Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Natural Resources Wales

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment guidance for Wales

Guidance note

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Document Owner: Head of Natural resources Management

Document Author: John Briggs CMLI

What is this document about?

How to commission, carry out, use, and update a landscape sensitivity assessment to influence spatial planning and land management change.

Who is this document for?

- Forward Planners and landscape specialists, typically in Local Planning Authorities, considering landscape in spatial planning and policymaking
- Those carrying out landscape sensitivity assessments, usually Landscape Architects
- Decision-makers and stakeholders wanting an understanding of the technique and use of landscape sensitivity assessment

The need for this guidance in Wales

Evolution of practice in landscape sensitivity assessment has led to variety in scope, definition of terms and method stages. Our discussion with other agencies and stakeholders led to clear calls for:

- A consistent approach across UK nations to avoid confusion
- Common method stages and terms, but keeping flexibility for a wide range of uses
- Keeping it simple to promote wider understanding of landscape sensitivity – notably not including landscape capacity, which depends on more factors than just sensitivity.
- Providing a robust evidence base that can withstand detailed scrutiny.

This guidance sets out a shared understanding of landscape sensitivity and compliments similar guidance developed by Natural England, NatureScot as well as seascape sensitivity assessment guidance developed by England's Marine Management organisation. We are particularly grateful for the input and discussion with Christine Tudor CMLI (Natural England, retired), Laura Campbell CMLI (NatureScot), Simon White FLI, the Landscape Institute Technical Committee and their wider membership.

Contact for queries and feedback

Please contact the Landscape team landscape@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Version History

Document Version	Date Published	Summary of Changes
1.0	08-2022	Document published
1.1	08-2023	Minor amendments e.g. corrections, updating broken URLs

Review Date: 08-2027

Contents

1 Deall asesiadau o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd

Yn yr adran hon

Dyma ble i gychwyn os hoffech drosolwg o asesu sensitifrwydd y dirwedd, p'un a ydych chi'n comisiynu neu'n defnyddio asesiad, neu'n cynnal un. Mae'r dudalen hon yn crynhoi ein holl ganllawiau ac yn rhoi dolenni i'r gwahanol rannau technegol, sydd yn y Saesneg yn unig.

Gallwch hefyd fynd at holl rannau'r canllawiau o'n tudalen gynnwys

Mae Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru wedi llunio'r canllawiau technegol hyn ar sut i gynnal asesiad o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd i fod o gymorth i awdurdodau cynllunio lleol, ymarferwyr tirwedd ac asiantaethau eraill. Rydym wedi gweithio'n agos ag arbenigwyr eraill yn y DU er mwyn sicrhau dull cyson. Yng Nghymru, mae'r canllawiau hyn yn disodli Papur Testun 6 Canllawiau ar Asesiadau o Gymeriad y Dirwedd (2002).

1.1 Beth yw asesiad o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd?

Mae Asesiad o Sensitifrwydd y Dirwedd yn arfarniad strategol o sensitifrwydd cymharol tirwedd i ddatblygiad neu newid i ddefnydd y tir. Mae'n offeryn pwysig i helpu i lywio datblygiadau tuag at y lleoliadau lleiaf sensitif yn ystod camau cyntaf cynllunio gofodol, cyn i gynigion unigol am ddatblygiadau gael eu gwneud ar safleoedd datblygu penodol. Fel y cyfryw, mae Awdurdodau Cynllunio Lleol yn aml yn eu defnyddio wrth lunio'u Cynlluniau Datblygu Lleol.

Gallwch ddarllen mwy am sut caiff asesu sensitifrwydd y dirwedd ei ddefnyddio mewn cynllunio gofodol

"*Mae sensitifrwydd y dirwedd yn cyfeirio at allu tirwedd i addasu i newid yn sgil mathau penodedig o ddatblygiad neu ddulliau rheoli tir. Mae'n cyfuno barn ynghylch ymateb tebygol y dirwedd honno i newid, a'r gwerthoedd sy'n gysylltiedig â'r dirwedd honno*". (Diffiniad y cytunwyd arno ar y cyd rhwng NatureScot a Chyfoeth Naturiol Cymru, ar sail nifer o gyfeiriadau cysylltiedig).

Yn syml, mae a wnelo ag a yw cymeriad y dirwedd yn debygol o gael ei newid yn fwy neu'n llai rhwydd yn sgil math o ddatblygiad neu ddull rheoli tir, ac a yw'n debygol y bydd y newid hwnnw o bwys.

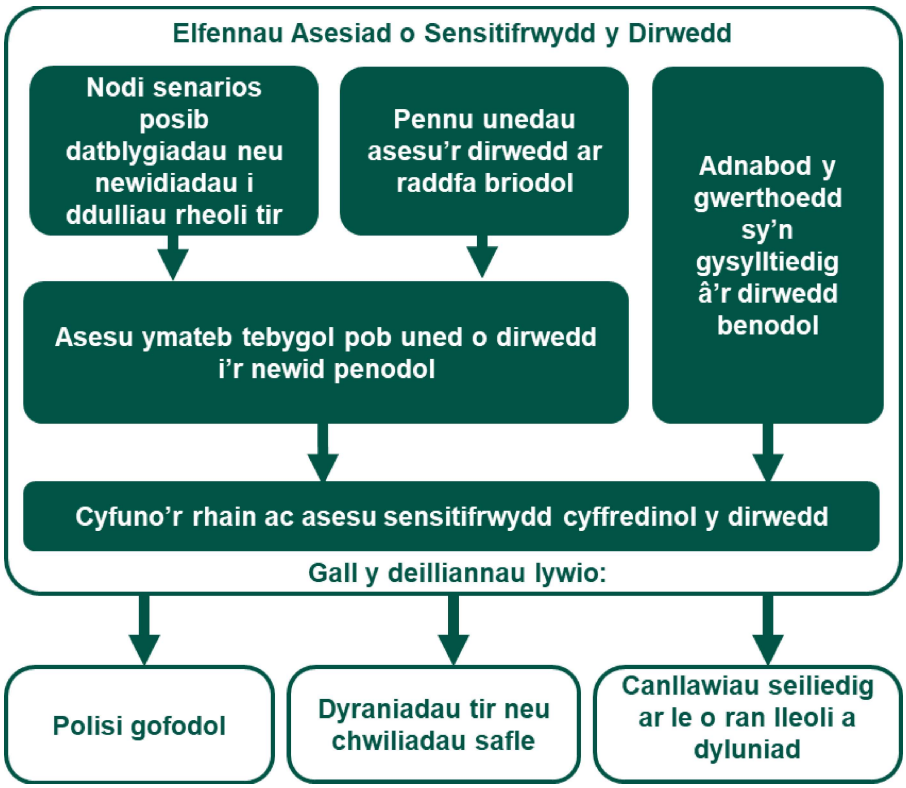
Mae asesiadau o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd yn rhoi arwydd o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd mewn ffordd gadarn, y mae modd ei hailadrodd, ac sy'n gallu gwrthsefyll craffu. Mae'r canfyddiadau'n strategol ac yn ddangosol, sy'n wahanol i Asesiadau o'r Effaith Weledol ac ar y Dirwedd sy'n benodol i safle ac i brosiect.

Gallwch ddarllen termau technegol mwy manwl yn ein rhestr termau

1.2 Prif elfennau asesiad o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd

- **Nodi senarios posib datblygiadau neu newidiadau i ddulliau rheoli tir.** Mae angen i ni ddeall prif nodweddion newidiadau arfaethedig fel aseswyr y dirwedd.
- **Pennu unedau asesu'r dirwedd ar raddfa briodol.** Mae angen i ni ddeall y brif dystiolaeth am y dirwedd, gan gynnwys adnoddau gweledol.
- **Asesu ymateb tebygol pob uned o dirwedd i'r newid penodol.** Caiff hyn ei lywio gan gyfres o feini prawf asesu a dangosyddion ar gyfer pob maen prawf.
- **Adnabod y gwerthoedd sy'n gysylltiedig â'r dirwedd benodol**. Mae angen i ni asesu a allai'r newid effeithio arnynt.
- **Asesu sensitifrwydd cyffredinol y dirwedd.** Mae hyn yn cynnwys cyfuno'r manylion ynghylch yr ymateb tebygol i newid a'r manylion o ran y gwerthoedd cysylltiedig â'r dirwedd, yn ogystal ag ystyried y dirwedd yn ei chyfanrwydd.
- **Wedyn gellir defnyddio'r deilliannau i lywio amrywiaeth o anghenion o ran blaengynllunio, gan gynnwys polisi gofodol, dyraniadau tir a chwiliadau safle, a chanllawiau seiliedig ar le o ran lleoli a dyluniad.**

Mae'r diagram isod yn amlinellu'r pwyntiau hyn.



1.3 Camau asesiad o sensitifrwydd y dirwedd

Dylid ystyried yr elfennau mewn dilyniant o 4 cam gwaith, fel a ganlyn.

Cwmpasu (Cam 1)

Mae hyn wedi'i anelu at y corff comisiynu ar gyfer yr asesiad. Mae'n cynnwys sefydlu grŵp llywio ar gyfer y prosiect, ysgrifennu briff, y dull ar gyfer ymgysylltu â rhanddeiliaid, a chomisiynu'r arbenigedd cywir i gynnal yr asesiad.

Gallwch ddarllen Cam 1 mewn manylder

Sefydlu paramedrau'r asesiad (Cam 2)

Mae hyn wedi'i anelu at yr aseswr ac yn cychwyn gyda chael briff clir. Mae a wnelo'r cam hwn â sefydlu'r manylion ar gyfer gwahanol elfennau'r asesiad, beth ellid adrodd arno yn y bennod ar ddulliau yn yr asesiad terfynol, yn barod am y cam nesaf.

Gallwch ddarllen Cam 2 mewn manylder

Asesu sensitifrwydd (Cam 3)

Mae a wnelo hyn â chynnal yr asesiad ei hun. Mae'n cynnwys gwaith desg a maes a chynnig barn ynghylch ymateb tebygol y dirwedd, gwerthoedd cysylltiedig â'r dirwedd a sensitifrwydd y dirwedd.

Gallwch ddarllen Cam 3 mewn manylder

Adrodd (Cam 4)

Mae hyn wedi'i anelu at y corff comisiynu yn ogystal â'r aseswr. Mae'n cwmpasu dulliau ar gyfer trefnu'r asesiad a'i gyflwyno i'r gynulleidfa darged ac at eu defnydd.

Gallwch ddarllen Cam 4 mewn manylder

Adolygu a diweddaru hen asesiad – mae hyn yn gam pellach.

Gallwch ddarllen am adolygu mewn manylder

2 Understanding landscape sensitivity assessment

In this section

This is where to start if you want an overview of landscape sensitivity assessment, whether you are commissioning or using an assessment, or carrying out one. This page summarises all our guidance and provides links to the different parts.

You can also access all the parts of the guidance from our contents page

Natural Resources Wales has produced this technical guidance on how to undertake a landscape sensitivity assessment to help local planning authorities, landscape practitioners and other agencies. We have worked closely with other UK specialists to provide a consistent approach. In Wales, this guidance supersedes Landscape Character Assessment Guidance Topic Paper 6 (2002).

2.1 What is landscape sensitivity assessment?

Landscape Sensitivity Assessments are strategic appraisals of the relative sensitivity of landscapes to development or land use changes. They are an important tool to help guide development to the least sensitive locations in the early stages of spatial planning, before individual development proposals come forward on specific development sites. As such, Local Planning Authorities often use them when preparing their Local Development Plans.

You can read more on how a landscape sensitivity assessment is used in spatial planning

"*Landscape sensitivity refers to the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management. It combines judgements of the susceptibility of that landscape to change, and the values attached to that landscape*". (Jointly agreed NatureScot and Natural Resources Wales definition, based on several related references).

In simple terms it is concerned with whether the character of the landscape might be more easily or less easily changed by a type of development or land management (with reference to 'landscape susceptibility'), and whether that change is likely to matter (with reference to landscape value').

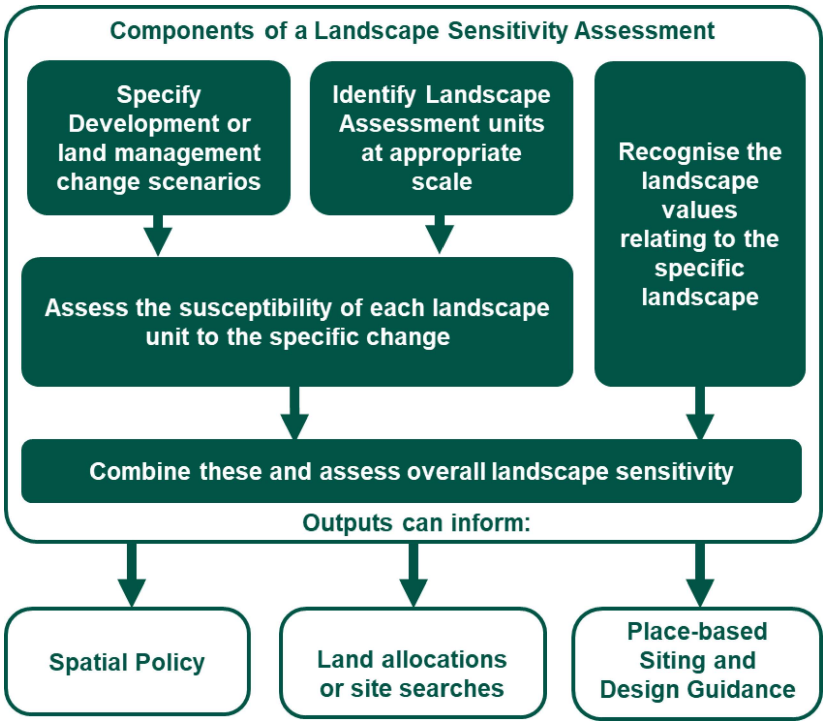
Landscape sensitivity assessment provides an indication of landscape sensitivity in a manner which is robust, repeatable, and capable of standing up to scrutiny. The findings are strategic and indicative, in contrast to site- and project-specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

You can read more detailed technical terms in our glossary

2.2 The main components of a landscape sensitivity assessment

- **Specify development or land management change scenarios.** We need to understand the key characteristics of proposed changes as landscape assessors.
- **Identify landscape assessment units at an appropriate scale.** We need to understand key landscape evidence, including visual resources.
- **Assess the susceptibility of each landscape unit to the specific change.** This is guided by a suite of assessment criteria and indicators for each criterion.
- **Recognise the landscape values relating to the specific landscape.** We need to assess whether they may be affected by the change.
- **Assess overall landscape sensitivity.** This involves combining the susceptibility to change and the landscape value details, as well as considering the landscape as a whole.
- **Outputs can then be used to inform a range of forward planning needs, including spatial policy, land allocations and site searches, and place-**based siting and design guidance.

The diagram below illustrates these points.



2.3 Landscape sensitivity assessment stages

The components should be considered in a sequence of four work stages as follows.

Scoping (Stage 1)

This is aimed at the commissioning body for the assessment. Content includes setting up a project steering group, writing a brief, the approach to stakeholder engagement, and commissioning the right expertise to carry out the assessment.

You can read Stage 1 in detail

Establish the assessment parameters (Stage 2)

This is aimed at the assessor and starts with being given a clear brief. This stage is about detailing up the various components for the assessment, what might be reported in the method chapter of the final assessment, ready for the next stage.

You can read Stage 2 in detail

Assess sensitivity (Stage 3)

This is about carrying out the assessment itself. It includes desk and field work and making the judgements of landscape susceptibility, landscape value and landscape sensitivity.

You can read Stage 3 in detail

Reporting (Stage 4)

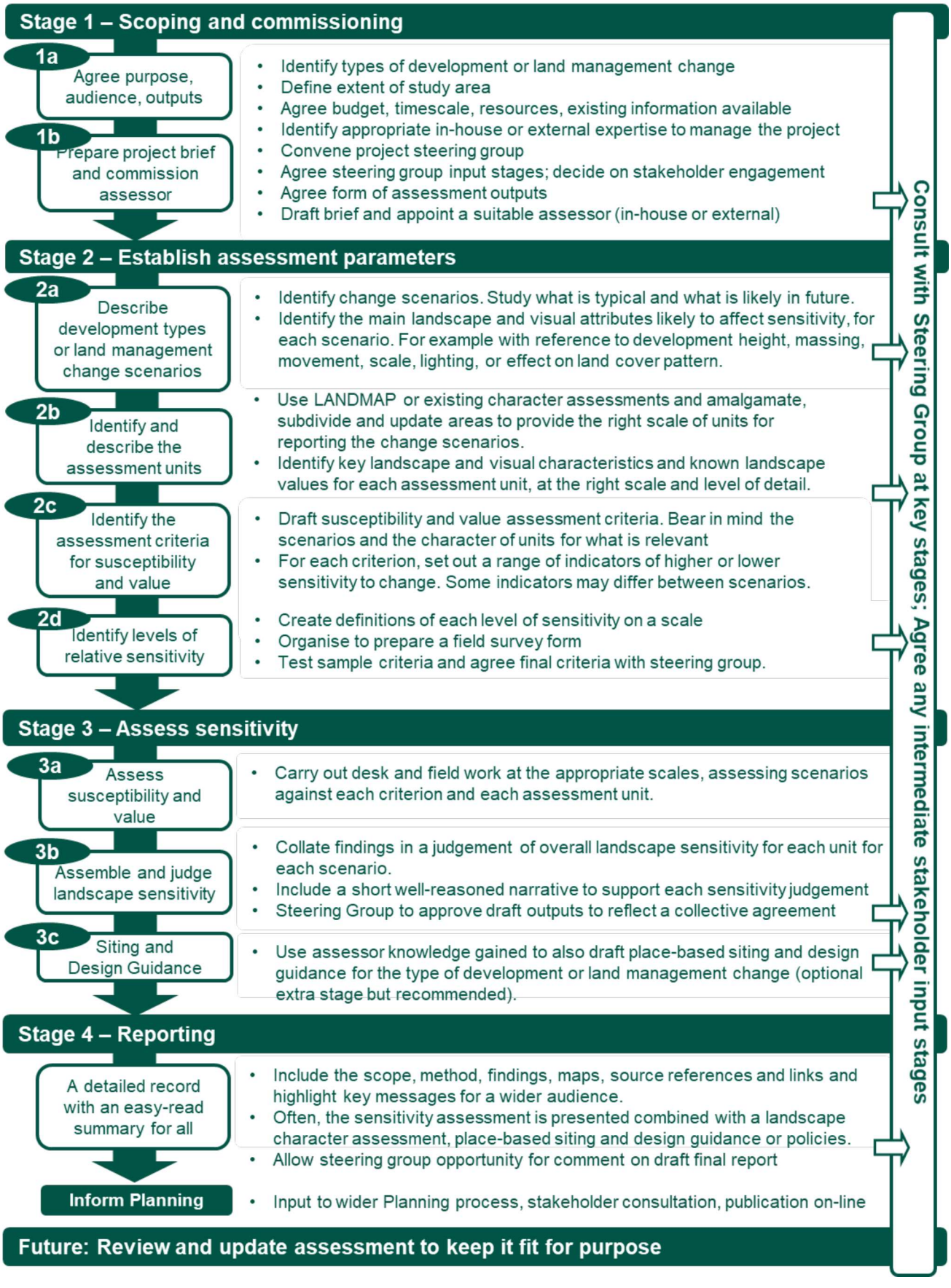
This is aimed at the commissioning body as well as the assessor. It covers approaches for how the assessment is organised and presented to the intended audience and their use.

You can read Stage 4 in detail

Reviewing and updating an old assessment is a further stage.

You can read about reviewing in detail

Landscape Sensitivity Assessment stages – at a glance



3 Using landscape sensitivity assessment in spatial planning

In this section

This is only part of our landscape sensitivity assessment guidance.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

3.1 Consider landscape early in a planning process

The best landscape and visual mitigation is usually to steer development towards the least sensitive landscapes. While other factors will steer too, landscape needs to be considered at the outset of the spatial planning process. This is long before individual development proposals come forward for specific sites.

This requires the landscape sensitivity assessment to be included in the resourcing and timetabling as part of larger planning exercises. For example, a review of a Local Development Plan.

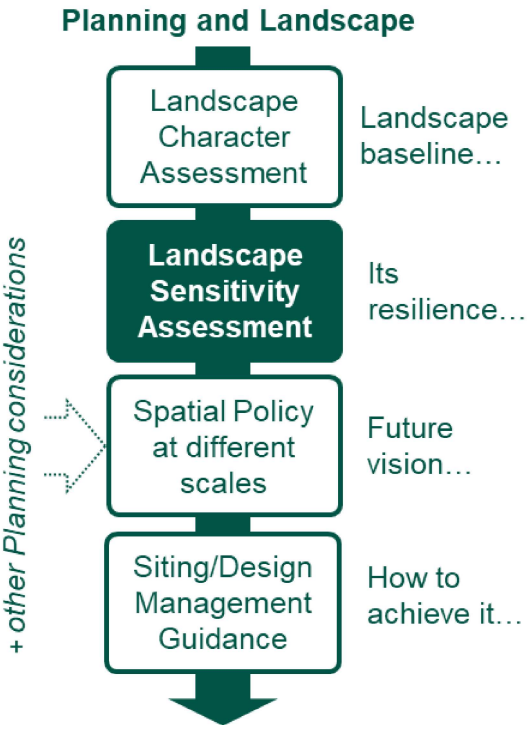
If landscape was only considered after development sites had been chosen, proposals risk being placed into more sensitive landscapes, which may be difficult or costly to mitigate.

3.2 Where to fit landscape sensitivity into a planning process

Landscape sensitivity assessment is one consideration in forward planning. The diagram below shows how the assessment would fit, in relation to other landscape considerations and other planning considerations.

The diagram below shows how landscape sensitivity assessment uses an understanding of landscape character, which includes visual resources. It considers whether the character of the landscape might be more easily or less easily changed by a type of development or land management change, with reference to landscape susceptibility. It also considers whether that change is likely to matter, with reference to landscape value. This understanding contributes with other planning considerations to working out the preferred spatial planning vision for an area, as expressed through policies. The landscape sensitivity assessment also informs the creation of appropriate siting and design guidelines

that show how the planning vision could be achieved on the ground. A landscape master plan or design brief might provide further direction on larger or more sensitive sites.



Landscape sensitivity assessment stops short of considering the acceptability of development, as that would depend on many other planning considerations too. Instead, it should be regarded just as evidence for the decision-making body to inform spatial policy. It is usually interpreted that the more sensitive the landscape, the harder it is to accommodate change to landscape character or qualities, without a sensitive approach to siting, design, scale, and quantity of development, or land management change.

Landscape Sensitivity Assessments are often presented alongside a Landscape Character Assessment, spatial policy and associated siting and design guidelines in Supplementary Planning Guidance, Strategic and Local Development Plans.

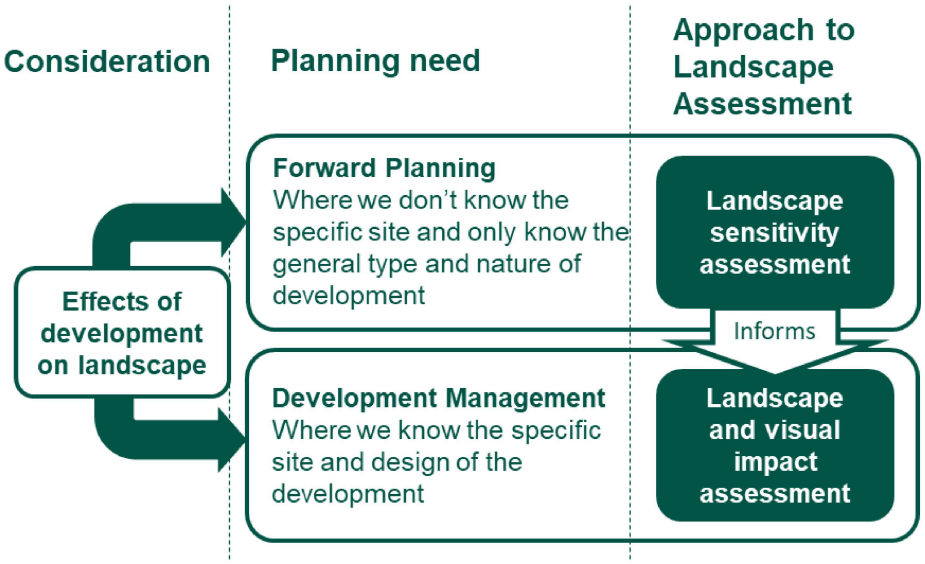
The assessments are usually carried out by a Local Planning Authority as part of their work. The approach and principles might also be used in other contexts, such as when planning for forestry or other landscape-scale interventions in a rural context.

3.3 The difference between landscape sensitivity and landscape and visual impact assessments

Landscape Sensitivity Assessments share some common principles with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, published by the Landscape Institute. However, it differs as follows, as illustrated in the diagram below:

- Landscape sensitivity assessments are used in forward planning before an actual development proposal or preferred site comes forward. It specifies generalised scenarios for types and scales of development or land management change.

- Landscape and visual impact assessments focus on specific, detailed proposals for specific sites.



3.4 Examples of common use in planning

Here are some examples of how landscape sensitivity assessments can inform a variety of forward planning needs.

- The preparation of a Strategic or Local Development Plan
- Topic-based spatial planning for known development pressures
- To help identify more suitable sites when considering different site options
- To inform landscape-scale conservation priorities across an area as part of a management plan
- When developing policy to manage a type of development pressure that is having a cumulative effect in an area

Here are some examples of types of development or land management change that a landscape sensitivity assessment might consider.

- **Housing** - Finding allocation sites around settlements
- **Forestry** - Searching for land for large-scale afforestation
- **Renewable Energy** - Creating or refining spatial policy for such developments
- **Scattered developments** - Providing a strategic spatial steer for sporadic development of a type, such as new caravan or camping sites, poultry units, or quarrying
- **Linear developments** - Strategic planning of route options through the landscape, such as for a new road, overhead power line or pipeline

You can see some examples of past assessments below. Some of their technical terms and their meanings may differ with our guidance. Some of them refer to 'landscape capacity' whereas today we refer to 'landscape sensitivity'. But they can still be valid sources of evidence for their original purpose.

Read the two Landscape Sensitivity Assessments to inform settlement extensions for Stratford-on-Avon Landscape Sensitivity Assessments, for main settlements and local service villages

Read the Stratford-on-Avon Renewable Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study for wind and solar farms and note section 3.3 for a helpful analysis of the height and spread of past developments in the area

Read the Snowdonia Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment, which covers a lot of different types of development, including small-scale wind energy developments, telecommunications masts, static caravan, and chalet parks, and see Technical Appendix, paragraphs A.38 to A.48, which cover development typologies (scenarios)

Read the Bridgend County Borough Landscape sensitivity assessment, on renewables, which is presented as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SP20) and is based on their existing Landscape Character Assessment areas

You can read a methodology for a local scale landscape sensitivity assessment to inform land use choices for Laverstock and Ford Parish (England)

3.5 Relating landscape sensitivity assessment to wider policy contexts in Wales

Landscape sensitivity assessments support achieving wider public policy objectives. You may find references to wider policy contexts helpful to support a case for commissioning a landscape sensitivity assessment. Referring to wider policy contexts can also help users of assessments to better understand and integrate their proposals with public policy.

The choice of what contexts are most relevant will vary with the scale and purpose of the assessment, but we summarise some common ones here to assist you.

European Landscape Convention

The UK continues to support this Council of Europe treaty. Articles 5 and 6 of the European Landscape Convention refer to recognising landscapes in law, establishing policies aimed at landscape planning, protection and management and integrating landscape into other policy areas. Landscape sensitivity is a key technical concept to help us do this.

Read the articles of the European Landscape Convention

Policy in Wales

Local Policy - Most landscape sensitivity assessments are carried out in response to a local spatial planning need, as part of a forward planning process. Assessments provide evidence and analysis to inform policies. They are often published by the Local Planning Authority as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Future Wales - The National Plan 2040 is the Welsh Government's national development framework for Wales. Its policies range from creating a new national forest to larger renewable energy developments. Putting the vision into practice, including Welsh Government's commitment to achieving 'net zero' (the overriding direction for policy in relation to climate change) will require a range of factors to be considered, including landscape change.

Read Future Wales - The National Plan 2040

Placemaking - An understanding of landscape setting and landscape design are key to good placemaking. Future Wales, Planning Policy Wales, and Technical Advice Note 12 on Design champion Placemaking and its principles as an integrating concept. The Local Authority may have signed up to the Design Commission for Wales's Placemaking Charter. TAN 12 recognises the need to appraise context in delivering good design and highlighting distinctive patterns of development or landscape where the intention will be to sustain character. It states that *"undertaking strategic landscape assessment at the outset of the design process should help to define the capacity of the natural and historic environment to absorb development"*.

You can read Planning Policy Wales

You can read Technical Advice Note 12

Learn about the Placemaking Charter

Wellbeing - The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out seven national well-being goals. All public bodies have duties under this Act. For each goal, a case can be made for how landscapes contribute to our wellbeing. One of the goals also refers to 'a resilient Wales'.

Read about the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Resilience - Landscape sensitivity is one aspect of environmental resilience. Natural Resources Wales's State of Natural Resources Report defines resilience as *"the capacity of ecosystems to deal with disturbances, either by resisting them, recovering from them, or adapting to them, whilst retaining their ability to deliver services and benefits now and in the future".* Landscape contributes to our understanding of ecosystem benefits as a 'cultural' benefit. A sensitive siting and design process can show how a landscape might be adapted while retaining or enhancing its ability to deliver services and benefits.

You can read the State of Natural Resources Report 2020 Glossary

Natural Resources - Welsh Government's Natural Resources Policy shows the attributes of resilience cover the diversity, extent, condition, connectivity and adaptability across broad processes, scales, habitats and land uses, and the interplay between them all. This links well with the European Landscape Convention's integrating concept of landscape as "*areas, as perceived by people, whose character results from the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*".

You can read Welsh Government's Natural Resources Policy

Sectoral Policy, such as renewable energy - Welsh Government's Planning for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy – A Toolkit for Planners guides Local Authority policy planners on how to carry out Renewable Energy Assessments to inform their spatial policies. The toolkit advises that Renewable Energy Assessments are refined by commissioning a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment prior to allocating or identifying areas in their Local Development Plans. Specific reference to landscape sensitivity assessment is made in section E4.3 (page 94); section P3 (page120); and for wind Sheet B (page144) and for Solar PV Sheet K (page 194).

You can read Planning for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy – A Toolkit for Planners

4 Scoping and commissioning a landscape sensitivity assessment (Stage 1)

In this section

This is Stage 1 of 4 of our guidance on carrying out a landscape sensitivity assessment. This stage is principally aimed at commissioning bodies and their steering groups, as it would be carried out before an assessor is appointed.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

4.1 Confirm the purpose of the assessment

You are likely to have identified a need to consider landscape as an aspect of spatial planning. This is often as an element of a wider forward planning exercise that addresses public policy on development and placemaking, environmental resilience, wellbeing, or landscape management. This planning exercise might be related to creating or revising a national, strategic, or local development plan and associated guidance.

You can read about public policy that landscape sensitivity assessment can provide evidence to inform

The specific role of the landscape sensitivity assessment is to provide evidence on the ability of a landscape to accommodate a type of development or land management change. This can be used as follows.

- As evidence to inform spatial policy that guides development to less sensitive landscapes to minimise negative impact
- As evidence to inform siting and design guidance for different landscape areas.

Confirming how you intend to use your assessment will influence the scale and detail of the assessment, and whether other work might also be added, such as creating siting and

design guidelines. It is useful to talk to a range of colleagues to understand their different requirements and look at examples of assessments done elsewhere to see how they work.

You can see examples of uses of landscape sensitivity assessment in planning and link to examples of published assessments

You should understand where landscape sensitivity assessment sits as part of your wider planning process.

You can read our guidance on when and where to consider landscape sensitivity in a wider spatial planning process

4.2 Identify types of change to be assessed

Consider what types of development or land management change that you wish to plan for. Landscape sensitivity is always expressed in relation to this, as the sensitivity to one type of change might be different to that of another. You will want to focus on those types of development that are most likely to occur, and which are also likely to affect landscape character.

You can see examples of uses of landscape sensitivity assessment in planning and link to examples of published assessments

4.3 Consider the scale of the assessment

Consider at what scale of landscape the type of development or land management change is likely to occur. Some types of change may affect larger areas than others. This will affect the choice of suitably scaled landscape units.

This means the scale of landscape assessment units used in the landscape sensitivity assessment will vary with the scale of change.

Here are some examples where the change can be expressed at different scales.

- Single houses in open countryside, versus the cumulative effects of many such developments over time
- Small woodlands versus large-scale afforestation
- An inherently large or prominent type of development where even one proposal might affect landscape character, such as a new trunk road or a large distribution warehouse
- Wind farms, tall turbines affecting larger areas due to their height and open locations creating varying visibility, versus smaller, farm-scale turbines.
- Different forms of a development, such as high-rise housing blocks versus low rise housing estates.

You can read details about different types and scales of development or land management change in Stage 2

4.4 Work out the assessment study area

It is only worth carrying out the assessment in areas where the type of development or land management change might occur. Bear in mind limits on assessment resources and the need to focus the assessment where it would have most benefit.

In many cases the planning need will be to consider all landscapes within the planning administrative area, such as a whole county. Working on joint assessments with neighbouring authorities is also encouraged for consistency across boundaries. There may be economies to be gained from pooling scarce expertise and resources.

In other cases, there will be factors that can exclude areas from further consideration prior to the start of the landscape sensitivity assessment. For example, as follows.

- Existing spatial policy of exclusion in principle. For example, Future Wales – The National Plan 2040 Policy 17 excludes large-scale wind energy developments from National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Some other forms of natural or heritage designation might also form exclusion areas.

- Existing spatial policy of acceptance of the type or scale of change in principle: For example, Future Wales – The National Plan 2040 Policy 17 accepts landscape changes in principle in its 'Pre-assessed Areas for Wind Energy' (PAWE). Given the purpose of Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is to inform spatial planning, landscape issues in these areas might now be limited to matters of layout and siting, and be better addressed through siting and design guidelines.

- The limit of the administrative, land ownership area. For example, if the objective is to find new housing allocation sites on the edge of a particular town, distant rural areas might be scoped out.

- Areas that would not be technically feasible. For example, hydro energy schemes require very specific types of location.

It is important to map out the study area boundary clearly and to include this in the brief. However, beware of constraining a study area to such an extent that the planning need would not met.

Note the study area only needs to include landscape areas where the development or land management change might occur, and not everywhere else that it might be seen from.

4.5 Resources for carrying out the assessment

Getting the resources in place and consulting on the scope and brief can take time. The procurement stage for externally commissioned assessors may take a few months. Ideally, these internal processes should be completed before the start of the funding period or year in which the assessment is carried out. This would avoid rushing field work or gaining feedback on draft outputs, which take time.

Other resourcing factors include:

- Aligning the timescale with a Strategic or Local Development Plan process
- Getting the right assessor expertise and whether this is available in-house or whether a landscape consultant needs to be engaged
- The need for stakeholder engagement, which can take time
- The time of year for field work, which might be harder in winter months
- Availability and existing commitments of specialist staff in the commissioning body
- Opportunities to test draft methodology
- Selection and availability of the Steering Group to comment on drafts
- Editing processes and presentation to optimise clarity
- Quality assurance at the end of the process, carried out by an independent assessor or Steering Group members with expertise.

Before starting an assessment, it is helpful to consider what existing available information or data is readily available that could affect the scope of the assessment. Perhaps there is an existing Landscape Character Assessment, but it may need updating, or adapting to be the right scale to use.

4.6 Steering group

A small expert steering group of named individuals should input at key work stages. They should be drawn from the commissioning body or their partners and reflect the interests of those who would manage and use the assessment. They need to bring strategic steer to landscape assessment, good project management, and an understanding of the wider planning context in which the assessment would be used. Representation might include Natural Resources Wales.

It is important to include some landscape specialism on the steering group, even if that has to come from a partner. This is especially important when drafting the brief. The steering group must perform an ‘intelligent client’ role to get the most out of the project. Other helpful specialisms could include those involved in the wider planning process who would use the assessment, as it needs to make sense to them. GIS or mapping expertise, and local knowledge are also helpful.

The steering group would typically input to:

- Support the case that argues the need for the work and assembles the resources
- Scoping, shaping, and agreeing the brief
- Agreeing assessment criteria and indicators
- Reviewing any pilot assessment work

- Commenting on draft outputs
- Supporting the Project Officer in peer-review or sign-off procedures.

The steering group may be more useful as a small, focussed number of ‘experts’ rather than a large number of corporate representatives. Each project must strike its own balance. All members should be able to comfortably express their views on sometimes complex technical matters and reach consensus on decisions and outputs.

A by-product of the steering group, and especially the project manager, is that by the end of the project they are likely to have gone up a learning curve and will be in a good position to understand and promote the use of the completed assessment in an intelligent way.

4.7 Approach to consultation

A stakeholder group might be used in consultation stages, but they would not be members of the steering group. Experience suggests stakeholders may be particularly useful to input as follows.

- Adding local knowledge on the specific cultural characteristics of a landscape that might otherwise be missed, for example when identifying landscape character areas
- Adding perspectives from different sectors with knowledge on future trends in development, to inform the creation of change scenarios.

This has been especially useful in early to mid-stages, for recognising landscape character area boundaries, their names, and their key characteristics. Specialists with local knowledge are best to involve for this, by invitation to a workshop day. On-line alternatives may be appropriate and be less onerous for participants. Be clear what is intended and who will manage this element, the commissioning body may be best placed to facilitate.

4.8 Writing the project brief

A good assessment starts with a clear brief, setting out the purpose of the assessment, resources available, any limitations, and requirements for outputs.

Drafting the brief is a careful process and Local Planning Authorities should involve their in-house landscape staff for this, in liaison with the steering group. They might also consult Natural Resources Wales and talk to other authorities or landscape consultants who are familiar with this type of assessment.

Follow existing guidance as far as possible. Complexity of process may be a barrier to communication. Accepted definitions and the sequence of assessment stages should be followed. Avoid breaking too much new ground on the method if the need is to gain a wide professional acceptance. Some tailoring will be needed on the details of the project, such as when establishing the assessment parameters.

While the brief can reference this guidance, it must also include specific project details as follows.

- **Setting out the planning need** - to provide helpful context so the assessor can frame their work to best suit that need

- **What existing information can be provided** - such as existing landscape character assessments of the area, GIS datasets of relevance, past landscape sensitivity assessments, intelligence gathered from planners or development sectors on likely future forms and scales of development

- **Extent of the study area**, set out clearly

- **Creation of the assessment units** - which might involve reviewing or creating a Landscape Character Assessment

- **Change scenarios** - that are to be assessed. The brief may require the details to be worked out, within given simple parameters

- **The need to create assessment criteria and indicators for the sensitivity assessment** –likely to be tasks for the assessor to work out the details

- **The need for pilot work.** Consider the benefits of this against resource implications. A good assessor should test their draft approach, but the brief may formalise this and allow for steering group input.

- **Field work** - is essential. Resources should be allocated to include for an experienced assessor to make the field work judgements, and for a period of challenge and harmonisation within the project team to result in a more robust and consistent assessment across the study area. A minimum of two locations should be visited within each assessment unit.

- **Consider if siting and design guidance is needed –** while not part of the assessment it can provide a useful follow on as part of the response to the assessment findings. Many projects include this as a later stage of the commission as it can benefit from the field work and local familiarity gained from the landscape sensitivity assessment stage.

- **Steering group and stakeholder consultation –** set out clearly how will this be handled and who will lead, incorporating enough time. For example, this might involve a workshop event to bring in valuable local knowledge when identifying landscape character areas, and an on-line consultation of draft sensitivity assessment findings.

- **Presentation** of the assessment, for which there might be specific formats, styles, or templates to use. Writing and formatting for web page text and writing and formatting for reports can differ. A critical eye should be cast on any proposed standard corporate template or interactive map to see if it is suitable. Any specific requirements such as map images or photos should be specified. It is helpful to readers if written and map information are not separated.

- **Corporate considerations** - related to presentation. These may also include how the assessment will fit into wider planning documentation such as Supplementary

Planning Guidance; on-line map presentation and GIS data standards; Open Government Data license requirements for downloads; Welsh Language Act requirements and Public Sector Accessibility Regulations.

- **Submission of output documents and GIS map files** and their formats. The GIS files should be made simple to understand, for example using plain-English table headings, as these are often carried through into map image keys.

- **Timescale.** This may be affected by the timescale of the wider planning process into which the assessment would fit. Include the key work stages, a timeline and final deadline. Allow for assessments to be carried out with enough time for the steering group to read drafts and offer comments. Field work may be easier to do in summer months. Stakeholder consultation can take considerable time.

Project outputs usually include the following.

- **Introduction** to provide a wider planning or landscape management context and set out why the assessment was prepared. This might be best written by the commissioning body in their own voice (optional).

- **Non-technical summary**, being a short but concentrated digest of key messages or findings, that users should take from the assessment. This may be the only part that some people will read. It needs map(s) showing the pattern of sensitivity across the study area and a clear caveat against interpreting lower sensitivity as 'any change would be acceptable'.

- **The technical method used**, setting out the assessment stages, criteria and indicators used and a glossary of terms, such that the assessment could be repeated by others in the future. Mere reference to this generic guidance would be insufficient.

- **The assessment itself**, with details for each assessment unit, including the nature and level of sensitivity, linked to the assessment of susceptibility and landscape value. This is often structured in tabular form, with map images to understand where is being referred to, and at least one panoramic landscape photograph of each assessment unit.

- **GIS files**, to required standards and format

- **Whether field notes are to be supplied.** A thorough assessment report that includes relevant details, but without original field notes, can result in a leaner, simpler document to use.

4.9 Writing a tender brief where work needs to be commissioned

The tender brief needs to include all the details in a project brief (above) and also the following details.

- **Timescale in relation to financial year end** - Consider the effect on timing and quality if work is rushed near the end of a financial year. Considered outputs and clear presentation may be better achieved by splitting resources across two financial years. Also, this may better suit summer field work.

- **Budget** - Set out the budget as a known limitation. A potentially good tenderer may lose because they over or under guessed the available budget. By declaring a budget cost limitation in tenderer documents, submissions can focus more accurately on what quality and quantity of work they can achieve for that cost. This enables a fairer comparison more closely related to the available resources, while keeping the competitive nature of the tender process. Remember the cheapest tender might not always be the best value.

- **Selection of the right assessor** - Appropriately qualified and experienced landscape professionals should be used to carry out the assessment. They need to be familiar with the terms and methodology. They are usually Chartered Members of the Landscape Institute. The brief should reflect this need and recognise the value of relevant experience. Some Local Planning Authorities have their own in-house landscape specialists who might sit on the Steering Group to advise. But where not, the Landscape Institute may be approached to advise on finding consultants. Talking to colleagues in other Local Planning Authorities may be helpful too.

- **Allowing a good tender to stand out** - The brief should not over-prescribe the method or stifle opportunities for the assessor to use their experience to demonstrate added value or efficiency.

- **Allocation of assessor time** - Request a detailed outline of how much time of each of the principal named assessors has been allotted to each task or stage of work. This enables those assessing the tender to see if sufficient senior staff time has been allocated to key tasks where professional judgement is needed. Asking for CVs for these people showing relevant past work will also indicate how experienced they really are. The following elements are time consuming and might be missed if they were not itemised - field work, pilot studies and involvement in consultation (such as preparing materials, attending managed stakeholder meetings, and collating and incorporating consultation findings).

4.10 Evaluating tender bids when commissioning a landscape sensitivity assessment

The project manager should ensure the following points are considered and agreed with the steering group.

Develop tender evaluation criteria, with weighting to reflect what is more important. Reflect the quality needs of the assessment and not just cost, such as a 70-30% split in favour of quality. These are published in the tender documents so tenderers can respond accordingly.

Examples of ‘gateway’ criteria, which tenderers must pass to be considered, might include the following.

- At least one senior specialist being a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute
- Being able to deliver the work within the available budget and timescale

Examples of quality criteria might include the following.

- The level of tenderer expertise in landscape sensitivity assessment. Clues may be in past work they cite and the degree to which key staff played a leading role in making the sensitivity judgements.
- Time inputs and roles of named senior qualified staff at different project stages, showing the degree to which they will be the ones making the assessment judgements.
- Including an ‘added value’ or ‘unique selling point’ as a criterion that can be used to recognise innovation or additional services that would create a better output than one which only minimally complied with the brief. For example, senior specialists who already have local knowledge of the study area may enable the project to progress more quickly in early stages, without the need for a familiarisation period.

Letting a range of potential consultants know when a tender is on the Sell2Wales website will help them to look out for it. It is easy to miss in alert emails. A clear title like ‘Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for X County’ will help too.

Tenders should be assessed by the commissioning body, with support from the Steering Group (if desired) so they are content with the eventual appointment.

5 Establishing landscape sensitivity assessment parameters (Stage 2)

In this section

This is stage 2 of 4 of our guidance on carrying out a landscape sensitivity assessment. It is written primarily for the assessor, and those overseeing them. The stage should start with a clear brief. Where a commissioning body lacks their own expertise, an external landscape consultant may have been commissioned.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

5.1 Describing the change scenarios

Study the result of past change of the type.

Start by looking at physical characteristics of prevailing existing development or land management patterns in the study area. If current trends continue then the change scenarios need to reflect more of the same. Past examples can illustrate how they typically alter a landscape and whether different types of landscapes are altered in different ways.

Anticipate future change

Changes in technology, economics or other factors may mean the scale or form of future development is different. Some research may be needed, talking with industry, to understand likely future proposals. The Steering Group, with their planning insight, may also provide advice. As an example, wind turbine developments have increased in height, spacing and number of turbines in recent years.

Use the present landscape for the assessment

Excepting novel approaches, the present landscape forms the default state used for the assessment. This means:

- The landscape may already contain some examples of the type of change being considered.
- The present landscape may also have some consented but not yet built development, normally included as well to avoid the assessment quickly becoming out of date.

- Other potential future development not yet consented would not be included, as the scope of the assessment is limited to the current landscape.

Use typical scenarios to represent a wide range of change

Change scenarios should represent what typically comes forward as a proposal which gains consent, rather than exceptional, unusual, or ideally designed ones. It is not necessary to get into detailed design matters, focusing on a few defining characteristics of the development type, and their scale, should be all that is needed. Some development types almost always use standard designs that are not place-based, such as solar panels or wind turbines.

Use as few scenarios as needed to reflect the widest range of likely development or land management change being considered, and keep them as simple and as generic as possible so they are more widely applicable. This would make the assessment outputs easier to understand and so be more likely to influence decision-making.

Landscape sensitivity assessment is not concerned with modelling how much development might be fitted into a landscape. More than one scenario may be needed if a type of change was likely to come in very different scales or forms, where the landscape sensitivity could differ in each.

- For example, housing scenarios may include place-based aspects of their design in general terms, affecting whether they are likely to be high or low rise, or whether small or large area developments, nucleated or scattered forms.

- For example, for wind farms, the full spectrum of likely proposals coming forward in the study area (hypothetically) might be represented by 3 scenarios: (i) a small number of very large turbines, (ii) a larger number of mixed medium heights of turbine, and (iii) a community-scale with small number of small turbines. This needs to be a project-specific judgement agreed by the Steering Group.

About ancillary works and mitigation in scenarios

Typical mitigation can be assumed because unmitigated proposals would not be typical of what gains consent. This assumes incidental works that do not form key attributes in their own right. For example, toned-down colours, a sympathetic choice of materials and boundary treatments. These need not be specifically detailed, but a note in the method might be helpful to readers wondering about how this issue has been handled.

If mitigation or ancillary works would be so dominant as to form a major feature of the development itself, then they should be set out in the scenario as key attributes. For example, a large overburden heap resulting from quarry working or very wide access routes.

When the amount of change is known at the outset

In some cases, the type and amount of change may be given to the assessor at the outset, coming from a higher tier plan or analysis report. For example, where there is a known amount of new housing that needs to be accommodated across an urban fringe planning

area. This knowledge can inform the identification of more likely scenarios for the landscape sensitivity assessment, and can inform subsequent discussions (after the landscape sensitivity assessment) on how the amount of development might be distributed across different landscapes or sites. In some older assessments, that subsequent discussion may have been framed by the term ‘landscape capacity’.

You can read our notes on the term landscape capacity (Section 8.2)

Set out simple parameters for the change scenarios

Scenarios need to be simply stated with reference to a few key attributes, enough for the assessor to envisage during field work. Clarity might be improved with the help of sketches or photos so long as they do not introduce distracting or place-specific detail.

When working out these parameters, identify defining characteristics for a scenario that are likely to affect key landscape characteristics of the assessment units. Look at any available landscape guidance on the type of development or land use change and look at past assessments from elsewhere.

Example parameters might include:

- For housing: maximum height to roof ridge, indicative density per hectare, extent to which best practice is assumed (e.g. on colours, materials, and structure planting).
- For caravan and camping sites: area of development, density, ratio of touring pitches versus static units, amount of tree canopy cover typically sustained.
- For woodland creation: predominant species and relative scale (small, medium, large defined by general bands of hectares); commercial clear fell cropping or continuous cover.
- For shellfish farms: format (trestles, buoy lines), colour, size, orientation
- For wind farms – height of turbine (often the crucial defining factor), design of turbine, indicative size of wind farm (likely to be a range), any visible aviation lighting.

Note how simple the typical scenarios are. Do not over-specify bespoke details that would differ by project as these may limit the wider applicability of the assessment.

Generic landscape design guidance may also help by setting out typical characteristics of different kinds of development. It is available from a range of sources such as the following examples.

You can read about Designing Wind Farms in Wales in the Design Commission for Wales guidance, which includes factors affecting siting in the landscape

You can read the UK Forestry Standard guidance. It includes a chapter on siting and designing forests in the landscape

You can read about the National Design Guide for England, which sets out approaches for creating well-designed urban areas.

You can read a companion guide to the National Design Guide that sets out a model design code

5.2 Identifying and describing the assessment units

The extent of study area

This will have been specified in the brief.

If you need to refine a study area, you can read our guidance in stage 1

Landscape Character Areas

Landscape sensitivity assessments normally report by whole landscape area. A study area will need dividing into discrete assessment units related to different areas of landscape character. Landscape Character Areas are normally used for this.

It should be accepted that in reality, lines on maps are usually just zones of transition. They rarely represent a sudden change in character.

You should first check to see if there is an existing landscape character assessment for your study area that might be used or adapted. Local Planning Authorities usually publish these where they exist.

Assessment units need to be scaled appropriately for the type of change. For example, wind farm assessment units might be larger than poultry farm assessment units. This may mean subdividing or amalgamating areas in an existing assessment to get the right scale, as well as checking that past assessments are not out of date, and that they have the necessary detail highlighting key characteristics.

Administrative or other planning boundaries might not reflect changes in landscape character, though they could form boundaries (constraints) to the study area.

Good practice when creating Landscape Character Areas is to consult stakeholders on proposed boundaries, proposed names for areas (in Welsh and English) and to help capture key characteristics. They may contribute expert or local knowledge, especially on cultural characteristics. This is often done as a focussed workshop facilitated by the commissioning body. The purpose and resources for the assessment will affect how extensive stakeholder engagement will be.

You can access LANDMAP, which is a detailed scale of landscape assessment for Wales. It can be used as a starting point for creating or revising landscape character areas

You can read Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment to help you to create or revise landscape character areas

You can read our National Landscape Character Areas profiles, which is a broad scale of assessment for Wales

You can read our National Marine Character Areas profiles which is a broad scale of assessment for seascapes in Wales. You can also find links to more detailed local seascape character assessments

You can read the full Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Bridgend and see its landscape character areas as an example

A note on visual resources

Visual changes can be a principal form of change in some types of development, such as tall wind turbines. These may affect views and visibility for a considerable distance beyond the extent of the landscape sensitivity assessment unit.

Visual resources are reflected in the assessment where they form key characteristics or qualities of the landscape. They may include notable visual features and widespread patterns of visibility to, from or within the assessment unit. For example, an open hill landscape may have long distance views out to the coast. The open hill landscape may also have a distinctive profile that is most notable in views looking in from nearby lowlands.

It is not necessary to map the extent of key views and visibility in order to recognise visual qualities in field work in a landscape sensitivity assessment. Such mapping is a resource intensive and specialist GIS task in its own right. However, existing visibility mapping studies might form a useful aide memoire to help understand the extent of views a seen in field work.

You can read about Natural Resources Whales' Mapping the visible settings of landscapes data

5.3 Identifying landscape susceptibility parameters

The landscape susceptibility component refers to "*the degree to which a defined landscape and its associated visual resource might respond to specified development types or land management changes, without undue negative effects on landscape character and the visual resource.*" (Jointly developed definition with Natural England and NatureScot). Landscape value is considered separately to susceptibility.

Criteria

Landscape sensitivity assessment criteria are the different individual landscape and visual factors from which landscape sensitivity is judged. They are selected to be relevant to the development type and study area. Here are some examples of criteria for landscape susceptibility, not exhaustive.

- Landform: Scale of landform, topography, enclosure by landform.
- Land Cover: Scale of land cover, type and pattern of land cover, Enclosure by land cover, Time depth, Integrity (how intact).

- Settlement, development, and transport: Level of built development, type of built development and historic character, Legibility (not withstanding cumulative effects), vertical elements.

- Views and visual resources, scenery, tranquillity: pattern of visibility, nature of views, skyline and ridges, soundscape, movement, sense of tranquillity, remoteness, sense of wildness.

- Landscape role or function: landscapes acting as focal points, gateways, landmarks, a setting for other areas, gap wedge or a border between other areas.

While many criteria will be common to different assessments, the list needs to be adapted to ensure it reflects the character of the landscape being assessed. Criteria also need to be relevant to the types of change being assessed, and to the scale of the assessment.

The same landscape characteristic might contribute to more than one susceptibility criterion, and possibly to landscape value too. However, criteria should avoid overlapping to avoid the risk of double counting or contradicting.

Indicators

Each criterion has indicators that show the nature of evidence used to support the judgement of landscape sensitivity. An indicator is expressed in terms of its ability to either increase or decrease landscape sensitivity. Indicators need tailoring to suit the scale of the assessment, the nature of the character of the study area, and what is relevant to the type of change being assessed.

You can see some examples of criteria and indicators as follows.

You can read NatureScot's guidance on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to see examples of criteria and factors to be considered in the assessment (indicators)

You can read Natural England's approach to Landscape Sensitivity Assessment to see example lists of criteria and indicators and different ways they can be set out Annex 2

It is useful to see examples of how landscape susceptibility criteria have been defined and applied in published assessments.

You can read Conwy and Denbighshire Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment to see an example of how criteria have been defined (Table 1.3), how indicators have been defined (Table 1.4) and how they were applied in the assessment

5.4 Identifying landscape value parameters

Landscape value refers to "*the relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities*". (as defined by the Landscape Institute). Landscape qualities refers to characteristics or features of the landscape that are valued. Landscapes may also be valued as a whole.

There will usually be a range of different values attached to any given landscape.

Different landscape values can be recognised at different scales of landscape. For example, a whole National Park versus a localised visitor honeypot area within it.

In contrast to landscape susceptibility, landscape value is not necessarily predictable or consistent. You may find differing levels of landscape value for apparently similar landscapes. This might be due to factors not related to landscape character, such as their being within easy access of a nearby town.

The role of landscape value in landscape sensitivity assessment is as follows.

- To recognise the range of existing values (at all relevant scales) attached to the specific landscape being assessed, rather than general values that could apply to any landscape.
- To relate to existing landscape values, not potential new values that might arise in consequence of future development or land management change. (Remember the assessment is only about the sensitivity of the existing landscape).
- To be proportionate and focus on values that may be affected by the type of development or land management change being assessed.
- Landscape value forms one or more additional criteria to the assessment. As with susceptibility, indicators are used to guide consistent judgements. Some landscape value indicators may be as simple as the presence or absence of that value in that landscape (such as a landscape designation) while others may be relative (such as LANDMAP evaluation levels, or different places popular for recreation).

Reference to the Landscape Institute's guidance on assessing landscape value is particularly useful in setting out the full scope and understanding of this topic.

You can read the Landscape Institute's guidance on assessing landscape value

The following further details are useful in landscape sensitivity assessment.

Designated Landscapes

- Nationally designated landscapes in Wales are National Park and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They are both statutorily designated and recognised as equal in landscape terms, with the highest level of protection. The nature of the landscape value in nationally Designated Landscapes is expressed through the 'special qualities', as set out in National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty management plans.
- Locally designated landscapes in Wales are represented by Special Landscape Areas. As these local designations are not nationally consistent in their methodology or coverage, they cannot necessarily be used to compare across different counties. Documents relating to their designation should highlight the nature of their landscape value.

- A landscape designation indicates a high level of landscape value. However, this does not automatically signify a high level of landscape sensitivity, as that also depends on its susceptibility.

- Different landscape values may be reported at different landscape scales. Thus at a broad-scale, a designated landscape would have a set of nationally important values, and in addition at a local-scale there may be further values specific to that part of the area, arising from local character and context.

LANDMAP evaluations

LANDMAP evaluations and their associated individual evaluation criteria, form a good starting point for indicators of different forms of landscape value, regardless of designations. They are readily mappable throughout Wales from the national dataset. Some evaluations will be more relevant than others for the assessment.

You can read about and access LANDMAP information and GIS datasets

Other recognised expressions of landscape value

Examples are as follows.

- Landscape condition (the physical state of management)

- Scenic quality (primarily visual qualities)

- Rarity (of characteristics, features, or the landscape type)

- Representativeness (where characteristics or features are considered particularly important examples)

- Conservation interests (heritage, ecological or physical environment values or designations where their subjects relate to landscape character.)

- Recreation value (a setting for activities where the experience of the landscape is important, including areas popular with visitors)

- Perceptual aspects (such as tranquillity, peace and calm, soundscape, wildness, dark skies)

- Associations (where the landscape provides the inspiration or focus for artists, writers, notable people, events, traditions, or historical or religious pilgrimage)

Value in purely ecological or heritage terms is beyond the scope of a landscape sensitivity assessment. Ecological or heritage designations might form a useful proxy for landscape value where their features represent a defining aspect of landscape character, such as a prominent castle or a large area of semi-natural habitat.

5.5 Levels of sensitivity for landscape parameters

Landscape sensitivity refers to "*the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management. It combines judgements of the susceptibility of that landscape to change, and the values attached to that landscape".* (Jointly agreed NatureScot and Natural Resources Wales definition, based on several related references).

As well as writing a narrative, landscape sensitivity assessments normally include a judgement of the relative level of landscape sensitivity for each assessment unit to each change scenario used. This enables different areas to be compared. In spatial planning exercises this is helpful to use as a layer of a constraints mapping exercise, when otherwise landscape sensitivity might only be considered as a matter of written detail after spatial choices have been made.

Each landscape sensitivity level should be defined on a qualitative scale. Numerical scoring systems should be avoided as it could tempt adding up or equating entirely different criteria.

Levels are typically expressed using a five-point scale, although a 3-point scale may suffice for broad-brush assessments. For example, 'Very High > High > Medium > Low > Very Low'.

- Terms that mix levels such as 'high-medium' may be less easily understood.
- A 3-point scale might not usually provide enough nuance whereas a 7-point scale might feel overly complex.
- The word 'moderate' should be avoided as that is associated with judgements of significance in Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments.

Judgements of the level of sensitivity are guided by a reference table that sets out generic descriptions of each sensitivity level. The example scale given only a hypothetical example and should not be copied blindly.

Very high landscape sensitivity:

- Susceptibility influences - The assessment unit landscape and its key characteristics are unable to accommodate the change scenario without also fundamentally changing the overall landscape character or key characteristics, without adverse effects. Its resilience to such change is very low.
- Landscape value influences - The assessment unit is within or occupies a prominent part of the visible setting of a nationally important landscape designation, possibly with areas of nature conservation or cultural heritage designations too. The area may also present a famous or iconic cultural or visual image or sense of place derived from its landscape or key characteristics, which is reflected clearly in multiple expressions of landscape value. There are one or more outstanding evaluations in LANDMAP and others are likely to be mostly high.

High landscape sensitivity

- Susceptibility influences - The assessment unit landscape and its key characteristics may be able to accommodate the change scenario in limited situations, but more typically there would be fundamental change to overall landscape character or key characteristics, with adverse effects. Resilience to change is low / medium.

- Landscape value influences - The assessment unit is within, or part of the visible setting of, a nationally important landscape designation, possibly also with areas of important nature conservation or cultural heritage. The area presents a strong cultural or visual image or sense of place derived from its landscape or key characteristics. There are one or more outstanding or high evaluations in LANDMAP.

Medium landscape sensitivity

- Susceptibility influences - The assessment unit landscape and its key characteristics may have the ability to accommodate the relevant type of development in some defined situations without fundamental change to overall landscape character or key characteristics. There are likely to be adverse effects. Resilience to change is medium.

- Landscape value influences - The assessment unit is an area that presents a recognisable cultural or visual image or sense of place derived from its landscape and has key characteristics that are recognised for this. There are likely to be moderate LANDMAP evaluations, but some variation is likely.

Low landscape sensitivity

- Susceptibility influences - The assessment unit landscape and its key characteristics can accommodate the change scenario in many situations without fundamental change to overall landscape character. There may be some adverse effects. Resilience to change is medium / high.

- Landscape value influences - The assessment unit is an area that has some cultural or visual identity or sense of place derived from its landscape key characteristics, but this may not be expressed very noticeably. LANDMAP evaluations are likely to be mostly in the moderate or low range.

Very low landscape sensitivity

- Susceptibility influences - The assessment unit and its key characteristics can accommodate the change scenario in most situations without adverse effects on landscape character, assuming appropriate siting, design, and mitigation. Resilience to change is high.

- Landscape value influences - The assessment unit is an area where the connection between cultural or visual identity or sense of place and landscape is not clearly expressed. LANDMAP evaluations are mostly low.

6 Judging landscape sensitivity (Stage 3)

In this section

This is stage 3 of 4 of our guidance on carrying out a landscape sensitivity assessment. It is written primarily for the assessor, and those overseeing them. The stage should start with all the assessment parameters having been worked out.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

6.1 What informs landscape sensitivity judgements

Landscape sensitivity refers to *"the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management. It combines judgements of the susceptibility of that landscape to change, and the values attached to that landscape*". (Jointly agreed NatureScot and Natural Resources Wales definition, based on several related references).

The landscape sensitivity assessment uses the assessment parameters developed in stage 2 and applies them using professional judgement including field work, to each of the assessment units for each of the development or land management scenarios. The parameters are as follows.

- The development or land management change scenarios
- The defined assessment units
- The landscape susceptibility criteria and indicators
- The landscape value criteria and indicators
- The landscape sensitivity levels indicators

Landscape sensitivity assessments judge both of the following, which require field work.

- the specific nature of the sensitivity of the assessment unit and
- the relative level of the sensitivity when compared to other assessment units in the study area.

The assessment would stop short of saying whether such change would be overall beneficial, neutral, or detractive. However, the assessment would provide useful evidence to inform subsequent judgements and for considering whether the change would help to achieve a policy vision for that landscape, or hinder it.

6.2 How to judge the nature of landscape sensitivity

The assessor judges and records each landscape susceptibility and landscape value criterion, guided by the indicators, in a structured and consistent and repeatable way. Standard field survey forms will help with this, which may also be the basis of the tabular form of presentation eventually used in the assessment report (as detailed in Stage 4).

Criteria should not be pre-weighted as it is the purpose of the assessment to judge their degree of influence. Criteria may act individually or in combination and have more influence in one assessment unit than another.

The judgement is based on a careful understanding of all the landscape susceptibility and landscape value criteria. It is not a 'sum' of these criteria, as also landscape is experienced in a whole or integrated way.

A clear narrative needs to be recorded for each assessment unit to set out the main reasons for its landscape sensitivity. This should reflect nuance and might include combinations of different indicators unique to that landscape.

Allow for testing a few worked examples to ensure that the multiple landscape susceptibility and landscape value indicators adequately cover relevant factors, without duplication, contradiction, or omission.

Try to avoid the following.

- An overly processed approach in which it is hard to unravel the defining issues causing the landscape sensitivity. Equally, avoid such a brief approach that the same issue occurs.

- Counter-intuitive judgements. Remember that one highly susceptible criterion is not 'cancelled out' by another one being of low susceptibility.

Examples of published assessments with a useful landscape sensitivity narrative are as follows.

You can read a pilot assessment for forestry in Scottish Borders (Narratives start on page 11).

You can read an assessment for North Norfolk that considers a variety of different development types. (Narratives start on page 68).

You can read an assessment for Sevenoaks (Narratives start on page 19).

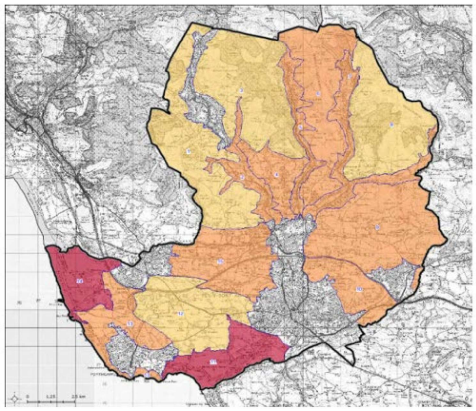
6.3 How to judge the level of landscape sensitivity

The table of levels of landscape sensitivity, drafted in Stage 2, should be used to guide consistent judgements across the study area. They may need refining when tested in pilot field work.

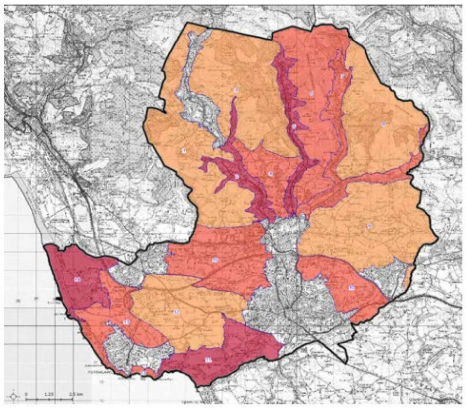
For each change scenario in each assessment unit, a judgement is needed on which criteria and indicators would have the strongest influence – and so inform the overall landscape sensitivity level.

There is no implication that there should be a 50/50 weighting split between landscape susceptibility and landscape value. Some practitioners advocate that the main influence should be the multiple susceptibility criteria, with landscape value criteria performing just a supporting, emphasising role.

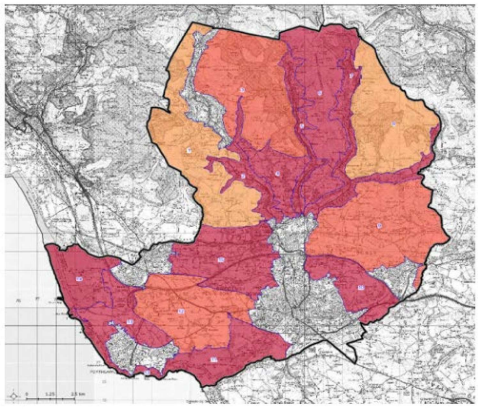
Consult the Steering Group to ensure the sensitivity levels adequately relate to sensitivity narratives, are 'pitched' reasonably for the assessment and study area, and represent an agreed, collective understanding. The following maps illustrate this, taken from an assessment of landscape sensitivity for Bridgend. Although the maps all show sensitivity to wind farm developments, they are relatively and collectively pitched to provide a widespread, ranging from lower sensitivity yellow colours to higher sensitivity red colours.



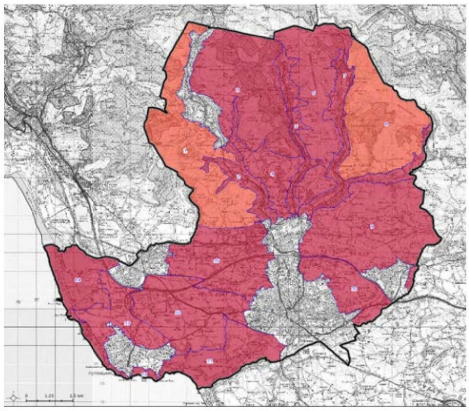
Wind small: 26-50m high



Wind medium: 51-75m medium: 51-75m high



Wind large: 76-110m



Wind very large: 111-150m high

Overall landscape sensitivity is a term used in many landscape sensitivity assessments to report by whole landscape character areas. That is often sufficient for the strategic purpose in broad-scale spatial planning exercises. However, remember the following caveats.

- The landscape sensitivity of one part of an assessment unit may differ to that of another part. Such detail is not picked up without a finer scale of assessment.
- Sensitivity levels are relative to other areas in the assessment. Levels may be calibrated differently in other assessments, meaning that direct comparison may not be correct.
- Specific development proposals on specific sites will need their own, more detailed form of assessment, normally a landscape and visual impact assessment.

6.4 Field work techniques

The following pointers flow from experience.

- More assessment units might be visited in the length of a summer's day
- A field assessor should be highly experienced. Their draft judgements should be challenged within the project team, so they are more robust and consistent across the study area, and better reflect a collective understanding.
- Pilot the field work by testing at least a couple of contrasting assessment units and scenarios. Refine the parameters if needed and present pilot work and final parameters to the steering group for agreement.
- Field survey forms will help to structure field observations and promote consistency.
- Have all parameters and assessment unit maps printed out and to hand. If using electronic media, ensure it has all been downloaded as there may be no mobile signal in the field.
- Take plenty of photographs. They will not only be of use in presentation but also act as reminders when refining judgements back in the office. Using a camera that records GPS will save a lot of cataloguing time and make more sense to anyone referring to them in the future.
- A purely desk-based approach cannot substitute for field observations.
- There may need to be more than one site visit. An initial site visit, primarily focussed on the landscape character assessment and initial sensitivity field work, might be followed up sometime later with some spot checks as part of a process of harmonisation of sensitivity judgements.
- It is essential to provide clear explanations of how the judgements were made.
- Plenty of time should be allowed for the Steering Group to consider and comment on the draft outputs to agree they reflect a common understanding.
- Sudden jumps in sensitivity level may occur along study area boundaries where different assessments abut. In many cases, character area boundaries are only broad zones of transition, and administrative boundaries might not mark a change

in landscape character at all. Where this cannot be resolved, set out reasons in the narrative e.g. the scenarios are very different, or the relativity within each study area was very different.

- Try to provide a good spread of sensitivity levels across the study area. This may not always be possible (and do not force it) but assessments of almost all the same sensitivity level across the study area may not have as much spatial effect in planning to steer changes to relatively less sensitive landscapes.

7 Reporting and presenting a landscape sensitivity assessment (Stage 4)

In this section

This is stage 4 of 4 of our guidance on carrying out a landscape sensitivity assessment. This stage is aimed equally at assessors and the commissioning body.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

Considering the form of reporting and presentation would start at the outset of the assessment (Stage 1). This is particularly so where the Landscape Sensitivity Assessment is an element within a larger project.

7.1 Different presentation for different audiences

A likely range of users might be as follows.

- **Public policy-makers** – who are interested in headline messages supported by robust evidence to inform policy, guidance, and advice. They may just read a short summary and possibly reproduce a sensitivity map in their work.

- **Spatial planners** - who are interested in spatial aspects of the assessment, notably landscape sensitivity levels. They may not be landscape specialists and will rely on the findings as presented. To them, landscape sensitivity may be one of many different environmental constraints' layers in their mapping exercise.

- **Landscape and planning professionals –** who are interested in specific assessment units and need to understand and judge for themselves if they agree with the findings. Occasionally they will read parts of the method or appendices to help them do this. They may be acting for a developer who is engaged in a siting and design process or are reviewing contextual baseline information as part of a landscape and visual impact assessment. Occasionally the landscape sensitivity assessment, including the method and parameters as well as findings, might be scrutinised in detail from regulator's, community, NGO or developer's perspectives at Examination or Public Inquiry.

Collectively, this means presenting as follows.

- **A non-technical overview of the landscape sensitivity of the study area**, highlighting the main patterns and reasons for the sensitivity. This should be supported by an easy-to-understand map image.

- **Each assessment unit in full written detail, including photos and a map image** showing the unit. It is easier for the user if map images are not separated from written detail. Depending on the project scope, presentation might be sandwiched between the landscape character assessment of that area and siting and design guidelines developed for it.

- **The GIS files**, formatted in a way that makes them easy to understand without a lot of further processing, by someone who may not be familiar with the assessment

- **The method and any technical appendices**.

Unused photographs and field notes should be archived in an orderly way for a reasonable period in case they are needed to resolve any errors or uncertainties.

7.2 Presenting the assessment on-line

Landscape sensitivity assessments should be published on-line. This will be the most convenient form of access to most people and demonstrates openness in relation to decisions based upon their findings.

- Traditional 'linear' forms of presentation (documents) have worked very well and can be popular with some users. They provide certainty when downloading a document that everything is contained within it including maps, photos and tables laid out suitably for printing. But landscape sensitivity assessments often run to hundreds of pages.

- Division of the assessment by each assessment unit allows on-line users the convenience of just downloading the parts they need. Summary, method, and technical appendices might form the other separate downloads.

- New 'non-linear' web-based approaches to presentation allow readers to get to the section they need in a few clicks. They may not even arrive via the assessment's home page but arrive in the middle from something brought up by a Google search. In which case it will be important for each section to be linked back so readers can orientate, get an overview of the whole assessment, and navigate to any other section. Using HTML web pages rather than document downloads may even be the corporate policy. However, it is important that contextual navigation, photos, tables, and maps are not lost in a text only approach.

- For public bodies, there will be legislative and corporate drivers affecting publishing on-line, such as the Public Sector Accessibility regulations and the requirements of the Welsh Language Act.

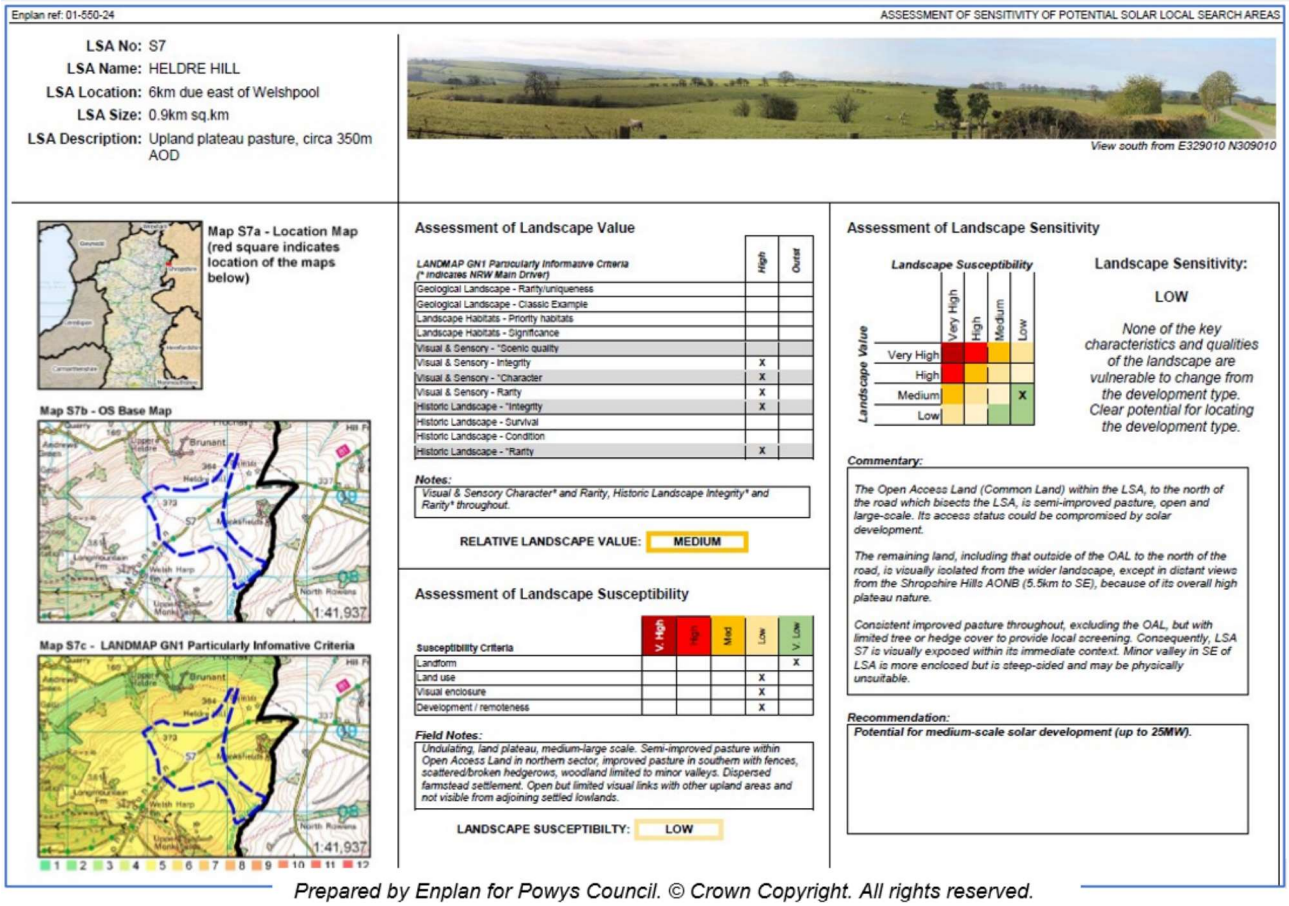
7.3 Organising a tabular presentation

Many assessments use a tabular format to convey a lot of different information consistently and efficiently. If well-designed and proportionate, the assessment can be easier to follow. Simpler sounding messages are more widely understood and can therefore be more helpful in decision-making. Tabular formats might be developed in

assessment stage 2 so they can be filled in stage 3 a as a consistent and efficient way to collect the evidence. However, also consider accessibility needs for on-line presentation.

Write the assessment outputs in short, definite, note form, accessible by quick scan reading on-line, highlighting key messages. Use plain English or Cymraeg clir. Use the third person as we present a collective experience. Minimise the need for cross referencing between or within documents for understanding.

Presentation Example 1: creating a single summary page for an assessment unit



Enplan ref: 01-550-24

ASSESSMENT OF SENSITIVITY OF POTENTIAL SOLAR LOCAL SEARCH AREAS

LSA No: S7
LSA Name: HELDRE HILL
LSA Location: 6km due east of Welshpool
LSA Size: 0.9km sq.km
LSA Description: Upland plateau pasture, circa 350m AOD

View south from E329010 N309010

Map S7a - Location Map (red square indicates location of the maps below)

Map S7b - OS Base Map

Map S7c - LANDMAP GN1 Particularly Infomative Criteria

1:41,937

Assessment of Landscape Value

LANDMAP GN1 Particularly Informative Criteria (* indicates NRW Main Driver)	High	Outst
Geological Landscape - Rarity/uniqueness		
Geological Landscape - Classic Example		
Landscape Habitats - Priority habitats		
Landscape Habitats - Significance		
Visual & Sensory - *Scenic quality		
Visual & Sensory - Integrity	X	
Visual & Sensory - *Character	X	
Visual & Sensory - Rarity	X	
Historic Landscape - *Integrity	X	
Historic Landscape - Survival		
Historic Landscape - Condition		
Historic Landscape - *Rarity	X	

Notes: Visual & Sensory Character* and Rarity, Historic Landscape Integrity* and Rarity* throughout.

RELATIVE LANDSCAPE VALUE: MEDIUM

Assessment of Landscape Susceptibility

Susceptibility Criteria	V. High	High	Mod	Low	V. Low
Landform					X
Land use				X	
Visual enclosure				X	
Development / remoteness				X	

Field Notes: Undulating, land plateau, medium-large scale. Semi-improved pasture within Open Access Land in northern sector, improved pasture in southern with fences, scattered/broken hedgerows, woodland limited to minor valleys. Dispersed farmstead settlement. Open but limited visual links with other upland areas and not visible from adjoining settled lowlands.

LANDSCAPE SUSCEPTIBILTY: LOW

Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity

Landscape Value \ Landscape Susceptibility	Very High	High	Medium	Low
Very High				
High				
Medium				X
Low				

Landscape Sensitivity: LOW

None of the key characteristics and qualities of the landscape are vulnerable to change from the development type. Clear potential for locating the development type.

Commentary:

The Open Access Land (Common Land) within the LSA, to the north of the road which bisects the LSA, is semi-improved pasture, open and large-scale. Its access status could be compromised by solar development.

The remaining land, including that outside of the OAL to the north of the road, is visually isolated from the wider landscape, except in distant views from the Shropshire Hills AONB (5.5km to SE), because of its overall high plateau nature.

Consistent improved pasture throughout, excluding the OAL, but with limited tree or hedge cover to provide local screening. Consequently, LSA S7 is visually exposed within its immediate context. Minor valley in SE of LSA is more enclosed but is steep-sided and may be physically unsuitable.

Recommendation:

Potential for medium-scale solar development (up to 25MW).

Prepared by Enplan for Powys Council. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved.

A lot of information has been précised to fit as a summary presentation on one page. Landscape orientation of the page also tends to suit most computer monitors better. Given the limited audience, likely to be viewing on an office computer, less focus is needed on making adaptable content that refits on a phone screen. Tables like this need reading in conjunction with other parts of the report, where categories and maps are explained.

[You can read the full Powys Local Development Plan - Supporting Evidence ED60]

Presentation Example 2: tabulating the assessment details

Criteria and indicators defined…

Scenic and special qualities				
Landscapes that have a high scenic quality (which may be recognised as a National Park, AONB, Heritage Coast or, locally, a Special Landscape Area) will be more sensitive than landscapes of low scenic quality. This is particularly the case where their special qualities (as recorded in the Landscape Character Assessment or designation documents) are likely to be affected by solar PV development. Scenic and special qualities may relate to landscapes that are not designated as well as landscapes designated for their natural beauty. Information sources: Landscape Character Assessment information on 'special qualities and features'; Heritage Coast designation information; Designation of Special Landscape Areas report (March 2010)				
Examples of sensitivity ratings				
Lower sensitivity ⟷ Higher sensitivity				
e.g. landscape has low scenic quality such as an industrial area or despoiled land– special qualities will not be affected by solar PV development.	e.g. landscape has low-medium scenic quality, or special qualities are unlikely to be affected by solar PV development.	e.g. landscape has a medium scenic quality and some of the special qualities may be affected by solar PV development.	e.g. landscape has a medium-high scenic quality (which might be designated as SLA) – most of the special qualities are likely to be affected by solar PV development.	e.g. area has a high scenic quality (likely to be recognised as National Park/ AONB/ Heritage Coast) and the scenic qualities will be affected by solar PV development.
Perceptual qualities				
Landscapes that are relatively remote or tranquil (due to freedom from human activity and disturbance and having a perceived naturalness or a strong feel of traditional rurality with few modern human influences) tend to increase levels of sensitivity to solar				

Criteria 1

Nature of sensitivity explained against each criteria

Sensitivity scale (the indicators) graded using short narratives

Criteria 2 etc.

Applied in assessment for specific landscape…

LCA 1: Landscape Sensitivity Assessment for Solar PV Development

Criteria	Landscape attributes and descriptions	
Landform	Distinctive undulating upland landscape with some prominent slopes and hill summits.	
Sense of openness/enclosure	A mixed landscape with some areas of pastoral land and upland – the latter with a more open feel. Some areas of coniferous plantation and tracts of broadleaved woodland provide shelter and enclosure. Fields are bounded by a mixture of hedgebanks, tree belts and stone walls.	
Field pattern and scale	A mainly pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of small, irregular medieval fields bounded by a mixture of hedgebanks, tree belts and stone walls. In some elevated areas fields are large and more regular and enclosed by fences.	
Land cover	The agricultural land is generally pastoral, with rough grazing found on higher ground. Broadleaved woodland is found along slopes and valleys, with areas of coniferous plantation on higher ground. Semi-natural habitats including heathland, blanket bog, acid grassland, fen and marsh are also found in this LCA.	
Historic landscape character	This landscape has several distinctive and significant heritage assets, namely Y Bwlwarcau hillfort and medieval Llangynwyd Castle, found in the Margam Mountain Landscape of Special Historic Interest (which covers 20% of the LCA). The key features of the designated historic landscape include the prehistoric and medieval settlement and associated field systems. Llangynwyd is also designated as a Conservation Area due to its medieval and post-medieval historic importance and associations.	
Key views and vistas	There are panoramic views across the County Borough from the high ridgelines in the south of the LCA, including to Cefn Cribwr (LCA 15) and beyond across the south-west of the County Borough (across the Bristol Channel to Exmoor in clear conditions). The northern half of the LCA has strong intervisibility with the valley settlement of Maesteg (LCA 2). Distant wind energy developments (Ffoch Nest/Pant-y-Wal, Taf Ely to the east, and Ffynnon Oer within Neath Port Talbot CB) also feature in views from elevated positions. Within the LCA itself Llangynwyd church tower is a prominent local landmark.	
Scenic and special qualities	70% of this LCA falls within the Western Uplands Special Landscape Area (SLA), valued for its rural agricultural character despite being close to Maesteg. Llangynwyd is identified as having importance due to its historic and cultural associations. A further 8% of the LCA is designated within the Foel y Dyffryn SLA, valued for the visual backdrop provided to settlements on the valley floor and the presence of Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats. The sensitive features of this landscape, as recorded in the LCA description, include the open, traditionally grazed uplands with high levels of tranquility, the historic field and settlement patterns, important semi-natural habitats and archaeological features and panoramic views.	
Perceptual qualities	The strong rural and tranquil character of this landscape with its dispersed and sparse settlement pattern, and patches of woodland and semi-natural habitats lead to a sense of naturalness, although this is impacted by existing human influence in the form of pylons and views of urban development and wind turbines in the distance.	
Summary of landscape sensitivity	There are some parts of the landscape that are more enclosed by plantations and woodlands, and larger, more regular field patterns also exist – which might indicate a lower landscape sensitivity to solar PV development. However, the open character of the landscape, the presence of prominent elevated slopes, the characteristic small scale, historic field pattern, presence of valued semi-natural habitats, sense of tranquility and important setting to historic features could all result in increased sensitivity to the development of solar PV. The following locational variations in landscape sensitivity should be taken account of: • The open moorland in the northern part of the LCA (within the Foel y Dyffryn SLA) would be highly sensitive to the development of any solar PV.	
Sensitivity to different scales of solar PV development	Very Small (<1ha)	L-M
	Small (>1-6ha)	M
	Medium (>6-10ha)	M-H
	Large (>10-16ha)	H
	Very large (>16ha)	H
SUMMARY OF SENSITIVE LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS AND FEATURES		
A summary list of the key sensitive features and characteristics for LCA 1: Llangynwyd Rolling Uplands and Forestry in relation to solar PV development is included below: • Strong historic pattern of irregular fields enclosed by hedgerows, tree belts and stone walls. • The open tracts of traditionally grazed uplands and other valued semi-natural upland habitats including		

Name of the particular assessment unit.

Description of the landscape characteristics

Narrative summary of landscape sensitivity

Sensitivity level for each scenario

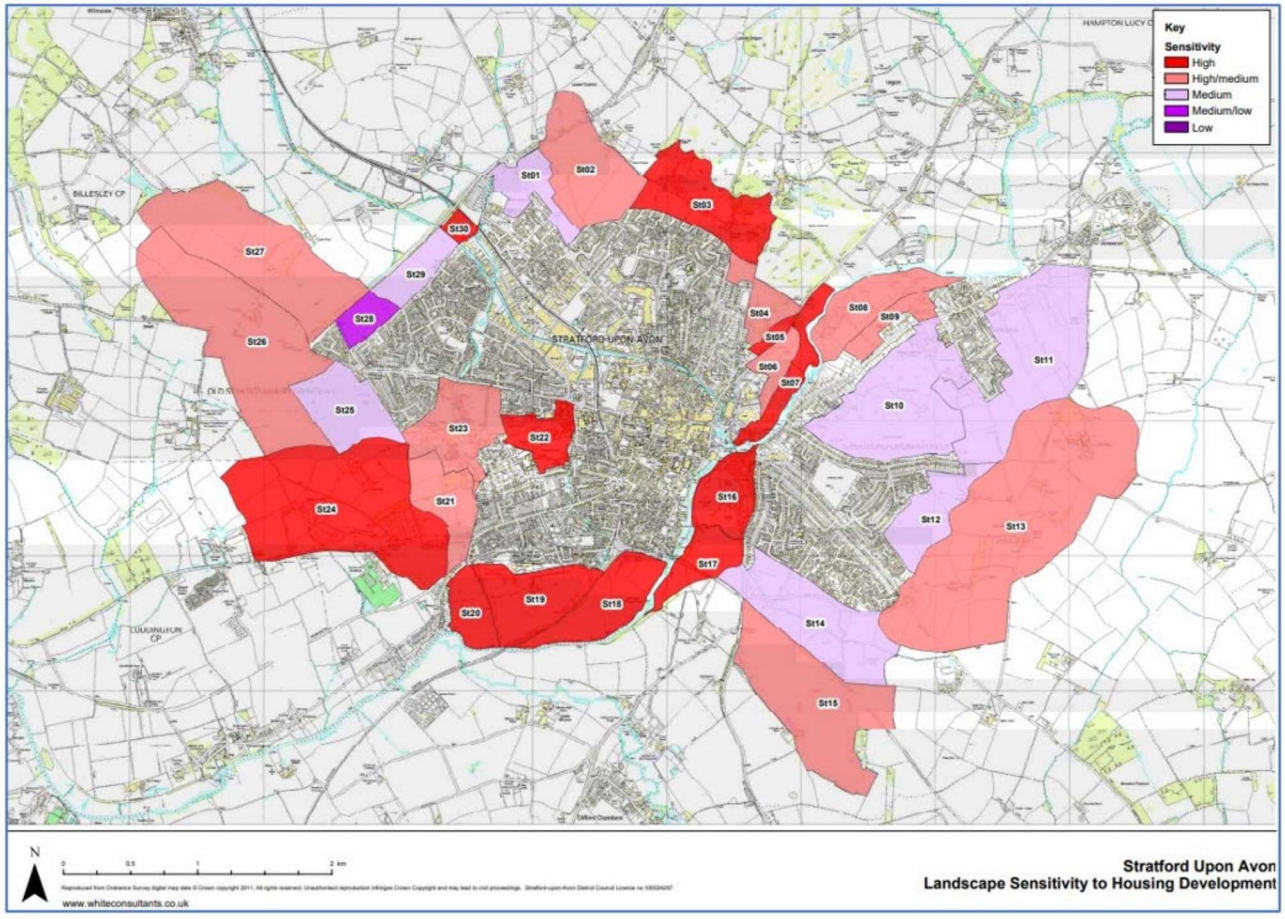
Summary of key landscape characteristics that are sensitive

Prepared by LUC for Bridgend County Borough Council. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Annotations added by Natural Resources Wales.

This form of presentation is more linear, which may suit some report formats. Map images

are provided in addition. Plenty of narrative is provided, clarifying both the nature of the landscape sensitivity as well as sensitivity levels for the different change scenarios. It is likely that subsequent siting and design guidance would need to address how these sensitive characteristics are managed. In future, improvements would be needed to the formatting of this type of presentation to meet more recent accessibility standards.

Presentation Example 3: map showing relative sensitivity levels



Prepared by White Consultants for Stratford-upon-Avon District Council. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved.

This example shows an assessment focussed around around a town, where a map shows comparative sensitivity levels as a summary to show the pattern of distribution. This kind of spatial information could be put into a wider spatial planning exercise as one of many different constraints. The nature of the sensitivity also needs to be understood when considering each assessment unit.

Presentation example 4: presenting multiple scenarios

This shows an extract from the individual susceptibility criteria judgements from one of the assessment units. (This assessment used the term ‘sensitivity’). The short notes for each criterion provide a basic understanding for the reason for the judgements. The second extract shows the overall sensitivity narrative for one of the change scenarios (this assessment refers to ‘development types’). This assessment goes on to indicate a landscape objective (beyond the scope of a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment itself) and

siting and design guidelines (not illustrated). It is likely that many readers would only start taking an interest with the landscape objective and guidelines, as these set out the desired planning response. Again, formatting in future work needs amending to aid accessibility.

Key	Higher Sensitivity	↑	Medium Sensitivity	-	Lower Sensitivity	↓	Criterion/development type not applicable	

Sensitivity Criteria		Characteristics of the LCA	Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity to each Development Type				
			Wind Energy	Field Scale Solar PV Energy	400 kV Overhead Line	Mobile Masts	Static Caravan/ Chalet Parks
Landscape	**Scale**	Typically a **vast scale** landscape. VS8: Medium (7%)/ Vast (90%)	↓				
	Field Pattern, Scale and Enclosure	Not applicable					
	Landform	Landform comprises **high hills and mountains** with associated **valleys**. VS Classification Level 2: Exposed Upland/Plateau (90%)/ Lowland Valleys (8%) VS4: High Hills/Mountains (81%)/ Hills/ Valleys (14%)	↑			↑	↑
	Landcover	Open, **craggy mountain tops** surrounded by large regular enclosures of ffridd and **upland moorland**. Valley slopes and bottoms defined by small-scale irregular field pattern. Medium-scale conifer plantations on prominent slopes. VS Classification Level 3: Barren/Rocky Upland (9%)/ Upland Moorland (80%)/ Mosaic Lowland Valleys (5%) VS5: Open Land (92%)/ Mixture (6%)	-			↑	↑

STATIC CARAVAN/ CHALET PARKS AND EXTENSIONS

OVERALL SENSITIVITY	
Very High	The natural characteristics, outstanding scenic quality and sense of remoteness of this LCA impart a high degree of sensitivity. This is reflected by the entire LCA being designated within the National Park and much of the area being recognised as an Area of Natural Beauty in the Eryri Local Development Plan. The vast and exposed nature of this landscape further increases sensitivity to static caravan/chalet park development; although there are areas of relatively large coniferous plantation alongside the road network which locally lessen sensitivity.
LANDSCAPE STRATEGY	
Landscape Objective	**Landscape Protection**
Baseline Development	1 no. **very small** development
Indicative Overall Capacity	**Typically no capacity within the ELDP Area of Natural Beauty for static caravan/chalet park developments. However, outside of these areas** there **may be capacity for a limited number of sensitively sited, well designed and very small scale static caravan/chalet park developments.**

Prepared by Gillespies for Snowdonia National Park Authority as part of a joint study also with Gwynedd and Anglesey Councils.

7.4 The importance of maps

Not everyone will be able to use the GIS files to make their own maps, nor is that convenient for a quick check of an assessment unit. Map images and-or an on-line map browser is needed.

Cartographic standards

Despite technology, cartography remains an art. The right graphic choices can transform the communication. Always understand what message a map is to communicate and optimise graphic presentation and base map choice for that. “Showing the data” is not the right reason for a map. The colours, symbols, scale, and thickness of lines all affect clarity. Maps need keys in plain language, which may not be the same as the GIS file table headings. Maps work best without too many categories and by choosing a base map that does not distract. Use intuitive colours and shades, and remember the needs of colour-blind users, such as offering a symbol or code as well as a colour for map areas to relate them to the key. Ensuring figures are crisp.

On-line interactive maps

Interactive maps allow users some flexibility to build their own maps on-line, incorporating other spatial layers and usually with a choice of base map. While this allows some creativity, the cartographic quality of the result can be very poor and saving the result as a map image needs to ensure titles, dates, keys, scales, copyright acknowledgements etc. are not left off. The assessment date or other publication reference is an important element of version control to include.

You can browse Natural Resources Wales’s on-line map browser (Wales Environmental Information Portal). This contains a wide variety of environmental information including a section on landscapes.

8 Reviewing an existing landscape sensitivity assessment

In this section

This is only part of our landscape sensitivity assessment guidance.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

8.1 Why a periodic review is important

Once an assessment has been published, periodic review is needed to make sure it has not become out of date. Users need to remain confident they can apply the assessment findings, that the change scenarios still meet today's planning need, and that the scope and terminology do not confuse today's readers.

The review can inform whether and how an existing assessment needs to be updated or replaced. For example, a larger wind turbines scenario might be needed, or some assessment units might need updating because their landscape character has changed significantly.

Equally, a review might conclude that apart from minor amendments, it continues to be fit for purpose and that no major revision is required.

8.2 How to review an old assessment

Still meeting needs - Review assessments at suitable intervals after publication to check they still meet the planning needs and whether any issues are arising. This might fit with a development plan review cycle. Frequency of review will vary with the development type and amount of development pressure. Identify the planning purposes and the specific objectives of the assessment, and what outputs were required. These may be linked to follow-on products such as siting and design guidance.

Sample - Analyse one example of the recommendations or conclusions, which may be as maps and text, or guidance. Work backwards to see how the recommendations have been justified in the analysis. Explore how well the method has led to the conclusions. It is easier to identify a sample number of landscape areas and follow them through the whole study, from analysis to conclusions, or vice-versa. Try to pick two or three landscape areas with contrasting character or conclusions and see how these worked in the assessment.

Suitable Format – Is the assessment structured in a way that provides an evidence source to dip into at any point? Can the next version be better formatted for this? Start the review by reading the recommendations or conclusions and see if the outputs reflect the objective(s) identified. Are the original objectives still valid or do they need updating too? Is the document clearly structured, are the maps an appropriate scale, and are illustrations

useful, adding value to the text? Is the presentation appropriate for the audiences? Could a simpler scope or presentation gain more understanding with non-technical audiences? Is the format optimised for accessible on-line presentation and finding specific sections using web search engines like Google? As a record of evidence, such as may be presented as a document at examination, is it easy to make a complete off-line or print ready copy?

Clarity and completeness - Look at the sensitivity assessment more closely. See if there are gaps in the train of thought, terms, concepts. Are conclusions clear and intuitive. Are there any that would be hard to defend under scrutiny? Could the scope, method stages, definitions or presentation be refined with updating?

Landscape Capacity - Does the existing assessment have a section on landscape capacity? Is 'high capacity' more or less just another way to say 'low sensitivity'? To improve understanding, consider simplifying the assessment in line with this guidance and avoid using the term landscape capacity.

Changes - Consider what might have changed. Has the landscape character changed? Do the types and scales of change being assessed need to be revised? Have any further landscape designations, landscape management plans or landscape policy objectives been created?

Consultation - Consider speaking to someone in the Local Planning Authority who was involved in commissioning or using the study to find out if they had any problems or limitations when using it. It is likely that a group of people would be needed for a review. The group might be small, but a range of perspectives and experiences need to be reflected. They might form the steering group for a subsequent updating project. It can be useful, over time, to compare the assessment with development patterns and decisions taken through the planning process. If decision-making appears to ignore landscape sensitivity, why is that? Do users understand the assessment, and are supporting landscape policies sufficient?

Resources - Assess the scale of the revision task and the resource implications in terms of timescale and specialist expertise needed.

9 Glossary of terms and concepts used in landscape sensitivity assessment

In this section

This is only part of our landscape sensitivity assessment guidance.

You can access all the other parts of the guidance from our contents page

9.1 Glossary

A common and consistent vocabulary should be followed throughout an assessment. While existing published sources offer accepted definitions, there is some variation between them. We have reviewed these to offer our recommended definitions below. Key sources are as follows. Other sources are noted as they occur in the glossary.

NS2022 - you can read NatureScot's guidance on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

NE2019 - you can read Natural England's guidance on Landscape Sensitivity Assessment

GLVIA3 - You can see an overview of the Landscape Institute's Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition

MMO2019 - you can read seascape sensitivity assessment guidance developed by England's Marine Management organisation

LI2022 - you can read the Landscape Institute's guidance on assessing landscape value

Assessment Units

The individual defined landscape areas into which the study area is divided for the purpose of the assessment. They are based on landscape character, according to the scale and purpose of the assessment. (based on NS2022)

Criteria and indicators

Landscape sensitivity assessment criteria - the different individual landscape and visual factors from which landscape sensitivity is judged. They are selected to be relevant to the development type and study area. (based on NE2019 and NS2022)

Landscape sensitivity indicators – the nature of evidence used to support the judgement of landscape sensitivity against each landscape susceptibility and landscape value criteria. An indicator is expressed in terms of its ability to either increase or decrease landscape sensitivity. (adapted from NE2019)

Elements, features and Key characteristics

Elements - the individual attributes that make up a landscape, such as rivers, trees, hedges, and buildings. (GLVIA3)

Features - prominent or eye-catching elements, such as tall structures, lakes or wooded skylines, key attributes of a project proposal. (GLVIA3)

Key characteristics - those elements and features or combinations, which are particularly important to giving the character of the landscape a clear and distinctive sense of place. (GLVIA3)

LANDMAP and LANDMAP evaluations

LANDMAP - an all-Wales landscape resource where landscape characteristics, qualities and influences on the landscape are recorded and evaluated in a nationally consistent data set.

LANDMAP evaluations - landscape value judgements using pre-defined criteria, such as in terms of its scenic quality or rarity, on an all-Wales relative scale.

You can read an overview of the LANDMAP methodology and its terms.

Landscape

Landscape - an area, as perceived by people, whose character results from the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

You can read this universal definition in the European Landscape Convention, Chapter 1 – General Provisions, Article 1 - Definitions

Landscapes form the environmental settings in which we live, work and experience life. They have been shaped by nature and people over time. Our distinctive natural resources, cultural heritage and our experience of places are represented in an integrated way through the study of landscape character. The planning and management of landscapes is concerned with guiding change in ways that best meet society's needs, expectations, and environmental considerations. Landscape sensitivity is part of the evidence base to help plan and manage landscape character like this.

Landscape character

Landscape Character - a distinct, recognisable, and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. (GLVIA3)

Landscape Character Areas - single, unique areas, which are the discrete geographical areas of a particular landscape type. (GLVIA3)

Landscape character assessment - the process of identifying and describing variation in the character of the landscape and using this information to assist in managing change in the landscape. It seeks to identify and explain the unique combination of elements and features that make landscapes distinctive. (GLVIA3). In Wales, LANDMAP information is used as the starting point for Landscape Character Assessment.

The principles can also be adapted for assessing seascape character. (MMO2019)

Landscape Character types - distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas in different parts of the country, but wherever they occur they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation and historical land use and settlement patterns, and perceptual and aesthetic attributes. (GLVIA3)

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

A tool used to identify and assess the likely significance of the effects of change, resulting from development both on the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity. (GLVIA3)

Landscape qualities and special qualities

Landscape qualities - landscape characteristics or features that have been identified as being valued, as opposed to all characteristics. (LI2022)

Special qualities – a term normally reserved for use in management plans for Designated Landscapes, with reference to their natural beauty, and including wildlife and cultural heritage. (LI2022)

Landscape sensitivity

Landscape sensitivity – is the ability of a landscape to accommodate change arising from specified types of development or land management. It combines judgements of the susceptibility of that landscape to change, and the values attached to that landscape. (Jointly agreed with NS2022, with reference to NE2019 and GLVIA3).

Landscape sensitivity assessment – provides a systematic indication of landscape sensitivity. It does so in a manner which is robust, repeatable, and capable of standing up to scrutiny. The findings are strategic and indicative, in contrast to site- and project-specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. (Jointly agreed with NS2022, with reference to NE2019 and GLVIA3).

The assessment concept can also be applied seascapes. (MMO2019).

Overall landscape sensitivity – refers to the sensitivity of a landscape as a whole. In reality, different parts of a landscape are likely to have different sensitivity. It is a judgement to adopt an appropriate scale of assessment for the type of change being considered. (based on NS2022)

Inherent landscape sensitivity - is a term to avoid, as sensitivity will vary according to the type of change. Inherency is better expressed as landscape value (based on LI2021).

Landscape sensitivities – is a term to avoid. Instead refer to landscape susceptibility and/or landscape value indicators.

Landscape susceptibility

The degree to which a defined landscape, including its character and associated visual resources, might respond to specified development types or land management changes without undue negative consequences. (Jointly agreed with NS2022, with reference to NE2019 and GLVIA3).

Landscape value

The relative value or importance attached to different landscapes by society on account of their landscape qualities (LI2021).

Seascape and Coastal Character Assessment

Seascape - landscapes with views of the coast or seas, and coasts and the adjacent marine environment with cultural, historical, and archaeological links with each other.

You can read this technical definition in context in The UK Marine Policy Statement 2011 in its section 2.6.5.

Seascape and Coastal Character Assessment - The process of identifying, describing, and mapping marine and coastal character. Based on Landscape Character Assessment, it considers additional characteristics associated especially with marine and coastal areas, including maritime influences, the character of the coastal edge and its immediate hinterland. (derived from NatureScot guidance on Coastal Character Assessment).

You can read NatureScot's guidance on coastal character assessment

You can read seascape character assessments for Wales on our website

Study area

The spatial extent of area in which there is a planning need for the assessment.

Tranquillity

An untroubled state, which is peaceful, calm, and free from unwanted disturbances. This can refer to a state of mind or a particular environment. Tranquillity can be measured in terms of the absence of unwanted intrusions, or by a balancing of positive and negative factors. These include the presence of nature, feeling safe, visually pleasing surroundings and a relaxing atmosphere.

This definition comes from Welsh Government's Noise and soundscape action plan 2018 to 2023.

Visual resources

Patterns of visibility to, from or within a landscape. They are not limited to just what can be seen from key viewpoints. It is not necessary to map the extent of visibility to recognise visual resources as aspects of landscape character. However, existing visibility mapping studies might form useful aide memoires.

9.2 Landscape Capacity and Cumulative Effects

Landscape capacity means the amount of specified development or change which a particular landscape and the associated visual resource is able to accommodate without undue negative effects on its character and qualities (NE2019).

In practice, capacity is not an inherent characteristic of the landscape but a wider planning consideration beyond just a response to landscape sensitivity. For example, more development might be able to be accommodated in a landscape without undue negative effects if it were more sensitively sited and designed.

The amount of change required may be set by a planning need and not by landscape capacity. Landscape sensitivity assessment can be used to focus distribution of the required amount of change to the less sensitive landscapes. Siting and design guidance can then follow on for each affected landscape, to show how to accommodate the change in particular distributions or forms that minimise undue negative effects.

Understanding landscape capacity when reading existing assessments

The concept and terminology related to landscape capacity varies between different assessments. You need to be aware of this when reading existing assessments that are still current or when reviewing and updating an old assessment.

Older assessments often based their approach on a 2002 discussion paper known as Topic Paper 6 (TP6). In many cases, the expression of high landscape capacity was a limited response to there being low landscape sensitivity, and vice versa.

You can check Topic Paper 6 of 2002 in a web archive

Some assessments express landscape capacity for a type of development in a descriptive way related to sustaining landscape character. For example, the capacity in one landscape might be “landscape with occasional wind turbines” whereas in another it might be “landscape with many wind turbines”. See Section 9.3 as this concept may be better expressed today through cumulative effects assessment.

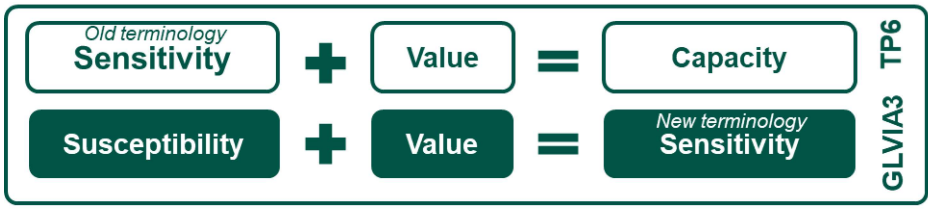
More recent guidance, starting with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment were published in 2013 (GLVIA3) introduces changes reflecting evolution in practice.

You can obtain the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition

The key differences to look out for are:

- When older assessments in England or Wales refer to landscape capacity, they usually refer to what our guidance terms landscape sensitivity.
- When older assessments in England or Wales refer to landscape sensitivity, they usually refer to what our guidance terms landscape susceptibility.

The diagram below illustrates this variation.



Also note:

- When older assessments in Scotland refer to landscape capacity, they usually refer to what our guidance terms landscape susceptibility.

References to capacity in policy contexts

These references should be understood in landscape assessment as relating to landscape sensitivity as a component of resilience. Such references include:

- Natural Resources Wales's State of Natural Resources Report, which defines resilience as *"the capacity of ecosystems to deal with disturbances, either by resisting them, recovering from them, or adapting to them, whilst retaining their ability to deliver services and benefits now and in the future".* Though referring to ecosystems, the scope includes landscape as a cultural service.

- Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, whose definition of "*a resilient Wales",* one of seven national wellbeing goals, and which refers to the "*capacity to adapt to change*"

- UK Marine Policy Statement, 2011, whose seascape scope refers to its "*capacity to accommodate change*".

9.3 Cumulative effects assessment and guidance

Those wanting to understand the effect of adding ever more of a type of change to an area can frame this in terms of cumulative effects.

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition, describes the principles of cumulative effects assessment in Chapter 7 in relation to specific development proposals. Whereas individual development proposals are concerned with their additional changes in conjunction with other similar developments, forward planning use is more concerned with the combined effect of all similar types of change, past, present and in the foreseeable future.

Find out how to access the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition

A Forward planning response to potential cumulative issues might be through policy and siting and design guidance. For example, more development might be fitted in where sited and designed to have lower impact. Bridgend County Borough Council's SPG20, section 3.13, Designing for Multiple Wind Energy Developments sets out some strategic principles for siting and designing multiple developments.

You can read Bridgend County Borough Council's SPG20, section 3.13, Designing for Multiple Wind Energy Developments

Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Councils and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority have published joint guidance on cumulative assessment for forward planning use. The guidance includes a very useful table to illustrate the effects on landscape character of the cumulative effect of different levels of development. Although landscape sensitivity assessment is not concerned with illustrating how much development is needed to change landscape character, an understanding of different levels of development may assist when developing suitable landscape sensitivity assessment scenarios.

You can read Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire Council's and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Cumulative impact of Wind Turbines on Landscape and Visual Amenity Guidance.