RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT OF CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA DESIGNATION FOR SOUTH EAST WALES LOCAL AUTHORITIES

FINAL REPORT

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C O N T E N T S

FIGURES:

(i)   Open the Geological Landscapes layer
(ii)   Overlay the Geological Landscapes layer with the Landscape Habitats layer
(iii)   Overlay the composite with the Visual and Sensory layer
(iv)   Overlay the composite with the History layer
(v)   Finally overlay the Culture layer
(vi)   Broad Area SLAs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In March 2007 TACP Consultants were appointed by a consortium of south-east Wales local authorities to develop criteria for the designation of Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). These non-statutory designations play an important part in landscape protection within the land use planning system within Wales and the rest of the UK.

1.2 The introduction of the LANDMAP Information System across Wales provides local authorities with the opportunity to review how they define SLAs. It is recognised that LANDMAP offers a widely different landscape data set than produced by other methodologies within the UK. Whilst this provides a range of interesting information it also sets challenges to how this can be used to support planning policy development, such as for SLA designation. Furthermore, local authorities are faced with the new Local Development Plan system which places different emphases on policy development consultation and community involvement.

1.3 Importantly, LANDMAP accords with current thinking on landscape protection, particularly on the European scale. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) recognises that landscape is more than just its visual qualities but must take into account past and present physical, environmental and cultural perspectives. This "all-landscape" approach is reflected within LANDMAP. The ELC defines landscape as "*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors*" and landscape protection as:-

"actions to conserve and maintain the significant and characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity".

1.4 In parallel with the conduct of this study the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) have been developing a guidance note on the designation of SLA's. This draws extensively on the contents of this study and should be consulted by any authorities going through the SLA designation process.

2.0   SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREAS - AN OVERVIEW

2.1   The use of non-statutory designations to protect areas of landscape value has been an element in UK planning guidance since the introduction of the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act and continues to be so today. They complement the national landscape designations such as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) and provide an important planning tool safeguarding and enhancing the diversity of landscapes found in the UK. At a local level they can play an important role in developing an understanding and awareness of landscape features and character, the qualities that make an area distinctive and give communities a sense of place.

2.2   Within Wales the role and function of such areas is contained within Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (2202). The key sections being:-

Section 5.3.11 - "Non-statutory designations, such as Special Landscape Areas…should be soundly based on a formal scientific assessment of the nature conservation landscape or geological value of the site. Local, non-statutory sites can add value to the planning process particularly if such designations are informed by community participation and reflect community values. Local planning authorities should apply these designations….where there is good reason to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection….."

Section 5.3.13 - "CCW LANDMAP information system methodology is an important information resource upon which local planning authorities can draw in making the landscape assessments needed to inform local policy, guidance and decision-making in this field ….. they can help inform supplementary planning guidance on landscape assessment".

2.3   An important factor is the reference in Section 5.3.11 to be the need for non-statutory designations only where there is a good reason to believe that normal planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection.

3.0   COMMISSION SCOPE

3.1   In meeting the objectives of the study the consultancy team have sought to answer a number of questions, namely:-

(i)   What do we mean by a non-statutory landscape designation [commonly referred to as a Special Landscape Area (SLA)]?

(ii)   How do we determine need?

(iii)   What criteria should be used to define SLAs?

3.2   Given the nature of the commission we also considered that the methodology should:-

(i)   Reflect the contents of the LANDMAP Information System which provides an all Wales approach to landscape assessment.

(ii)   Be applicable to all of Wales, not just the South East region.

3.3   In order to achieve this within the restricted programme of the study, it was agreed that the study would be based upon:-

(i)   A review of existing methodologies and criteria from the remainder of the UK.

(ii)   Initial review with representatives of the regional local authorities and Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

(iii)   A validation exercise again with representatives of the regional local authorities Countryside Council for Wales and LANDMAP Quality Assessors for the five evaluated aspect topics in order to bring wider agreement to the suggested methodology.

3.4   This approach was agreed with the client team and the two meetings (3.3 (ii) and 3.3 (iii) above) were held on the 19 April 2007 at CCW Offices, Cardiff and 25 April 2007 at Belle Vue Park, Newport.

3.5   The initial task undertaken was a review of the definitions of SLAs used by the local authorities within the study area and elsewhere. The local authorities within south-east Wales use the following definitions:-

Blaenau Gwent County Borough

"Typically those areas which make a substantial contribution to Blaenau Gwent's identity, diversity and quality with their own features and distinctive sense of place".

Bridgend County Borough

"SLAs are those areas which are important to the sub-regional and local character of south-east Wales or locally within the Borough".

Cardiff City Council

"Areas considered to be of particularly high intrinsic landscape value and therefore worthy of special protection from damaging change for their own sake as part of the County's landscape resource".

Caerphilly County Borough

"Those areas which are considered to be important in the overall landscape of the County Borough in terms of their intrinsic value and by virtue of the contribution the landscape makes in terms of the visual setting of towns and villages and the historic environment".

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

"Those landscapes which are of particularly high intrinsic value and which require special protections for their own sake as part of the landscape within the Plan area".

Newport City Council

"Areas considered to be of particularly high intrinsic landscape value and therefore worthy of special protection from damaging change for their own sake as part of the County's landscape resource".

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

"The County Borough Council designates those areas which it considers to be the most important areas of high quality landscape within the Plan area".

Vale of Glamorgan Council

"Those landscapes which are of particularly high intrinsic value and which require special protections for their own sake as part of the landscape resources".

3.6 Elsewhere within Wales definitions include "*Landscapes characteristic of Gwynedd in terms of historical, ecological and physical features and provide consistency in terms of landscape character*" (Gwynedd Council) and *"areas of the County Borough to be of particular high landscape value" (Wrexham County Borough Council).*

3.7 What is apparent from these designations is that local authorities see SLAs as:-

- being locally important
- of high quality and value
- contribute to the image of the area

and of these only one (Bridgend) mentions the sub-regional importance of the landscape.

3.8 By defining SLAs it has to be asked what value they bring to the development plan framework and by definition to the landscape of the local authority area. Reasons for definition can include:-

(i) *Influence* - they act as "accolades" promoting the quality and value of an area and establishing a focus for positive landscape planning and raising awareness among the local community.

(ii) *Control* - as an additional development control layer which helps to determine location and quality of development and consider that other means of protection are inadequate.

(iii) *Policy* - to assist in the identification of policy priorities and objectives and the development of policy in relation to the landscape of an area.

(iv) *Management* - as a focus for developing and enhancing landscape management systems to the benefit of a designated area.

3.9 In terms of need it is plainly a choice of the local authority and will reflect the requirements of PPW Section 5.3.11. If a local authority decides that there is no requirement for SLAs there is still the potential to manage the landscape in total, using criteria based policies and the LANDMAP Information System.

3.10 Finally, there is the consideration of criteria used in their definition. From a review of the criteria used to date, and from emerging policy guidance elsewhere (Scottish Natural Heritage – 2004) the choice of criteria used has developed little from the former Countryside Commission's Landscape Assessment Guidance document (CCP243). Indeed, this was approached by the south-east Wales Strategic Planning Guidance group and used to define SLAs in Merthyr Tydfil and the Vale of Glamorgan.

3.11 These criteria are based upon six themes namely:-

(i) *Landscape as a Resource*

The landscape should be a resource of at least County importance due to its being; especially representative of its type; of scarcity value; or in a fragile condition and therefore vulnerable to change from natural or man-made forces.

(ii) *Scenic Quality*

It should be of high scenic quality, with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features and important aesthetic or intangible factors.

(iii) *Unspoilt Character and Integrity*

The landscape within the area generally should be unspoilt by large scale, visually intrusive development or land uses, and should possess integrity and coherence of content.

(iv) *Sense of Place*

It should have a distinctive and common character, including topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place, "bro" or local distinctiveness.

(v) *Conservation Interests*

In addition to scenic qualities, it should include other notable conservation interests, such as feature of historic, wildlife or architectural interest.

(vi) *Consensus*

There should be consensus of both professional and public opinion as to it's importance.

3.12 Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) published "Guidance of Local Landscape Designations" (March 2004). This sought to reflect the changing approaches to landscape assessment which includes historic and cultural perspectives (as with LANDMAP), together with the objectives of the European Landscape Convention, which is the UK Government has recently signed up to, which reflects a wider perspective to understanding landscape by included natural and man-made contributions to landscape development. This document identified two types of criteria, namely:-

Landscape Criteria

Significance	To what extent does the character and qualities of a particular landscape have special importance in the context of the local authority area.
Representativeness	To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape contribute to the distinctive or regional identity of the local authority.
Relative Merit	To what extent do the character and qualities of a particular landscape merit designation compared to other parts of the local authority area.

Practical Criteria

Need	To what extent will designation provide for more effective safeguard, management or promotion of the special attributes of the area being considered for designation?
Integrity	Is the area to be designated both coherent enough and of sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and promotion?
Support	Is there sufficient support for the area to be designated amongst the communities and other stakeholders in the area.

3.13   These criteria focus particularly on locally important character which is likely to lead to a concentration on other landscape values rather their scenic qualities. They also recognise the importance of the association between people and place in determining what is of particular value at a local level.

3.14   Both sets of criteria consider similar issues, and the SNH criteria are properly reflective of the approach to landscape assessment developed by SNH in association with the former Countryside Agency (now Natural England). However, what is apparent is that both sets of criteria require that SLAs need to be:-

- Distinctive
- Require protection over and above that already available
- Be a coherent area of landscape
- Have consensus
- Have merit and value

- Be representative of the local authority area.

4.0   CONSIDERATION OF METHODOLOGIES

4.1   From the initial information review it was felt that a number of possible methodologies existed:-

(i)   Use CCP243 criteria
(ii)   Use Scottish Natural Heritage Criteria
(iii)   Use LANDMAP Aspect Area Evaluation Criteria
(iv)   Use LANDMAP defined Landscape Character Areas as the basis for designation.
(v)   Review existing SLAs against the LANDMAP Information System.

4.2   These were discussed and reviewed at the initial workshop on 19 April 2007 and the key findings were as follows:-

(a)   Methodologies (i) and (ii) are tried and tested approaches, and indeed (i) was that previously used by the regional authorities in south east Wales. However, it was felt that these did not fully take into account the opportunities offered by the extensive data available to LANDMAP and were focused primarily, but not totally, upon the visual qualities and character of an area.

(b)   Methodology (iv) whilst having merit, particularly in areas of distinctive landscape character, again did not fully take on board the opportunities provided by the LANDMAP Information system. Of particular concern was that Character Areas are not based around the quality values of the landscape, whilst SLAs are.

(c)   Likewise method (v) was felt to offer no benefits, merely sustaining many of the existing SLAs and not fully utilising LANDMAP data.

(d)   Methodology (iii), after considerable discussion, was agreed as providing the most appropriate way forward. The criteria identified are central to the LANDMAP Information System which is adopted across Wales. Furthermore it underpins Planning Policy Wales (Paragraph 5.3.13) and provides a clear audit trail which many of the local authorities required.
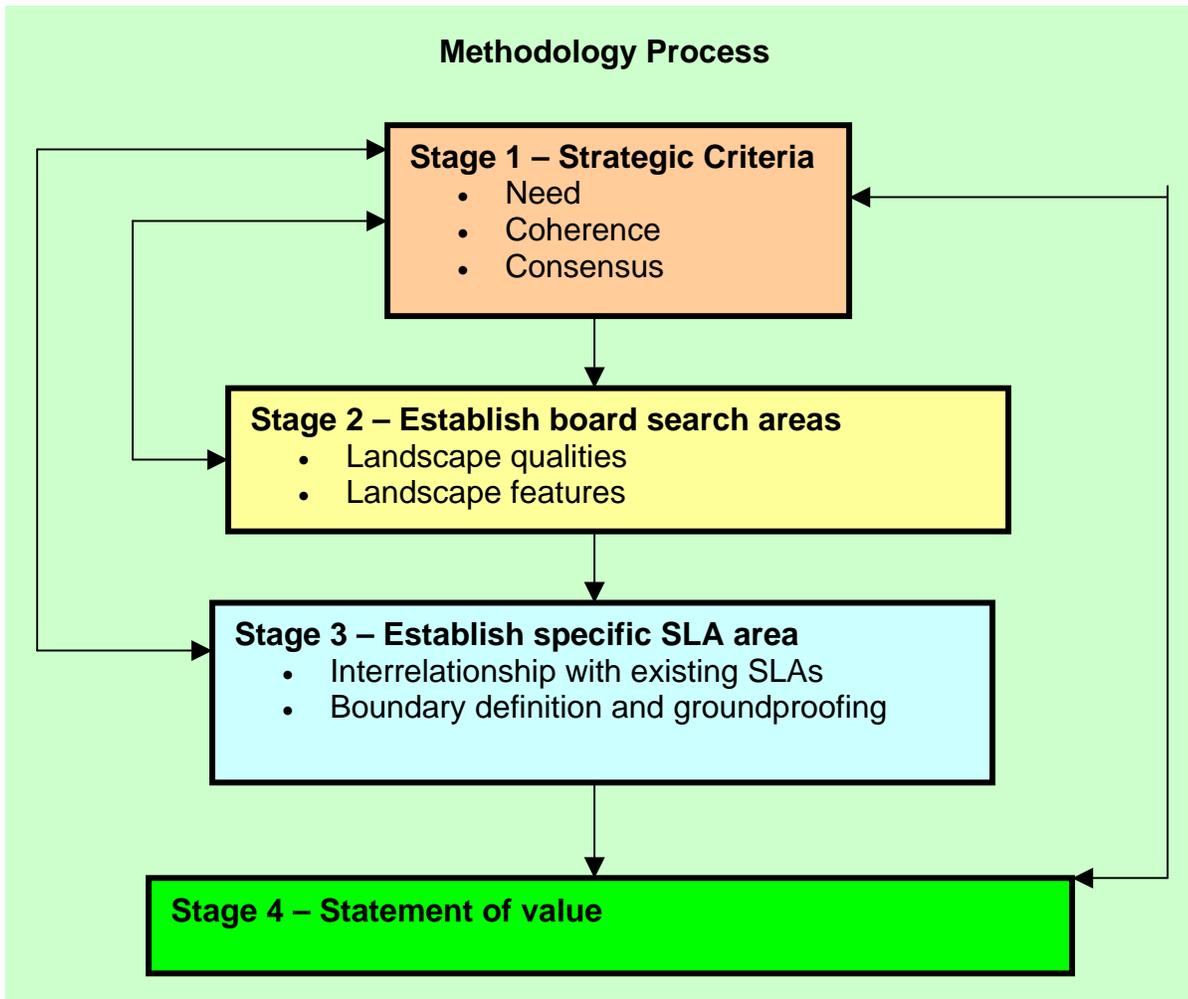
4.3   It was agreed therefore to refine this methodology for the Validation Workshop on 25 April 2007. In addition, the study team felt that whatever criteria were agreed it was also important that a more structured approach was required. A simple, iterative model was proposed.

5.0 PREFERRED APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 For the validation review meeting on 25 April 2007 a more detailed approach and methodology was discussed and agreed.

5.1.2 In terms of the methodology it is proposed that a simple iterative model is used. In summary this will be as follows:-

Methodology Process

Stage 1 – Strategic Criteria
- Need
- Coherence
- Consensus

Stage 2 – Establish board search areas
- Landscape qualities
- Landscape features

Stage 3 – Establish specific SLA area
- Interrelationship with existing SLAs
- Boundary definition and groundproofing

Stage 4 – Statement of value

In more detail the key stages are as follows:-

5.1.3 Stage 1: Strategic Criteria

Planning Policy Wales (2002) is clear in its guidance that non-statutory landscape designations should only be used when other policy protection is deemed inappropriate or unsuitable. It was considered therefore that it was important to clearly identify a strategic "check list" against which designations could be reviewed and considered.

From the review exercise and discussions at the working groups we considered the following to be relevant:-

(a) Need	this reflects the guidance within Planning Policy Wales, Section 5.3.11 and is concerned with establishing to what extent designation will be more effective in safeguarding, managing or promoting the special attributes of the area concerned.	

In addressing this criteria it is important that the potential of an area for designation is tested against the purpose of the proposed designation itself. As an example if the purpose of the designation is primarily to protect an area, then areas under more intensive development pressure may be in more need of protection than other areas of similar merit and quality. Whereas, if the purpose of designation is related to landscape management, other very different priorities will emerge. For instance, areas showing decline in quality and features, or areas with particularly distinctive landscape characteristics may justify designation.

(b) Coherence	ensure that the areas considered for designation are of a sufficient size to make it practical to develop policies for its protection, management and promotion.	

In view of the variety of landscapes across Wales, and the size of the unitary authorities it is not considered appropriate to set upper and lower thresholds for the size of SLA designations. It is important that the authorities develop an approach that is suitable for its areas and that designations properly reflect the landscape qualities of the area.

(c) Consensus		needs to be agreement and sufficient support for an area to be designated. This must include all stakeholders, including the local community as well as statutory and professional groups. This reflects the core of the LANDMAP approach which includes a public perception exercise within the methodology, and closely relates to the Local Development Plan consultation process.

A number of techniques exist in relation to involvement of stakeholders and these should be reviewed an used to suit local circumstances. It may require different strategies to address the different types of stakeholders. Wherever practicable, the approaches should be part of, rather than separate from, other consultative processes established for the Local Development Plan exercise. An important starting point will be the results of the LANDMAP public perception exercise.

5.1.4 Stage 2: Establish Broad Search Areas

This stage is concerned with establishing broad search areas which will form the basis of the SLA designations. It is based upon a sequential approach of opening each of the five LANDMAP aspect topic layers in turn, namely:-

- Geological Landscapes
- Landscape Habitats
- Visual and Sensory
- History
- Culture

Each of those aspect areas with Outstanding, High and Moderate evaluation levels (ie National, Regional and Local Importance) are identified with the same colour for the three evaluation levels whatever the aspect topic. This is illustrated on the following five extracts from the Bridgend, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taff LANDMAP study (see Figures (i) to (v).

(i)   Open the Geological Landscapes layer
(ii)   Overlay the Geological Landscapes layer with the Landscape Habitats layer
(iii) Overlay the composite with the Visual and Sensory layer
(iv) Overlay the composite with the History layer
(v)   Finally overlay the Cultural layer

As each layer is opened, the overlaying of each aspect topic establishes "hot spots" where aspect areas of the same evaluation level overlap. This approach also allows the user to switch "off" and "on" different aspect layers to establish an understanding as to which topic is driving the development of the "hot spots" and to establish the extent of the different aspect areas and indicative boundaries to potential SLA's. This is illustrated on Figure (vi). – Broad Area SLAs.

These should be reviewed against the strategic criteria. In addition, the assessor should then interrogate both the evaluation and classification data to gain an understanding of the key qualities and characteristics of potential SLA's. Notwithstanding the flexibility provided by the GIS format of the LANDMAP Information System, its interrogation and analysis requires professional judgement.

It should be noted that a SLA could be based solely on one aspect topic layer and not always an aggregation of all five layers. This will obviously reflect local differences and circumstances.

5.1.5 Stage 3: Establish Specific SLA areas and define boundaries

This stage requires a refinement of the broad areas identified in Stage 2 and should include a review of emerging SLA's against any existing designations, as follows:-

- Agreement of refined SLA's through a more detailed interrogation of the evaluation criteria for the LANDMAP aspect areas which make up the broad areas defined at the Stage 2 process.

- Detailed observations should be made from the assessment exercise.

- Ground truthing of emerging SLA's to ensure their relevance and cohesion. As part of the process it is important that reference is made to the strategic criteria identified in Stage 1. Whilst this requires data manipulation, it is key in justifying areas and final boundary definition. It is especially important in terms of reviewing the contribution of Moderate level aspect areas have in defining SLA's.

- **Boundary definition** - the choice of final boundaries for the SLA's will be based both upon the evaluation criteria used in Stage 3 and more practical judgements – what clear and permanent features best enclose the proposed SLA and can be readily defined on the ground. The choice of boundaries will be based both on desk study and field survey work. Not only will they reflect the inherent merit and value of the proposed SLA, but also how they relate to the strategic criteria. This will assist in establishing how important views in and out of an area are and therefore

whether these should be included within the designation. In establishing boundaries, local authorities should:-

i) Seek to include whole landscape units. In certain circumstances these could take into account the Landscape Character Area boundaries where this work has been undertaken as part of a LANDMAP study and where the Character Areas reflect whole units.

ii) Base them upon definable, enduring features, such as roads, railways, rivers and topographic features. In coastal areas boundaries may need to include the marine environment. How much will reflect the relationship between land and sea and how changes to the marine environment can affect the integrity of the proposed SLA. Within this context reference should be made to the Seascape work already undertaken by CCW.

iii) Include settlements where they contribute to the overall quality of the area.

iv) Consider future development proposals and settlement expansion close to proposed SLA's. This will be an integral feature of the Local Development Plan process and does not form part of LANDMAP assessments.

v) Ensure synergy with adjacent authorities where local authority boundaries are chosen as an SLA boundary.

5.1.6 Stage 4   Statement of Value

This forms the primary information source for designated SLA's. We set out below the suggested format of the statement. In completing these statements the following should be taken into account:

- **Title** – the name of the SLA should reflect its location and be recognisable.
- **Location Plan** – this should be a scale that is easily read. We suggest that 1:25000 OS scale is the minimum used. If required the location plan can take up a complete side of A4.
- **Photographs** – these should be provided where they contribute to an understanding and appreciation of the characteristics of the area. Again the number and size should reflect the assistance they give to the reader.
- **Relevance Against Strategic Criteria** – a brief statement is required as to how the areas that have been chosen in relation to the three strategic criteria. Where areas chosen do not relate to one or more of the strategic criteria a reasoned justification should be given.

- **Primary Landscape Qualities and Features** – this should describe the essential landscape qualities and features and draw upon the data contained within the classification sections of the LANDMAP data sets.
- **Key Policy and Management Issues** – this should draw upon both the LANDMAP data sets and other policy development documents - national, regional and local used by the authority.
- **Cross Reference to LANDMAP Data Set**: – this should list the individual aspect areas from the five aspect topic layers within the LANDMAP data set, including the unique reference number. This will provide a clear audit trail for any subsequent review.

TITLE:	
Location (Plan)	**Photograph(s)**
Relevance against Strategic Criteria	
• **Need**	
• **Coherence**	
• **Consensus**	
Primary Landscape Qualities and Feature (*Written description from LANDMAP data sets*)	
Key Policy and Management Issues • **Policy** • **Management**	
Cross Reference to LANDMAP data set. (*List aspect areas that form the SLA to provide an audit trail for any review*)	

6.0   CONCLUSIONS

6.1   The preferred approach and methodology meets the objectives of the study as well as the secondary objectives identified by the consultancy team - using LANDMAP data and providing applicability across Wales.

6.2   It is apparent from the study that local authorities will need to become more proactive in the use of LANDMAP data sets and maps. However use of both this approach and methodology will provide a clear audit trail.

6.3   The following is considered best practice in applying the approach and methodology:-

(a)   a project champion (external or internal) is identified,

(b)   at each stage a review of the results and decision to proceed draws upon a range of disciplines within the local authority   - landscape, countryside, policy and development control, as well as any results from public consultation exercises where relevant,

(c)   the methodology requires the use of professional judgement at all stages, but provides a clear rationale for each decision.

APPENDIX A - Local Authority List

Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend
Cardiff
Caerphilly
Merthyr Tydfil
Newport
Rhondda Cynon Taff
Vale of Glamorgan

APPENDIX B - Attendees at Validation Workshop - 25 April 2007

Name	Organisation
Jo Gossage	Newport City Council
Steve Moon	Bridgend County Borough Council
David Gwyn	Govannon Consultancy (LANDMAP Gullwa)
Richard Kelly	CCW – Landscapes Section Head
Jill Bullen	CCW LANDMAP Co-ordinator
Colin Cheesman	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Victoria Tomlin	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Neil Daniels	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Sarah Bessell	Monmouthshire County Council
Owen Jones	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Tom Bramley	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Bronwen Thomas	Bronwen Thomas Landscape Architect
Lyn Dunn	Cardiff City Council
James Clemence	Cardiff City Council
Katie Medcalf	Environment Systems (Landscape Habitats Specialist)
John Marks	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Brian Swain	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council