



**Cyfoeth
Naturiol**
Cymru
**Natural
Resources**
Wales

Conwy
LANDMAP Visual & Sensory
Aspect monitoring
site verification report
Final

White Consultants

March 2015

Rev No

Contents

1.0.	Introduction
2.0.	Method
3.0.	Changes within study area
4.0	Observations on changes in North Wales
5.0	Monitoring table introduction
Appendix	Monitoring Table

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) commissioned White Consultants in July 2013 to undertake the first stage of monitoring of change for the LANDMAP Visual & Sensory aspect for Powys and North Wales excluding the Isle of Anglesey. The stages undertaken were 1, 2a and 2b interpreting the LANDMAP Change Detection Packs (CDP) and were completed in February 2014.
- 1.2. This study comprises the second stage of the process setting out the site verification of the desk study (Stage 2c) in Conwy. A report was prepared for comment/approval by NRW, the NRW QA assessor and local authority in October 2014. Refinements were made as necessary and the changes were then implemented by entering the amended data through LANDMAP Portal (the online survey) and revising the GIS aspect polygons as necessary. This report is the final report.
- 1.3. This report is meant to be read in conjunction with the first stage February 2014 report. As such it addresses only those issues arising from the site verification ie updating of comments or adding of existing aspect areas where change has occurred. Illustrations of change in boundaries in the first report have not been included as these remain the same as before. In section 2.0, the report addresses the method used with a commentary on any limitations. In section 3.0, the changes specific to the study area are set out and the additional aspect areas which have been found to exhibit change are listed. Section 4.0 sets out the general changes found to have occurred in North Wales. The monitoring table is located in the Appendix.

2. Method

- 2.1. LANDMAP Guidance for Wales: Monitoring Landscape Change' (NRW 2014) provides a full explanation of the method. The tasks carried out for this stage are:

Stage 2: Fieldwork verification and survey completion

- Visits to aspect areas that require field verification, if it is not clear from the change detection resources, to capture and record significant changes to characteristics, qualities, recommendations, evaluation etc;
- Population of relevant columns in the monitoring table (with pink header):
 - Change indicated by fieldwork
 - Adjustments to recommended LANDMAP amendments
- Adjustments to monitoring table relating to further feedback from LPA and others, and incorporation of further additional sources of information;
- Short summary report to note changes made at stage 2c;
- Preliminary Quality Assurance.

- 2.2. Following this the following will be carried out.

Stage 3: Updating the Visual & Sensory Baseline

- Updating all aspect area surveys as recommended in the monitoring table;
- Updating aspect area boundaries in the Visual & Sensory GIS layer;
- Final Quality Assurance.

2.3. The following comments are made on the site verification for the broader study area in North Wales. Not all of these may apply to this study area:

- The site verification of areas, carried out in August and early September 2014, does not allow for a complete review of all aspect areas in each district/county.
- The desk study areas omitted from the site survey were those where a settlement has expanded to a small extent through housing/employment uses or other development, and some upland conifer plantation felling, as the aerial photo and mapping is clear.
- Also omitted is verification of areas of 2013/14 storm damage to coasts as the NRW report on Welsh coastal storms, December 2013 and January 2014 (see below) was received after the site visits were carried out. The findings will still contribute to the change report and used to amend the LANDMAP data as the source is considered to be reliable.
- The routes between aspect areas have been planned to quarter each district/county as far as possible but inevitably there will be some areas which will not have been reviewed via site visit.
- Inaccessible upland areas have been surveyed as far as possible from roads with vehicle access, and at a distance in some locations with the use of binoculars and camera telephoto lenses. In a few cases, views have been obtained from locations access by foot but resources have not allowed for more than this. This approach has meant that limited change has been noted although it is considered that the visual and sensory qualities of these areas are unlikely to have changed significantly.
- To an extent, the likelihood of missing landscape change is reduced as the relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have made comments on the desk study as part of the monitoring process. It is hoped that their local knowledge will have picked up locations of significant change which have been subsequently verified.

2.4. The additional sources of information used in the desk study report and updated in this report for the broader North Wales study area are as follows:

- GIS Forestry mapping showing conversion from conifer to broadleaf woodland (source: NRW)
- GIS windfarm mapping showing windfarm developments (source: NRW)
- GIS mapping of rhododendron location and management (source: Snowdonia National Park Authority)
- GIS mapping of land management agreements (source: Snowdonia National Park Authority).
- Anglesey and Snowdonia National Park seascape character assessment (source: Snowdonia National Park Authority).
- *‘Welsh coastal storms, December 2013 and January 2014 – an assessment of environmental change’*, NRW evidence report number 33, July 2014.

3. Changes within the study area

3.1. Within the study area the key changes include:

- Effect of onshore windfarms, directly and indirectly, especially around the Clocaenog Forest Strategic Search Area.
- Effect of offshore windfarms on coastal character.
- Expansion of settlements especially along the coastal strip.
- Expansion of commercial development areas.
- Continued/expanding limestone extraction at Llandulas.
- Forest plantation felling and broadleaf plantings which change the character eg Clocaenog Forest.

3.2. Additional aspect areas where changes have been picked up through site visits are:

- CNWVS 002 Denbigh Moors Western fringes
- CNWVS 051 Conwy Sands

The reasons for the inclusion of these additional areas are set out in the **Appendix**.

4. Observations on changes in North Wales

4.1. The key observations that have arisen from this site verification and updating stage are as follows:

- Conifer plantation felling is widespread changing the character of previously unbroken forests.
- The reason for conifer plantation felling is not clear eg whether as part of Forest Plans or Phytophthora ramorum control felling.
- Young broadleaf planting in conifer plantations has a limited visual impact at the moment so what is perceived is cleared forest with some regrowth but the difference between young broadleaf and conifer trees is difficult to perceive at any distance.
- Management initiatives such as the removal of rhododendrons have been difficult to perceive and may not be significant at a landscape scale. However, the presence of existing rhododendrons in some areas is apparent and this needs to be added to the description if not there already, as well as management guidelines for its control/eradication.
- New roads and bypasses have been found to affect the tranquillity of the areas through which they pass but have not in general been regarded as justifications for changing aspect area boundaries.
- Settlement expansion is generally incremental and has been considered in most cases to have made limited changes to the qualities of a settlement or the surrounding countryside, other than changing the extent of aspect areas.
- Changes to upland vegetation patterns have been difficult to discern. It is unlikely that these will change the perceived visual and sensory qualities but may be more important for the landscape habitats aspect. It is hoped that these will be examined further in the monitoring for this layer.

- Where there are new wind farms these have an effect on the character and qualities of the aspect areas in which they lie but also on views from some nearby aspect areas. These are significant if, for instance, the windfarm forms part of a backcloth to the area.
- Many consented windfarms have not yet been approved so change is more limited than some of the desk study mapping suggested in this respect.
- Single or double wind turbines were noted in various areas. In some cases these justify a change in the description of the aspect area.
- To take into account of the various levels of wind energy development in each area it is proposed that standard phrases are used to consistently capture the status of the area. These would be generally consistent with planning control documents such as that used for cumulative wind energy development supplementary planning guidance (SPG) in Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and which are now in the process of being widely adopted across Wales and are as follows:
 - Landscape character area with no wind turbines
 - Landscape character area with very occasional wind turbines
 - Landscape character area with occasional wind turbines
 - Landscape character area with wind turbines
 - Wind turbine landscape
 - Windfarm
- Some areas were found to have very few turbines but when viewed at close quarters these were noticeable as their height was 45 to 70 m so these areas would be best described as having very occasional wind turbines, which is an additional category to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park SPG.
- The storms in the winter 2013/2014 have apparently affected certain stretches of coastline such as dunes or soft cliffs and this information will be included.

5. Monitoring table introduction

- 5.1. The tabulated list of updated changes is set out in the **Appendix**.

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