



Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan

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APPENDIX 4 - SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS

INTRODUCTION

Following guidance from Natural Resources Wales, and using Landmap information, the Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) in Carmarthenshire have been reviewed and updated for the purposes of the emerging Local Development Plan. At the outset of this project it was established that the landscapes in Carmarthenshire that are considered to be of greatest importance, and which are worthy of the protection that the designation of Special Landscape Area provides are the:

- River valleys
- Upland landscapes
- Coastal landscapes

The proposed SLAs have been grouped according to these landscape types are described below.

Using Landmap information

All counties and National Parks in Wales have completed Landmap assessments. These assessments are based of five layers of landscape information and this information can be used to assist in the process of identifying SLAs. The data is map based and held within a Geographic Information System. For the purposes of identifying the landscapes that are considered to be important in the Carmarthenshire the visual and sensory information is particularly important, but the other sets of data have also been used. For example the historic landscape layer also identifies Llanllwni Mountain and Drefach Velindre as being important landscapes. The landscape habitats layer identifies the coastal landscapes as being of importance.

RIVER VALLEYS

Tywi Valley

The Special Landscape Area (SLA) includes the entire river valley apart from the Tywi estuary, which forms a part of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SLA. The Tywi Valley SLA consists of the valley floor and associated slopes, and includes number of different landscapes. The upper Tywi Valley, north of Rhandirmwyn is typically narrow, rising steeply on either side to the more rugged upland landscapes of Mynydd Mallaen and the North Eastern Uplands, both of which are SLAs in their own right. The upper Tywi Valley is characterised by small fields, hedgerows, woodland, traditional farms, narrow roads, and the river itself, often bordered by trees, but in places by open meadows.

Moving down stream towards Rhandirmwyn and Llandovery, the mid Tywi valley opens out more, but the valley continues to rise up to the open hill land. The landscape is well wooded with a significant number of hedgerow and other individual trees. Here there is more open flat agricultural land, some small settlements - Rhandirmwyn and Cilgwm, both dominated by traditional buildings and vernacular architecture. These are harmonious unspoilt rural landscapes.

The lower Tywi valley down stream of Llandovery consists of the wide level flood plain, together with its northern and southern slopes which provide outstanding views over the

valley and from the north towards the Brecon Beacons. Although dominated by agricultural land and larger fields than in the mid and upper valley, the flood plain also has a significant number of mature hedgerow and fields trees, and the valley slopes, particularly the steeper southern slopes are well wooded. Historic parklands and castles are also a feature of this part of the valley, e.g. Gelli Aur and Dinefwr Park, and Dinefwr and Dryslwyn castles. The castles in the valley have imposing locations on limestone outcrops, over looking the valley. Traditional farms in the valley have typically expanded and often now include large agricultural buildings. Most of the settlements in this part of the valley have also grown with an element of modern building around a more traditional core. Inappropriate development continues to threaten the conservation of this outstanding landscape, hence the reason for its designation.

Bran Valley (north of Llandovery)

The SLA consists of the flood plain and the valley side. The A483(T) and the Heart of Wales railway line run along this valley making it an important gateway into Carmarthenshire and it is known for the views into the county that these routes provide when travelling from Powys. The railway includes the viaduct at Cyngordy which is a well known landscape feature, and is visible from the main road, giving this area a strong sense of place. The main road is a feature of the area, while not particularly busy there is a fairly constant stream of traffic and the noise associated with this.

There are few settlements other than Cyngordy and here there is some parkland. The rest of the valley is a mix of agricultural land with hedgerows and trees on the flood plain and flatter areas and significant amounts of woodland on the valley slopes creating an attractive balance. The area includes a number of well wooded tributaries to the Bran.

Llwchwr Valley

The Llwwchwr valley on the Carmarthenshire/Swansea boundary has a wide and level flood plain with steeply rising valley sides. The flood plain is open and is characterised by large irregular fields and some drainage channels. In contrast the slopes on the Carmarthenshire side support an attractive mix of woodland and agricultural land, the woodland often being associated with watercourses that run down the slopes. Small irregular fields with a mix of outgrown and cut hedge boundaries are also a feature of these slopes. There is little access to the flood plain other than for farming purposes, there is no settlement in it other than Pontarddulais to the south, and Ammanford to the north. The slopes are sparsely settled with scattered farms. The railway runs along the valley (mostly in Swansea), the track making a strong line in the landscape in contrast to the meandering river. Pylons cross the valley in the south but are partly masked by the wooded slopes to the west.

Cwm Cathan

Cwm Cathan is an impressive and steep sided river valley running from the upland area of Mynydd Betws to the lowland Llwwchwr valley. It is well wooded with semi-natural broadleaved woodland - including area of birch woodland, as well as semi-improved grasslands as well as scrub and bracken areas. The variety of vegetation here provides texture in this landscape, and creates a network of semi-natural habitats across the area. Some hedgerows are becoming lines of trees and these also contribute to the enclosed and well-wooded appearance of the area. Holly-rich hedges are a feature. This is an intimate enclosed, unspoilt and natural landscape, and not without views of the surrounding areas. With narrow twisty roads and being sparsely settled, this quiet area feels some distance from Ammanford.

Teifi Valley

The source of the Teifi is in Ceredigion, and the middle course of this river flows along the Carmarthenshire county boundary between Lampeter and Llechryd. Within Ceredigion the Teifi valley is also recognised as a SLA. The Carmarthenshire section of the Teifi runs through a well wooded valley. As the river flows west so the flood plain becomes broader. The valley immediately west of Lampeter is noted for the number of hedgerow and field trees it contains, although there is less woodland in this part of the valley than further downstream.

As the river flows through Maesycrugiau it becomes very narrow and gorge like. The river and its valley dominate this landscape and the area feels secluded. This section of the valley is well wooded. There is little new development in this section of the valley. Small farms and traditional houses including road side cottages are the dominant types of settlement.

The Teifi valley between Maesycrugiau and Llechryd is characterised by a particularly attractive balance between woodland (mostly broadleaved) with some conifer woodland) and open fields, notably in the flood plain, with mature trees. The river is frequently visible and with the roads that run either side of the river and this gives the area a feeling of movement in

each direction. Views are restricted to the valley floor and its slopes, so there is a sense of being within the valley at all times. Development consists of scattered farms, some small settlements along the roads, and also includes the larger settlements of Newcastle Emlyn and Pentrecwrt.

Cothi Valley

The Cothi Valley can be described in four parts.

As the Cothi runs between Mynydd Mallaen and the North Eastern Uplands Special Landscape Areas the valley is upland in character. The slopes rise up from 160m to just over 400m on Mynydd Mallaen. The valley sides are well wooded with an attractive and balanced mix of broadleaves and some conifers, as well as enclosed and unenclosed grazing, and fridd. Where there are field boundaries these tend to be fairly weak, with some hedge lines becoming lines of trees. Fences are not un-common where hedges have disappeared. In contrast the valley floor is more intensively farmed, with frequent views of the fast flowing river throughout the area. Farms tend to be positioned at the base of the steep valley sides, at the break of slope. Towards Pumsaint the landscape has an estate character to it - visible in some of the building styles. The road is narrow, the farms scattered and vernacular styles dominate the building design. There is very little new development in the area.

The Llansawel Basin contains the confluence of the Cothi with a number of other rivers - the Marlais, Melinddwr and Twrch. The narrow upland valleys in the surrounding area opens out in this section into a much larger river basin creating a much more open lowland landscape. Shingle banks are a feature of this section. The area combines gently rolling land with flatter valley bottom land, the majority of which is improved agricultural land, with a small amount of woodland. The hedgerows and hedgerow trees create the impression of a significant amount of tree cover. At the Glan yr Rannell Hotel there are some elements of a planned parkland landscape. Llansawel is the largest settlement and there are numerous scattered farms.

Between Edwinsford and Brechfa the Cothi valley is well wooded, and downstream of Abergorlech it passes through the Brechfa Forest. This section of the valley is more enclosed than the Llansawel Basin. The lower lying pasture land here is characterised by well developed hedgerows, and hedgerow and field trees. There are few views of the river itself as its banks are frequently tree lined. The B road runs through the area and passes through the small settlements of Abergorlech and Brechfa.

Down-stream of Brechfa the valley is narrower and more V-shaped than the river upstream of the village - rather more like an upland river. It appears that the Cothi changed its course, having previously followed what is now the Gwili valley to the west of Brechfa. South of Brechfa the deeply incised valley rises steeply, to the hills on either side. The valley slopes are a mix of bracken, woodland, new woodland planting and farmland. There are views of the river at a number of places along the valley, particularly where the road and footpath run close to it. Farmland and woodland dominate the lower lying land. This area provides a clear contrast with the more open Mid Cothi valley to the north, and the Llansawel Basin and the Tywi Valley to the south, as the river is more gorge-like, and the valley sides steeper. This section of the valley is sparsely settled with few farms. The course of the river is varied, and includes open and shallow areas as well as cuttings through dark rocks. Much of the river bank in this stretch is wooded.

Lower Taf Valley

The SLA includes the river valley from the railway crossing east of Whitland to the estuary, so effectively the lower reaches of the Taf. Much of the area is secluded, and there is little access to. Settlements are restricted to the valley sides. The valley feels empty despite being so close to the main roads. The valleys sides of this stretch of the river are well wooded and contribute to its scenic qualities. Down stream of the A477 the river is tidal, and at the A4066 it enters the estuary where the slopes are less wooded, and the landscape becomes more open, and the character of the landscape changes from being that associated with a river valley to that of an estuary, with areas of salt marsh mud flats. This SLA abuts the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SLA

Drefach Velindre

Both the visual and sensory and the historic environment layers of LANDMAP recognise the distinctive landscape of this area. A network of steep well wooded valleys, with linear settlements with a distinct vernacular style - typically small road side terraced cottages, made from locally quarried stone, and larger riverside mills and chapels that reflect the former woollen industry that was thriving here (and in parts of the Teifi Valley) in the 19th and early

20th century. Narrow roads run along each of these valleys. The area has a sense of being very enclosed, sheltered and tucked away, it has a unique character in Carmarthenshire. Agricultural fields are typically small and surrounded by woodland.

Swiss Valley

The landscape of Swiss Valley is an attractive mix of woodland and water. The reservoirs have a natural feel to them and support a variety of aquatic vegetation, the area provides an attractive interface between woodland and water. Swiss valley is easily accessible on foot and cycle from Llanelli and is used for recreation but with the minimum of infrastructure (this does include a cycle path) . There are very attractive internal views over the water, and along the river. The valley has a sense of enclosure, and feels remote from the busier landscapes that surround them. The woodland in Swiss valley is mostly broad-leaved. The valley is peaceful and unspoilt. While there is no settlement in the valley, it is overlooked by farms in the surrounding countryside.

Talley

The historic part of the village of Talley, centred on the abbey, enjoys an attractive lake side setting that is unique in the county. It has an attractive backdrop of fairly steep slopes that are used either for agricultural or forestry. The Special Landscape Area includes the abbey, church and surrounding dwellings, the lakes and the land that surrounds these features and provides a setting for them. The two connected lakes are an unusual feature and known throughout the county. There are very few lakes in Carmarthenshire. The two lakes are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest for the aquatic habitats and species they support. The B road runs through the more modern part of the village and traffic on it can be heard most of the time.

Gwendraeth Levels

These are the low lying flood plain grazing meadows on former marsh land that are often flooded in the winter months. Despite being relatively wet this area continues to be managed largely for agricultural. The rectilinear fields are broken up by wide tall hedges and drainage ditches. In places these tall hedges create a feeling of enclosure, elsewhere these landscapes usually appear very open and wind swept (e.g. Gwent Levels). There are few dwellings, few roads, other than the main road, and where these occur they tend to be straight. In addition to the agricultural land, the area includes a variety of wetland habitats, ponds, fens giving the area a more naturalistic appearance, and the capacity to support wildlife. Largely un-spoilt, the area remains rural in character. There is an important historic dimension to this landscape as it was created as a result of draining wetlands and constructing sea defences to hold back the sea water that began in 1609, and continues into the mid 19th century with the enclosure of fields. The Gwendraeth Levels SLA abuts Pembrey Mountain SLA and this area provides an important and unspoilt backdrop to the levels

UPLANDS

North Eastern Uplands

An extensive area of rolling upland area characterised by unenclosed grazing land and some large coniferous forestry blocks, which are considered to be an integral part of this landscape. The area also includes small pockets of enclosed improved land near the isolated farms, but the majority remains unenclosed. The mix of habitats and vegetation cover within these open unenclosed areas provides texture in this landscape, and includes marshy grasslands, wetland vegetation in the shallow river valleys, bracken on the steeper land, some fridd habitat, small areas of heath land habitat etc. Small rocky outcrops occur throughout the area, adding further variety. There are few broad-leaved trees, and these are more frequent in the shallow river valleys. These different elements add variety to the area. There are only a few small roads in the area and farm tracks, barely any settlement. As an area it feels sparsely populated. North of Ffarmers there are areas where, unusually in Carmarthenshire, some of the field boundaries are stone walls. There is relatively little new development here, other than new agricultural barns. There are extensive views within the area and into the surrounding valleys; there are also longer views to the Brecon Beacons. The area feels remote, exposed and elevated and largely empty of people. On the county boundary Llyn Brianne forms a part of this Special Landscape Area.

Mynydd Mallaen

Mynydd Mallaen is an exposed area of un-enclosed grazed upland plateau, dominated by heathland and wetland plant communities with, bilberry, heather and wet heath mosaic. The

plateau drops down into the surrounding valleys through fridd habitats, grassland, rocky scree in places and woodland. The area is Common Land with open access. The plateau is marked by one or two cairns; otherwise it creates a very gently almost level skyline. There are tracks across the area. There are no trees, nor field boundaries, but several rocky outcrops and wet depressions. There area provides extensive views in all direction, and feels extremely exposed, wild, empty and isolated.

Llanllwni Mountain

is an area of unenclosed heather moorland, positioned on a rolling plateau positioned along the watershed between the Teifi and the Cothi valleys. Bronze aged burial mounds are discernable on the main ridge, and provide a sense of our impact on this landscape over millennia. There are extensive views in all directions from the plateau, particularly notable are the views north-west over the Teifi Valley and south east towards the Brecon Beacons .The areas is Common Land with open access, and is grazed by sheep and ponies, and regularly burnt. The roads that cross the area are used infrequently, and while they permit easy access to the mountain, it has a feeling of being exposed, and of being wild, and empty. The farms that abut the mountain are positioned below it on the enclosed land. It is one of few areas in the county that is devoid of settlement.

Carmarthenshire Limestone Ridge

This undulating ridge (reaching 280m AOD) of higher exposed upland is the only extensive area of limestone in Carmarthenshire. The ridge has a distinct and varied landscape, which includes unenclosed common land e.g. Mynydd Llangynderine and Mynydd y Garreg, with bracken and heather and rock exposures, the limestone quarries at Crwbin and Cilyrchen, and extensive areas of small fields, mature hedges and woodland e.g. Carmel (which include Carmel Woods NNR). Llyn Lech Owain Country Park lies on the ridge. The ridge provides views over the adjacent valleys and over much of south Carmarthenshire. It is crossed by several roads, the busiest being the A48(T) but is also very tranquil in parts, e.g Mynydd y Cerrig. Settlements include scattered farms and linear settlements that are often related to the quarries, and this is reflected in the vernacular architecture.

Pembrey Mountain

Pembrey Mountain rises steeply from the Gwendreath Levels forming and important back drop to this area, and hence its recognition as a Special Landscape Area. The slopes are now mostly wooded with a mix of broadleaves and conifers, and from the ridge (100m AOD) there are extensive views over the levels and Carmarthen Bay towards Caldy Island. When the sea encroached further inland over the Gwendreath Levels, the slopes of Pembrey Mountain would have formed the coastal cliffs. The mountain has a rich and diverse archaeology, that includes iron-age hill forts, possible bronze-age barrows, evidence of Medieval ridge and furrow as well as quarries and coal pits.

Mynydd y Betws

This is an extensive area of exposed undulating upland moorland extending into the Swansea. It is an area of unenclosed, grazed common land, with a mix of grasses and some smaller areas of heather, and wetland habitats. There are impressive views from Mynydd y Betws over south-east Carmarthenshire and towards the Brecon Beacons. The area is interrupted by the road that crosses the mountain and where this enters the common on its northern side at Scot's Pine, by the telegraph poles and larger pylons and a mast. These elements detract from the integrity of the area but this is restricted to this small part of the whole. Elsewhere within the area there is a considerable degree of unity and little interrupts the rest of this landscape. It is one of five extensive area of unenclosed moorland in the county. There are no trees or shrubs in this area and there is a striking difference between this area and the enclosed land at lower elevations on the northern slopes. Today there are no settlements here, but the area is rich in archaeology, with several sites clearly discernable on the ground, illustrating the history of this area.

CARMARTHEN BAY AND ESTUARIES SLA

This SLA contains a number of distinct landscapes, which should be considered as a continuum. The SLA wraps around Carmarthen Bay and includes:

Coastal Hills: Marros – Pendine, Llanybri, Llansaint and Pembrey Coastal hills:

Coastal slopes: Marros to Wharley Point and St Ishmael's coastal slopes:

Estuary slopes: the slopes above the estuaries i.e. the slopes on either side of the Taf and Tywi rivers where they are within the estuary:

River estuaries: the rivers channels, and associated mud flats at low tide:

Coastal grazing marsh: West Marsh, East Marsh south of Laugharne, south of Kidwelly;

Sandy beaches: Marros, Pendine and Cefn Sidan;

Sand dunes: Pendine and part of Cefn Sidan;

Salt marsh: This occurs in several areas within the estuaries, and near the coast e.g Pembrey Saltings;

Settlements: Pendine, Laugharne, Llansteffan and Ferryside.

The Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SLA includes all the landscapes that contribute to our coastal and estuary landscapes. It is often the juxtaposition of one landscape with another such as salt marsh and the river, or the wooded estuary slope and the river channel that together create a landscape of high scenic quality.

The coastal hills provide the backdrop to the bay and the estuaries, and from them there are fine views over the sea. Being close to the coast, and elevated these hills are exposed, and this is demonstrated by the windswept trees.

The coastal slopes are usually characterised by rough non-agricultural land with bracken and scrub, again often sculpted by the wind. They are exposed, and usually face the sea. They are located between the hills and the lower lying beaches or marshes.

The estuary slopes are the more sheltered slopes between the hills and the river estuaries. In the Tywi estuary they tend to be particularly well wooded, but also include some agricultural land.

The river estuaries include the river channel. These are tidal and at low tide include mud flats. East and West Marsh are the largest areas of coastal grazing marsh in Carmarthenshire. West Marsh has been developed for military purposes and so is relatively disrupted and has scrubbed up somewhat as a result of becoming drier. East Marsh is still managed in a traditional way for grazing, but has also been subject to some development. It is more open, windswept and empty than West Marsh.

These landscapes are typically open windswept and empty, are of importance for the biodiversity they support. They are also of historic interest as well as these areas only came into existence once land could be drained.

The three beaches are some of the longest in Wales. Pendine and Cefn Sidan are well known as holiday destinations. When the tide is out there are extensive areas of sand, and views out to sea and along the coast.

The sand dunes about the beaches and their landscape is typical of any dune system. Efforts are being made to control the sea buckthorn has been spreading within the Cefn Sidan dune system.

The salt marsh is an integral and distinctive part of the estuary and coastal landscape, and one which provides a free and natural sea defence. The salt marsh usually abuts mud flats which are exposed at low tide. The salt marshes are typically dissected by muddy creeks and support plants that can tolerate the saline conditions, and these are two of the features of the salt marsh that make this landscape so distinctive. Salt marshes are exposed and windy places, with no shelter.

The three settlements – Laugharne, Llansteffan and Ferryside within the SLA each have a distinct character. Ferryside is the only one on the railway, which in itself is a feature of the Tywi estuary. Laugharne is the most urban of the three, and has developed around its castle, whereas the castle at Llansteffan is in an elevated position above the village.