give a strong 'sense of place and belonging' within Snowdonia.
3. Vibrancy of the Welsh language	The vibrancy of Welsh is most obvious in Eryri as it continues to be the choice of language in many social and professional environments. It is evident in local place names, the wildlife and history therein and is therefore intrinsic to the uniqueness of our cultural and natural heritage.
4. Inspiration for the Arts	Snowdonia is a place which has inspired some of the nation's most notable culture, folklore, art, literature and music; an influence which continues across all creative pursuits to the present day
5. Tranquillity and solitude	The opportunity for people to understand and enjoy Snowdonia National Park actively, whilst maintaining areas of silence, tranquillity and solitude, thus promoting vital aspects of health, well-being and personal reflection.

⁴ See <https://cynlluneryri.org/special-qualities/>

6. Recreation Leisure and Learning	Extensive opportunities for recreation, leisure and learning for people of all ages and abilities.
7. Historic Landscapes	The changing relationship between people and nature over time has produced landscapes of great beauty and variety in Eryri; a national asset that is essential both to our identity and to our individual 'sense of place' and wellbeing.
8. Renowned Geology	Complex, varied and renowned geology, which has been vital in influencing the disciplines of geology and geography internationally.
9. Internationally important species and habitats	There are 17 National Nature Reserves in Snowdonia; more than in any other National Park in England and Wales; and 56 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The tremendous biodiversity reflects the varied landscape, geology, climate and land management. The richness of plants and animals is fundamental to the history, culture, language, economy and ongoing well-being of all people who live in and visit the area

3.37. Eryri states that most National Parks have kept themselves very close to the original legislation (i.e., landscape, recreation etc.). What differentiates Eryri is special qualities 2, 3 and 4. These grew from the interaction between members and staff and then consultation with stakeholders and statutory consultees. The plan is now up for review and there may be a tenth special quality – which is the quality of our dark skies. There is no archived material on the adoption of the earlier Special Qualities.

Note on other protected landscapes

3.38. The Special Qualities for the following National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are set out in Appendix 2.

- Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog / Brecon Beacons National Park
- Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfre / Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
- AoHNE Ynns Môn / Isle of Anglesey AONB
- AoHNE Gwyr / Gower AONB
- AoHNE Llŷn / Llŷn AONB
- AoHNE Dyffryn Gwy / Wye Valley AONB

3.39. The style and approach to the presentation and use of the Special Qualities does vary between these landscapes. For some it is a simple list that then forms the chapter headings of the management plan, for others there is a detailed consideration of the qualities, sometimes with an engaging narrative to draw the reader in.

Cultural associations

3.40. During our review of published material, we have collected references to the cultural associations, artists and features (including contemporary) within the Area of Search. In addition, artists and galleries have suggested items and we have searched out the links to the area. We have then logged each item against the most appropriate NLCA so that we can see where the influence lies.

3.41. The historical cultural associations are well known. The NLCA's and local authority websites encapsulate this. Of greater interest for the present task is the influence on future generations. Our review and interviews have found ample evidence that the landscape in the Area of Search inspires the current generation of artists, whether they be painters, sculptors, poets, writers, musicians, story tellers or crafts people.

This material is set out in a separate annex (see Annex 1).

4. Workshop outputs

A full reporting of each workshop is set out in a separate annex (see Annex 2).

In-person workshops

4.1. There were two in-person workshops held to engage local authority staff within the Area of Search and the adjoining Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri / Snowdonia National Park, along with other strategic stakeholders and specialists. The venues were:

- Llangollen Town Hall – 21 September 2023
- Llanfyllin: Public Institute Committee – 22 September 2023

The number of attendees for each workshop was lower than expected but there was a good breadth and range of interests; the depth and scope of discussion was good. However, we also ran an on-line workshop to engage with those who could not attend (we report on these below). The programme for the in-person workshops is set out in Appendix 3. Key features and common themes emerged. These included:

- Tranquillity
- Sense of Place derived from cultural heritage and cultural associations (potentially making the prospect of designating a new National Park unique and different from other designated landscapes in Wales)
- Far-reaching views from within and outside the Area of Search – long-reaching
- Outside and within Area of Search – a diverse range of landscape features
- The importance of geology/geomorphology in defining the area, developing a cohesiveness for the whole area, but also celebrating the differences across it
- Geology and relationships to valleys/characteristics of area
- Valleys – key role in defining different distinctive characteristics/unique in North Wales (culturally akin to the valleys of South Wales)
- The interface between upland and lowlands. These places are different. Someone with recreational interests might naturally be drawn to the uplands. Valley communities will live within the limits imposed by topography, employment, road networks and public services. Sense of place and appreciation of landscape can be very different based upon where you live and how you earn a living
- Welshness – borderland – resilience, toughness, proud Welshness. Toughness through mining, steel work, etc.
- Connectivity – commons/uplands. Common features that link the north and south of the Area of Search
- Quality of upland farmed landscapes. Hefted flocks. People are an intrinsic part of landscapes (indigenous)

- The land dictates type of farming -
 - Industrialised modern farming
 - Upland traditions
 - Relationships between uplands and lowlands – still connected?
 - Uplands/lowland agriculture/land use
 - Links to land use/agriculture to Welsh language
- Post-industrial landscape – linked back to community regeneration
- Industrial heritage
- Cultural associations to place
- Collation of traditional Welsh folklore/folk songs etc. – the birth place for many traditions
- Artists taking inspiration from the place
- Sense of place is not necessarily associated with the valley in which one lives. Farmers in remoter locations might associate with more than one community, and not necessarily the most obvious one. Topography is one of several factors
- Recognition, sense of place and pride in place including the past – it has shaped people and place
- Communities should be part of Special Qualities and feature strongly in their consideration
- Strong communities = sense of place
- Use of landscape for recreational purposes
- Breathing spaces for urban communities – Mold, Wrexham. Ruthin was different
- Communications – connectivity, links and infrastructure
- Gronant Dunes was popular and seen to be an integral part of the Area of Search and should be included in the overall discussion to designate a new National Park. Potential inclusion of dunes systems as a special feature – unique ecological features of international importance (North Wales) will add to uniqueness and distinctive characteristic of the area and potential National Park
- Should Hope Mountain be linked to Halkyn mountain in the Area of Search? The boundary looks contrived
- Owain Glyndwr and Offa's Dyke – nationally important cultural references and a theme that links some wider landscapes with the current AoHNE / AONB

Conclusions drawn

- 4.2. The potential to designate a new National Park is an opportunity to do things differently, within the legislative framework. It comes with a sense of pride and a sense of imposition. It is important to have a strong sense of ownership.
- 4.3. Participants felt that a real emphasis should be placed on the integrity of a potential National Park and what ties it together, as expressed in the Special Qualities. However, these Special Qualities were not so much about nature. Cultural associations, people and a sense of place played an integral role and would make a new designated landscape for Wales unique.

- 4.4. In noting the different approaches to recording Special Qualities in other Welsh designated landscapes, there was a preference for the qualities to tell a story (participants like the Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog / Brecon Beacons National Park approach). However, there must be evidence to justify the Special Qualities of an area, together with how to experience them. There was an opportunity to shift the emphasis to people and culture supporting landscape and nature. There was an opportunity to bring cultural/people associations to the fore, balancing telling a story with the links between people and nature. This needs to be defensible, with a clear action plan for all based on robust policies and sustainable resources to deliver.
- 4.5. There was a need for an inclusive approach, looking at how a new designation, including identifying Special Qualities, would meet the challenges faced in delivering Sustainable Development Goals. More locally, there was a need to strengthen the inclusive nature of Special Qualities and include all communities including farming, business and young people in the process from the outset. Therefore, a regional narrative approach should be reflected within Special Qualities.
- 4.6. The key messages are:
- Whole should be representative of area;
 - Cover all demographics;
 - Special Qualities to be fresh, new, vibrant and inclusive – art, poetry, visual, people, nature, etc.;
 - Create a story that sweeps across the whole area; and
 - Be open and imaginative in determining Special Qualities – interpret and do things differently.

On-line workshops

- 4.7. An on-line workshop was held on the 23rd October 2023. The programme is set out in Appendix 4. There were ten participants representing a wider range of interests than in the in-person workshops, as well as input from NRW specialist staff and a CIEEM Wales Policy Group representative. We presented the Area of Search in four sections, illustrated with maps and photographs. Attendees put their responses in the chat box which were then collated into a report (set out in Annex 2).
- 4.8. Some statements related to the whole area:
- An extensive area of uplands and interlacing valleys
 - Much of the area contains large-scale upland (and headwaters) or interlacing river valleys – all with very diverse landscape and biodiversity features. The juxtaposition of scale and diversity is an opportunity to support resilient habitats and adaptive ecosystems – through durable and effective incentives and management.
 - Water, geology and landform
 - The overlay of catchments would allow hydraulic influences, geology and resultant special qualities to be understood and linked to management objectives and interventions

- Water - both quality (ecological and chemical), supply (including extractive and export), flood risk management, inextricably influence landscape character, biodiversity, human habitation and culture.
- Opportunities of a new National Park
 - New National Park should be seen as a platform to raise awareness, target intervention and focus conservation priorities at a strategic level.
 - Conservation action for these iconic species should be a key driver and priority.
 - The area could contain 96% of the remaining Black Grouse in Cymru. We would love to see the BG as the new NP logo.

4.9. Key features and common themes linked to the four areas emerged. These included:

- Dark skies
- Iconic views
- Isolated, peaceful, quiet, remote, tranquil
- Wilderness
- Dramatic and contrasting rising land
- Intricate nature of the landscape in the Dee valley
- "valleys and headwaters"
- A stronghold of spoken Welsh
- Ancient feel with strong links to the Mabinogi
- Archaeology
- Bronze age burial mounds, hillforts
- Iconic sites - Castell Dinas Bran, Glyn y Groes, Valle Crucis, Pennant Melangell , Plas Newydd, Pen Plenau roman marching camp
- Close knit communities - very culturally distinct
- Common land that is managed by grazing, active grazing association.
- Home of sheepdog trials
- Industrial archaeology and former mine, slate and kiln sites
- Lake Vyrnwy Hotel
- Manorial lands
- Transport links rail, road, and canal links
- Varied and distinctive habitats
- Black Grouse, Curlew, Golden Plover, Hen Harrier, Lapwing, Little Tern, Merlin, Red Kites, Ring Ouzel, Yellowhammer
- Butterflies
- Salmon
- Veteran and ancient oaks
- Cycling, Climbing, walking, water sports, Fishing, hunting, shooting
- Country parks
- Commons
- Exploring old workings
- Extensive ridge line walks
- Offa's Dyke
- Open access land
- Roads over the Berwyn are a visual delight.
- Tourism
- Wat's dyke

Conclusions drawn

- 4.10. There may be a large and elongated National Park, with very different areas. Key factors played an important role in shaping these diverse landscapes, including communities, agriculture and traditional sports. There needs to be consideration on how to maintain these elements. There is an opportunity to use Welsh legislation and priorities to connect these factors and bring a cohesive and innovative approach to managing landscapes.
- 4.11. As the water theme developed, it was suggested that using a catchment overlay may better define (or refine) the area of search. There was an opportunity for a new National Park to have a diverse set of areas linked by Special Qualities. This would require an assessment of the impacts of climate change on water quality/quantity, recreation and water supply together with needs of biodiversity.
- 4.12. Access, recreation and tourism must add benefits to the area without degrading the special qualities. Lake Vyrnwy was proposed as a demonstration model.
- 4.13. There was a general feeling that there needs to be more emphasis on the cultural associations and heritage – language, art, local produce and products, industrial and built heritage, festivals, etc., of the area and how communities have shaped their place.

5. Emerging Special Qualities

- 5.1. Taking our findings from the literature review, cultural association study and workshop findings, we developed our special qualities, grouped under six headings:
- An inspiring space that promotes mental, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing
 - A place with cohesive communities and distinctive settlement patterns
 - A story of human interaction with the landscape over millennia
 - A home to internationally and locally important species and habitats
 - A distinctive, complementary and contrasting landscape
 - A landscape providing benefits beyond its borders

Checklist for comprehensiveness

- 5.2. Our methodology requires that we ensure that the Special Qualities embrace the full scope and range of potential qualities. We test our Special Qualities against a series of generic attributes to ensure a comprehensive expression of the area. These are shown in Appendix 5 and summarised in the Table 3.

Table 3: Checklist for comprehensiveness

Comprehensiveness checklist ⁵	Proposed Special Qualities
1. Authenticity and integrity	A landscape providing benefits beyond its borders
2. Landform, land use, land cover	A distinctive, complementary and contrasting landscape
3. Emotional response	An inspiring space that promotes mental, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing

⁵ After David Tyldesley & Associates 2007 page 28

4. Visual experience	A distinctive, complementary and contrasting landscape
5. People and community	An inspiring space that promotes mental, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing A place with cohesive communities and distinctive settlement patterns
6. History and culture	A place with cohesive communities and distinctive settlement patterns A story of human interaction with the landscape over millennia
7. Settlement	A place with cohesive communities and distinctive settlement patterns
8. Wildlife	A home to internationally and locally important species and habitats

Standalone qualities

The Welsh Bible of 1588

- 5.3. William Morgan translated the Bible into Welsh whilst vicar at Llanrhaeadr-y-Mochnant. Published in 1588, Queen Elizabeth I ordered that this Welsh Bible be placed in every church in Wales so that all who speak Welsh can read and understand. All church services and prayers in Wales were then to be in Welsh. Revised in 1620, it was the version in general use until the final years of the twentieth century⁶. Morgan wrote in an accessible style that was close to spoken Welsh. This made his translation extremely important to the Welsh people and to Queen Elizabeth I. It helped Elizabeth, as many Welsh people now became loyal Protestant subjects of the Queen. Of even greater importance was the translation's cultural significance.
- 5.4. The translation of the Bible gave great prominence to the Welsh language, to the extent that it served to preserve the Welsh language, culture and tradition. Welsh congregations could understand what was being read to them and this served to reinforce their religious devotion (BBC Bitesize website).

No other Welsh book has been as influential. It is a work of immense linguistic and literary significance. Morgan not only produced a version of unfailing accuracy but also skilfully moulded the classical language of the poets into the literary Welsh known today. The book is the foundation stone on which modern Welsh literature is based (The National Library of Wales website). **This quality is truly special to the area.**

Findings

- 5.5. In combination, the proposed Special Qualities address all the attributes. They capture the full range of potential qualities. We have found many individual qualities but there are none that are individually outstanding, with one exception. The publication, in 1588, of the first Welsh translation of the complete Bible. The other qualities work in combination to give this area a strong recognisable identity.

⁶ William Morgan (1588): Y Beibl cyssegr-lan: sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd (Llundain)
William Morgan, John Davies and Richard Parry (eds.) (1630): Y Bibl Cyssegr-lan: sef Yr Hen Destament, a'r Newydd (Llundain)

Stakeholder consultation

- 5.6. Before finalising our text, we presented our findings to all those who have contributed to our study at an on-line meeting held on the 5th December. NRW then circulated the special qualities table for comment.

Proposed Special Qualities

- 5.7. Taking account of all responses, we revised our text and now present the emerging Special Qualities found in the Area of Search (see Table 4).

Table 4: Special Qualities found in the Area of Search

HEADLINE	SPECIAL QUALITIES		EVIDENCE
	CHARACTERISTICS	FEATURES	
AN INSPIRING SPACE THAT PROMOTES MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING	The foundation of modern Welsh literature	The 1558 Welsh Bible	A work of immense linguistic and literary significance. Moulded the classical language of the poets into the literary Welsh in use today.
	The home of poets Dramatic and spectacular Iconic views Inspirational Legends, myths and story-telling Natural wonders Open country Opportunities for recreation Peace and tranquillity Quietness and solitude Remoteness and wildness Sense of adventure Sense of deep-time Space and freedom Uninterrupted views Warm and prosperous feel	The Mabinogion Owain Glyndŵr George Borrow's – Wild Wales Gruffudd ap Cynan (c. 1055 –1137) Jim Perrin – The Hills of Wales John Puleston Jones Car parks Country parks Craggs for climbing Cycle routes Dark skies Eisteddfodau Environmental education Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau High mountain ridges Iconic sites Iconic species Long distance routes – Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke & Glyndwr Way Outdoor education and activity centres Rights of Way Rising land	Abundant flora and fauna Amount and type of network Artworks Braille system for the Welsh language Climbing guides Cycling centres - Revolution Bike Park, One Giant Leap and One Planet Adventure Llandegla Eisteddfod at Caerwys (c. 1081-1137) Eisteddfod Fawr Llangollen (1858) Llangollen International Eisteddfod Fell / mountain racing, trail running and mountain biking Hymns Impact of footfall Links with Liverpool and Birmingham – WWII evacuations and development of outdoor education centres

		<p>Skylines interlacing valleys</p> <p>Urban links</p> <p>Uplands</p> <p>View points</p> <p>Visitor facilities</p> <p>Waterfalls, rivers and lakes</p>	<p>Loggerheads – links to Crosville bus company</p> <p>Music</p> <p>Numbers and types of visitors</p> <p>Poetry and writing</p> <p>Programmes and events</p> <p>Publications</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>Social reform</p> <p>Tourism and recreation use by urban conurbations</p> <p>Villages and scattered farms have been a nursery of poets for centuries</p> <p>Water centres - Mile End Mill, the River bank Hub for Whitewater Active and the Bearded Men Adventures HQ</p>
<p>A PLACE WITH COHESIVE COMMUNITIES AND DISTINCTIVE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS</p>	<p>Vibrancy of Welsh culture</p> <p>'Border' cultures drawing on distinctive traditions and networks</p> <p>'Bro' – sense of community, belonging, attachment and sense of place</p> <p>Communities of interest</p> <p>Distinctive valley cultures</p> <p>Language links to land use and agriculture</p> <p>Pride in Welshness</p> <p>Recognition and pride in place including the past</p> <p>Sense of welcome</p>	<p>The Welsh Bible</p> <p>Carolau Haf</p> <p>Carolau Plygain</p> <p>Celebrations</p> <p>Close-knit communities</p> <p>Community based events</p> <p>Community enterprises that bring communities together</p> <p>Language and place – strongly Welsh v strongly English</p> <p>Links between settlements</p> <p>Literature</p> <p>Locally sourced energy & communications</p> <p>Places of worship</p> <p>Roots of the National Eisteddfod of Wales</p> <p>Schools – clubs and connections</p> <p>Settlement patterns, building styles and materials</p> <p>Traditions – stories – songs</p> <p>Welsh language dominant in agricultural communities</p>	<p>Activity hubs for art, adventure, leisure</p> <p>Community companies</p> <p>Community Energy/tech enterprises</p> <p>Eisteddfod Fawr Llangollen</p> <p>Eisteddfodau</p> <p>Events – programmes</p> <p>Local foods and crafts</p> <p>Memoirs</p> <p>Newspaper reports</p> <p>OS maps</p> <p>Photography</p> <p>Welsh plygain carols – tradition persisting around Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa</p> <p>Written literature</p>
<p>A STORY OF HUMAN INTERACTION WITH</p>	<p>Stories revealed</p> <p>Reflections of the past</p>	<p>Ancient burial mounds</p> <p>Bronze Age upland landscape</p>	<p>Aerial photography</p> <p>Archaeological archive</p>

<p>THE LANDSCAPE OVER MILLENNIA</p>	<p>A destination An ancient feel with links to the Mabinogi Defensive sites Feeling of smallness Industrial Sites People and place shaped by the past Settlements The past explained Traditional communications</p>	<p>Common lands Drove roads Estate parkland Hefted sheep Hillforts, stone circles and castles Historical features – domestic, ecclesiastical, military, industrial Manorial lands Medieval farmed landscape Milestones and cairns Names with cultural associations Offa's Dyke Old railways / roads / canals Owain Glyndwr Pastures Quarries and mines Relationship between Welsh language and the agriculture landscape Tourist attractions Traditional boundaries and field patterns World Heritage Site WWII and Cold War features</p>	<p>Artworks Cadw Grade 1 & 2 listed buildings Film archives e.g., BFI Historic OS maps Llangollen Canal Llangollen railway Minutes of public meetings/ decisions Museum artifacts Newspaper records Oral recordings Photographic records Place names Prominent sites include Castell Dinas Brân, Chirk castle, Craig Rhiwarth, Eliseg pillar, Glyn y Groes, Pen Plenau, Pennant Melangell, Plas Newydd, Pont Cysyllte aqueduct, Rhyd y Mwyn, Valle Crucis Abbey, Vyrnwy dam Registered Historic landscapes Scheduled ancient monument listings Society names Telford Road World Heritage Site War time pillboxes, listening stations, bunkers</p>
<p>A HOME TO INTERNATIONALLY AND LOCALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES AND HABITATS</p>	<p>Living wonders Farmed diversity Nature at risk Iconic habitats and species Seasons on show Sounds of nature</p>	<p>Protected habitats and species Dunes, mudflats, saltmarshes, wetland, blanket bog, upland heath, ffridd, woodland, river corridors, lakes, screes and crags. Global leadership on peatland restoration Species e.g., Black Grouse, Red Grouse, Curlew, Golden Plover, Hen Harrier, Lapwing, Little Tern, Merlin, Nightjar, Peregrine Falcon, Red Kite, Ring Ouzel, Short-eared Owl, Yellow Hammer, farmland birds,</p>	<p>Biodiversity plans The most extensive tract of near-natural blanket bog in Wales Restoration at Blaen y Coed Catchment Management Plans Invasive species notifications IUCN Red listed species In Wales, Black grouse are found in upland areas in north and mid-Wales. Surveys show 213 males in 2005. This increased to almost 320 recorded males in 2014,</p>

		<p>Lesser horseshoe bat, otters, Natterjack Toad, Great crested newt, Atlantic salmon, Welsh clearwing moth, Grizzled skipper butterfly, Floating water-plantain, liverworts.</p> <p>Woodlands, heathers limestone grasslands, veteran trees.</p>	<p>with Ruabon Mountain, near Wrexham, a stronghold where habitat management and predator control have been undertaken together.</p> <p>Managed introductions – beaver, osprey</p> <p>Nature Recovery Plans</p> <p>Opportunities for Nature-based Solutions</p> <p>Predator management</p> <p>Red Data Book species</p> <p>RSPB reports</p> <p>SSSI/NNR notifications – numbers, area, variety, linkage</p> <p>Sensitive / threatened key species and habitats (Schedule 1 species)</p> <p>State of nature for Wales</p>
<p>A DISTINCTIVE, COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING LANDSCAPE</p>	<p>Dramatic and spectacular</p> <p>Colours and shades</p> <p>Exposure and enclosure</p> <p>Extensive uplands and interlacing valleys</p> <p>Flowing topography</p> <p>Full of surprises</p> <p>Geology and geomorphology embracing a cohesive area</p> <p>Land cover – commons and uplands, enclosed farmed landscape</p> <p>Panoramic views</p> <p>Rural and undeveloped</p> <p>Scenic and secluded</p> <p>Unbroken skyline</p> <p>Visual delight</p> <p>Windswept and sheltered</p>	<p>Building styles and materials</p> <p>Dee and Alwyn</p> <p>Diverse range of landscape features, dunes, crags, screes, waterfalls, rivers, caves</p> <p>Dyffryn Ceiriog spectacular contrasts with the hilltops</p> <p>Hedgerows, walls, fences</p> <p>Improved and unimproved grasslands</p> <p>Rivers, lakes and wetland</p> <p>Settlement patterns</p> <p>Valleys and headwaters</p> <p>Woodland and scrub</p>	<p>Aerial photography</p> <p>Artworks</p> <p>Cadw records</p> <p>NLCA descriptors</p> <p>Photography</p> <p>Poetry and writing</p> <p>Prominent landscape features include Cadair Berwyn, Cregiau Eglwyseg, Gronant Dunes, Llyn Vyrnwy, Moel Famau, Moel y Gamelin, Pistyll-Rhaeadr</p> <p>SSSI catalogue</p>
<p>A LANDSCAPE PROVIDING BENEFITS BEYOND ITS BORDERS</p>	<p>Nurturing life</p> <p>Biodiversity</p>	<p>Farmed land and produce</p> <p>Habitats</p> <p>Reservoirs</p>	<p>Calculations of captured carbon</p> <p>Calculations of flood mitigation</p>

Breathing spaces for urban communities	Soil organic carbon stock	Food miles
Carbon sinks	Wetland and moorland	Food types – distinctive foods, local produce
Clean air		Location and amount of stored water – location of users
Clean water		Marketing and management
Delivering services		
Food		
Tourism		
Water modulation		

- 5.8. It is the preference of the consultees that the presentation of the special qualities follows the format developed by the Parc Cenedlaethol / Brecon Beacons National Park. They should not be presented as a list or table (*as above!*) but rather set out as a story. We have consulted the three National Park Authority teams on the processes they followed and lessons learned.
- 5.9. Generally, the National Park Authorities do have a simple list of special qualities that informs their formal processes. The special qualities help define the vision and objectives for enhancing the purposes of designation. The authorities state that they are of most value in the planning context, especially in relation to development occurring in the setting.
- 5.10. Bannau Brycheiniog is exploring ways of merging socio-economic and environmental evidence to support a range of strategic documents, including local plans, the planning framework and the management plan. In addition, each authority develops special quality narratives to enthuse and inspire the general reader but these do not define those qualities. The authorities have not yet had to defend these new approaches from a challenge. They know that NRW is going to update its management planning guidance and they will use that opportunity to clarify the process.
- 5.11. The task set by our consultees is quite complex, not least because the finished text must be robust enough to support the next stages of search. At this stage, we do not know if there is to be a national park; and if there is to be one, we do not know what area it will cover. Much of the material to write the narrative is within the table and supporting annexes and there is an opportunity to search out further meaningful cultural references and local illustrations. Within the supporting annexes, we tie our special qualities to the National Character Areas and sub-divisions made by NRW. This will help NRW build up a record of the special qualities found in the Area of Search and assist in modifying the record should NRW chose to concentrate on smaller areas within the Area of Search. We recommend that the full expression of the special qualities as a detailed narrative be delayed until the drafting of a designated area management plan.

Next steps

- 5.12. The Special Qualities we have collected and described will be presented to Natural Resources Wales. Once adopted, they will be the subject of a 'Forces for Change' study that will consider the issues affecting them and the implications for designation.

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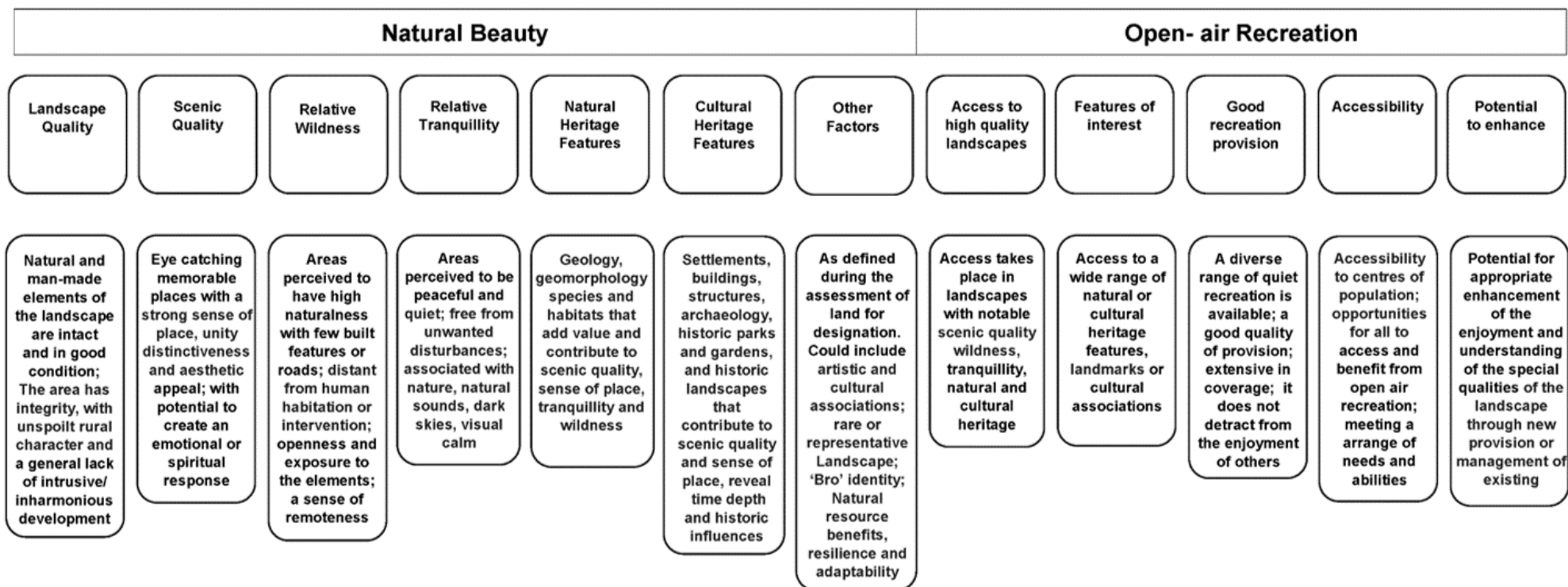
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Appendices

Appendix 1: NRW Criteria for Candidate Assessment



The diagram captures terms and considerations that relate to how landscape is evaluated in Wales. This brings together the approach set out in NRW's Statutory Landscape Designation: Procedural Guidance Note GN010 2022; LANDMAP methodology; and agreed definitions used in Wales.

Below each Natural Beauty and Open-air Recreation criterion, are indicators that describe a range of characteristics and qualities that contribute to their expression in the landscape. The indicators don't all need to be present for the criterion to be met.

Diagram inspired by King, I; Martin, J. (2021)

The indicators have had regard to the following sources:

Landscape Quality: NRW Procedural Guidance Note 2020; LANDMAP visual and sensory methodology 2016; Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment edition 3 2013

Scenic Quality: NRW Procedural Guidance Note 2020; LANDMAP visual and sensory methodology 2016; Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment edition 3 2013

Relative Wildness: NRW Procedural Guidance Note 2020; Scottish Natural Heritage mapping of Scotland's wilderness and wild Land: Non-technical description of the methodology 2014

Relative Tranquillity: NRW Procedural Guidance Note; definition adopted by Welsh Government and NRW in 2012

Appendix 2: The Special Qualities of other designated landscapes

Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog / Brecon Beacons National Park	Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfre / Pembrokeshire Coast National Park
<p>Because our special qualities are often felt on a visceral level rather than rationalised this Plan expresses the qualities using a range of poems and art, as well as the more standard policy statements. This we hope goes some way to capture the essence of this very special plan in ways that speaks to many different experiences.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SPECIAL LANDSCAPES Sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty 2. SPECIAL PEOPLE Intimate sense of community 3. SPECIAL EXPERIENCES Enjoyable and accessible 4. SPECIAL NATURE Diversity of wildlife and richness of semi-natural habitats <p>[Each quality is described in a few paragraphs]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessibility 2. Coastal splendour 3. Cultural heritage 4. Distinctive settlement character 5. Diverse geology 6. Diversity of landscape 7. Islands 8. Remoteness, tranquillity and wildness 9. Rich historic environment 10. Richness of habitats and species 11. Space to breathe 12. The diversity of experiences and combination of individual qualities
AoHNE Ynns Môn / Isle of Anglesey AONB	
<p>Features of the Anglesey AONB which define its designation status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal landscape / seascape features • Traditional agricultural landscape features • Geological and geomorphological features <p>The special qualities of the Anglesey AONB which define its designation status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansive views / seascapes • Peace and tranquillity • Islands around Anglesey • Broadleaved woodlands • Lowland coastal heath • Species-rich roadside verges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecologically important coastal and wetland habitats (including rocky shores, mudflats and estuaries, saltmarshes, beaches and dunes) • Built environment including conservation areas and listed buildings • Archaeology and ancient monuments / historic landscapes, parks and gardens • Rural agricultural / coastal communities • Welsh language • Soil, air and water quality • Public rights of way network • Accessible land and water
AoHNE Gwyr / Gower AONB	AoHNE Llŷn / Llŷn AONB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Geology • Landscape • Seascape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape and coast • Tranquillity and a clean environment • A wealth of wildlife • The Historic environment

- Archaeology
- Historic Landscapes
- Historic Parks and Gardens
- Historic Building and Conservation Areas
- Air Quality
- Water Quality
- Soil Quality
- Tranquillity
- Public Rights of Way
- Access Land
- Beaches

[Each quality becomes a chapter heading in the management plan]

- The Welsh Language and Culture
- People and close-knit communities
- Local produce and rural businesses
- Rights of way and access

[Each quality is described in detail with reference to places where the quality can be experienced and further facts and information can be found]

AoHNE Dyffryn Gwy / Wye Valley AONB

There is a 9 paragraph **Statement of Significance** followed by a list of 27 **Special Qualities**:

- Overall Landscape of 16 Landscape Management Zones
- Biodiversity
- Woodlands
- The river & tributaries
- Species-rich grassland
- Boundary habitat diversity & connectivity
- Silurian Rocks
- Lower Devonian Old Red Sandstone
- Quartz Conglomerate 9. Carboniferous Limestone
- Riverine geomorphology
- Picturesque, extensive & dramatic views.
- Overall sense of tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness / wildness
- Prehistoric sites from Palaeolithic to Iron Age

- Roman and early Medieval sites including Offa's Dyke
- Mediaeval Defensive and Ecclesiastical sites and associated landscapes
- Post-medieval industrial sites and associated landscapes
- Railway heritage
- Ancient and veteran trees
- Historic / registered parks and gardens
- Vernacular architecture: Farmsteads, Commoners cottages, Estate houses
- Welsh language & accent; Forest of Dean & South Herefordshire dialects & accents
- Old tracks: often in sunken ways &/or bounded by drystone walls
- Offa's Dyke Path
- Wye Valley Walk
- Access land
- Small commons
- Orchards

Appendix 3: Programme for the in-person workshops

Time	Activity
09.30	<p>Arrival and refreshments</p> <p>Action: Upon arrival you will be assigned to one of the workshop tables by the greeters.</p> <p>Action: As you arrive and have some refreshments, please place a dot for each question, above the mid line, for your response to the pre-workshop questions displayed on the wall (within your Participant Pack).</p> <p>Think about the following and say whether you agree, disagree or do not know.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>'Anyone can recognise special qualities – by definition they are special and are easy to identify'</i> • <i>'Identifying special qualities is essentially a subjective process'</i> • <i>'Special Qualities' is a collective term for the outstanding features of a place.</i> • <i>You need to know a place to be able to identify and discuss its special qualities.</i> • <i>The criteria for identifying a landscape's special qualities are the same as those for designating a landscape.</i> • <i>Everywhere has special qualities. This does not mean to say that everywhere is special.</i>
	Morning Session
10.00	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Richard Sumner, Natural Resources Wales Chair – Paul Tiplady, Craggatak Consulting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the scene for the day • Housekeeping
10.10	<p>Session 1: Where's This? - Whole group activity</p> <p>Introduction to Session 1 – Paul Tiplady</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are they? • What were the clues? • What are you seeing? • What are the key features? • What might you associate with some of the places that you cannot show visually?
10.50	<p>Session 2: Your Special Places – Break out groups</p> <p>Introduction to Session 2 – Paul Tiplady</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre workshop exercise – Sharing your special places/memories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appoint a spokesperson – take notes ○ Discussion: does anything emerge as common in responses – emotions, words, phrases
11.15	<p>Session 3: Presentation: Special qualities and natural beauty – features and characteristics – Paul Tiplady</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions – how do we define 'special qualities' and 'natural beauty'. Can they be agreed? • What is the relationship? • How do we find the special qualities? • What are the limitations?
11.45	<p>Plenary: Review and Summarise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report back on morning sessions • Discussion on landscape character and its special qualities – more than just visual • Many individual qualities, but is it their particular combination that gives an area its identity and makes it special? • Subjectivity-vs-objectivity – how do you achieve consensus? Who has a say?
12.15	Lunch
	Afternoon Session
13.00	Introduction to the afternoon session – Paul Tiplady

Time	Activity
13.10	<p>Session 4: Developing Special Qualities – Break out groups The Area of Search will be divided into separate sub-areas. Each group will work towards identifying and agreeing a set of Special Qualities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoint Spokesperson • Discuss and agree what your special qualities are for area and how you would wish to present them • Record any difference of opinion • Aids include: Supporting maps and photo boards
13.55	<p>Session 5: Market Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed Spokesperson for each group stays at their table • Everyone else circulates and offers thoughts on the Special Qualities developed by each group • Record any difference of opinion or suggested new Special Qualities
14.15	<p>Plenary: Review and Summarise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each group presents its special qualities to everyone else • Current Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB's Special Qualities presented. Compare with break-out group's Special Qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do they differ? ○ Are there new Special Qualities for the AONB? ○ How do they affect each group's special qualities? ○ Can you integrate them? ○ Which would you keep, change, remove? • Other Special Qualities from other Welsh National Parks/AONBs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discuss how they are presented ○ Who is the audience? ○ Who are they sharing them with?
15.00	<p>Conclusion Based on today's activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final responses to the questions: Having listened and participated in today's workshop on Special Qualities, please look again at the questions from this morning (on the wall) and review. This time place a dot below the mid-line as to whether you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agree ○ Disagree ○ Do not know • Sum up and draw conclusions/key points from the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes a landscape special? • Next steps • How we will keep in touch
15.30	Close

Appendix 4: Programme for the on-line workshops

Time	Activity
14.00hrs	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Richard Sumner, Natural Resources Wales Chair – Paul Tiplady, Craggatak Consulting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the scene
Session 1: What are Special Qualities and Introduction to the Area of Search	
14.05hrs	<p>Presentation: Setting the Scene – Richard Sumner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of the Area of Search • Setting the scene
14.10hrs	<p>Presentation: Special qualities and natural beauty – features and characteristics – Paul Tiplady</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we find the special qualities? • What are the limitations?
Session 2: Developing Special Qualities	
14.30hrs	<p>Session 2: Developing Special Qualities – interactive whiteboard brainstorm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to session by Paul Tiplady • Area of Search broken into four sections • Each section displayed in turn • Attendees identify special qualities by chat box or post-it- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Landscape ○ Wildlife ○ Heritage ○ Culture ○ Recreation • All suggestion posted on whiteboard and debated • Differences of opinion recorded • Area of Search map can be found here
15.20hrs	<p>Conclusion and Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other special qualities from the other Welsh designated landscapes • Summing up and drawing conclusions/key points from the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes a landscape special? • Next Steps and how we will keep in touch – Richard Sumner
15.30hrs	Close

Appendix 5: Test for a comprehensive set of Special Qualities

Scope & range of potential qualities ⁷		Proposed Special Qualities
Authenticity and integrity	Distinctive, intact, integrity, unspoilt, unharmed, distinct – not transitional, natural and naturalness, clean earth, air and water, pristine, clean, fresh, pollution-free	A LANDSCAPE PROVIDING BENEFITS BEYOND ITS BORDERS
Landform, land use, land cover	Topography, landform features including hills, drumlins, dunes, beaches, cliffs, scarps, gorges, ravines, clefts, valleys, lochs, lakes, rivers, streams, burns, waterfalls, ponds, fields and field patterns, woods, moors, alpine and montane areas; hedges, stone dykes, walls, shelterbelts, avenues; rich mixture of landscape features, myriad of detail, intricate mix, mosaic, patchwork	A DISTINCTIVE, COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING LANDSCAPE
Emotional response	Influence of weather and light, influence of the sea, tranquil, secret, hidden, undiscovered, softness or hardness, smoothness or roughness, gentleness or ruggedness, dramatic, spectacular, comforting, reassuring, safe, intimate, rural idyll, exhilarating, exciting, inspiring, surprise, open, windswept, exposed, unified, harmonious, quiet, silent, calm, peaceful, peace and quiet, solitude, spiritual refreshment, wildness, freedom	AN INSPIRING SPACE THAT PROMOTES MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING
Visual experience	Diverse, complex, varied, constantly changing scene, intricate, contrasting, juxtapositions, colourful, green, intensity and clarity of light, dominance of the sky, varied views, panoramic views from mountains, cliffs, hills, edges, escarpments; iconic viewpoints, landmarks and 'beauty spots'; composition, proportion, mass, shape, movement	A DISTINCTIVE, COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING LANDSCAPE
People and community	Vibrancy, sense of community, value attached to area by surrounding urban communities, friendly people, warm-hearted, caring people, delightful people, courteous people	AN INSPIRING SPACE THAT PROMOTES MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING A PLACE WITH COHESIVE COMMUNITIES AND DISTINCTIVE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

⁷ After David Tyldesley and Associates (2007): Identifying the Special Qualities of Scotland's National Scenic Areas. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.255 (ROAME No. F05NC701) – page 28. NOTE - the guiding text is generic, not all will apply to the Area of Search.

<p>History and culture</p>	<p>Distinctive skills, dialects, songs and customs; legends, folklore; religious associations, strong religious past and present, ruined abbeys and ancient churches; example of medieval land management; past industries including lead mining, wireworks, tin plate works, craft and cottage industries; strong associations with visual arts, literature, science or exploration; local produce including cheese, meat, fruits, beers, mushrooms; special or distinctive crops including lavender, hops and fruit orchards; distinctive or rare breeds of domestic horses, cattle, sheep or goats; distinctive boats, ships or barges; historic infrastructure including leats, bridges, harbours, water meadows, industrial archaeology including mills, factories and military buildings; archaeological monuments, castles, large houses and designed landscapes</p>	<p>A PLACE WITH COHESIVE COMMUNITIES AND DISTINCTIVE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS A STORY OF HUMAN INTERACTION WITH THE LANDSCAPE OVER MILLENNIA</p>
<p>Settlement</p>	<p>Uninhabited, sparsely populated, remote, pretty villages, churches, vernacular buildings, distinctive building materials, building types and styles, settlement pattern especially related to natural features</p>	<p>A PLACE WITH COHESIVE COMMUNITIES AND DISTINCTIVE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS</p>
<p>Wildlife</p>	<p>Large scale habitats such as heaths and moors, woods full of wildlife, hay meadows, mudflats, estuaries, cliffs, sea birds, wildfowl, migratory birds, mammals, butterflies, bird song and calls</p>	<p>A HOME TO INTERNATIONALLY AND LOCALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES AND HABITATS</p>