

Landscape, Seascape and Cultural Services

Shaped by nature and people over time, landscapes are the settings in which we live, work and experience life. All landscapes matter. They combine natural resources, culture and economy. Many environmental resilience and place-based planning challenges that shape our future wellbeing and prosperity are best addressed at a landscape-scale.

Landscape characteristics and qualities combine to create a distinct sense of place. Sense of place is key to understanding how we derive cultural inspiration and well-being from landscape. Understanding the contribution of landscape to cultural services is part of the natural resources approach.

www.naturalresources.wales/landscape

The South-Central Wales Landscape

The area encompasses the moorland fringes of the Brecon Beacons National Park; the deeply incised South Wales Valleys of the Rhondda, Cynon and Taf, famed for their industrial and cultural heritage, with their contrasting dramatic uplands.

The gentle lowlands of Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan with sandy beaches, dunes and the cliffs of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast with views across the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary.

Cardiff, capital city of Wales, lies on the coastal lowlands, with Cardiff Bay at the mouth of the River Taf.

Distinctive landscapes and sense of place

The exposed upland moorland to the north forms part of the extensive **Brecon Beacons National Park**, highly valued for its scenic quality, views, tranquillity, remoteness, dark skies and for recreation. They include the historic landscape of East Fforest Fawr & Mynydd-y-Glog. Adjacent mining and industrial areas at Fros-y-Fran and Hirwaun are in stark contrast to the National Park. The Taf Fawr and Fechan Valleys include crags, reservoirs and conifer forests and become deep wooded gorges before their confluence within a broad bowl at Merthyr Tydfil.

Merthyr Tydfil's historic core is the focus of a historic industrial landscape that includes surrounding industrial remains on the slopes and uplands. Notable historic features include ironworks and tramways, the prominent Cyfartha Park and dramatic stone viaduct which give a strong sense of place.

Mynydd Aberdare to the west, with the large conifer forests of Gethin, and the windswept moorland of Merthyr Common to the east form part of the upland plateau of the South Wales Valleys. The contrasting combination of dramatic moorland and forested uplands and deep, urbanised valleys with their network of interconnecting settlements, roads and railways make these areas highly distinctive. Country parks, nature reserves and trails are highly valued in these forests and valleys and walking and mountain bike trails cross the area. Wind farms disturb the sense of tranquillity and remoteness in places.

The historic landscape of the Rhondda within **Rhondda Cynon Taf** is well-known for its cultural heritage. Historic industrial settlements line the narrow, steep sided valleys of the Rhondda Fawr and Fach and prehistoric forts and cairns are scattered across the surrounding uplands.

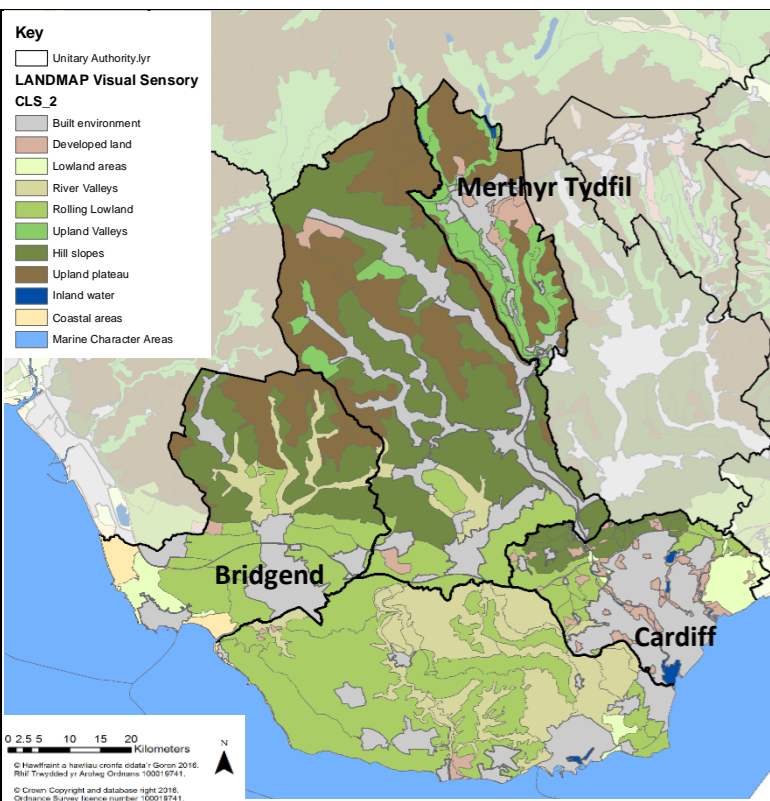
The dramatic Rhondda valleys are cut into the upland plateau, with crags, waterfalls, and historic mining and quarrying features. The broader Cynon and lower Taf valleys are forested and include the larger towns of Aberdare and Pontypridd. The valleys drain south into high hills and valleys, and thence to the lowland rolling farmland of Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan.

North of **Bridgend** Ridges of high ground such as Cefn Hirgoed give way to larger hills with moorland and conifer forests and the upper Cwm Ogwr Fawr, Garn and Llynfi are attractive narrow, steep, and wooded valleys that are tranquil away from the M4 and the historic industrial towns of Maesteg and Pontycymer. There are extensive attractive views to the mountains to the north and sea to the south and historic cairns and hillforts are a feature.

The gentle, undulating lowland farmland around Bridgend includes quarries and country parks. The River Ogmore flows through Bridgend and provides a focus for parkland and recreational routes.

The coastline includes scenic Heritage Coast at the Ogmore estuary and the historic landscapes of Merthyr Mawr Warren and Kenfig and Margam Burrows. There is a strong sense of place, with large, dramatic dune features, historic features and sea views.

Broad, sandy beaches are characteristic of this coast, with rocky headlands and the landmark of Porthcawl lighthouse. The Wales Coast Path follows the coast and popular bathing beaches at Porthcawl are backed by caravan and leisure parks and a golf course. There are wide views over the Bristol Channel, with Tusker Rock a feature. The coast connects to the narrow, industrialised coastal plain at Port Talbot with the M4 and main rail line.



Headline Characteristics

- Distinctive linear valley settlements and transport networks influenced by landform
- Characterised by 494km² (37%) of upland landscapes in the north
- 33% of the coast is Heritage Coast, 6% of the area Brecon Beacons National Park.
- There are 6 Registered Historic Landscapes, including the industrial landscapes of The Rhondda and Merthyr Tydfil
- Diversity and contrast from the uplands, valleys, lowlands, coastline and seascapes
- Intricate rolling lowlands and river valleys
- Hillslopes adjacent to settlements as visual backdrops and contrast to urban living
- Cardiff urban areas close to the open countryside and bay
- Large nucleated settlements dotted along the coast west of Cardiff
- 21% landscapes are classified as development, (national average 5.14%)
- Upland and lowland landscapes are equally represented in this area at 37% each;

The Vale of Glamorgan is a rolling lowland farmland plateau incised by rivers and streams, with scattered farms, villages and larger towns including Cowbridge, Llantwit Major and Barry. The valleys, including the Thaw, Ely and Alun, are frequently wooded with pasture and hedgerows and tranquil away from main towns, roads and industry. Downland with heath and open access provides views over the vale and towards the Bristol Channel from high ground. Historic features provide a strong sense of place, particularly around the historic landscape of Llancafarn and at Ewenny, with historic villages and forts, Ogmore castle and Ewenny Priory.

The Glamorgan Heritage Coast between Ogmore and Aberthaw is highly scenic, with a strong sense of place. Exposed limestone cliffs have extensive views over the Bristol Channel towards Somerset and Exmoor. Historic forts and lighthouses are features above the sandy beaches and rocky platforms. The often wild and open seascape, rocky shore and cliffs feel isolated in places. The seascape has a generally southerly aspect, exposure to prevailing winds and gently shelving waters. This is combined with a build up to the high tidal range of the Severn Estuary, with the distinctive sandbank of Nash Sands and associated shoals and shallows.



Glamorgan Heritage Coast © John Briggs

The dramatic cliffs at Penarth Head and Lavernock Point have spectacular views over Cardiff Bay and the Severn estuary whilst lower cliffs towards Barry include caravan and leisure parks, Cardiff airport and the Aberthaw power station.

The city of **Cardiff** forms an extensive urban area, from the historic core to the modern suburbs and Cardiff Bay development. The River Taf provides a strong sense of place through the city. Open spaces such as Bute Park and recreational routes, including the Taf Trail follow its course. There are views towards the Garth ridge, Llandaff Cathedral and the Principality Stadium.

Cardiff Bay provides an important leisure area at the mouth of the Taf and provides the setting to the Senedd and Millennium Centre. Attractive coastal parkland links to the barrage, with views across the bay to Penarth Head, and from the barrage to the Severn estuary and the rocky islands of Flatholm and Steepholm.

The Rivers Rhymney and Ely wind through the city and include informal recreation and spaces along their routes. The Nant Fawr is the focus for Roath Park and Lake. The historic landscape of the Wentlooge Levels, with its distinctive pattern of reens and drainage ditches, lies east of the Rhymney mouth. The Wales Coast Path follows the historic Rumney Great Wharf, with extensive views across the mudflats and saltmarshes of the Severn estuary.

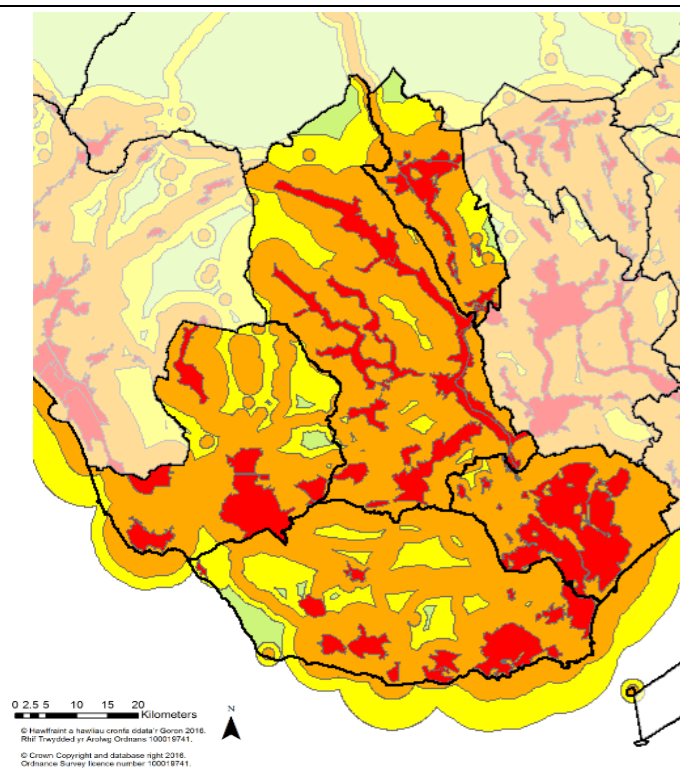
The attractive undulating pastoral farmland around the fringes of Cardiff has pockets of tranquillity and includes the castle at St Fagans parkland, reservoirs and golf courses. The land rises to the north towards the Garn ridge, which forms a backdrop to Cardiff, with views over the city and Vale of Glamorgan. Castle Coch is a dramatic landmark against the steep wooded slopes, which extend to Graig Llanishen in the east. Limestone quarries, the Ridgeway Trail, historic earthworks and a country park are features.



St Brides Major, Vale of Glamorgan © LUC



Cardiff Bay © Visit Wales

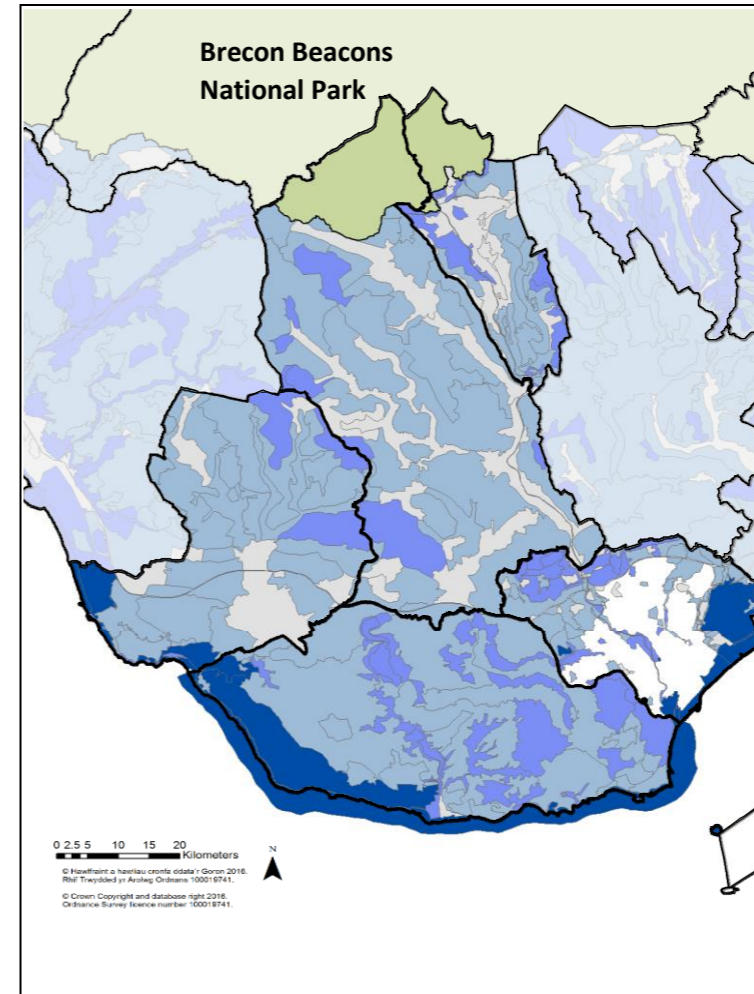


Tranquillity

- Tranquil areas have decreased by 75% over a 12-year period
- Only 33km² of the 1997 tranquil landscapes remained in 2009
- Areas like the Ynysybwll valley are important remaining tranquil landscapes

Key

- Unitary Authorities
- Built environment
- Tranquil areas generally free of daytime significant disturbance 'Undisturbed'
- Tranquil areas with some disturbance e.g. light traffic noise, small villages etc. 'Zone C'
- Disturbed areas e.g. significant traffic disturbance 'Zone B'



LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Evaluation

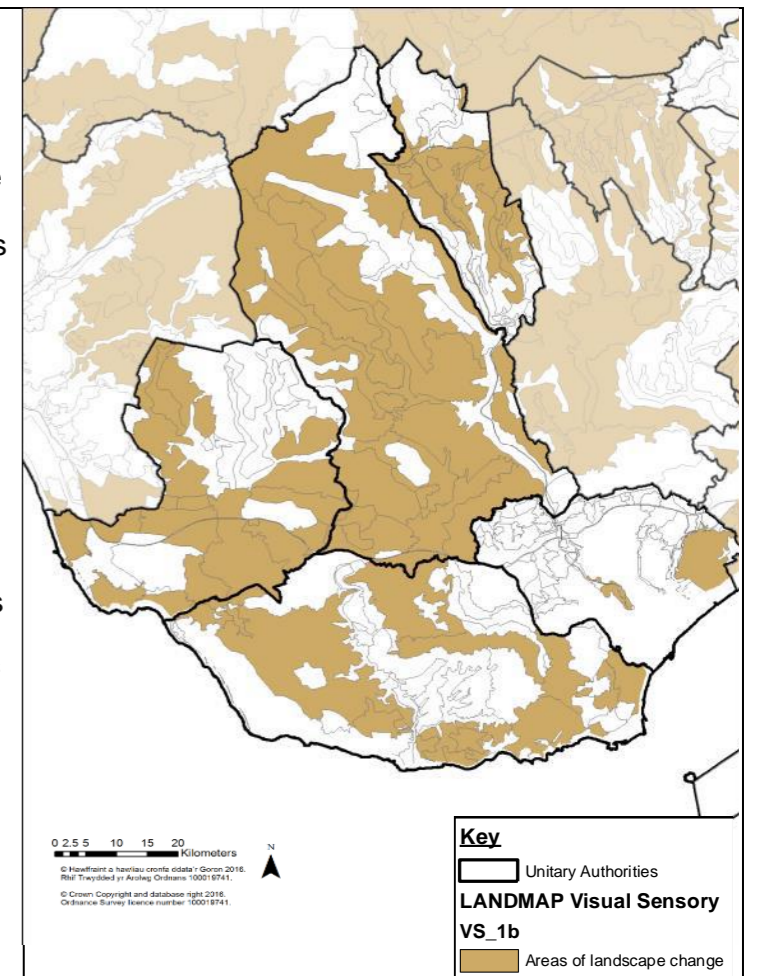
- Outside the urban area of Cardiff, 9% (119km²) is evaluated as a **nationally outstanding** visual & sensory landscape, mostly in the lowlands
- 17% (228km²) is evaluated as **high, regionally important** landscapes mostly in the uplands
- Development landscapes are generally evaluated as **low** in Visual & Sensory terms
- Small improvements in landscape integrity and character are evident resulting in fewer low value landscapes
- Conserve and enhance outstanding and high landscapes
- Enhance lower quality landscapes to contribute to wellbeing

Key

- Unitary Authority, lyr
- National Parks
- LANDMAP Visual Sensory
- Outstanding
- High
- Moderate
- Low
- Cardiff urban core not evaluated

Landscape Change

- The largest change is an increase in land classified as Development mostly of low landscape value
- Little development in the open countryside yet there is a loss of lower valley agricultural settlement, fieldscape and early industrial extractive landscapes
- Expansion of settlements and housing infill impacting on adjacent rural views
- Increased commercial development especially along widened transport corridors and road prominent junctions
- Increased prominence of expanding quarries, reclamation and industry intruding on semi-rural areas
- Increased visual impacts from windfarm and large solar developments, flying activity and intrusiveness has reduced
- Positive improvements and regeneration (Bute, Taff Bargoed and Cyfarthfa Parks, Pontcanna Fields, Ogmere & Old Castle Downs)
- Forestry changes and felling of larch has changed some settings
- Invasive Japanese Knotweed and buddleia impacting on structures and landscapes, especially post industrial



Key

- Unitary Authorities
- LANDMAP Visual Sensory VS_1b
- Areas of landscape change