

**LAND AT CAE INCLINE FIELDS,  
BANGOR**

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**AGRICULTURAL LAND QUALITY  
CONSIDERATIONS**

**December 2024**





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### **Appendices**

- KCC1 Welsh Government's "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) booklet (May 2021)
- KCC2 Welsh Government Guidance Note v2.1 (May 2021)

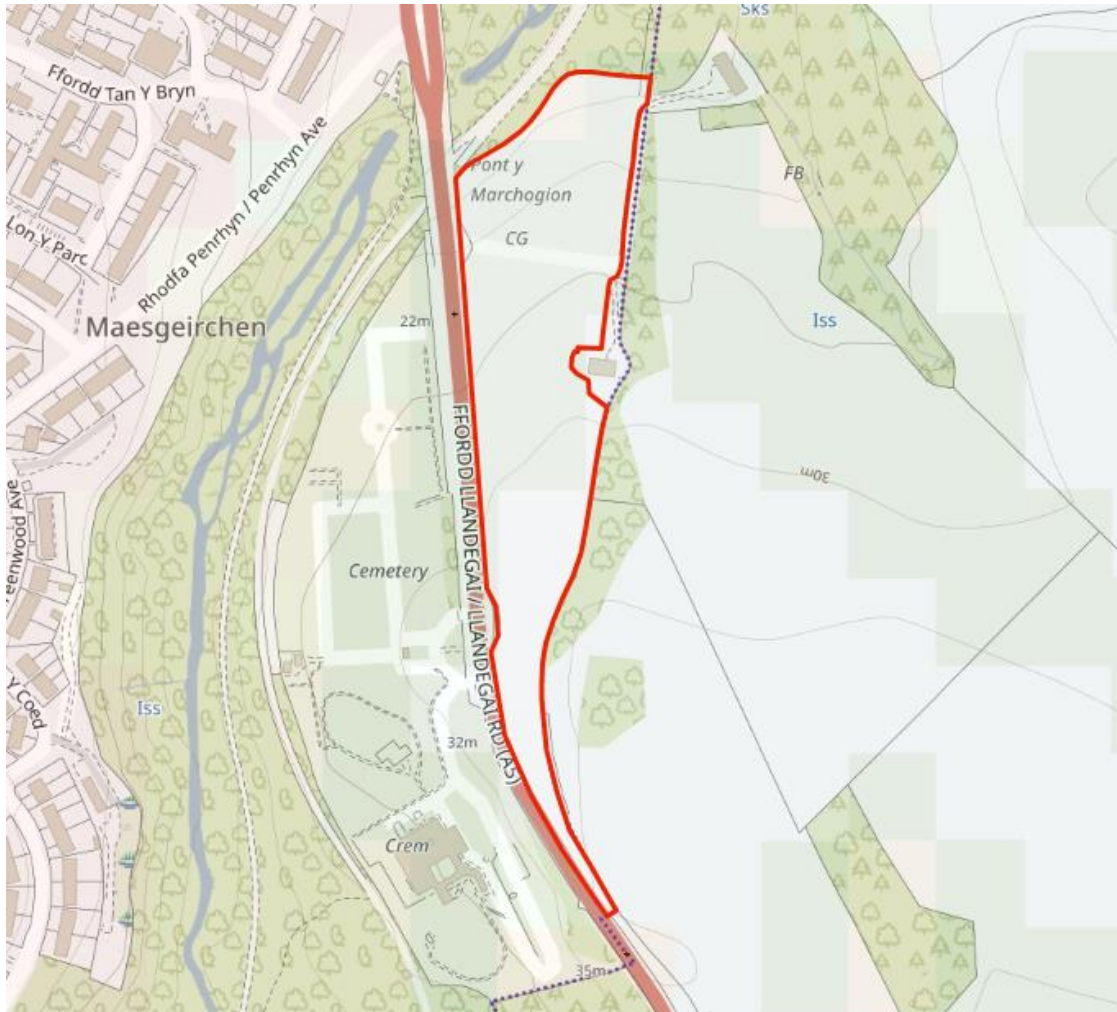
# 1 INTRODUCTION

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1.1 This report considers the agricultural land quality issues relating to an area of approximately 2.5ha of agricultural land at Cae Incline Fields, Bangor.

1.2 The area is shown outlined in red on the insert below.

*Insert 1. The Site (boundary approx.)*



1.3 The Site is being proposed for non-agricultural development.

1.4 This report:

- (i) describes the agricultural land quality in section 2;
- (ii) sets out the planning policy of relevance in section 3; and
- (iii) provides an assessment in section 4.

1.5 This report has been prepared by Kernon Countryside Consultants Ltd. We specialise in assessing the effects of developments on agricultural land and businesses.



## 2 THE SITE AND LAND QUALITY

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### The Site

- 2.1 The Site extends to approximately 2.5ha of grassland, as shown outlined in red on the Google Earth aerial image below. The land is made up of two land parcels, with woodland and a residential settlement to the north, a crematorium to the west and agricultural land to the east and south.

*Insert 2. Google Earth of the Site*

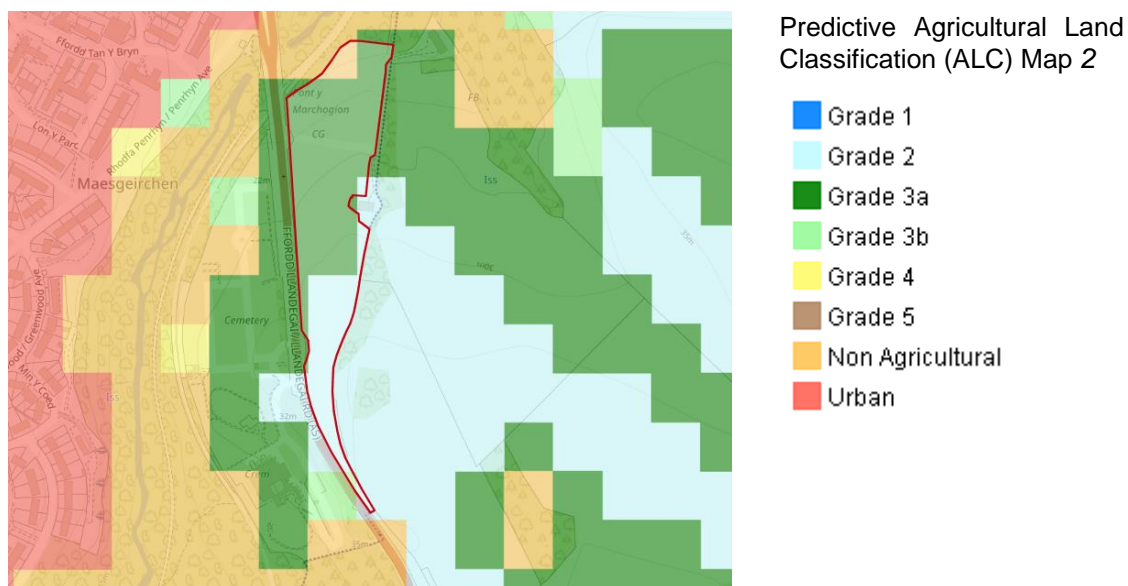


### Land Quality

- 2.2 Agricultural land quality is measured by a system of Agricultural Land Classifications which was devised in the 1970's by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), and was last amended in 1988.
- 2.3 The system is described in the Welsh Government's "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) booklet (May, 2021), which has been reproduced in **Appendix KCC1**.
- 2.4 As described in the FAQ booklet, agricultural land is divided into five grades, with Grade 3 divided into two subgrades: 3a and 3b.
- 2.5 The predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (version 2, 2020) provides the best available information to predict the grade of land.

- 2.6 The Site is shown on the Predictive ALC as Grade 2, Subgrade 3a and non-agricultural quality land. This can be seen in the insert below. There is a tiny amount of Subgrade 3b at the southern end.

*Insert 3. Welsh Predictive Mapping*



- 2.7 The Welsh Government's Frequently Asked Questions (**Appendix KCC1**) defines Grade 2 land as **“very good”** quality land, with **“minor limitations on crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. Wide range of crops but limitations on demanding crops (e.g. winter harvested veg)”**.
- 2.8 Subgrade 3a is described as **“good”** quality land **“capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet”**.
- 2.9 Subgrade 3b is described as **“Moderate”** quality land, with **“Moderate yields of cereals, grass and lower yields of other crops”**.
- 2.10 The map is predictive, identifying key limitations that mean that land cannot be better than a specific grade. The system produces pixelated “quadrants” of 50m by 50m (0.25ha). No field survey was involved.
- 2.11 The Site extends as a whole to 2.5ha. This is a small area in agricultural terms with a significant mixture of grading. As set out in the FAQ document, ALC surveys are normally undertaken at one auger point per hectare. Small areas of land of differing quality lying within wider areas of other land are often not mapped separately.

- 2.12 The ALC guidelines advise that **“where soil and site conditions vary significantly and repeatedly over short distances and impose a practical constraint on cropping and land management, a “pattern” limitation is said to exist”**.
- 2.13 If a field survey identified a mix of grades over a small area, as the map indicates, it is probable that the overall grading would be limited to the most extensive area of ALC grade found, and therefore, an overall ALC grade of Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a.
- 2.14 Sampling for ALC is usually carried out at one sample per hectare. The small area of Subgrade 3b would not be separately mapped. The whole Site, therefore, can be considered to be a mixture of Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a.

### 3 PLANNING POLICY

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#### Planning Policy

- 3.1 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (Edition 12, February 2024) sets out in paragraph 3.58 that agricultural land of grades 1, 2 and 3a is the **“best and most versatile and should be conserved as a finite resource”**.
- 3.2 Paragraph 3.58 notes that the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) should be considered as a finite resource for the future.
- 3.3 Paragraph 3.59 sets out policy that seeks to develop land of poorer quality in preference to BMV land unless other considerations outweigh the agricultural considerations.

#### Local Plan

- 3.4 Policy PS6 of the Anglesey and Gwynedd Joint Local Development Plan 2011 – 2026 (adopted 2017) only permits development **“where it is demonstrated with appropriate evidence that they have fully taken account of, and responded to (inter alia) ... 6 safeguarding the best and most versatile agricultural land, promoting allotments, support opportunities for local food production and farming in order to reduce the area’s contribution to food miles”**.
- 3.5 The site has, historically, been allocated for development. However there are policies in place that support housing developments. This includes policies:
- SO15 which states that there is a requirement **“to ensure that a sufficient range of housing sites are available”**; and
  - SO16 which states a need to **“provide a mixture of good quality and affordable housing units, or a range of types and tenures to meet the housing requirements of all sections of the population”**.
- 3.6 The policy also states that there will be a consistent minimum 5 year supply of land for housing purposes within the District.



## 4 ASSESSMENT

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### Guidance

- 4.1 The Welsh Government Guidance Note v2.1 (May, 2021) that accompanies the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Maps is set out in **Appendix KCC2**. This describes the purpose of the Predictive Map.
- 4.2 The Guidance Note identifies that where land is shown on the predictive ALC as likely falling within Grade 1, 2 and 3a of the ALC, field surveys will be required. Such land is defined in Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, 2024, Paragraph 3.58) as the “**best and most versatile agricultural land**”, and is afforded a degree of protection, as described above.
- 4.3 The Survey Decision Flowchart in the Guidance Note shows that, where land is shown on the Predictive Map as Grades 3b, 4 and 5 then “**Survey Not Required**”.

### Assessment

- 4.4 Under the Guidance Note, it is necessary to assess the agricultural land and the implications of its development.
- 4.5 Setting aside the land quality, this is a small and awkwardly-shaped field, especially at the southern end where it becomes so narrow that it is not normally farmed. The width is very narrow for farm machinery, and not suitable for grazing animals as they will poach the land quickly as they walk over it. It is not suitable for arable uses due to the restricted width.
- 4.6 The Council has, historically, allocated the site, accepting that poorer quality land was not available in the alternative.
- 4.7 Therefore in this assessment we consider, first, the agricultural importance of the site, then turn to consider if poorer quality land is available.

### Agricultural Use of the Site

- 4.8 A field survey has not been carried out in this case. The Site extends to approximately 2.5ha of agricultural land. As an approximation (based on measurements from the Welsh Predictive Mapping) the Site is made up of the following:

Table 1. Site Area

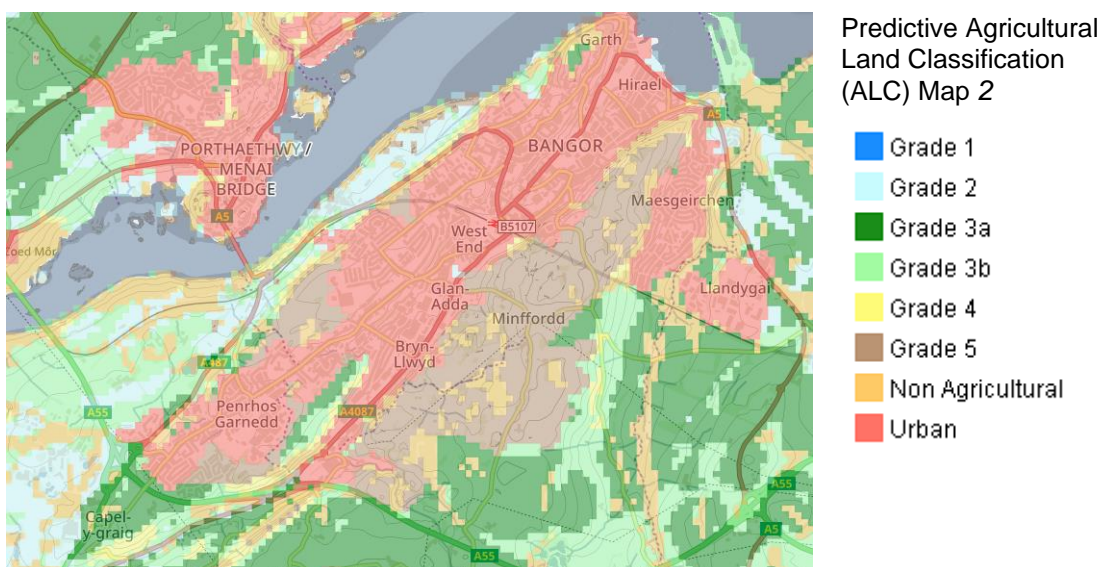
ALC Grade	Description	Ha (rounded)	% (of total Site)
Grade 2	Very Good	0.7	28
Subgrade 3a	Good	1.7	68
Subgrade 3b	Moderate	<0.1	<1
Non-agricultural	Woodland	0.1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>100</b>

- 4.9 It is evident from aerial photography that the site is used as grassland. Land to the east is used as arable land, on rotation with grassland, but the site itself has only been used for grassland. In practical terms, therefore, its agricultural use is limited. In practical terms, given the shape of the field, it is not “versatile”.

#### Land Quality in the Wider Area

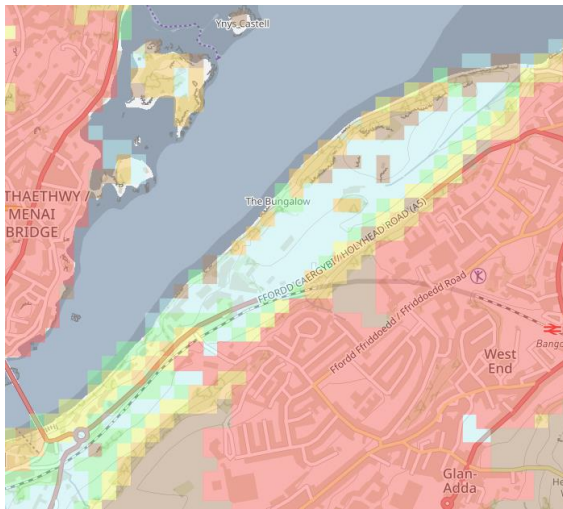
- 4.10 Bangor is bordered, mostly, by land of a similar quality (ie Grades 2 and 3a), on the predictive ALC. The land quality around Bangor is shown below. There are large areas of Grade 5 “very poor” land, but this is mostly steep and rocky, and not suited to development.

#### *Insert 4. ALC Around the Settlement*



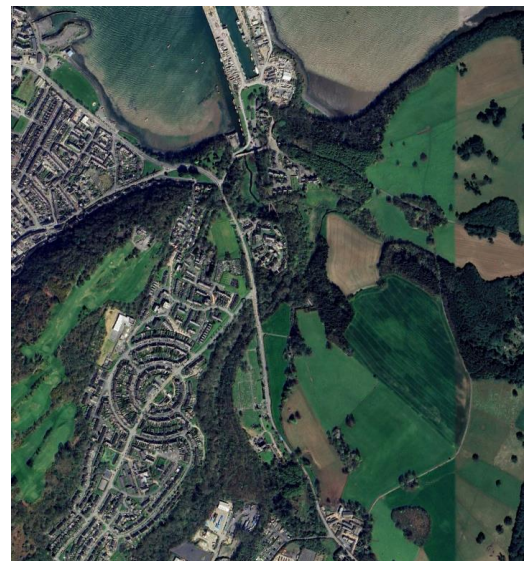
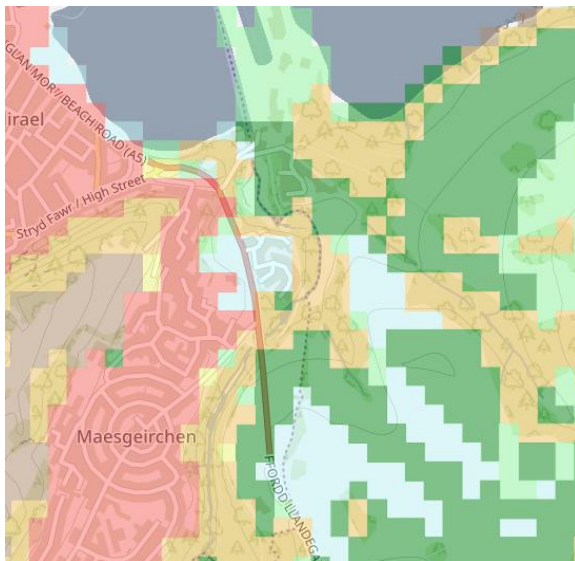
- 4.11 Land to the west/northwest is shown as mostly Grade 2, except for the narrow scarp adjacent to the road, as compared below.

*Inserts 5 and 6. Land to the West*



- 4.12 Land to the north is shown as Grade 2 and 3a. This area, shown below, includes the site. The golf course is Grade 5, on slope (it is assumed).

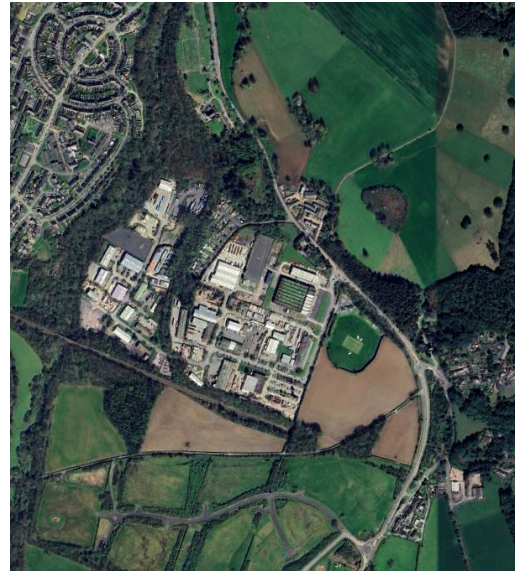
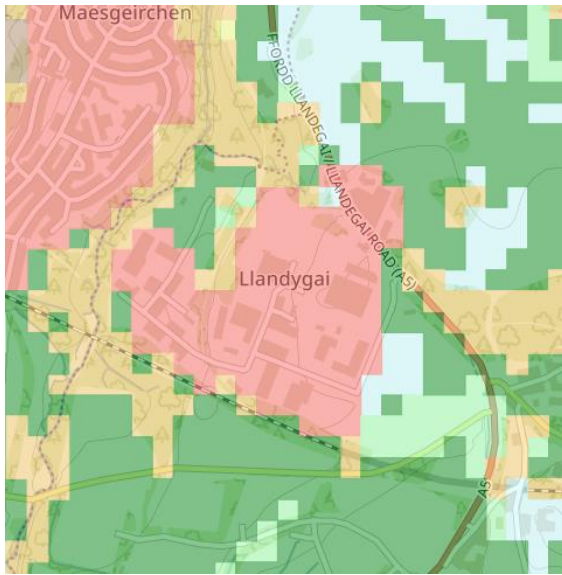
*Inserts 7 and 8. Land to the North*



- 4.13 Land to the south of the site, around Llandygai, is shown as almost all Grade 2 and 3a, with small patches of Subgrade 3b (similar to the site). This land is mostly in arable use and is clearly more versatile than the application site. The area to the south is being developed.

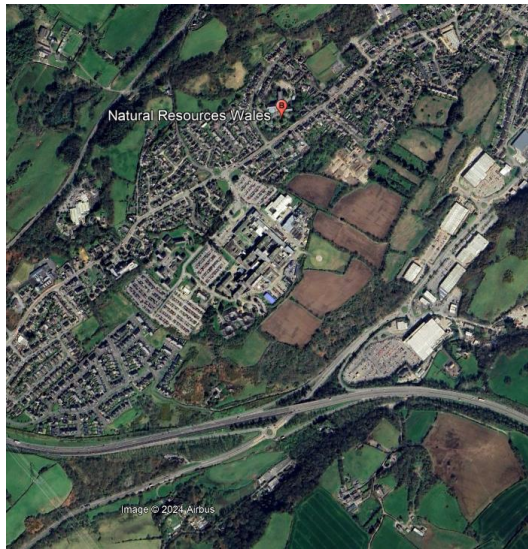
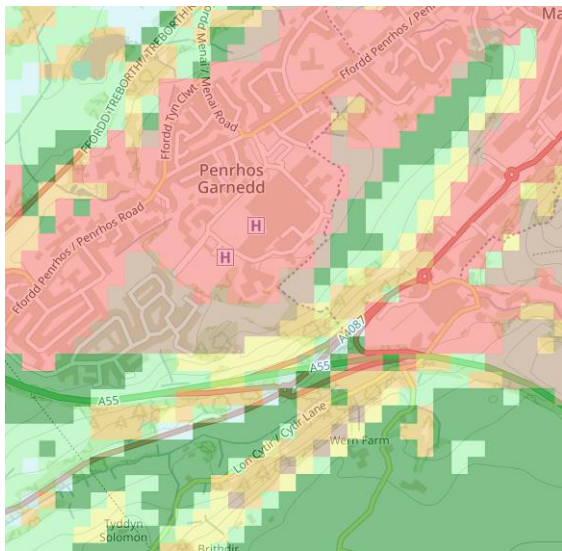


*Inserts 9 and 10. Land to the South*



- 4.14 Land to the south, around Penrhos Garnedd, and to the west of the hospital, is mapped as a mixture of mostly Subgrades 3a and 3b. It is largely in arable use.

*Inserts 11 and 12. Land to the South*



- 4.15 None of these areas are notably poorer quality than the site. Poorer quality land is not available.

**Assessment**

- 4.16 The site is small, at 2.5 ha, and a mixture of mostly Grades 2 and 3a with small patches shown as non-agricultural and Subgrade 3b.

- 4.17 In practical terms the site is of limited agricultural use. It is a long, narrow field, very narrow in parts, and not suited to arable uses. From review of aerial images it appears to have been in grassland uses, not arable, which is expected given the limitations.
- 4.18 At 2.5 ha the site is well below the threshold for consultation with the Welsh Government (20 ha).
- 4.19 In EIA terms, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) set development of less than 5 ha as “minor development”. The site is half of this size (IEMA Guide: A New Perspective on Land and Soil in Environmental Impact Assessment, February 2022).
- 4.20 Analysis around the settlement shows that there are no other areas of poorer quality land available. Almost all areas are mapped as a mixture of Grades 2 and 3a.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

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- 5.1 The predictive mapping indicates that the Site could contain small areas of Grade 2, Subgrade 3a, Subgrade 3b and non-agricultural.
- 5.2 Due to the small areas of the grading it is likely that the Site would be mapped as the dominant grading at the Site and therefore being Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a land quality.
- 5.3 Despite the BMV quality land, the small Site extending to 2.5ha of agricultural land would be only 50% of the threshold of what constitutes as “minor” development under the IEMA guidance.
- 5.4 The small Site area also causes practical difficulties with regards to farming the Site and due to the mixture of grading, the areas of differently classified land could not be exploited to benefit from its grading, and the narrow and awkward shape is not suitable to arable farming. The land seems to have only been used as grassland.
- 5.5 In addition, the Proposed Development Site is allocated for housing under the Local Development Plan and residential development is also supported by local planning policy.
- 5.6 When looking at the land quality around the settlement, it is clear that high quality land is not a rare resource, with most land mapped as Grade 2 and Subgrade 3a, with minimal areas of lower quality agricultural land available.
- 5.7 Based on the above, it is considered that only limited weight should be given to the loss of this small area of agricultural land, and that poorer quality land is not available.



**APPENDIX KCC1**  
**Welsh Government's "Frequently**  
**Asked Questions" (FAQ) (May 2021)**

# Agricultural Land Classification

## Frequently Asked Questions

### May 2021.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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## General Background Questions

### What is the ALC system?

The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland in England and Wales. The ALC system classifies land into five grades, with 1 being the best and 5 being the worst and Grade 3 subdivided into Subgrades 3a and 3b. The current grading methodology is described in [The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land \(MAFF 1988\)](#) sometimes referred to as 'The Blue Book'.

### What is agricultural land?

Agricultural land is land which is capable of being used for agricultural purposes (e.g. cropping). The current use of the land does not affect the grade or agricultural potential of the land. Where the potential for agriculture has been irreversibly lost (e.g. through housing development) the land should no longer be classed as agricultural. For planning purposes, it is recommended that the Local Planning Authority is contacted to confirm the status of the land. Also see: [Can land be high grade if it is not cropped or is used for grazing?](#)

### What is ALC used for?

The ALC is used to grade the quality of agricultural land so that informed decisions can be made over its future use within the planning system. The planning systems in England and Wales seek to conserve the 'Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Government policies in **Wales** with regard to BMV land can be found on the Welsh Government ALC webpages at: [Welsh Government Web Topic - Agricultural Land Classification](#) BMV policies in **England** are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

### What is Best and Most Versatile agricultural land?

National planning policy defines the Best and Most Versatile agricultural land as land within grades 1, 2 and 3a. This is good to excellent quality land which can best deliver the food and non-food crops for the future.

### How does the Agricultural Land Classification system grade land?

The criteria for grading are based on the long term physical limitations of land for agricultural use, such as **climate** (temperature, rainfall, aspect, exposure and frost risk), **site** (gradient, micro-relief and flood risk) and **soil** (texture, structure, depth and stoniness, and also chemical properties which cannot be corrected), and interactions between these factors such as soil wetness, droughtiness and erosion. Field survey to obtain site and soil data is required. The current grading methodology is described in: [The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land \(MAFF 1988\)](#)

## What do the different grades mean?

### Generalised Description of the Agricultural Land Classification Grades

Grade & standard colour notations	Description of agricultural land	Detail
1	Excellent quality	No or very minor limitations on agricultural use. Wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown. High yielding and consistent.
2	Very good	Minor Limitations on crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. Wide range of crops but limitations on demanding crops (e.g. winter harvested veg). Yield high but lower than Grade 1.
3 (subdivided)	Good to moderate	Moderate limitations on crop choice, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or level of yield. Yields lower and more variable than Grade 2.
3a	Good	Moderate to high yields of narrow range of arable crops (e.g. cereals), or moderate yields of grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and less demanding horticultural crops.
3b	Moderate	Moderate yields of cereals, grass and lower yields other crops. High yields of grass for grazing/ harvesting.
4	Poor	Severe limitations which restrict range and/or level of yields. Mostly grass and occasional arable (cereals and forage), but highly variable yields. Very droughty arable land included.
5	Very poor	Severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing except for pioneering forage crops.

A full description of the grades can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

### Can land be high grade if it is not cropped or is used for grazing?

The current land use does not affect the grade or longer term agricultural potential of the land. Land use is an economic and management choice of the land manager. The ALC grade describes what the land is potentially capable of, not what it is currently used for.

### Can the ALC grading be changed by farming practices?

Normal agricultural land management will rarely, if ever, affect the ALC grading of land. The grading is based on the long term physical and chemical limitations of land for agricultural use. The current or historic agricultural management, or intensity of use, does not affect the ALC grade. ALC grading could potentially only be improved by very major and expensive interventions, well beyond the scope of normal agricultural works. Examples could include major new drainage schemes, new flood defence systems or infilling / levelling of highly uneven land. It is extremely unlikely that an ALC grading would drop because of neglect or poor agricultural management.

### Will fertilizer improve the grade?

Applications of fertiliser or lime are part of the normal management of agricultural land and do not affect the grade. Normal fertiliser levels in the soil have no bearing on ALC grade. Chemical limitations in ALC relate to major long term problems that cannot easily be remediated. These can include extreme acidity, saline environments and presence of toxic elements.



#### **What can I grow on my land? (Crop suitability)**

The suitability of land for certain crops is determined by a variety of factors. The ALC Grade of the land doesn't determine what can be grown, but indicates the type of crops that are generally suited to land of that quality and versatility. Typical crops are given in Appendix 1.

#### **Are land values determined by ALC grade?**

The ALC system was developed to inform land use planning decisions. The use of the ALC system for land valuation has never been intended and should not be used for this purpose.

### **Grade and Map Questions**

#### **What is the grade of my land?**

The only way to accurately determine the agricultural grade of land is by way of a detailed field survey in accordance with the current ALC 1988 guidelines. [What does a detailed field survey involve?](#)

In **Wales**, the Welsh Government holds detailed field survey information for selected areas and a predictive map which can be found at <http://lle.gov.wales/map/alc2>. For further information please contact [LQAS@gov.wales](mailto:LQAS@gov.wales).

The most up-to-date information on ALC Grades in **England** can be found on [www.Magic.gov.uk/](http://www.Magic.gov.uk/) (Landscape tab). Detailed field surveys (Post 1988 ALC layer on the Magic website) are available for selected areas. Also see: What about strategic maps showing the likely occurrence of best and most versatile land mentioned in [TIN049](#)?

#### **Why do different maps show different grades for the same area?**

ALC assessments became more field based and site specific from 1976, partly due to limitations of the Provisional mapping. On 1 January 1989, the current system of ALC grading was introduced: (*The Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land*: MAFF 1988). The guidelines provide the most definitive ALC grading and normally supersede any earlier surveys. In some areas there will be several different levels of detail of ALC data. Soils are variable and the grade of the land can vary over small distances. The ability to map this variation depends on the scale of the survey and the associated scale of mapping. The most detailed survey will usually represent the most definitive grading.

#### **What are the 'Revised Guidelines'?**

The ALC was devised and introduced in the 1960s and Technical Report 11 (MAFF, 1966: Technical Report 11, Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales) outlined the national system. Following a review of the system, criteria for the sub-division of Grade 3 (3a, 3b & 3c) were published in 1976 and Technical Report 11/1 (MAFF, 1976: Technical Report 11/1, Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales). The definition and identification of Sub-grades within Grade 3) outlined the updated.

The new and most up-to-date guidance was issued in 1988 "*The Revised guidelines and criteria for grading the quality of agricultural land*". This was implemented from 1 January 1989. The 1988 Revised guidelines were developed and tested with the aim of updating the system without changing the original concepts. This recognises two subgrades within in Grade 3: Subgrade 3a and Subgrade 3b, the latter being a combination of the previous Subgrades 3b and 3c. Consequently, modern ALC surveys are sometimes referred to as 'post 1988' or post revision. Any surveys carried out using the old guidelines (sometimes referred to as pre 1988 surveys or pre revision) would need to be reassessed under the current criteria.

## Survey Related Questions

### **There is no detailed survey of my land, is a field survey required?**

It depends why you want to know the grade of your land. For a planning purpose you should contact your local planning authority for advice.

### **What does a detailed field survey involve?**

ALC surveys are undertaken, according to the published [Guidelines](#) by field surveyors using hand held augers to examine soils to a depth of 1.2 metres. This usually consists of one boring per hectare, supplemented by digging occasional small pits (usually by hand) to inspect the soil profile at representative locations to provide more detailed information about soil conditions to depths up to 1.2 metres. Information obtained by these methods is combined with climatic and other data to produce an ALC map and report, which will normally include individual soil profile and pit descriptions, and written explanations to support the grading applied. ALC maps are normally produced on an Ordnance Survey base at varying scales from 1:10,000 for detailed work to 1:50 000 for reconnaissance survey. It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions.

### **Can you recommend an ALC surveyor?**

The Institute of Professional Soil Scientists (the professional body of the British Society of Soil Science) maintains a register of competent soil surveyors who have experience of carrying out ALC surveys. [www.soils.org.uk](http://www.soils.org.uk). Other professional bodies may also maintain lists of their members who undertake ALC work. It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions.

### **Is urban land subject to ALC surveys?**

Urban land may be shown on ALC survey maps. It will normally not be surveyed because the land has relatively little potential for return to agricultural use. The full definition of urban and other non-agricultural categories in the ALC system can be found in Appendix 1. You should contact your local planning authority for advice on whether an ALC survey is required to support a planning application.

### **Does the Welsh Government carry out ALC (detailed field) surveys?**

Yes. The Welsh Government does carry out detailed Agricultural Land Classification (detailed field) surveys. These surveys are undertaken largely in response to requests from Local Planning Authorities for individual sites or areas at the urban edge which are being considered for development. The Welsh Government also holds copies of detailed individual Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys carried out by them, as well as the former Welsh Office or Welsh Assembly Government. In addition the Welsh Government also provides a site survey validation service for Local Planning Authorities providing a technical assessment of submitted reports and enables them to fully consider land quality in the decision making process.

### **Does Natural England carry out ALC surveys?**

Natural England provides advice to Local Planning Authorities on ALC matters, but does not carry out ALC field surveys. Natural England holds copies of detailed individual Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys carried out by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food until the late 1990s. These surveys were undertaken largely in response to requests from Local Planning Authorities for individual sites or areas at the urban edge which were to be considered for development; not all agricultural land was surveyed at the time. There is no longer a national programme to survey all areas in detail and since the late 1990's, the Government no longer undertakes detailed field surveys itself. Specialist consultants are engaged by developers, Local Planning Authorities, landowners and others



to carry out detailed Agricultural Land Classification surveys for local plans and other development proposals.

**What sampling density should I use in my ALC field survey?**

There is no prescribed guidance on the sample density of field surveys; however, most experienced ALC surveyors use an average density of 1 sample point per hectare (carried out on the Ordnance Survey 100m grid). Soil pits are also useful to obtain further information about soil structure, porosity and stone content, rock layers etc. to enable confirmation of the grading found on site. The number of soil pits is difficult to specify in advance of starting field survey work. In general, one soil pit is dug for each of the main grades or soil types on the site, though not necessarily for each map unit, but it should be left to the professional judgement of the surveyor as to the appropriate minimum number required.

Surveys at this detailed level can also enable an assessment of the soil resources in line with the [Defra Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites](#) and will allow users to present the land quality case to public inquiry level if required.

Depending upon the type of development, location, scale, purpose of the survey, availability of existing ALC data etc., less detailed surveys (or sometimes more detailed) surveys may be undertaken, but expert advice must be sought from a soil scientist or other practitioner experienced in undertaking ALC survey work. All data captured in ALC surveys is done to the same standard (i.e. standard recording of soil colour, texture etc. plus pits). The only difference in a less detailed survey is the grid spacing, not the quality or detail of data capture at the points examined.

It is important that ALC surveys are completed by an experienced ALC surveyor to ensure that the evidence is accurate and robust to inform planning decisions. The British Society of Soil Scientists run training courses and has a competency scheme, **Working with Soil**, covering aspects of soil survey and the ALC system.

**What climate data is used for ALC?**

The definitive climatic data used for assessing the overall climatic limitation (and for the wetness and droughtiness limitations) are obtained from a series of grid point datasets compiled specifically for ALC (Meteorological Office 1989: Climatological Data for Agricultural Land Classification). They provide long term average values of the required variables on a 5km grid covering the whole of England and Wales. These variables are interpolated for the location (grid reference) and altitude for intermediate sites.

**I am a consultant/soil scientist undertaking a detailed ALC site survey and the land benefits from irrigation. Should I be taking this into account in my grading assessment?**

No. The advice that irrigation should be removed from the ALC assessment was expressed in a consultation on the ALC system in 1996.

## APPENDIX 1: AGRICULTURAL LAND CLASSIFICATION (ALC)

### Descriptions of the Grades and Subgrades

The ALC grades and subgrades are described below in terms of the types of limitation which can occur, typical cropping range and the expected level and consistency of yield. In practice, the grades are defined by reference to physical characteristics. The grading guidance and cut-offs for limitation factors in the MAFF (1988) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land enable land to be ranked in accordance with these general descriptions.

Descriptions are also given of other land categories which may be used on ALC maps.

#### **Grade 1: Excellent Quality Agricultural Land**

Land with no or very minor limitations to agricultural use. A very wide range of agricultural and horticultural crops can be grown and commonly includes top fruit, soft fruit, salad crops and winter harvested vegetables. Yields are high and less variable than on land of lower quality.

#### **Grade 2: Very Good Quality Agricultural Land**

Land with minor limitations which affect crop yield, cultivations or harvesting. A wide range of agricultural or horticultural crops can usually be grown but on some land of this grade there may be reduced flexibility due to difficulties with the production of the more demanding crops such as winter harvested vegetables and arable root crops. The level of yield is generally high but may be lower or more variable than Grade 1 land.

#### **Grade 3: Good to Moderate Quality Land**

Land with moderate limitations which affect the choice of crops, the timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield. When more demanding crops are grown, yields are generally lower or more variable than on land in Grades 1 and 2.

#### **Subgrade 3a: Good Quality Agricultural Land**

Land capable of consistently producing moderate to high yields of a narrow range of arable crops, especially cereals, or moderate yields of a wide range of crops including cereals, grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet and the less demanding horticultural crops.

#### **Subgrade 3b: Moderate Quality Agricultural Land**

Land capable of producing moderate yields of a narrow range of crops, principally cereals and grass, or lower yields of a wider range of crops or high yields of grass which can be grazed or harvested over most of the year.

#### **Grade 4: Poor Quality Agricultural Land**

Land with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops and/or the level of yields. It is mainly suited to grass with occasional arable crops (e.g. cereals and forage crops) the yields of which are variable. In moist climates, yields of grass may be moderate to high but there may be difficulties in utilisation. The grade also includes very droughty arable land.

#### **Grade 5: Very Poor Quality Agricultural Land**

Land with severe limitations which restrict use to permanent pasture or rough grazing, except for occasional pioneer forage crops.

#### **Descriptions of other land categories used on ALC maps**

##### **Urban**

Built-up or 'hard' uses with relatively little potential for a return to agriculture including: housing, industry, commerce, education, transport, religious buildings, cemeteries. Also, hard-surfaced sports facilities, permanent caravan sites and vacant land; all types of derelict land, including mineral workings which are only likely to be reclaimed using derelict land grants.

##### **Non-agricultural**

'Soft' uses where most of the land could be returned relatively easily to agriculture, including: golf courses, private parkland, public open spaces, sports fields, allotments and soft-surfaced areas on airports/ airfields. Also active mineral workings and refuse tips where restoration conditions to 'soft' after-uses may apply.

##### **Woodland**

Includes commercial and non-commercial woodland. A distinction may be made as necessary between farm and non-farm woodland. Includes the normal range of agricultural buildings as well as other relatively permanent structures such as glasshouses. Temporary structures (e.g. polythene tunnels erected for lambing) may be ignored.

##### **Open water**

Includes lakes, ponds and rivers as map scale permits.

##### **Land not surveyed**

Agricultural land which has not been surveyed. Where the land use includes more than one of the above land cover types, e.g. buildings in large grounds, and where map scale permits, the cover types may be shown separately. Otherwise, the most extensive cover type will usually be shown.

**Source:** Section 2: [MAFF \(1988\) Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land.](#)

## **APPENDIX KCC2**

**Welsh Government Guidance Note v2.1  
(May 2021)**



**Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)  
The Hollington Map**

**Guidance Note  
Version 2.1 - May 2021.**



**Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government**

**Contents:**

1. Introduction
2. Using the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map
3. When to Commission a Survey
4. Survey Decision Flowchart
5. Map Creation and Use – Key Points

**How to Determine the Grade of Agricultural Land:**

**1. Introduction:**

Planning Policy Wales (PPW11) paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 outlines national policy towards conserving Wales' Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Further guidance is provided in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6, including the consultation arrangements with the Welsh Government included at Annex B.

Best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land is defined in Planning Policy Wales as Grades 1, 2 and 3a. This is excellent to good quality land which is able to best deliver the food and non-food crops.

The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use within the planning system. It is the only approved system for grading agricultural land quality in England and Wales.

The Agricultural Land Classification Grade should be determined in order to be able to apply Planning Policy in development management decisions. Wales does not have a national survey programme. To survey the whole of Wales at a detailed level is not a realistic prospect, due to cost and time restraints.

The drive for natural resource management and better evidence provision by the Welsh Government has provided the impetus to produce a Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map.

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map uses the best available information to predict the Grade of land on national basis. It has been designed to help Local Planning Authorities, Developers, Surveyors and Land Use Managers make informed long term decisions over the use of land in the planning system and to target survey work to the most appropriate locations.

Further detail concerning the Agricultural Land Classification System can be found in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section of the Welsh Government website.

**2. Using the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map:**

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is the first step in gathering evidence to inform the user as to whether or not Planning Policy Wales (PPW) paragraph 3.58 and 3.59 should be taken into account.

## Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales) The Hollington Map

The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is not intended to replace the need for Agricultural Land Classification survey work. The Map will assist the user in targeting survey work to the most appropriate locations.

It remains the case that the only way to determine the grade of land is by commissioning an agricultural land classification survey. Planning applications and Local Development Plans are expected to be supported by survey evidence where BMV agricultural land is an issue for consideration.

### 3. When to Commission a Survey:

In spatial assessments and development management decisions the grade of land must be known. The flowchart below sets out the decision process.

Where the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map identifies grades 1, 2 or 3a, a survey will be required to determine Grades present and in what proportion.

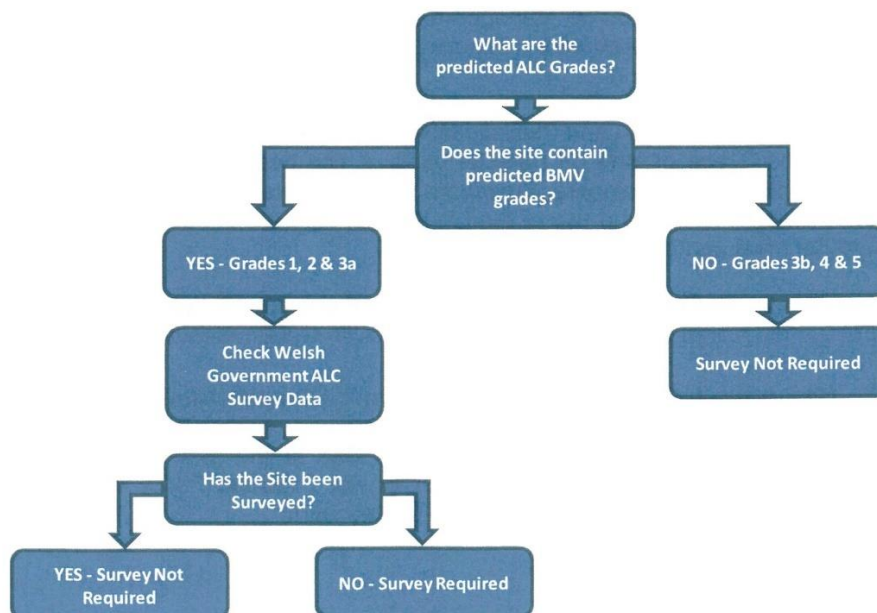
The Welsh Government has also published existing survey data. Before commissioning a survey, these records should be checked to see if the site(s) in question has already been assessed in detail.

If there is no survey record for the site(s) or part remains un-surveyed, an Agricultural Land Classification survey should be commissioned.

The [Land Quality Advisory Service](#) will provide advice on survey requirements and validate agricultural land classification surveys for Local Planning Authorities free of charge. This service allows the Authority to have confidence in the information being presented.

Should any party refuse or neglect to commission a survey, or the survey is not accepted by the Welsh Government, the Predictive Map Grade should be accepted as the best available information.

### 4. Survey Decision Flowchart:



2



## **Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales)**

### **The Hollington Map**

#### **5. Map Creation and Use – Key Points:**

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map replaces the Welsh 'Provisional' 1:250,000 Series of maps produced between 1967 and 1974.
- The 'Provisional' 1:250,000 Series maps were withdrawn in Wales on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and should not to be used to support any planning proposal or as an evidence base for Local Development Plans (LDP).
- Should there be any confusion over which Agricultural Land Classification map to use, please contact [LQAS@gov.wales](mailto:LQAS@gov.wales) for further guidance.
- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map for Wales is based on the principles of the Agricultural Land Classification System of England & Wales, the Revised Guidelines & Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land (MAFF 1988).
- Version 2 (released 2020) of the Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map represents the first significant update since its launch in 2017. The developments are focused on 2 specific areas – inclusion of detailed soil series data were available and an updated ALC survey layer.

#### **Soil Data:**

Where more detailed mapped soil series information is available, it now replaces the 1:250,000 national soil map (Cranfield University). This represents approximately 50% of Wales' surface area with a focus on lowland areas and parts of the Brecon Beacons. The detailed mapping includes scales of 1:25,000; 1:50,000; and, 1:63,000.

Where more detailed mapping is available, soil series phases have been included for shallow and rocky areas.

Where evidence is available, the properties of some soil series have been amended. This is a result of survey work, auger samples, wetness class changes, surveyor knowledge, and recognised mistakes in the mapping digitisation / transcription process

#### **ALC Survey Layer:**

Surveys commissioned, validated and accepted by Welsh Government since 2017 have been added.

The Welsh Government survey layer has been updated for surveys commissioned between 1988 and 2017 following a comprehensive file scanning exercise.

Surveys include those completed by the Welsh Government, the Welsh Office Agricultural Department, ADAS Statutory and commercial organisations. Commercial surveys have only been included when validated by the Welsh Government.

## Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales) The Hollington Map

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map has been designed on a 50m raster (gridded squares). Please note the reliability of background data (especially soils) will vary. The map is a *modelled prediction and not definitive*, albeit based on best available data. For each 50m square the following individual criteria were assessed, and the most limited factor assigned:  
  
Agricultural Land Classification - Climate  
Agricultural Land Classification - Soil Depth  
Agricultural Land Classification - Slope  
Agricultural Land Classification - Soil Wetness  
Agricultural Land Classification - Drought  
Agricultural Land Classification - Stones  
Agricultural Land Classification - Wind Exposure  
Agricultural Land Classification - Other (Surveyor Experience)
- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map does not take into account the following Agricultural Land Classification criteria.  
Flooding  
Pattern Limitation  
Micro-relief  
Frost  
Chemical Limitations  
  
Expert advice will need to be sought to assess the risk of these factors imposing a long term limitation on a site by site basis.
- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map has **not** been designed for, and the Welsh Government does not approve of, the following uses:  
  
Valuing agricultural land  
Assigning agricultural rents  
Allocating financial support
- There are significant differences in the distribution of Agricultural Land Classification Grades between the 'Provisional' and 'Predictive' map products. This is because the Provisional Map is based on criteria pre-dating the introduction of the current 'Revised Guidelines and Criteria for Grading the Quality of Agricultural Land'. (MAFF 1988) and the National Soil Map. The 1988 guidelines are well established in planning, so the grading system used is not new.
- In cases where the predicted grade has been revised from that stated on the Provisional Map, and it is felt this has led to a financial disadvantage or otherwise, the Welsh Government accepts no liability. It is long established that the Agricultural Land Classification system forms the basis for advice given by the Welsh Government on land use planning matters; not for any other uses such as the valuation of land.
- The Welsh Government intends to review and update the Predictive ALC Map as better information becomes available.
- Should it be felt the predicted grade for an area does not fairly reflect agricultural land quality, the Welsh Government will only accept an Agricultural Land Classification survey as evidence the Grade should be changed. The

## **Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map (Wales) The Hollington Map**

Welsh Government shall not be liable for any cost incurred. Changes to the Predictive Map are at the discretion of the Welsh Government. Should the Welsh Government accept the proposed changes, these will follow when the Predictive Map is updated.

- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification Map is available as a GIS layer showing Grades 1-5. This has been made available under Open Government Licence.
- The Predictive Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map is derived from soils data which remain the property of Cranfield University. (Soil data © Cranfield University (NSRI) and for the Controller of HMSO 2019).
- For further information, advice and survey validation, please contact the Land Quality Advice Service:

Email: [LQAS@gov.wales](mailto:LQAS@gov.wales)

Web: [Agricultural Land Classification Information](#)



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