

Guidance Note Version 2.1 - May 2021.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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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.

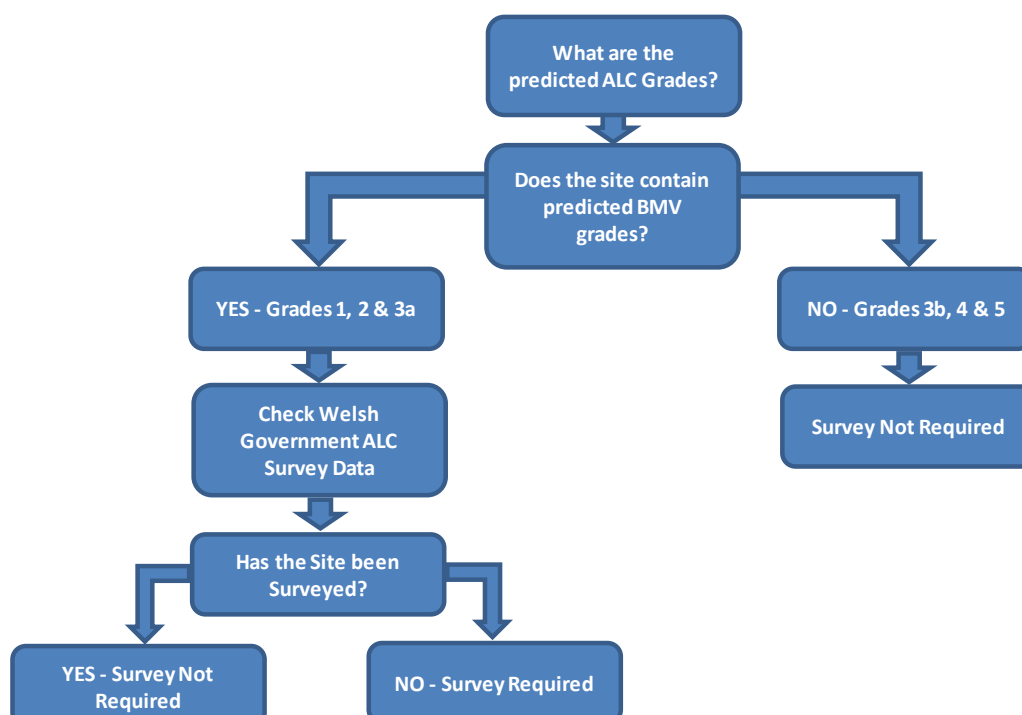
The Welsh Government has also published existing survey data. Before commissioning a survey, these records should be checked to see if the site(s) in question has already been assessed in detail.

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:



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 27th 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 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 where 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

Web: [Agricultural Land Classification Information](#)