

APPENDIX 7.6 – LANDSCAPE DESIGNATIONS BASELINE

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Landscape designations offer insight into the significance recognised by national and local authorities, as well as other organisations, across diverse landscapes. While all landscapes hold inherent importance, especially for residents, workers, and leisure users, the assessment of landscape quality remains somewhat subjective. Nonetheless, the recognition of both Statutory and Non-Statutory landscape designations plays a pivotal role in defining and affirming landscape value.
- 1.1.2 Within the study area, a spectrum of national, regional, and local designations exists, spanning both statutory and non-statutory categories.

2 STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

2.1 Bannau Brycheiniog National Park BBNP

- 2.1.1 The Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) National Park is 3km north of the site at the closest point and has areas of high ground within the ZTV.
- 2.1.2 Established in 1957, exemplifies the harmonious coexistence of nature and human heritage. Spanning 1,347 square kilometres (520 square miles), it resides between rural Mid Wales and the industrious South Wales Valleys. The park features majestic uplands, contrasting with lush valleys, cascading waterfalls, ancient woodlands, archaeological sites, caves, forests, reservoirs, and vibrant communities. This national treasure not only showcases nature's splendour but also encapsulates Wales's rich historical and cultural heritage, a cherished asset for residents and visitors alike.

Special Qualities

- 2.1.3 The following list provides the 10 Special Qualities identified in the National Park Management Plan 2010 – 2015;
- *A National Park offering **peace and tranquillity** with opportunities for quiet enjoyment, inspiration, relaxation and spiritual renewal.*
 - *A feeling of **vitality and healthfulness** that comes from enjoying the Park's fresh air, clean water, rural setting, open land and locally produced foods.*
 - *A **sense of place and cultural identity** – “Welshness” – characterised by the use of the indigenous Welsh language, religious and spiritual connections, unique*

customs and events, traditional foods and crafts, relatively unspoilt historic towns, villages and family farms. The continued practices of traditional skills developed by local inhabitants to live and earn a living here, such as common land practices and grazing.

- *A **sense of discovery** where people are able to explore the Park's hidden secrets and stories such as genealogical histories, prehistoric ritual sites, medieval rural settlements, early industrial sites, local myths, legends and geological treasures.*
- *The Park's **sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty** observed across a variety of harmoniously connected landscapes, including marvellous gorges and waterfalls, classic karst geology with caves and sink holes, contrasting glacial landforms such as cliffs and broad valleys carved from old red sandstone and prominent hilltops with extensive views in all directions.*
- *A working, living "patchwork" of **contrasting patterns, colours, and textures** comprising of well-maintained farmed landscapes, open uplands, lakes and meandering rivers punctuated by small-scale woodlands, country lanes, hedgerows, stone walls and scattered settlements.*
- *Extensive and widespread access to the Park's **diversity of wildlife and richness of semi-natural habitats**, such as native woodlands, heathland and grassland, natural lakes and riparian habitats, ancient hedgerows, limestone pavement and blanket bogs including those of international and national importance.*
- *In the context of the UK, geographically **rugged, remote and challenging** landscapes.*
- ***Enjoyable and accessible** countryside with extensive, widespread and varied opportunities to pursue walking, cycling, fishing, water-based activities and other forms of sustainable recreation or relaxation.*
- *An **intimate sense of community** where small, pastoral towns and villages are comparatively safe, friendly, welcoming and retain a spirit of cooperation.*

2.1.4 The National Park have produced an updated Management Plan: Future Beacons: The Management Plan for the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park 2022-2027 which is currently in consultation draft (October 2021). This expands on the Special Qualities into the following categories:

- *Special Landscapes - sweeping grandeur and outstanding natural beauty, contrasting patterns, colours, and textures, rugged, remote and challenging*
- *Special People - intimate sense of community, sense of place and cultural identity,*
- *Special Experiences - Enjoyable and accessible, sounds, sights, smells and tastes, sense of discovery, peace and tranquillity and darkness*
- *Special Nature - diversity of wildlife and richness of semi-natural habitats*

2.1.5 The objective of the National Park is to “conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park”. The landscape policy is as follows:

“The landscape is vital to all that we are as a National Park. We will in all our endeavours work to guide and harmonise necessary changes in the landscape to ensure that the essence remains strong and vital.

We will conserve and enhance landscape features which have intrinsic value due to their geological geomorphological, ecological, heritage or aesthetic value.”

2.2 Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

2.2.1 The UK employs specific criteria to discern sites of significance within Wales. Among these, the study area hosts 23 Registered Parks and Gardens, detailed in drawing 044. However, only three of these are subject to potential visibility of the proposed turbines. Therefore, the remaining 21, experiencing minimal to no theoretical visibility, and have therefore been excluded from further assessment.

Aberfan: Cemetery, Garden of Remembrance and Former Tip and Slide Area

2.2.2 The Aberfan site is approximately 8km to the south-south-west of the site. Registered for its profound national significance, commemorates the tragic coal tip collapse on October 21, 1966. It includes the Cemetery, Garden of Remembrance, and Former Tip and Slide Area, serving as a poignant memorial to Aberfan disaster victims. The cemetery, housing victims' final resting places, features a memorial cross, pavilion, and serene garden. A distinct section with linked arches in glistening white stone pays solemn tribute to each individual. The Garden of Remembrance, located at the school site, is a somber and dignified space. The landscaped area above Aberfan, a pioneering feat of earth-moving, draining, and landscaping, demonstrates a commitment to stability and efficient drainage. This meticulously designed space, integrated into the natural hillside, symbolizes community resilience and the enduring memory of Aberfan tragedy victims.

Cefn Coed Cemetery & Jewish Burial Ground

- 2.2.3 Cefn Coed Cemetery is approximately 6.5 km west of the Site and is the oldest and largest general public cemetery in Merthyr Tydfil, created in 1859 when the town was experiencing a population explosion. Apart from the loss of the chapel of rest it survives in its entirety with its original layout. Some of the graves are of great historic interest, reflecting a wide range of occupation and wealth. Historical events, such as pit disasters and cholera outbreaks, are also commemorated. A few memorials are of value for their sculptural and monumental qualities and include the work of the well-known Victorian sculptor Joseph Edwards RA. The cemetery is about 40 acres and can be divided into four main sections: the oldest, Cefn, on the east flank of the Taf Fawr valley (opened 1859); the Ffrwd section, on the west flank (1905); and the Pontycapel (1982) and Capel Fach (1994) sections above the Ffrwd. Each section represents a phase of development and expansion since the original area was laid out.
- 2.2.4 The Jewish Burial Ground, opened in 1860 and one of the largest in south Wales, is of historic interest in reflecting the presence of a thriving Jewish community in Merthyr Tydfil in the nineteenth century. It lies as a separate plot adjacent to the Cefn section of the cemetery, just beyond its north end, on the opposite (east) side of the A4701. Trees are absent aside from a large oak which probably predates the cemetery.

Cyfarthfa Castle

- 2.2.5 Cyfarthfa Castle is located approximately 4.5 km to the west of the Site and is a large gothic Victorian mansion built as a mock castle by Robert Lugar for the ironmaster William Crawshay in 1825. The park and gardens are of great historic interest not only as the landscape setting for the Romantic mansion but also for their proximity and usefulness to the ironworks which in their day were considered to add great sublimity to its landscape setting.
- 2.2.6 Cyfarthfa Castle is surrounded by Victorian parkland, converted from private to public park, with formal gardens. By 1873 the park had assumed its present layout. It became a public park in 1910.
- 2.2.7 The park is roughly oval in shape, elongated north-south, with the highest ground in the middle. The park contains a range of landscape and ornamental features, both original and post-1910.

2.3 Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site

2.3.1 Blaenavon is approximately 12km to the east of the site. Inscribed as a World Heritage Site (WHS) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the year 2000, the Blaenavon World Heritage Site stands as an exceptional testament to the pivotal role played by the Upper Avon Llwyd valley in the global narrative of iron making and coal mining during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The parallel advancement of these industries at Blaenavon was a linchpin in propelling the Industrial Revolution forward. Key components of this remarkable heritage site include the meticulously preserved Blaenavon Ironworks and the iconic Big Pit, complemented by an extraordinary relict landscape featuring coal and ore mines, quarries, an early railway system, canals, furnaces, workers' residences, and the social infrastructure of a burgeoning industrial community. The Blaenavon World Heritage Site stands as a living historical archive, showcasing South Wales' pre-eminence in the 19th-century production of iron, steel, and coal.

3 NON-STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

3.1 Special Landscape Areas

3.1.1 There is a total of 36 SLAs within the study area, illustrated on drawing 063. SLA's where it is considered that there will be either no or very limited potential visibility and/or the SLA is located at a distance where effects are unlikely to be significant, have been excluded from further assessment and are not considered further. These SLAs are listed below.

- Brecon Beacons Edge as Llwydcoed (RCTCBC)
- Cwm Orci (RCTCBC)
- Rhondda Fawr Norther Cwm & Slopes (RCTCBC)
- Mynydd Troed y Rhiw Slopes (RCTCBC)
- Mynydd y Cymmer (RCTCBC)
- Llwynceilyn Slopes (RCTCBC)
- Cwm Clydach (RCTCBC)
- Blaenavon Heritage Landscape (TCBC)
- Eastern Uplands (TCBC)
- Afon Llwyd Valley (TCBC)
- South West Uplands (TCBC)

3.1.2 Special Landscape Areas (SLA) are designations put on landscapes that are seen as being attractive and of local significance, so much so, they are protected under planning policy. The SLA's below have been included in this assessment as they have been identified as being within the ZTV as shown on drawing 063.

Caerphilly County Borough Council

Upper Rhymney Valley

3.1.3 The region is a spacious upland within the County Borough, bordering the Brecon Beacons National Park. It comprises open moorland featuring marshy, neutral, and acid grasslands. The SLA showcases industrial heritage through reclaimed land and spoil tips. The upland area offers expansive and unobstructed views, characterized by minimal field boundaries. Adjacent upland areas prominently shape the landscape.

Gelligaer Common

3.1.4 Gelligaer Common is a significant upland landscape in Southeast Wales, displaying uninterrupted land use for centuries. The area features unenclosed uplands with unimproved acid grassland, wet dwarf shrub heath, mosaic flushes of wet heath/acid grassland, open water, bracken, and ephemeral/short perennials on spoil. This Special Landscape Area (SLA) harbours a rich archaeological heritage, showcasing a continuous history of human activity and occupation.

Mynydd Eglwysilan

- 3.1.5 The region, encompassing open uplands and lowlands, is a significant landscape near the densely populated Rhymney Valley to the east and the Cynon Valley to the west. It presents a well-preserved, cohesive multi-period landscape, focusing on 19th and 20th-century industrial and residential development. The area comprises agriculturally improved grassland, interspersed with broadleaved woodlands and bracken, and is subject to extensive grazing in both upland and lowland areas.

North Caerphilly

- 3.1.6 The SLA features a rolling valley side with pastoral farmland, woodland blocks, and diverse plantations. The lower valley sides display a mosaic landscape of rough pasture, semi-improved grassland, hedgerows, and small spinneys. This landscape, remaining largely unchanged, is a remarkably diverse multiperiod upland area with significant concentrations of prehistoric ritual/funerary monuments and medieval settlement sites.

Mynyddislwyn

- 3.1.7 This region features a substantial and well-preserved irregular rural landscape from the post-medieval period, resilient against 20th-century quarrying. It constitutes a relatively small but distinctive landscape unit on the open upland ridge of Mynydd y Lan, situated north of Cwmfelinfach and west of Abercarn. This area is crucial as an open upland space in a densely developed part of the borough, resisting complete conversion to commercial forestry plantations seen in nearby areas like Cwmcarn and Coed Medart to the east.

Mynydd Bedwellty, Rhymney & Sirhowy Sides

- 3.1.8 This landscape highlights 19th and 20th century development, featuring industrial and residential communities. Evidence of historic and contemporary human presence includes prehistoric monuments, industrial remnants, and transport systems. Habitats include agriculturally improved grassland, broadleaved woodlands, and marshy areas. Grazing prevents bracken spread but limits ecological growth. Significant features include ponds, mature hedgerows, and protected species. Geologically, it's a glacial mountain valley with sandstone and drift. Proximity to urban areas offers panoramic views, making it a visually striking landscape.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Nant Morlais & Cwm Taf Fechan

- 3.1.9 A large complex area situated on the fringes of the BBNP with a variety of land uses ranging from an exposed upland character to bleak and open areas remote from development in the northeast with long views to BBNP to incised valleys and upland farmland in the southwest. The area is influenced by its proximity to the town on its southern edge. Former industries are evident by the presence of the disused quarries of Morlais, Bryniau and Twynau Gwynion and the water management of the Dowlais Free Drainage System and Pitwellt Pond.

Gelligaer and Taf Bargoed

- 3.1.10 The area comprises the Taf Bargoed Valley, Gelligaer, and Craig Fargoed, featuring simple ground cover on the remote Gelligaer Common. West-facing slopes with no settlements contrast with enclosed farmland below. Views extend across the coalfield plateau, while the river and tributaries define the unenclosed upland commons. Rich archaeological resources span prehistoric to medieval periods, including dry stone walls and monuments. The landscape surrounds watercourses like Taf Bargoed, Nant Llwynog, and Cwm Cothi, with dispersed medieval farmsteads, streams, woodlands, hedged pastures, and stone walls at higher elevations.

Pontygwaith

- 3.1.11 The area is comprised of a distinct steep sided U-shaped wooded valley consisting primarily of oak and beech dominated woodland with conifers increasing on the upper slopes. The valley is dramatic in places and imparts a positive image of the area. There are attractive views of the area from both sides of the valley with its woodlands and pleasant river corridor. The wooded section of the valley is a relatively peaceful area in which minor footpaths give access to riverbanks which seem much further from urban areas than they are. The rivers tortuous alignment is followed by roads revealing a succession of varying views over the adjacent settlements.

Merthyr West Flank

- 3.1.12 This area lies between the town and the ridgeline and reaches right down to the A470 trunk road which cuts through the landscape and revealing at close hand the mix of industrial heritage, field pattern and woodland on this edge of Merthyr. The area forms a strongly dominant green flank to the town and is distinct ly rural in character.

It contains a complex mosaic of tips, transport features and mine sites intermingled with an upland pasture field pattern. There are areas of woodland and substantial natural regeneration, which have the appearance of natural habitats.

Winchfawr

- 3.1.13 The area is large and lies between the town and the ridgeline and the limit of western settlement and consists chiefly of open access land. It forms a continuous landscape character and boundaries consisting of stream bed (BBNP) to the north, settlement limits to the south and east and adjacent LPA boundary to the southwest. An agricultural landscape of traditional drystone and hedged bank boundaries and sheep pens; post-medieval farms with farm buildings; ancient woodland; historic association, an important industrial extractive landscape associated with the Cyfarthfa Ironworks and other minor industrial incursion.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Trefil and Garnlydan Surrounds

- 3.1.14 This area is the northernmost part of Blaenau Gwent, comprising the lower slopes of the Brecon Beacons to the margins of industrial estates, housing and A465 road. The majority of the area to the west and north is open upland commonland, including areas showing many typical limestone features such as sink holes. Around the shallow valley of the upper Sirhowy there are patterns of fields. To the east, around Garnlydan, the large features of forestry and reservoirs dominate in a more varied landscape which includes the small valley of Cwm Carno, and areas of open upland.

Cefn Manmoel

- 3.1.15 This is the northwestsoutheast ridge and sides between the Sirhowy valley and the Ebbw Fawr. There is the open upland ridge, extending from Hilltop southward to above Cwm. The northwestern slopes overlook the Sirhowy Valley and are covered with a mix of planted woodland and open fields. The eastern part, being the steep Ebbw Fawr valley sides, have a varied profile and areas of tipping, quarrying, reclaimed land and open commonland, as well as dense forestry in the south. The southern part of the ridge, a long slither of which is in this SLA, is covered with a distinctive field pattern relating to the old settlement of Manmoel.

Mynydd Carn-y-Cefn & Cefn yr Arail

- 3.1.16 Within this SLA there are four main landscape types. There is the central open upland ridge. On either side are steep Ebbw Fawr and Ebbw Fach valley sides, with their mix of open land, reclaimed land and tips, quarries and rough ground. In the north the more rounded slopes overlooking the Heads of the Valleys are a mix of fields, un-reclaimed tips and recreational uses. On the southernmost lower parts of the ridge there are fields with dense forestry on the adjacent steep valley sides.

Eastern Ridge & Mynydd James

- 3.1.17 The extensive Eastern Ridge & Mynydd James SLA covers all of the open land of the eastern ridge, and its slopes to the Ebbw Fach valley, excluding Cwm Tyleri and Cwm Celyn (which form a separate SLA). There are three main landscape types within this area. The large majority is open upland common land, in places extending down the valley sides as well as over the ridges, and rising to the highest point in Blaenau Gwent on Coity Mountain. The remainder of the Ebbw Fach valley sides are a mosaic of woodland and fields as well as areas of tips and past workings. The northern slopes, overlooking the Heads of the Valleys and Brynmawr, are a mix of open hillsides and fields, pockmarked with past tipping and extraction.

St Illtyd Plateau & Ebbw Eastern Sides

- 3.1.18 Taking up most of the south-eastern ‘peninsula’ of Blaenau Gwent, this area lies in the extreme south-east of the county, adjacent to the boundary with Torfaen in the east. This is part of the dissected plateau of the mid section of the coalfield. The area consists of two distinct landscape types. The plateau, rare in Blaenau Gwent for being the only extensive area of enclosed farmland, is centred on the ancient settlement of St. Illtyd. To the west and south, the plateau drops away forming the steep, well-wooded Ebbw Fach valley sides, including several small side valleys. All the area has generally hardly been disturbed by industrialisation.

Cwm Tyleri & Cwm Celyn

- 3.1.19 These two south-flowing side valleys of the Ebbw Fach, in the eastern part of the county, are enclosed by the upland of the Eastern Ridge & Mynydd James SLA, in the upper valleys section of the coalfield. Although separate, they consist of a single landscape type, being enclosed valley sides, mainly fields, with areas of woodland. Cwm Tyleri includes areas of reclaimed land and lakes which are now becoming well-integrated into rural valley landscape.

Beaufort Common

- 3.1.20 This is the belt of heads of the valleys land bounded by the A465 in the north and the urban boundaries of Beaufort and Brynmawr in the south. It consists of one landscape type, an area of rounded hills, lower than those to both north and south, mainly rough pasture land, with open access to recent woodland in the west, with areas of both reclaimed and un-reclaimed old tips, including areas of 'patches' of historic value.

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

Cynon Valley Northern Slopes

- 3.1.21 This area includes lengths of valley sides showing variety of characters, including open grassland and common, forestry, broadleaf woodland, fields of improved and unimproved grassland, reclaimed and planted tips and un-reclaimed tips. From the upper slopes there are fine viewpoints giving extensive vistas up and down the Cynon

Taff Vale Eastern Slopes

- 3.1.22 The South Wales Valleys present a striking landscape along the A470, with rural hillsides contrasting densely developed valleys to the west. From small irregular fields and woods on lower slopes to larger fields on mid slopes, leading to open land atop, the area offers a diverse terrain. Cefn Eglwysilan's high point features prominent landmarks, while historic earthworks of Senghenydd estate adorn the ridge. Cilfynydd tips in the north, remnants of industrial history, now blend attractively with nature.

Hirwaun Common, Cwm Dare & Cwm Aman

- 3.1.23 This area consists of a series of well-defined steep glacial cirques cut into high along northern edge of coalfields. The steep slopes and tops are mainly open common land, with grassland and heath habitats, there are also areas of broadleaf woodland on the lower slopes around Dare valley. Cairns and other ancient monuments on tops are part of widespread evidence of early settlements.

Mynydd y Glyn & Nant Muchudd Basin

- 3.1.24 The largest area in RCT boasts unindustrialized lowland farmland rising to Mynydd Glyn's forested hill in the north. It features narrow lanes, irregular fields with mixed hedges, and scattered farms, distinct from other parts of RCT. The basin harbors unimproved grassland habitats, potentially a candidate SSSI. The Nant Gelliwion

valley, with woodland SSSI, leads into Pontypridd. Mynydd Glyn's steep northern sides provide a dramatic backdrop to settlements, offering extensive views across the Rhondda Valleys and the coalfield plateau, with traditional smallholdings and allotments overlooking Pontypridd and Trehafod.

Treforest Western Slopes

- 3.1.25 The area features picturesque farmland on rolling plateau with irregular fields, mainly improved grassland, and large hedges. Wooded slopes toward Taff Vale contribute significantly to the scenic views from A470 and Treforest. These woodlands are vital to the overall impression of the Valleys from the major north/south route through Wales. There's a blend of broadleaf woodlands and open common land on slopes, with indistinct boundaries and pockets of derelict land near the northern edge at Treforest.

3.2 Visually important local landscapes (VILL's)

- 3.2.1 Part of the Caerphilly Council Local Development Plan, VILLs are designations that seek to protect the distinctive features or characteristics of the visual and sensory landscape and how people respond to the landscape.

Northern Rhymney Valley

- 3.2.2 The visual character of the VILL is a predominantly upland and open area. Distinctive rocky hillside with rock outcrops, upper valley sides and views across the Rhymney valley give it a strong upland character, occasionally limited by topography and / or vegetation. Scattered rural settlements and farms are the predominant built form in the area. Evidence of industrial and mining throughout the VILL. Wind noise is a dominant sensory feature, which evokes particular experiences of exposure and wildness on the upland areas.

Manmoel

- 3.2.3 The VILL is predominantly an upland landscape with a strong sense of openness. The Upland feel of the landscape increases with elevation as views increase in quality. The upland area is characterised by rough grassland with scattered woodland, hedgerows and narrow lanes and affords views down valleys and to plantation woodland. Manmoel Common falls within this upland area and is characterised by the same landscape qualities. This upland area forms the northern tip of the VILL.

Abercarn

- 3.2.4 The forested areas within the VILL boundary are of high visual and sensory value for rarity in the regional context. The overall visual and sensory layer has the evaluation of moderate, which is classified as locally important. Some views are restricted by forestry but open ridgelines afford views across adjacent wooded valleys. Coniferous plantation flanks areas of heath (which provide autumn colour) and grassland.

3.3 The Registered Landscapes of Outstanding and of Special Interest in Wales

- 3.3.1 The Register of Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales was established by the International Council on Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS) UK to identify landscape that can be considered of importance within Wales based upon a clear set of criteria.

Merthyr Tydfil – Outstanding

- 3.3.2 Merthyr Tydfil occupies a natural basin at the head of the Taff valley. High hills and ridges reach 450m above OD on all sides, with development constrained to the basin floor and smaller tributary valleys of the Taff, which itself provides the only natural route out of the basin to the southeast. The area identified here contains many and diverse elements, which include Merthyr's Dowlais Ironworks, established in 1759, and probably the first such works to use coke in South Wales.

Gelli-Gaer Common – Outstanding

- 3.3.3 The landscape area of Gelli-gaer Common represents an increasingly rare survival in Southeast Wales of an area of high upland moor rich in a diverse archaeological resource. The Common and the area lying immediately to the southeast which is included here, is about 8km long and 1km wide and extends from the pivotal ancient settlement of Gelligaer in the south east to the summits of Pen Garnbugail and Mynydd Fochriw in the north west.

Blaenavon – Outstanding

- 3.3.4 Blaenavon is located at the head of the Afon Llwyd valley in one of the more exposed areas of the Gwent uplands. The lowest part of the town, where the river enters the narrow valley floor, is at 300m above OD. The valley sides rise fairly steeply to the surrounding moorland ridges of Cefn Coch, Coity Mountain and the Blorenghe which reach almost 600m above OD. The Pwll Du area, to the north of the town, occupies

the plateau forming the watershed between the Afon Llwyd valley and the Clydach gorge to the north. The whole area is covered by early, coal opencasts and it survives as probably the only sizeable, abandoned, multiple period, opencast mineral working in South Wales

Clydach George – Special

- 3.3.5 The short but spectacular Clydach Gorge cuts through the extreme northeast corner of the South Wales coalfield, between the North Gwent uplands to the south and Llangattock Mountain to the north. The floor of the gorge drops steeply down from Bryn-mawr in the west at 350m above OD, to Gilwern in the east at 100m above OD, in a distance of just over 5km. The gorge is seldom more than 0.5km wide and its sides rise extremely steeply, precipitously in places, to gentler slopes on either side above about 350m above OD.

East Fforest Fawr and Mynydd-y-Glog – Special

- 3.3.6 The visually imposing northwards-facing escarpments and adjoining dramatic mountain masses of the Black Mountains, the Brecon Beacons, Fforest Fawr and the Black Mountain together form a vast natural ridge and physical barrier that divides South from Mid-Wales. Fforest Fawr forms the central part of this barrier with the area identified here comprising its eastern side situated between the valleys of the Mellte in the west and the Taf Fawr in the east. This natural block of land extends from Fan Fawr and Mynydd y Garn in the north, to Cadair Fawr, Cefn Sychbant and Mynydd-y-glôg in the south which lay outside the historical extent of the forest.

The Rhondda – Special

- 3.3.7 The geographical area of the Rhondda identified here comprises two narrow, steep sided valleys, the Rhondda Fawr and the Rhondda Fach, situated in the heart of the Glamorgan coalfield. The two river valleys, rarely more than 0.5km wide, wind their way south-eastwards on a roughly parallel course before converging at Porth y Cymmer (Porth), the confluence of the Rhondda river, which flows a further 6km to reach the River Taf at Pontypridd. In between, and on either side of the valleys, are narrow ridges with areas of upland plateaux interspersed with local summits between 300m and 600m above OD.

Middle Usk Valley: Brecon and Llangorse – Special

- 3.3.8 The section of the Usk valley identified here lies to the east and west of Brecon in southern Powys; an area confined on the south by eastern flanks of the Brecon

Beacons range and on the north by the southern foothills of Mynydd Epynt. To the east, the western end of the Black Mountains scarp overlooks the shallow basin containing Llangorse Lake which has been included in the area. The Usk valley forms a distinctive and easily accessible corridor across the area, with its wide, flat floor rising gently from 120m above OD at Llansantffraed in the east to 150m above OD at Aberbrân in the west.

3.4 Country parks

3.4.1 Seven Country Parks are situated within the study area, as depicted drawing 040. For those Country Parks where the potential for visibility is deemed minimal or the intervening distance is substantial, significant effects are not anticipated. Consequently, these parks have been excluded from further assessment. The excluded Country Parks are listed below.

- Parc Coetir Bargod (CCBC)
- Parc Penallta (CCBC)
- Sirhowy Valley (CCBC)
- Pen-y-Fan Pond (MTCBC)

3.4.2 Below are listed Country Parks where significant effects are anticipated due to the proposed development. Detailed descriptions of each park follow.

Park Brynbach (BGCBC)

3.4.3 Based in Tredegar approximately 1km to the east of the site. As a local nature reserve, the park boasts 340 acres of stunning grass and woodland including a 36-acre lake and a number of nature trails and an interactive sculpture trail.

Parc Cwm Darran (CCBC)

3.4.4 Located in the Darran Valley, approximately 2.5km south of the site. The park includes a lake, extensive areas of woodland and the Cwmllydrew Meadows Local Nature Reserve all connected by a network of footpaths.

Dare Valley (RCTCBC)

3.4.5 This park is located in Aberdare, approximately 12km west of the site. Created from around 500 acres of land that was reclaimed from former coal mines, the park offers a wide range of activities set in a mixture of woodlands, pastures and moorland.

3.5 National trails / long distance footpaths

Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk

- 3.5.1 The Rhymney Riverside Walk spans a linear distance of 32 miles, tracing the course of the Rhymney Valley and meandering from the river's source to the southern plains. This designated footpath traverses the eastern boundary of the site.

Rhymney Riverside Walk

- 3.5.2 This trail winds through the hills around the Rhymney Valley, following quiet countryside paths and lanes. The route includes steep beech woodlands and panoramic mountain tops, with Mynydd Machen as the highest point. It connects to the Taff-Ely Ridgeway Walk at Caerphilly Common and overlaps with the Sirhowy Valley Walk in the east, passing about 200m north of the site.

Cambrian Way

- 3.5.3 The footpath, spanning approximately 6k north of the site, meanders along a northerly route over notable landmarks such as the Black Mountains, Brecon Beacons, Carmarthen Fan, Plynlimon, Cadair Idris, the Rhinogs, the Snowdon massif, and the Carneddau before reaching the north coast.

Beacons way

- 3.5.4 The Beacons Way, the official trail of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in Wales, spans approximately 8.5km north of the site. Crossing major ranges like the Black Mountains, the Brecon Beacons, and the Black Mountain, this trail showcases the stunning upland scenery of the significant protected landscape in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Sirhowy Valley Walk

- 3.5.5 Crossing 5km east of the site, the route traverses lowland and upland farms, woodlands, riverside parks, and numerous historically significant sites, including an Iron Age hill fort, an old mill, and a canal center, concluding near Tredegar.

Usk Valley Walk

- 3.5.6 The Walk traverses approximately 13km northeast of the site, proceeding along the Usk valley, passing through the historic market town of Usk. It utilizes riverside, field, and woodland paths, as well as some minor roads, until reaching Abergavenny. From there, it continues along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal towpath to Brecon.

Ebbw Valley Walk

- 3.5.7 Passing approximately 7km to the east of the site, the Walk goes through forests and woodlands, exploring the industrial history, farming techniques and local superstitions associated with the valley.

Taff Trail

- 3.5.8 The Taff Trail, spanning 5km westward, caters to pedestrians and cyclists, primarily utilizing converted railway lines, former canals, and forestry tracks. It traverses the Taff Valley, reaching Llandaff, Pontypridd, and Merthyr Tydfil. Beyond, it circles the east of the Brecon Beacons via Talybont and Pencelli to Brecon.

Raven Walk

- 3.5.9 The Raven Walk, a 12-mile circular route, passes approximately 17k to the south of the site, traversing farmland and woodland with panoramic views of the Severn Estuary to the south and the Brecon Beacons to the north..

Coed Morgannwg Way

- 3.5.10 The Way, passing approximately 6km west of the site, intersects the Taff Trail at the finish. Crossing Forestry Commission land, it traverses Coed Morgannwg, a complex of four upland forests, including Dare Valley and Craig y Llyn. The route ascends to various viewpoints before reaching Afan Argoed Country Park. Continuing on less elevated paths, it passes archaeological remains spanning prehistoric to industrial times.

Iron Mountain Trail

- 3.5.11 Passing 14km to the east of the site, Two walks, Parts I & II, of the Iron Mountain Trail combine to give a 12 mile figure of eight circuit of the major sites of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.

Monmouthshire Way

- 3.5.12 The Monmouthshire Way, a 116-mile circular route, traverses the ancient county of Monmouthshire, passing approximately 12km east of the site. The route showcases significant contrasts, exploring diverse countryside while visiting Chepstow, Monmouth, Abergavenny, Pontypool, and Usk.

4 NATIONAL CYCLE ROUTES (NCR'S)

- 4.1.1 There is a network of National Cycle routes within the study area that contribute to the regional cycling infrastructure. Notably, Route 46 traverses the area in an east-to-west direction, aligning with the Heads of the Valleys Road. Route 468 extends southwards, following the course of the Rhymney Valley. Additionally, a comprehensive network of other cycling routes, including Routes 465, 466, 467, and 469, further enhances the cycling connectivity within the study area.