

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2006-2021)

Natural Environment Topic Paper

April 2008

Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
National Policy Context	1
Local Policy Context	4
Key Issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf	7
Preferred Strategy	8
Draft Local Development Plan Policy	10
Further Advice	18

BACKGROUND

In January 2007 the Council issued for public consultation the Local Development Plan: Preferred Strategy. The Strategy was the first stage of the new statutory local development plan (LDP).

The next stage in the plan making process is the production of a deposit draft LDP. In order to ensure the soundness of the emerging LDP and transparency in the plan making process, the Council has produced a series of topic papers.

The topic papers address the main area of policy to be considered in the LDP. **It should be stressed that these papers are a starting point for policy development, through the sustainability appraisal process and as the Council's evidence base develops, emerging LDP policy will evolve and be refined.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Environment Strategy for Wales (2006) considers that *the landscape and its historic character is a reflection of our culture and history and our continuous interaction with the environment and the resources it provides. Our landscapes must provide real places for people to live, work, enjoy recreation and may provide the scenic backdrop that attracts tourism and enhances the quality of life of the people of Wales. The quality and diversity of the natural and historic landscape should be maintained and enhanced.*

The document further outlines the challenges facing this natural environment, taking into consideration the range of

pressures currently being put upon it from modern society. It is essential that these challenges are met, through addressing such issues as the degradation of habitats and ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity, whilst maintaining our landscapes and heritage quality and distinctiveness.

This Topic Paper aims to set out how the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP is able to protect, safeguard and develop the natural heritage of Rhondda Cynon Taf. These objectives will be achieved through formulating comprehensive policies on all aspects of the natural environment so that they may be appreciated by generations to come.

In order to do this the topic paper will outline;

- **The policy context** for the natural environment, including an explanation and the objectives of national, regional and local policy;
- **Key issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf**, which relate specifically to the natural environment;
- **The Preferred Strategy** policy in respect of the natural environment, representations to the Strategy and proposed policy response; and,
- **Draft LDP Policy**, which provides a policy context for new housing development.

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (adopted 2004)

The Wales Spatial Plan provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf, along with the neighbouring authorities of Cardiff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan has been identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The vision for the Capital Network is:

“An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally by increasing its global visibility through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and the UK and Europe, helping spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales”.

Whilst the Spatial Plan may not provide a detailed framework for the future of planning the natural environment in South East Wales it does relate the subject to the broader context of the future viability of the region;

- *By safeguarding and enhancing both the natural and built environment we will attract people to and retain them in our communities and preserve the foundations for the future.*
- *Wales benefits from high quality landscapes and a rich biodiversity. Preserving and enhancing this quality will be increasingly important to the long term ability of Wales to be a place where people want to live and work.*

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valley 2020 (June 2006).

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the heads of the Valleys 2020 as the name suggests, outlines a strategy for regenerating the Northern Valley areas of South East Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the strategy includes Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. The objectives of the programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:

- An attractive and well used natural, historic and built environment;
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities;
- A well educated, skilled and healthier population;
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience, and
- Public confidence in a shared bright future.

Specifically, Strategic Programme 2; A perception Changing Landscape, sets out the aim to develop and implement a number of key strategic landscape-scale environmental enhancements, concentrating on key corridors and gateways such as the Heads of the Valleys Road and Hirwaun. The programme will also seek to protect, enhance and manage the natural and semi-natural environment, its resources and biodiversity.

Planning Policy Wales (2002) and Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide 2006.

Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), natural environment policy is embodied in Planning Policy Wales (PPW). Supplementary guidance in relation to the natural environment is contained in Planning Guidance (Wales), Technical Advice Note (Wales) 5 – Nature Conservation and Planning 1996 and Consultation Draft Revised Technical Advice Note 5 'Nature Conservation And Planning' January 2006. The Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006) relates the guidance to the LDP system, identifying clear statements of national policy that should only be repeated where local circumstances require.

The Assembly Government's objectives for the conservation and improvement of the natural heritage are to;

- *Promote the conservation of landscape and biodiversity, in particular the conservation of native wildlife and habitats;*
- *Ensure that action in Wales contributes to meeting international responsibilities and obligations for the natural environment;*
- *Ensure that statutorily designated sites are properly protected and managed; and to safeguard protected species.*

PPW goes on to state that *a role of the planning system is to ensure that society's land requirements are met in a ways which do not impose unnecessary constraints on development whilst ensuring that all reasonable steps are taken to safeguard or enhance the environment. However, conservation and development can often be fully integrated. With careful planning and design, not only can the potential*

for conflict be minimised, but new opportunities for sustainable development can also be created. For example, new development on previously developed land provides opportunities to restore and enhance the natural heritage through land rehabilitation, landscape management and the creation of new or improved habitats.

Planning Guidance (Wales), Technical Advice Note (TAN) (Wales) 5 – Nature Conservation and Planning 1996

The Technical Advice Note aims to ensure that development plans are based on adequate information regarding geology, landform, habitats and species and nature conservation issues.

Nature conservation policies should indicate the criteria against which a development will be judged, having regard to the relative significance on international, national and local designations.

Consultation Draft Revised Technical Advice Note 5 'Nature Conservation And Planning' January 2006

The draft revised TAN outlines the Welsh Assembly Governments aims and objectives to promote the Natural Environment, taking into consideration further guidance and the increased importance of the topic area in the interim period since 1996.

The document aims to develop an ambitious but achievable vision of the environment of the plan area in the future, including healthy, functioning ecosystems, a wealth of native

wildlife and natural features and the habitats and natural processes on which they will depend.

The TAN outlines how this vision is achieved through considering a range of international and national legislation and developing local policy and designations.

European Legislation and Designation Sites.

The EC Birds and Habitats Directives and the Ramsar Convention, guide the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994, which provide for the selection of candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) and the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

National Legislation and Designated Sites.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 or Section 35 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981

Local Sites

Policies in Local Development Plans should also provide for the protection of Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs). Locally designated sites should be subject to the application of rigorous criteria to ensure their designation is justified on biological or geological grounds.

Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement; 01/2006 - Housing

The document seeks to promote policies which seek to make maximum use of vacant urban land for housing will need to distinguish between sites which need to be retained for recreation, amenity or nature conservation purposes, and areas which are genuinely suitable for housing development.

3. LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

A Better Life – Our Community Plan 2001 – 2014

A Better Life – Our Community Plan sets out a framework for creating a brighter future for everyone who lives and works in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The plan was developed through the Better Life Consortium, during 2003/2004. The community Plan identifies 5 key themes under which are a series of local level aims. The key themes are:

- Safer Communities
- Our Living Space
- Our Health and Well Being
- Boosting Our Local Economy
- Learning for Growth

The key themes identified in the Community Plan have been developed into strategies for improving the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Natural Environment is considered as part of 'Our Living Space, an environmental improvement strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf'.

The strategy sets out its aspiration that Rhondda Cynon Taf will be a community where everyone who lives, works in or visits the area will enjoy the benefits of a better quality of life, achieving their potential, while helping to develop and protect the area for the benefit of others

The goals for 'Our Living Space' are;

- *To protect and improve our local environment, which we value because of the growing quality of its biodiversity, natural beauty, heritage, parks and open spaces, streetscape and architecture*
- *To make Rhondda Cynon Taf a place where people want to live in the 21st century, because of the high quality of life it offers*

The Strategy sets out the following themes.

- Biodiversity and Rivers
- Waste
- A cleaner, safer environment
- Local environments
- The built environment
- Transport
- Energy, resource use and climate change
- Education and awareness raising

Of particular relevance to this topic area, is the theme of biodiversity and rivers. Its main priority is to increase the biodiversity value of land within Rhondda Cynon Taf and improve the quality of the local rivers.

It aims to protect and enhance the sites of recognised biodiversity value, with improved land management to benefit wildlife.

Much reference in this theme is to the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, which considers these issues in greater detail.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (2000 updated draft 2008)

The LBAP has been produced by the Council in partnership with a series of public, private and voluntary bodies to ensure the national targets for species and habitats, as specified in the UK Action Plan, are translated into effective action at the local level.

The LBAP identifies the breadth of important biodiversity that exists in Rhondda Cynon Taf and sets out programmes and actions to ensure their conservation and enhancement.

The LBAP will be a key document in providing evidence for locally designated sites.

Special Landscape Areas

Landmap

The Countryside Council for Wales has developed 'LANDMAP', which is a programme that assesses the diversity of landscapes within Wales. It identifies and explains their most important characteristics and qualities – such as an

area's geological, ecological, visual, cultural and historic character.

Previous work had been undertaken for Rhondda Cynon Taf using broad, overall, evaluations on the Landmap information held on the above five areas. However, this meant missing out on defining some locally important landscapes.

Therefore CCW engaged Environment Systems to develop a more refined method of overlaying all the 35 evaluation criteria of the five aspect layers.

Regional SLA framework.

In March 2007 consultants 'TACP' were appointed by a consortium of south-east Wales local authorities, including Rhondda Cynon Taf, to develop criteria for the designation of Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). **(See report – Development of criteria for Special Landscape Area designation for South East Wales Local Authorities).**

A detailed approach and methodology was discussed and agreed amongst the group to use the new Landmap aspect area evaluation criteria.

SLA designation in Rhondda Cynon Taf

In February 2007 Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect was appointed by Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council (RCT) to carry out a study of the Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) in the county – **(see report - Proposals for designation of Special Landscape Areas).**

The objective of this study was to identify and justify a revised set of SLAs for use in the Local Development Plan (LDP). Current Planning Policy Wales (Section 5.3.11) states that SLAs should be based on assessment of nature conservation, landscape and geological value of the site, thereby advocating a more holistic approach than the previous assessment for SLAs.

Both the use of overall evaluations and of all 35 evaluations have been tested against the *LANDMAP* information for RCT. The resulting Landscape Value maps appear to give a more balanced overview as a basis to define broad search areas.

It was identified, however, that the Landmap data was not sufficient alone for providing the basis for identifying the proposed SLAs. In addition to the *LANDMAP* data, the Development of Criteria report allowed for other more specific or local needs to be identified at stage 1, and therefore included at all later stages.

These include;

- **Prominence,**
- **Spectacle – dramatic topography and views,**
- **Unspoilt areas - Pre-industrial patterns of land use**
Unspoilt' areas:
- **Remoteness & tranquillity**
- **Vulnerability & sensitivity to change**
- **Locally rare landscape**
- **Setting for special landscapes**

Cynon Valley River Park Draft Strategy (2007).

The Heads of the Valleys Programme funded a draft Cynon Valley River Park Plan in 2006/7 to develop proposals for the natural improvement of the undeveloped floodplains of the River Cynon.

The Cynon Valley River Park concept is being developed with the key focus on the strategic importance of the floodplain to provide a broader scope of nature conservation and public access.

It consists of a network of natural open spaces, of the various landforms, natural habitats and features of the River Cynon and its floodplains. The proposals then aims to connect these sites with a public route for walking, cycling etc, leading from Penderyn to Pontcynon, where it will join the Taff Trail.

4. KEY ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The key issues to be addressed by the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP have been identified by making an assessment of the following:

- The results of pre-deposit consultation with key stakeholders;
- The results of the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Exercise ;
- A review of baseline social, economic environmental information,;

The issues identified through this process will inform directly the development of the spatial strategy for the LDP.

Pre Deposit Consultation

Natural environment issues identified are as follows:

- Need for environmental improvement/protection to support/promote tourism
- River quality and rights of way
- Protection of the environment along the M4 corridor
- Wind farm – dictated by Welsh Assembly Government – need careful location if not to make the area undesirable for tourism, homebuyers, business
- Amount of land previously use for industry, and derelict land reclamation.

The new LDP process was also seen as an opportunity to market the natural heritage and promote the landscape and the cultural heritage of the area. There was opinion that there was no suitable land for development in the northern part of the county, and that the natural environment should take precedence here.

Other issues raise were the need to protect wildlife and designated wildlife sites and the health of rivers and lakes.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The SA/SEA identified the following natural environment issues:

- The need to protect and enhance the quality of the environment, local distinctiveness, cultural and historical heritage.
- Conserve and enhance the biodiversity of Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Sustainability problems, objectives and issues;

Protection of the landscape and biodiversity – the quality of the landscape is recognised as an important factor in the future of the borough. Whilst the landscape is valued for its own sake, it could also play an important role in creating a desirable environment in which to live and work and be the basis for an improved tourist and leisure economy.

5. PREFERRED STRATEGY

The Preferred Strategy provides the following policy framework for the natural environment in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Objectives of the Local Development Plan;

Paragraph 4.2 of the Preferred Strategy list 16 objectives for the LDP. The following objectives are the most relevant to the topic area;

- Promote and protect the cultural and heritage including landscape, archaeology and language
- Improve, protect and enhance the landscape and countryside

- Protect and enhance the diversity and abundance of wildlife habitats and native species
- Improve, protect and enhance the water environment

Development Strategy

Paragraphs 6.22 and 6.23 of the Preferred Strategy provides a strategy for the future of the natural environment. The paragraphs are as followed.

Environmental Protection

6.22 The natural environment of Rhondda Cynon Taf has seen considerable changes over the past 30 years. As the pressures put upon it by heavy industry have subsided, the visual and wildlife qualities that are unique to the area have been able to thrive and in some cases, return. However, the landscapes and biodiversity that exist within the northern strategy area and the undulating countryside of the valleys mouths and Vale fringe in the southern strategy area are still under continuous pressure from the large human population that lives there.

6.23 The Strategy will play a vital role in securing an appropriate balance between protection of the natural environment and historic heritage. In order to maintain and improve the local environment the Strategy is based on providing a high level of protection for important features as well as providing a basis for positive policies on issues such as design, conservation and amenity provision.

Strategic Policy

The Strategic Policy is as follows;

SP 11 - Protection of the Natural Environment

Rhondda Cynon Taf’s distinctive rural character will be preserved and enhanced by the protection and improvement of the natural environment, countryside and landscape from inappropriate development. Development proposals will not be permitted if it would cause unacceptable harm to the following:-

- a) the character and quality of local landscapes and the wider countryside;**
- b) ecology and wildlife of acknowledged importance;**
- c) the quality of natural resources including water, air and soil;**
- d) natural drainage of surface water;**

Where, the benefits of development outweigh the conservation interest, mitigation measures required to offset adverse effects will be secured by planning condition and/or obligation.

Representations to the Preferred Strategy

Representation made in respect of the Natural Environment element of the Preferred Strategy fall into 4 areas – representations to the Paragraphs 3.1 – 3.8 - Key Issues,,

paragraphs 6.22 and 6.23 Strategic Policies SP1, SP2 and SP11.

Outlined below is a summary of the main representations submitted in respect of these areas.

Paragraphs 3.1 – 3.8 - Key Issues,

Issue; Key issues should include reference to those habitats and species identified in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Biodiversity Plan.

Response: Noted. The Draft LDP will take into consideration the aims and objectives of the LBAP

Issue: Support for the factors identified as key environmental issues. The LDP must provide protection for the natural environment.

Response: Support noted.

Paragraph 6.22 - 6.23 – Environmental Protection

Issue: The LDP must provide protection for the natural environment.

Response: The Draft LDP will include detailed policies for the protection of the natural environment.

Representations to Strategic Policies SP1 and SP2

Issue: SP1 and SP2 Area Strategy policies need to make reference to protecting the natural and built heritage in the promotion of growth in the strategy areas.

Response: The Draft LDP will include detailed policies for the protection of the natural heritage when considering development and growth in the Strategy areas.

Representations to Strategic Policy SP11 – Natural Environment

Issue: Development proposals should not be permitted where it would cause unacceptable harm to local and nationally designated sites.

Response: The Draft LDP will include detailed policies for the protection of the natural environment, and in particular, local and nationally designated sites.

6. DRAFT LDP POLICY

Strategic Policy

The Strategic Policy is as follows;

SP 11 - Protection of the Natural Environment

Rhondda Cynon Taf’s distinctive rural character will be preserved and enhanced by the protection and improvement of the natural environment, countryside and landscape from inappropriate development.

Development proposals will not be permitted if it would cause unacceptable harm to the following:-

a) the character and quality of local landscapes and the wider countryside;

b) ecology and wildlife of acknowledged importance;

c) the quality of natural resources including water, air and soil;

d) natural drainage of surface water;

Where, the benefits of development outweigh the conservation interest, mitigation measures required to offset adverse effects will be secured by planning condition and/or obligation.

Area Wide Policies

The Natural Environment is of fundamental importance to our future well-being and prosperity because a rich and diverse environment supports a long-term sustainable economy and contributes to a healthier and happier society. Biodiversity and geodiversity add to the quality of life and local distinctiveness.

The enjoyment of wildlife and geology provides opportunities for lifelong learning, recreation and tourism. The conservation of our natural resources is a necessity not only set out by a plethora of legislation, but for the future of Rhondda Cynon Taf as a sustainable place to live and work

Rhondda Cynon Taf is blessed with a broad diversity of natural environments, with a variety of topographies, soils and habitats. The land forms and uses also contribute to the County's biodiversity, from small farm management, bracken and woodland covered valley sides, and open moorland mountain tops.

The policy framework contained in the LDP will ensure the provision of a sustainably protected Natural Environment, that meets the needs of existing and future residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Policy NE 1 - INTERNATIONALLY DESIGNATED SITES AND SPECIES.

Development proposals on sites statutorily designated at the European level, or affecting the habitats of species statutorily protected at the European level, will be permitted where;

- 1) it is directly necessary for the positive management of the site, or;**
- 2) where there are reasons of overruling public interest.**

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are identified on the basis of scientific criteria as set out in the European Commission Birds and Habitats Directives and the subsequent Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994. They may be designated on any area of land of special interest for its flora, fauna, geological or physiographic features and are notified by the Countryside Council for

Wales (CCW) for Rhondda Cynon Taf as part of a European series of important sites.

Within the LDP area of Rhondda Cynon Taf, i.e. outside the Brecon Beacons National Park, there are parts of two SAC. Blaen Cynon SAC, Hirwaun supports a significant marsh fritillary butterfly colony, important rhos pasture and peat bog. In the far south of the Authority a small part of the Cardiff Beachwood SAC lies within the County Borough.

Measures and proposals to improve, protect or enlarge the biodiversity value of sites and establish new protected habitats, will be supported.

Development will not be permitted unless an appropriate ecological survey and appraisal is submitted with the planning application.

Policy NE 2 INATIONALLY DESIGNATED SITES AND SPECIES.

Development proposals on sites statutorily designated at the national level, or affecting the habitats of species statutorily protected at the national level, will be permitted where;

- 1) it is directly necessary for the positive management of the site, or;**
- 2) the socio-economic benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the attributes of the site for which it has been designated, or;**
- 3) the proposal would not have an unacceptably adverse effect on the attributes of the site for which it has been designated.**

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are identified on the basis of scientific criteria as set out in section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and may be designated on any area of land of special interest for its flora, fauna, geological or physiographic features. SSSI's are notified by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), as part of a British set of important sites. Management plans are also prepared by CCW. There are 11 SSSIs in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Measures and proposals to improve, protect or enlarge the biodiversity value of sites and establish new protected habitats, will be supported.

Development will not be permitted unless an appropriate ecological survey and appraisal is submitted with the planning application.

Policy NE 3 - LOCALLY DESIGNATED SITES AND SPECIES.

Development proposals on sites designated at the local level, or affecting the habitats of species identified for protection at the local level, will be permitted where;

- 1) it is directly necessary for the positive management of the site, or;**
- 2) the socio-economic benefits of the proposed development clearly outweigh the value of the attributes of the site for which it has been designated, or;**
- 3) the proposal would not have an unacceptably adverse effect on the attributes of the site for which it has been designated, or;**

4) the development could not reasonably be located elsewhere.

For the purpose of the policy, locally designated sites comprise of Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Trust Nature reserves.

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) are defined by scientific criteria of both a biodiversity and geographical nature. Over 200 SINC's have been formally defined to be protected through the LDP. The sites, most of which are privately owned, will require positive management if the habitat is to remain of wildlife value. Further guidance on SINC designation is contained within SPG: Natural Environment.

Local Nature Reserves (LNR) are owned or managed by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council for nature conservation. There are currently two LNR's in the RCT, at Glyn cornel (Llwynypia) and at Craig yr Hesg (Pontypridd).

Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales Nature Reserves are owned or leased by the Trust and managed for nature conservation. At present there are three Trust reserves in Rhondda Cynon Taf; at Nightingales' Bush (Pontypridd), Pwll Waun Cynon (Mountain Ash) and Y Gweira (Llantrisant).

Measures and proposals to improve, protect or enlarge the biodiversity value of sites and establish new protected habitats, will be supported.

Development will not be permitted unless an appropriate ecological survey and appraisal is submitted with the planning application.

Policy NE 4

PROTECTION OF FEATURES OF NATURAL AMENITY, LANDSCAPES AND BIODIVERSITY.

Development will be permitted if it does not unacceptably affect features of importance to landscape or nature conservation, including; Trees, woodland, hedgerows, river corridors, ponds, wetlands, stone walls, fridd and species rich grassland.

This policy would apply to a range of natural environment features that although not formally designated, have been identified at the County Borough level for their intrinsic merits and need of protection. Such features have been identified in Council documents and strategies such as the LBAP and 'Our Living Space'.

Any conditions attached to permissions should consist of mitigation measures to minimise the harm associated with any development (including negative effects on adjacent land). Alternatively, compensation and/or enhancement measures will be required from the development.

Northern Strategy Area Policies;

The LDP Northern Strategy Area has been identified with the emphasis on building sustainable communities and halting

the process of depopulation and decline. The natural environment has a major role to play in this Strategy. It is essential to conserve and enhance the unique and outstanding features of natural landscapes, habitats and other biodiversity that exist in the area. In turn, this will help to create communities which have a natural environment that will be attractive for people to live, work and spend their recreational time. Furthermore, these natural features, if correctly managed, will be able to draw in people from outside the area, which can only help the economy of the area.

Although there has not been major development pressure in majority of the Northern Strategy Area, apart from in the northern Cynon Valley in recent years, there will be increasing pressure in the future. Moreover, it is essential that the character of the area and the biodiversity that lives within it is not compromised in any way by piecemeal developments.

Policy N-NE 1

SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS.

Special landscape areas are identified at the following locations:

- i) Mynydd y Cymmer**
- ii) Mynydd Troed y Rhiw Slopes**
- iii) Llwyncelyn Slopes**
- iv) Cwm Clydach**
- v) Cynon Valley Northern Slopes**
- vi) Cwm Orci**
- vii) Rhondda Fawr Northern Cwm & Slopes**
- viii) Hirwaun Common, Cwm Dare & Cwm Aman**

ix) **Brecon Beacons Edge at Llwydcoed**

Development within the defined special landscape areas will be expected to conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials appropriate to the character of the area.

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) have been designated to protect areas of fine landscape quality within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The designation of these landscape areas has been undertaken at local level using a regionally agreed methodology. The methodology used to identify the SLA's in Rhondda Cynon Taf builds on the Countryside Council for Wales LANDMAP methodology and considers factors such as:

- Prominence,
- Spectacle – dramatic topography and views,
- Unspoilt areas - Pre-industrial patterns of land use
Unspoilt' areas:
 - Remoteness & tranquillity
 - Vulnerability & sensitivity to change
 - Locally rare landscape
 - Setting for special landscapes

In order to protect the visual qualities of each SLA development proposals within these areas will be required to conform to the highest possible design standards.

Details of the Special Landscape Areas are as follows:

1) Mynydd y Cymer;

An abrupt, steep sided hill with an unspoilt 'wild' craggy character. It is also designated for its distinct and considerable prominence, overlooking Porth, Trebanog, Williamstown, Penygraig and Dinas on all sides.

2) Mynydd Troed-y-Rhiw Slopes;

The designation consists of the prominent hillside overlooking Porth and the settlements in the south of the Rhondda Fach and Rhondda Fawr. This hill and ridge-line forms the division of the Rhondda Valleys. The whole area has moderately important Landmap values. The slopes are vulnerable to encroachment from these urban areas.

3) Llwyncelyn Slopes;

Includes the northern and western slopes of the lower Rhondda Valleys, from Trehafod to Ynyshir. The site is prominent in overlooking these settlements and particularly Porth. The northern and southern sections have moderately important Landmap values.

4) Cwm Clydach;

Large, linear SLA extending from the dramatically prominent slopes of Craig yr Hesg and Lan Woods, Pontypridd, across the unspoilt pre-industrial farmed plateau above and to the south west of Ynysybwl which is of moderately high Landmap value. It continues, to form the ridge-line and valley sides to the south west of Ynysboeth and Perthcelyn in the Cynon Valley.

5) Cynon Valley Northern Slopes;

The southern tip of the uniquely prominent ridge overlooking Abercynon is of moderate Landmap value. The designation

then forms the dramatic backdrop to the north of the Cynon Valley as far as Cwmbach. There are also large areas of unspoilt broadleaf woodland.

6) Cwm Orci;

An 'unspoilt' side valley, tucked away from the main valley to the north east. The edges of the valley are prominent in overlooking Treorchy. The lower slopes and bottom of the valley have high Landmap value, whilst the upper slopes are of moderate value.

7) Rhondda Fawr Northern Cwm and Slopes;

Very prominent and considerably dramatic slopes to the west of the settlements in the north of the Rhondda Fawr. Blaencwm and the top of Cwmparc is of Landmaps most important value, with the areas around Blaenrhondda, Cwm Saerbren and Cwm Parc of high value. They form the best examples of glacial scenery in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

8) Hirwaun Common, Cwmdare and Cwmaman;

The SLA extends along the tops and south western slopes of the upper Cynon Valley. Dramatic hillsides, escarpments and crags, prominent from the A465. Mostly consisting of unspoilt, traditional open commonland. The top of Hirwaun Common is of Landmaps most important value in scale and character of the BBNP, Mynydd y Bwllfa of high value and Cwm Dare to Cwm Aman of moderately high value. The SLA is vulnerable to skyline developments.

9) Brecon Beacons Edge at Llwydcoed;

Important setting for the National Park, with a mix of high and moderately high Landmap values. Within the SLA are areas of ancient broadleaf woodland and the wooded valley of Nant y Gwyddel.

Policy N-NE 2

CYNON VALLEY RIVER PARK

Development that would contribute to the protection, enhancement, enlargement, connectivity and management of important wildlife sites, species and features of nature conservation within the Cynon Valley River Park area will be favoured.

The idea of the Cynon Valley River Park is drawn from the Cynon Valley Local Plan. The Draft Cynon Valley River Park Strategy, 2007, updates the original concept, taking in to account new development proposals and community aspirations, the adopted Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the Heads of the Valleys environmental programme.

The key focus of the Cynon Valley River Park is on the strategic importance of the flood plain environment. However, protecting the River Cynon floodplain does not mean that the land is abandoned or that built development is banned. It also aims to develop projects to encourage positive use and management of the floodplain, to provide space for natural processes, for wildlife and for people.

Southern Strategy Area Policies

The South of the County Borough has seen major development over the past 50 years and continues to be under considerable pressure for further development. In the Southern Strategy Area, emphasis is on sustainable growth that benefits Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole. Although there are large urban settlements, the area is still within a predominantly natural setting, having a range of important landscape features and a wealth of habitats and biodiversity.

It is essential that the LDP ensures that the distinctive natural environment of the area is not lost, so that it remains an attractive place to live for generations to come.

POLICY S-NE 1 SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS

Special landscape areas are identified at the following locations:

- i) Llanharry Surrounds**
- ii) Talygarn Surrounds**
- iii) Ely Valley at Miskin**
- iv) Coed-yr-Hendy & Mwyndy**
- v) Llantrisant Surrounds**
- vi) Mynydd y Glyn & Nant Muchudd Basin**
- vii) Mynydd Hugh & Llantrisant Forest**
- viii) Efail Isaf, Garth & Nantgarw Western Slopes**
- ix) Craig yr Allt**
- x) Taff Vale Eastern Slopes**
- xi) Treforest Western Slopes**

Development within the defined special landscape areas will be expected to conform to the highest standards of design, siting, layout and materials appropriate to the character of the area.

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) have been designated to protect areas of fine landscape quality within Rhondda Cynon Taf. The designation of these landscape areas has been undertaken at local level using a regionally agreed methodology. The methodology used to identify the SLA's in Rhondda Cynon Taf builds on the Countryside Council for Wales LANDMAP methodology and considers factors such as:

- Prominence,
- Spectacle – dramatic topography and views,
- Unspoilt areas - Pre-industrial patterns of land use
Unspoilt' areas:
- Remoteness & tranquillity
- Vulnerability & sensitivity to change
- Locally rare landscape
- Setting for special landscapes

In order to protect the visual qualities of each SLA development proposals within these areas will be required to conform to the highest possible design standards.

Details of the Special Landscape Areas are as follows:

1) Llanharry Surrounds;

The SLA extends from Brynsadler, across the north of Llanharry and around the southern and western edge of the

former opencast site at Llanilid. The eastern two thirds of the site are of moderately high Landmap values. The unspoilt 'border vale' farmland is prominent from the M4 and is vulnerable to adjacent development pressures.

2) Talygarn Surrounds;

The landscape is predominantly 'border vale', bordering the edges of Talygarn and extending along the M4 to the east. The land around Talygarn is of high landmap value, with the land south of the M4 of moderately high value. It consists of traditional farmland patterns and attractive parkland.

3) Ely Valley at Miskin;

The land borders the urban areas of Pontyclun and Miskin, with the land around Miskin Manor of moderately high Landmap value. The area is prominent from both the M4 and mainline railway and is vulnerable to encroachment of settlements. It also includes the only area of lowland river valley in RCT.

4) Coed-yr-Hendy and Mwyndy;

The designation extends from the enclosed Coed-yr-Hendy, across the A4119 to the open countryside around Mwyndy to Rhiwsaeson in the east. It consists of mainly undisturbed fields and woodlands which are of moderately high Landmap values which are vulnerable to spread of development.

5) Llantrisant Surrounds;

Included in the SLA is the plateau of Llantrisant Common and also the higher, prominent ridge hills along the western edge of Beddau and above Rhiwsaeson. It plays an important part in the setting of the conservation area of Llantrisant. The southern section is vulnerable to developments relating to the Church Village bypass.

6) Mynydd Y Glyn and Nant Muchudd Basin;

A considerable designation of undisturbed traditional farmland and field patterns, unspoilt by industrialisation. The land rises to the north and the prominent, open, Mynydd y Glyn which serves as a backdrop the lower Rhondda valley, which is of moderately important Landmap value.

7) Mynydd Hugh and Llantrisant Forest;

The SLA is visible from the M4 and extends to the north of Llanharan to Toneyrefail, including the windfarm on the skyline. To the east is the parkland around Llanharan House and the prominent Llantrisant forest on Mynydd Garthmaelwg, which are of moderately high Landmap values.

8) Efail Isaf, Garth and Nantgarw Western Slopes;

The south and west of the SLA consists of farmland generally undisturbed by industrialisation and acts as an important buffer between Garth Hill and the urban area of Efail Isaf/Church Village. The eastern part is prominent wooded slopes of the Taff Valley and an important backdrop to the Treforest Industrial Estate.

9) Craig yr Allt;

Well defined landscape of prominent ridges and valleys, standing above Taffs Well and Nantgarw. The ridge tops and upper slopes are of moderately high Landmap values with the lower slopes of a high value.

10) Taff Vale Eastern Slopes;

The SLA extends along the eastern side of the Taff Vale slopes from Nantgarw to Abercynon. Primarily , the landscape consists of unspoilt, pre-industrialised patterns of farmland along the steep valley sides, with open common and moorland on the ridge of Cefn Eglwysilan. The dramatic hillsides are prominent from the A470. There are parts of the designation which are of moderately important Landmap value.

11) Treforest Western Slopes;

Extends from the Graig part of Pontypridd to Church Village, including the Taff Vale slopes above Treforest. Here is a prominent native, broadleaf woodland, which are of moderately important Landmap value. Above the slopes is an area of open, generally unspoilt farmland on a rolling plateau.

7. FURTHER ADVICE

If you require any further advice or assistance in respect this or other LDP documents or wish to be placed on the Council's consultation database please contact a member of the Local Development Plan Team at:

Development & Regeneration Unit,
Floor 5,
Ty Pennant,
Catherine Street,
Pontypridd
CF37 2TB

Email: LDP@rhondda-cynon-taf.gov.uk

Telephone: 01443 495193