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### **Map**

#### **Landscape Units and Features**



## **1.0 Introduction**

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a means by which distinct, recognisable and consistent elements which form landscapes can be identified. It is intended to inform the development of policies regarding the sustainable management of change affecting landscape. Its origins lie in the European Landscape Convention of 2000.

The European Landscape Convention, also known as the Florence Convention, promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes. The Convention was adopted by the Council of Europe in October 2000 and came into force in March 2004. Ireland signed and ratified the Convention and must now implement some policy changes and objectives relating to landscape.

The preparation of a National Landscape Strategy is central to the implementation of the Convention. In 2011, the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht signalled its intention to publish a National Landscape Strategy. The Strategy is intended to further the objectives of the European Landscape Convention and to set out a policy framework which will inform the consistent preparation of landscape policies and landscape character assessments across the State. In September 2011, the Department published a public consultation paper on the issues to be considered in the preparation of the Strategy.

The Council considers that it would be prudent to await publication of this National Landscape Strategy before embarking on a comprehensive review of the LCA prepared for the Wexford County Development Plan 2007-2013. In the interim, the Council considered it appropriate to refine the LCA to improve its legibility and practical application.

## **1.1 Landscape Character Assessment**

The Landscape and Landscape Assessment: Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2001) provide guidance for planning authorities on the preparation of an LCA. The LCA prepared for the Wexford County Development Plan 2007-2013 was prepared with regard to these guidelines following an objective assessment of:

- physical attributes, for example, topography, ridge lines, slope, altitude and coast
- sensitivity to development
- geology and soils
- vegetation and land cover
- settlement patterns
- historical activity

The LCA has been amended as follows:

- The number of landscape character units has been reduced from 11 to four. This was achieved by combining units which have broadly similar physical characteristics and sensitivity to development. The four landscape character units are:
  - (1) Uplands
  - (2) Lowlands
  - (3) River Valleys
  - (4) Coastal
- The LCA now identifies 'Landscapes of Greater Sensitivity'. These are generally located within the lowland and coastal landscape units and represent the features in the landscape and seascape which have the most visual interest and prominence, and are therefore generally more sensitive to development. Many of these features also have profound historical, socio-cultural and religious interest. These landscapes are identified on the Landscape Character Assessment map.

### **1.1.1 Specific Landscape Features**

The LCA cannot, and is not intended to, identify specific landscape features on a field by field basis. There are also important features in the landscape of the County, for example, hedgerows and trees which line fields and roads, woodlands, wetlands and old demesne walls which cannot all be plotted on the Landscape Character Assessment map. However, the contribution that these landscape features make towards the site specific and overall character of the County's landscape is recognised and should be taken into account in the assessment of development proposals.

## **1.2 Landscape Character Units**

### **1.2.1 Uplands**

The Uplands is mainly characterised by areas of higher ground, with some variations within, and relates to the north and west of the County. The higher ground has more rainfall, wind and poor drainage with a limited range of vegetation and land use. Stunted and/or absent trees are conspicuous. At the higher reaches, agriculture is generally low intensity with stock rearing, forestry plantations and some areas of transitional vegetation. Afforestation may become a more dominant land use in these areas in the future.

On lower ground, fields are larger with low hedges and scattered smaller trees. The land is mostly used for stock rearing or mixed agricultural use. Some coniferous forestry, deciduous forestry and transitional woodland on steep slopes can be found within these areas. Recently constructed wind farms have become a feature in this landscape.

Whilst having lower population densities than the lowland landscapes, the upland landscape does accommodate significant living and working populations whose needs must be accommodated.

This landscape contains elevated and steeper land, ridges and skylines, which are prominent in the overall landscape, and which are generally more sensitive to development.

This landscape unit has limited capacity to absorb development. Local concentrations of one-off housing developments, outside of designated settlements, could have an adverse visual impact, either individually or cumulatively, on this landscape.

### **1.2.2 Lowlands**

The Lowlands unit is generally made up of gently undulating lands and relates to extensive areas of the County. There are generally higher levels of population and more intensive agriculture. The slopes and topography in this unit are shallower. Agricultural lands tend to be characterised by views across larger fields as a result of the generally low well-trimmed hedges.

There are a number of prominent hills within the Lowlands which provide more enclosure and 'punctuation' within the overall landscape. The 'Kettle and Kame' landscape near Screen is distinctive and interesting. These have been highlighted as Landscapes of Greater Sensitivity on the Landscape Character Assessment map. This landscape unit hosts the principle towns and major infrastructure such as the main roads and railways.

The predominant agricultural use of most of the Lowlands unit is expected to continue due to the high quality and fertility of the soils. Intensification of agricultural practices and expansion of urban settlements will be factors of change in this landscape.

The lowland unit generally has characteristics which have a higher capacity to absorb development without it causing significant visual intrusion although, care still needs to be taken on a site by site basis, particularly to minimise the risks of developments being visually intrusive.



### **1.2.3 River Valleys**

The Slaney and Barrow River Valleys have similar characteristics to that of the Lowlands, but have a more scenic appearance due to the presence of the rivers and their associated riparian and woodland habitats. This unit is very sensitive to development.

### **1.2.4 Coastal**

The Coastal unit has a character that often overlaps with the Lowland landscape. The nearby presence of the sea gives these areas a more scenic appearance which is very sensitive to development.

The east coast is generally characterised by long, relatively straight coasts of sand or shingle backed up by low cliffs and sand dune systems. The sandy beaches are popular with visitors. Within this coastal landscape are the more distinctive land and seascapes of Wexford Harbour, Wexford Slobs and Cahore Polders and Dunes. The northern part of the eastern coast has more promontories and smaller bays. There are concentrations of sand extraction developments which form prominent features in the landscape, notably near Blackwater.

The south coast also has long beaches and dune systems. Views to the Saltee and Keeragh Islands draw the eye in this landscape. There are a number of 'Landscapes of Greater Sensitivity' including Lady's Island and Tacumshin Lakes, the Inish and Ballyteige Slobs, Carnsore Point, Ballyteigue Burrow and Bannow Bay. The Hook peninsula has a variety of interesting and distinctive landscapes.

The coastal areas of Wexford experience greater pressure for tourism and residential development. Developments in coastal landscapes need to show greater sensitivity as this landscape unit has a lesser capacity to absorb development.

### **1.3 Landscapes of Greater Sensitivity**

There are landscapes of greater sensitivity within the four landscape character units.

#### **1.3.1 Hills and Ridges**

Hills and ridges have a significant presence all across County Wexford, and there are often broad views across the surrounding landscape from them. By definition, the designated Upland landscape character unit has concentrations of hills and ridges which have not been individually plotted on the Landscape Character Assessment map. In the lowland landscape, the important and prominent hills and ridges have been identified. A number of these hills, such as Oulart Hill, Vinegar Hill and Carrigbyrne have historical resonance.

Where public access is possible, hills and ridges are often popular places for recreational activity such as walking, riding and cycling.

#### **1.3.2 Water Bodies**

Lady's Island Lake, Tacumshin Lake and Ballyteigue Burrow are coastal lagoons, fully or partially separated from the sea by sandbanks, shingle and some rocks. The water features and the generally low-lying land in which they are set form distinctive landscapes. All are of great ecological interest. Lady's Island Lake is also of significant religious and cultural importance and attracts many visitors particularly during the summer pilgrim season.

Bannow Bay and Wexford Harbour estuaries are subject to strong tidal forces. Retreating tides expose expanses of mudflats and sandflats. The low-lying dune systems and mature trees at the Raven and Rosslare Point form the mouth and frame the seascape of Wexford Harbour. Bannow Bay also has particular historical significance associated with the Normans.

### **1.3.3 The Islands**

The Islands around the south coast of Wexford, the Saltees being the largest, are significant landscapes in themselves, as well as providing punctuation and focus to the seascape.

### **1.3.4 Coastal Promontories**

In South Wexford, Forlorn Point (Kilmore Quay), Carnsore Point and Rosslare Point are prominent features in the coastal land/seascape.

Now dominated by wind turbines, Carnsore Point is of significance as the most south-easterly point on the island of Ireland. It is also of archaeological and geological interest. As the location for the anti-nuclear festivals in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Carnsore Point also has socio-cultural interest.

To the north of the County, the promontories of Kilmichael Point, Cahore Point and those in between are also prominent features in the coastal land/seascape. The promontories often enclose sandy bays which are popular with visitors.

### **1.3.5 The Hook Peninsula**

The Hook peninsula is profoundly influenced by Waterford Harbour, Bannow Bay and the Irish Sea, which enclose the peninsular on three sides.

To the north, the peninsula is characterised by rolling undulating farmland with occasional views to the water and distant views to the Blackstairs Mountain and Forth Mountain.

The peninsula's coastline is heavily indented by bays and coves and numerous sandy beaches. It is characterised by generally low and rocky cliffs, particularly midway between the north and south of the peninsula, for example, at Baginbun Head. The coastline has a cluster of sites of geological interest.

The southern tip of the peninsula has a very flat low lying distinctive landscape punctuated by agricultural and residential buildings, Loftus Hall being the most prominent, and culminates at the Hook lighthouse at Hook Head. The area has a distinctive settlement and field pattern, which development proposals should have regard to.

There are sites of great historical interest throughout the whole of the peninsula, particularly associated with the Normans, the Hook lighthouse and with the historical use of Duncannon Port. The beaches, landscapes, villages and, in particular, the Hook lighthouse, are all popular with tourists and much of the development on the peninsula is consequently tourist-related.

### **1.3.6 Screen Hills**

Formed from the withdrawal of the Irish Sea sea glacier at the end of the Ice Age, the hills represent the largest raised ice contact delta in Ireland and possibly in Europe. Consisting of rounded 'hills' and the occasional 'kettle' lake, the Screen Hills landscape is distinctive from the general lowland landscape of south and east Wexford. Below ground, sand and gravel sediments, sometimes in excess of 30m thick, support distinctive flora and are also attractive to the extractive industry. This landscape is sensitive to development.

### **1.3.7 Slobs**

The slobes at Wexford and Inish and Ballyteige form distinctive, very low lying flat landscapes with straight drainage ditches and wetland areas, largely formed by land reclamation projects in the 1800s. These landscapes provide important habitats for wildfowl. The Inish and Ballyteige slobes landscape is backed by the dune landscape of Ballyteigue and is punctuated by sand extraction activity and more recently by wind turbines.





**Draft Wexford County Development Plan 2013-2019  
Landscape Character Assessment**

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Landscape Units and Features	
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