

FINAL

DYFI ESTUARY FLOOD RISK APPRAISAL

Landscape Baseline Site Visit Notes

Project no. 4020938

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1. Introduction

The Dyfi Estuary Flood Risk Appraisal seeks to establish a sustainable and integrated approach to the future management of the tidal floodplain. Natural Resources Wales commissioned Binnies to establish the landscape baseline of the Dyfi Estuary Flood Risk Appraisal study area by, among other tasks, undertaking a site visit. This report records the site visit notes along with photographs. An annotated plan showing where the photographs were taken from can be found in Appendix A.

This report does not set out the full landscape baseline including desk study. The landscape baseline study, including designations, existing landscape character assessments and LANDMAP, is recorded in the Environmental Constraints and Opportunities Record (ECOR)¹, and shown on the Cultural Heritage, Landscape and Visual Environmental Constraints and Opportunities Plan (ECOP) (drawing no. 4020938-BUK-ZZ-00-DR-EN-00007).

The site visit was undertaken on 1st and 2nd August 2022 by Binnies' landscape architect Heather Reed. The purpose of the walkover was to gain an overview of the likely landscape issues within the area; note any traditional styles of building, local materials and landscape features; and verify the landscape baseline desk study recorded in the ECOR.

The walkover included the dunes, visitor centre and beach at Ynyslas, part of the Dyfi National Nature Reserve (NNR); public footpaths along the Afon Leri (2/29 and Ceredigion Coast Path) and Afon Clettwr (3/22); the boardwalk route within Cors Fochno raised bog (also part of Dyfi NNR); waymarked trails within RSPB nature reserve at Ynys-hir; the villages of Ynyslas, Furnace, Tre'r-ddol, Llancynfelyn and Borth; Borth and Ynyslas Golf Club; Borth Sands; and views from laybys/parking along roads where it was safe to do so, including the B4353 which dissects the study area. See Figure 1 for location plan.

Only areas which were publicly accessible were visited during the walkover. Access underneath the railway at the northern end of the Afon Clettwr footpath was restricted due to wet mud which was judged to be slippery and unsafe, and footpath 5/48 from Llwyn-glas was blocked by overgrown vegetation. The Lodge deer park was not accessible during the site visit, and due to woodland cover there was not a nearby alternative location to take a photo from with views over the estuary. There were no other access restrictions during the survey.

Weather conditions on the 1st August were dry and sunny, with good visibility (views 1-5 within this report). Weather conditions on the 2nd August were overcast with occasional rain and poor visibility (views 6-12 within this report).

It should be noted that as the site visit took place in August, and therefore during the school summer holidays, visitor/tourist numbers could have been comparatively higher than would be experienced at other times of year.

It should also be noted that although landscape and nature conservation designations have generally not been discussed in this Site Visit Note, the Dyfi NNR has been included as an exception due to the impact it has on public access and therefore visual amenity/views of relevance to the site visit.

¹ Natural Resources Wales (2023). Dyfi Estuary Flood Risk Appraisal. Environmental Constraints and Opportunities Record, Version 2

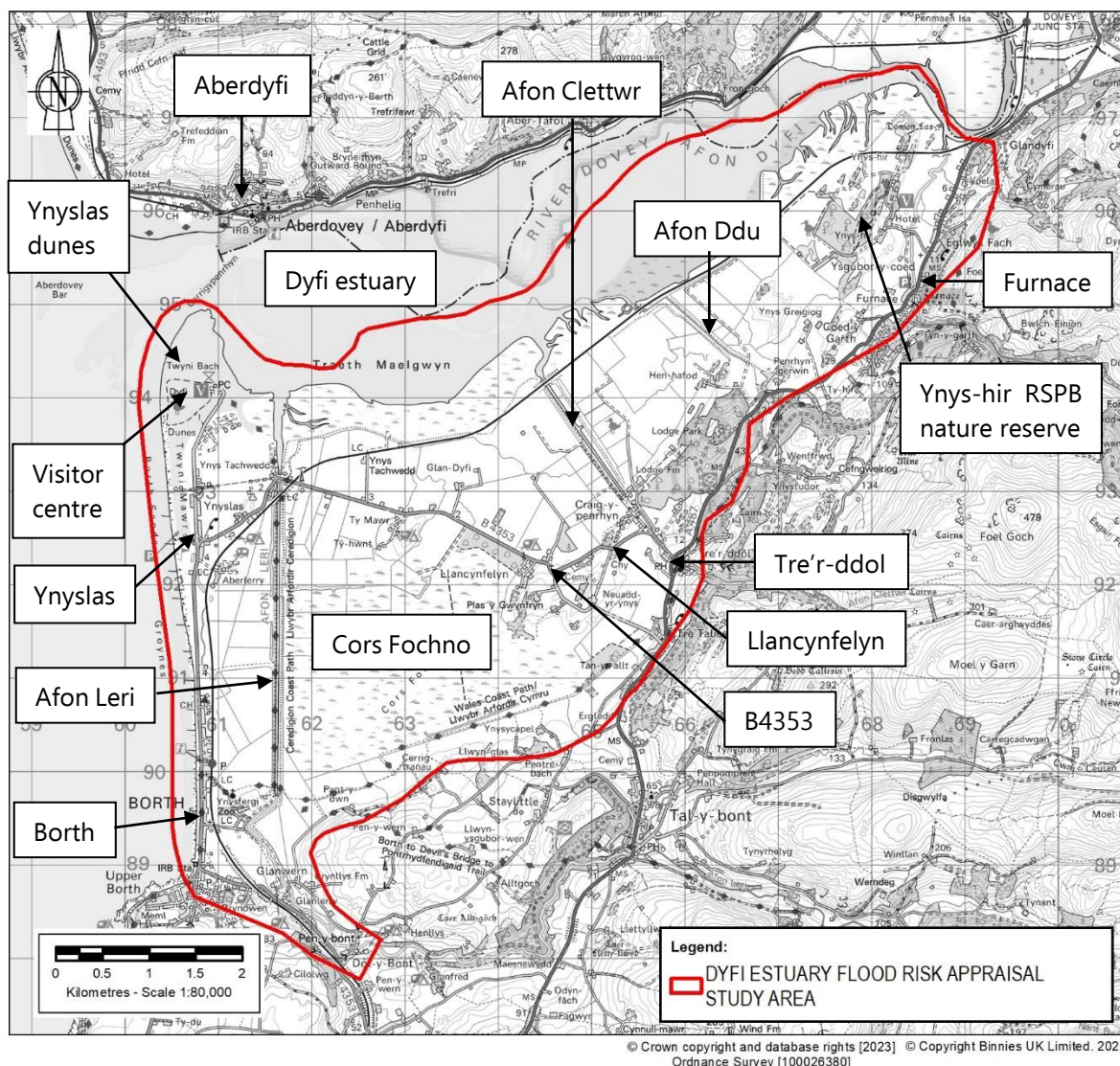


Figure 1: Location plan.

2. Landscape Baseline Description

2.1 Key Landscape Features

The key features and character of the landscape as noted on the site walkover are as follows:

- Largely flat landscape of the estuary and hinterland with small, rolling hills further inland;
- Surrounded to the north, east and south by mountains including the Cambrian Hills (east) and Snowdonia National Park (north) which are prominent and create a regular backdrop in views;
- The landscape opens up towards the sea to the west;
- Rolling hills and surrounding mountains are heavily wooded, whereas the estuary and hinterland are very open;
- There is evidence of human interaction with the landscape in the form of the straightened river channels of the Afon Leri, Afon Clettwr and Afon Ddu;
- Pasture is the dominant land-use in the hinterland between the B4353 and the publicly accessible areas of the Ynys-hir RSPB reserve. Fields are regular and bounded by hedgerows;
- The landscape has the feel of a semi-rural, working character, evidenced by the presence of small-scale infrastructure such as small pylons and isolated buildings, as well as the farmland and canalised channels;
- Building vernacular is not coherent. Older buildings are of stone, which is whitewashed in locations nearer the coast. Stone buildings further inland in the villages along the A487 may be whitewashed or left as bare stone. However there are also several more modern buildings of mixed material types, and agricultural or other functional buildings such as Ynyslas boatyard of corrugated metal. There are also several caravan parks;
- Inland settlements are small and located along roads, within the rolling hills at the base of the mountains and appear older in character. Coastal settlements at Ynyslas and Borth are larger and more modern in appearance;
- The landscape is generally quiet and there is a sense of wilderness in places. Roads are often bounded by trees or hedgerows, hiding them from view and reducing traffic noise. There are tourist hotspots however such as Ynyslas, Borth and to a lesser extent Furnace, which are busier, and several caravan parks revealing the value of the area for tourism; and,
- Whilst views outwards of the surrounding mountains are common, views within the study area itself are restricted. As the land of the estuary and hinterland is so flat, even slight rises in topography, e.g., river embankments, or presence of vegetation such as hedgerows or other boundary treatments, can block low-level views.

2.2 Photographic Record



View 1: View from high ground on informal path through Ynyslas dunes looking south east.

The dunes at Ynyslas rise approximately 4-5m high, with a few trails through the dunes including a waymarked trail as part of Dyfi NNR. The Dyfi NNR visitor centre at Ynyslas can be seen in the left of the view in the middle distance and the Cambrian Mountains in the far distance. Due to the flat, low-lying nature of the study area, it is largely hidden from view by the dune system, and the eye is drawn to the Cambrian Mountains beyond. Scattered buildings can be seen, and Mynydd Gorddu Windfarm is visible on the hilltop in the far right of the view. The character of the surrounding mountains can be seen to change from the Cambrian Mountains in the left of the view (east) which have wooded lower slopes and open heathland on the peaks; and the lower hills towards the coast at Borth in the right of the view (south), which are covered by irregular agricultural fields. The area is quiet despite the popularity of the beach.



View 2: View from public footpath along the Afon Leri left hand (west) bank, looking south east.

Whilst the channel of the Afon Leri is artificially straight, it does have an element of a natural feel in the way that the water meanders slightly within its channel, and the banks are of mud and grass, without the use of hard materials to shape the channel such as concrete or sheet piles; this gives the channel a 'softer' feel.

From the footpath along the left hand bank, views of Cors Fochno, on low-lying flat land on the opposite side of the channel, are blocked by the right hand bank of the Afon Leri, and views over the bank are instead of high ground beyond.

Views are less enclosed towards the west (not visible in image above); Borth and Ynyslas settlements as well as caravan parks along the coast are visible, beyond which is the open expanse of the sea. Although the sea itself cannot be seen due to the coastal flood defence wall to the rear of Borth Sands, the lack of visible ground beyond the flood wall leads to an open, expansive feel when looking west, which is in contrast to the more enclosed feel when looking towards the mountains.



View 3: View from B4353 between the Afon Leri and Ynyslas, looking south east.

The landscape is very open and has a wild, desolate feel. This is despite, or perhaps partly because of, small scale infrastructure being visible in the landscape. Small pylons, a railway line with infrequent trains and occasional small settlements show that this landscape is used, but not busy. Due to this slightly elevated viewpoint, the low-lying ground of Cors Fochno can be seen before the hills rise to the south. As Cors Fochno is a homogenous land type however, the eye is still drawn over it towards higher ground.



View 4: View from boardwalk at Cors Fochno, looking south west towards Borth.

Cors Fochno is protected as part of Dyfi NNR and access is only permitted via a boardwalk in the north. Cors Fochno is expansive and flat, with a homogenous appearance. Once again, the hills to the south create a backdrop, leading to a partial sense of enclosure, and Borth settlement is visible in this otherwise rural-feeling landscape. Cors Fochno is quiet, the sounds of the B4353 road having been shielded from the nature reserve by trees.



View 5: View along Afon Clettwr left hand (west) bank, looking north towards Snowdonia.

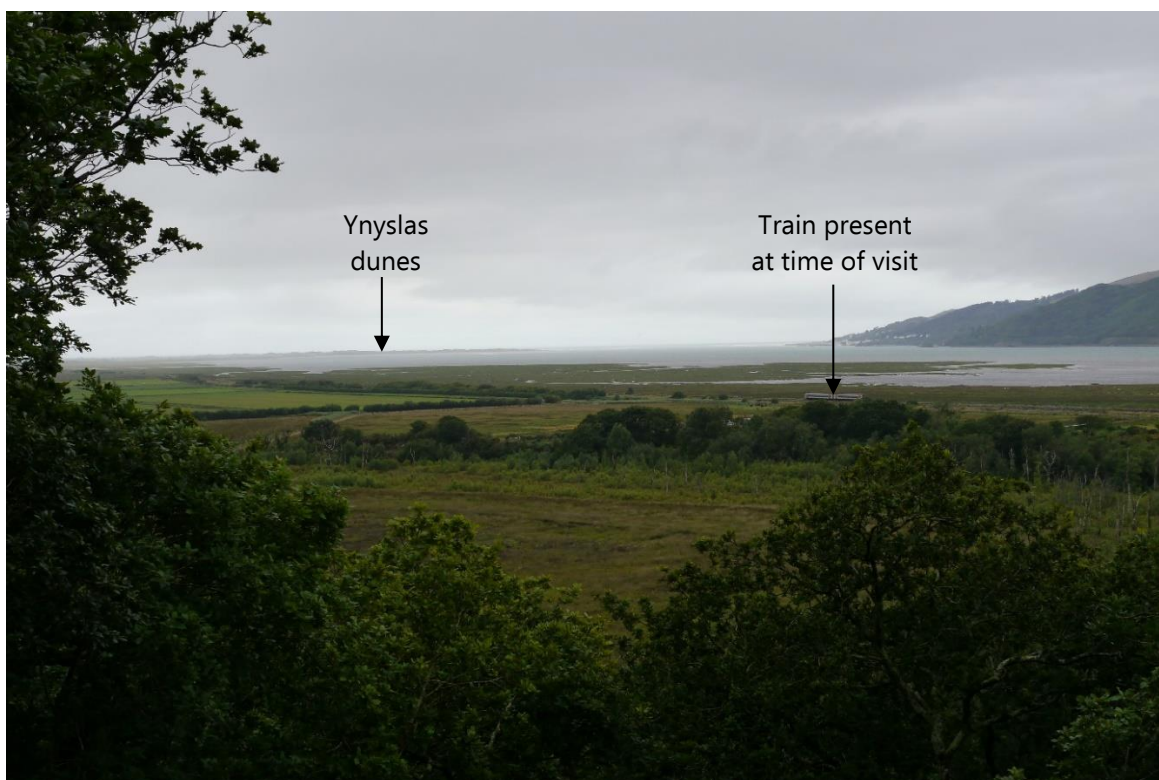
Although the landscape is flat, long-range views are blocked by river embankments and boundary hedgerows. The left hand Afon Clettwr embankment divides the land into farmland which is visible to the left (west), and marshy grassland within a washlands area to the right (east). Both landscape types are only visible in conjunction from the embankment crest; from either side the embankment blocks the other from view. The Afon Clettwr is made up of a primary and secondary (higher flow) channel, surrounded by marshy grassland consisting of short grass and rush, within which were grazing sheep, and has a desolate feel. On the other side of this washlands area, the right hand (east) Afon Clettwr embankment is visible in the distance on the right of the image and, as with the left hand embankment, rises above the surrounding land blocking views beyond it to the east. The mountains of Snowdonia and Ceredigion are visible as a backdrop.



View 6a: View west from Ynys Feurig hide at Ynys-hir RSPB nature reserve, looking over the Dyfi estuary, saltmarsh and hinterland.

This is an open, exposed, large scale, flat expanse with the Snowdonia mountains as a backdrop, and Aberdyfi visible on the opposite side of the estuary channel. The landscape is peaceful and undisturbed, in which the sounds of the wind and birds can be heard, and there are long range views down the estuary towards the sea. Although the railway line runs from east to west through the centre of this flat landscape, it is not substantially raised above the level of the estuary and from this viewpoint the flat land either side of it appear to merge into a single landscape type; the railway line, although visible, is not obvious and does not from this viewpoint form a visual barrier.

The landscape character within the publicly accessible areas of the RSPB nature reserve at Ynys-hir varies. The above image shows the character of the northern edge of the RSPB reserve overlooking the Dyfi estuary; other land types include woodland, scrub, wetland, reedbed, and raised bog which has been reclaimed from conifer plantation. The woodland, including some oak woodland, is found on the steep foothills of the Cambrian Mountains and the rolling hills between the mountains and the flat hinterland. The character of the woodland is sheltered and enclosed, in sharp contrast to the open saltmarsh and hinterland, although there are some glimpses outwards towards the estuary to the north. An interpretation board within the reserve described the bog reclamation work as clearing conifer plantation, rhododendron and scrub, and installing dams and a sluice to raise water levels and encourage peat to form. There is a boardwalk along the edge of this area.



View 6b: View west from Ynys-hir hide at Ynys-hir RSPB nature reserve overlooking the Dyfi estuary.

There is a sharp contrast between the regular-shaped agricultural fields to the west (left) with their bright green grassland and straight boundary hedgerows; the more 'informal' landscape of the RSPB reserve and estuary saltmarsh; and the wooded hill slopes of the foothills of the Cambrian Mountains. Although the railway line provides a physical barrier, it is not obvious in the landscape (even with the train in the above image) and the estuary saltmarsh and flat marshy grassland south of the railway line appear as one character type. The eye is drawn towards the open mouth of the estuary and the sea; and Ynyslas dunes can be seen across the southern (left hand) edge of the estuary mouth.



View 7: View south-west from St Michael's Church at Eglwys Fach.

This view is within the rolling hills between the flat estuary/hinterland and the mountains which border the study area. The land is pastoral, with drystone wall boundaries and enclosed by wooded hill slopes. The predominant building material is stone, but not whitewashed. In this area the wooded hills limit views and there is no indication that the estuary and sea are close by. Hedgerows and trees along roadsides largely block views to/from roads.



View 8: View north-west from A487.

The A487 at this point is passing through the rolling hills and provides an elevated viewpoint. The land use is pastoral with boundary hedgerows and clumps of trees. The estuary is barely visible through the trees, though the mountains of Snowdonia are still visible as a backdrop.

(NB: due to the poor visibility due to weather on the day, the full height of the Snowdonia mountains may not have been visible).



View 9: View north-east from B4353 at Llancynfelyn.

Llancynfelyn has its own very localised character as it occupies a small hill overlooking the flat estuary and hinterland. Pastoral fields are less well defined here than elsewhere within the study area, with an absence of hedgerow boundaries which are replaced by post and wire fences, and individual trees scattered or in clumps. The grass is tussocky and the ground level irregular, giving a wild appearance. The regular fields of the hinterland can in contrast be seen in the middle distance. There are views of the Dyfi estuary, Aberdyfi and Snowdonia from this elevated viewpoint, although these are limited from the B4353 due to hedgerows alongside the road. This is a working landscape with small scale infrastructure visible including farm buildings and small pylons.



View 10: View north-east from Borth sea defence embankment, looking across Ynyslas golf course to Ynyslas.

Unlike most other roads within the study area which are bounded by hedgerows, the B4353 between Ynyslas and Borth is open, and separated from Ynyslas golf course by only a post and wire fence. Views across the golf course are therefore plentiful from the road and the sea defence embankment, but the golf course blends in well with the surrounding landscape and does not appear incongruously artificial. The golf course largely consists of gently undulating short grassland and drainage ditches containing reeds. There are views of Ynyslas and associated caravan parks to the north, with a backdrop of the Snowdonia mountains, and (if the viewer looks southwards) Borth can be seen to the south (Borth is not visible in image above). The area has an open, exposed feel, particularly if facing the sea to the west, but not a rural feel due to the presence of the settlements of Ynyslas and Borth.

(NB: due to the poor visibility due to weather on the day, the full height of the Snowdonia mountains may not have been visible).



View 11: View north-east from Borth railway station platform.

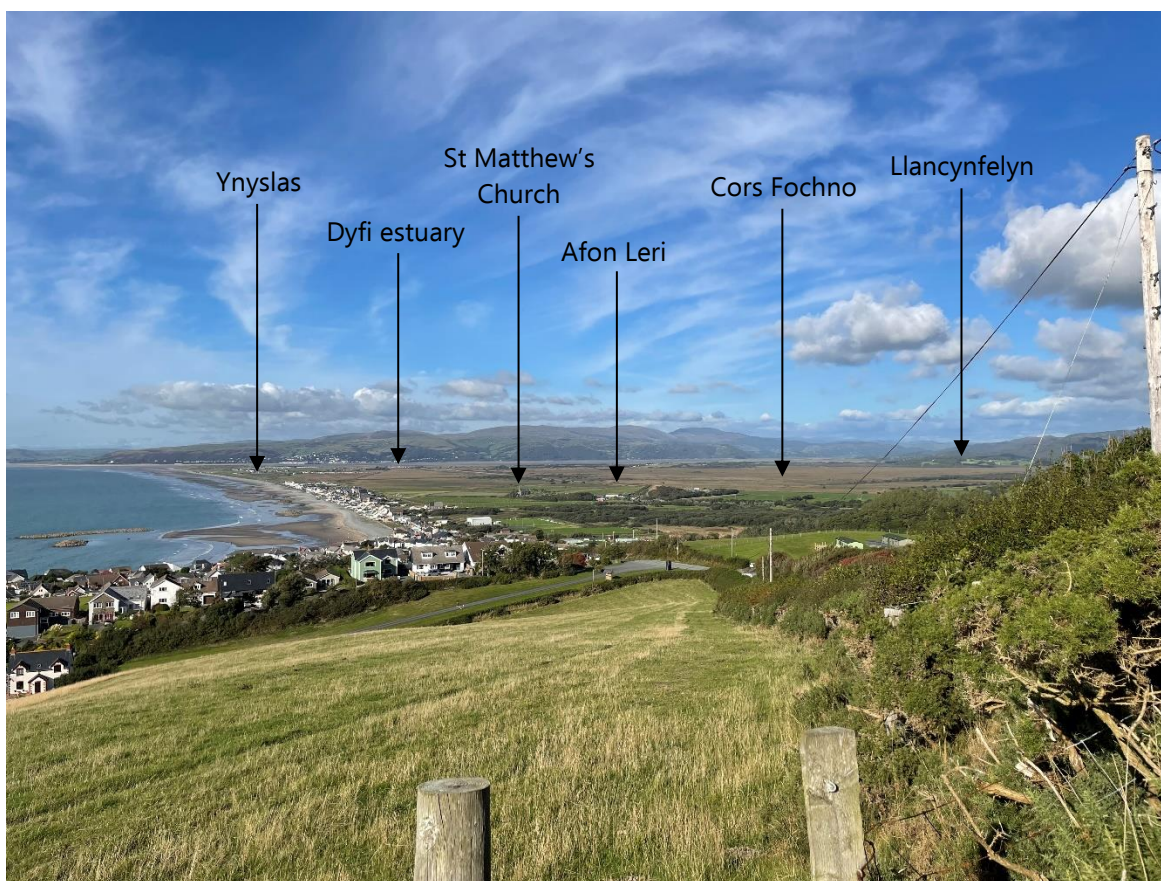
Borth railway station has only one platform, which offers uninterrupted views eastwards from the slightly elevated position on the platform. Flat grassland can be seen in the foreground, interspersed with straight, reed-filled drainage ditches, post and wire fences, and trees and shrubs in clumps or scattered individually. The flat landscape has an expansive feel, although at this point the viewer is aware that they are immediately adjacent to the settlement of Borth (which is behind the viewer), and therefore the landscape is not as tranquil as it would appear in this image. Small scale infrastructure is visible in the form of lines of small pylons, the railway line (off the front of this image), and the buildings of Llancynfelyn. From this position, to the right (south-east) and left (north) of the image above, there are views of further built elements including isolated farm buildings and dwellings, St Matthew's Church, caravan parks and the settlements of Borth and Ynyslas. Buildings are often painted white or limewashed and are therefore prominent within the landscape. Llancynfelyn is situated on a small hill which is a prominent feature in this flat landscape, although difficult to make out on the image above due to the poor weather conditions at the time of the site visit. The Cambrian mountains form a dramatic backdrop, although again these are difficult to see in the image above due to the weather at the time leading to poor visibility. It should be noted that although the viewer is looking in the direction of both the Afon Leri channel and Cors Fochno bog, neither the channel or the bog can be seen as, due to the flat nature of the land, they are hidden from view by any elements with minor vertical elevation including the embankments of the Afon Leri channel and any intervening vegetation.



View 12: View north-west from unnamed road near Staylittle.

From this viewpoint on high ground in the hills to the south of the study area, the various landscape types that make up the study area can be seen. The flat land of Cors Fochno is visible in the centre-left of the image, with a homogenous, flat brown appearance. Towards the east, scrub and woodland can be seen encroaching onto the bog habitat of Cors Fochno, before the land rises at Llancynfelyn. The pastoral fields with hedgerow boundaries of the hinterland can be seen behind Cors Fochno, and the expanse of the Dyfi estuary behind that. As a backdrop, the Snowdonia mountains rise behind.

Due to the flat nature of the land within the study area, the various elements which make up the landscape cannot all be seen in conjunction when standing within the study area itself and are only visible from surrounding high ground.



View 13: View north-east from field gate on B4572 near Upper Borth (image provided by NRW).

The above photograph, taken 20/09/2021 on a day with good visibility, has been provided by NRW. When visibility is good, the viewer can see from Upper Borth across the study area to the mountains of Snowdonia, the outlines of which are clearly visible. The various land use types within the study area can be identified: the coastline; the settlements of Borth and Ynyslas; Cors Fochno raised bog; the linear channel of the Afon Leri; and the Dyfi estuary. It should be noted however that this photograph is taken from a field gate; and as with other roads noted within this report, hedgerows block views from elsewhere along the B4572.

Appendix A: Landscape Site Visit Photo Locations

Drawing no. 4020938-BUK-ZZ-00-DR-EN-00003_P02	Landscape Site Visit Photo Locations
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