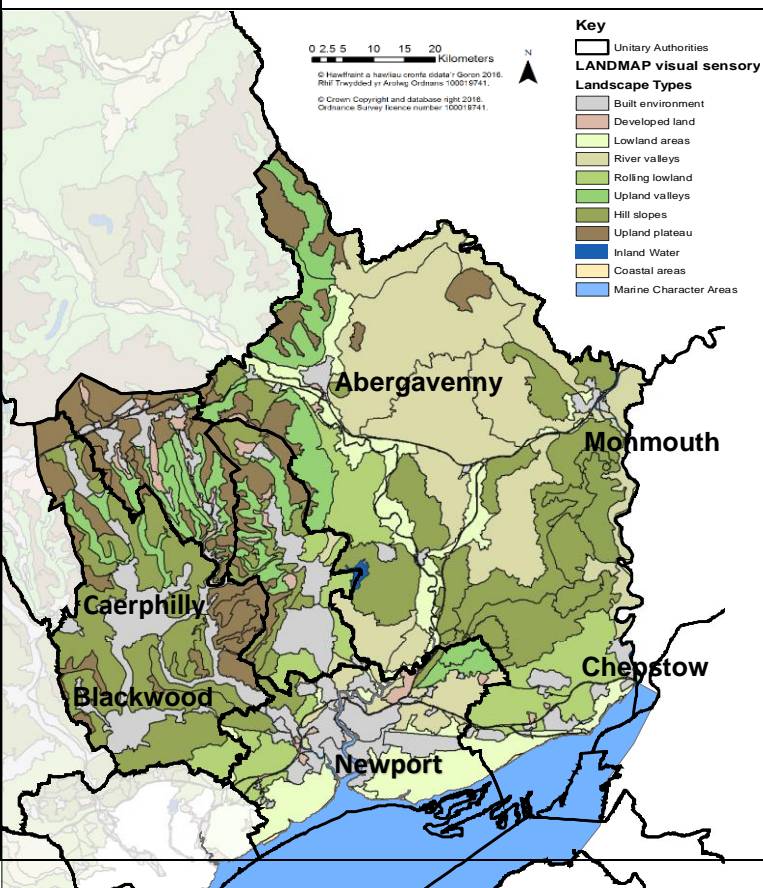## Landscape, Seascape and Cultural Services

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 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-East Wales Landscape

The area includes the eastern uplands of the Brecon Beacons National Park, Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, the Clydach Gorge and South Wales Valleys of the Sirhowy, Ebbw and Rhymney to the north. The undulating lowlands of Caerphilly and Monmouthshire feature historic towns and tranquil areas along the Rivers Usk and Wye. The Wye Valley AONB extends across the border into England to the east. The city of Newport lies at the mouth of the Usk, close to the Gwent Levels historic coastal landscape and mudflats and saltmarshes of the Severn Estuary.

Headline Characteristics

- Characterised by almost equal proportions of upland and lowland landscapes
- 13% classified as development (national average 5%)
- 16.5% of area within Designated Landscapes
- There are 5 Registered Historic Landscapes
- Tranquil landscapes in eastern hills and valleys
- Distinctive linear valley settlements and transport corridors influenced by upland landform in the north west
- Urban settlements and industry concentrated along the Severn Estuary from Newport to Chepstow, with the estuary and hilly backdrop forming contrasting settings
- The Gwent Levels is an internationally important Registered Historic Landscape
- Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a World Heritage Site
- Major transport corridors link to the Severn crossings and to England
- Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal
- Significant areas of woodland lie between the Usk and Wye, at Wentwood and along the Wye Valley

LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Types

Newport Transporter Bridge © Visit Wales

Distinctive landscapes and sense of place

The exposed upland moorland to the north, dramatic Clydach Gorge, distinctive upland peaks framing the Usk Valley at Abergavenny, the Black Mountains and the more gentle spur of the Blorenge ridge form part of the extensive **Brecon Beacons National Park**. The high ground is often scenic and tranquil, with extensive views, sometimes exposed and windswept. Industrial history is a strong feature, including the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, Clydach Gorge historic landscape and Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal and forms the basis for much of the recreational activity. The Monmouthshire & Brecon canal and the River Usk together are important ecosystems and landscapes.

The open, exposed uplands of **Torfaen** are extensively disturbed by historic mining evidence and include the historic landscape of upland commons around Blaenavon historic industrial town and Big Pit. The steep wooded valley of Cwmavon, with its historic industrial villages gives way to attractive, undulating farmland surrounding Pontypool and Cwmbran and includes tranquil and wooded areas, away from main roads and industry and includes parkland, golf courses and Llandegfedd Reservoir.

To the north west, a series of high, open, rounded ridges define and separate the main north-south valleys of the Sirhowy, Ebbw Fawr and Ebbw Fach within **Blaenau Gwent**. The main valleys are narrow and steep-sided with conifer forests and historic industrial settlements, with a strong sense of place. The valleys broaden towards the heads and include cycleways, parks, woodland and nature reserves, often on reclaimed industrial land. The shallow basin at the Heads of the Valleys includes the towns of Tredegar and Brynmawr. The exposed, upland moors are tranquil away from the A465 corridor, with views to the Brecon Beacons.

As they enter **Caerphilly**, the narrow, steep-sided valleys of the Rhymney and lower Sirhowy are extensively wooded. The valleys are separated by the open ridge of Cefn y Brithdir and to the west lies the high moorland of Gelligaer Common historic landscape, which includes prehistoric cairns, a Roman fort and practice area. Extensive views over upland valleys and industrial areas evoke a strong sense of place as the Common merges with Merthyr Common and the rising slopes on the edge of the Brecon Beacons to the north.

An undulating plateau of pastoral fields and woods surrounds Aberbargoed, Blackwood and Ystrad Mynach, with a network of footpaths and country parks. The plateau rises to outlying hills and moorland and the historic town of Caerphilly, with its castle, lies on slopes above the Rhymney surrounded by high hills with views over the town. To the south, Caerphilly Common and the wooded slopes of Cefn Onn, with its historic Ruperra Castle, has extensive views over Cardiff and beyond to the Severn Estuary.
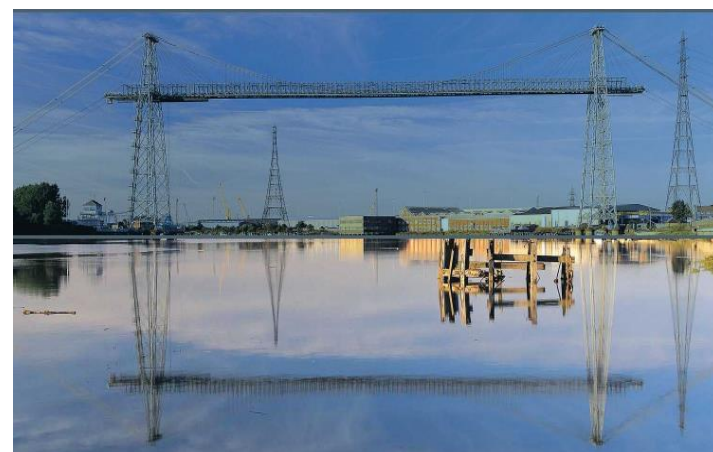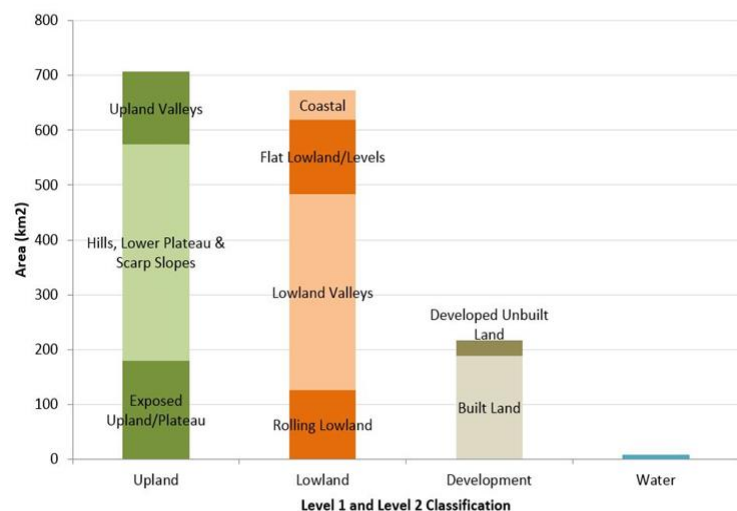
The rivers Rhymney, Ebbw and Usk provide strong natural features flowing through the rural lowlands, which are tranquil away from main roads. The Roman town of Caerleon is located on the Usk, which provides a strong sense of place as it flows through the city of **Newport**, with its numerous bridges, on course to the Severn Estuary. The Gaer hillfort and Ridgeway provide important public spaces and views, along with Celtic Manor Golf Course and Tredegar House parkland.

The Gwent Levels of the Wentlooge and Caldicot Levels form an extensive, low-lying, coastal reclaimed landscape with a very distinctive network of reens and drainage channels, fields and settlements. The historic landscape of the Levels is of international historic and archaeological importance, reflecting the history of land reclamation since Roman times. The area is tranquil, away from the backdrop of residential and industrial areas fringing Newport and Caldicot and includes the recreational features of the Wales Coast Path and Newport Wetlands as well as extensive views over the Severn Estuary.

The Severn Estuary is an exposed, natural feature with extensive views across water, mudflats and saltmarshes to the English Coast and Severn Bridges and forms a highly distinctive setting to the towns and villages along its shore.

Inland from the mainline railway, M48 and M4 corridors, and the Caldicot Levels, the gentle undulating hills of **Monmouthshire** surround the historic town of Caergwent and form a backdrop to the estuary. Between the Wye and the Usk lie scenic and tranquil hills and valleys with parklands and extensive woodlands at Wentwood and Chepstow Park, used for informal recreation.
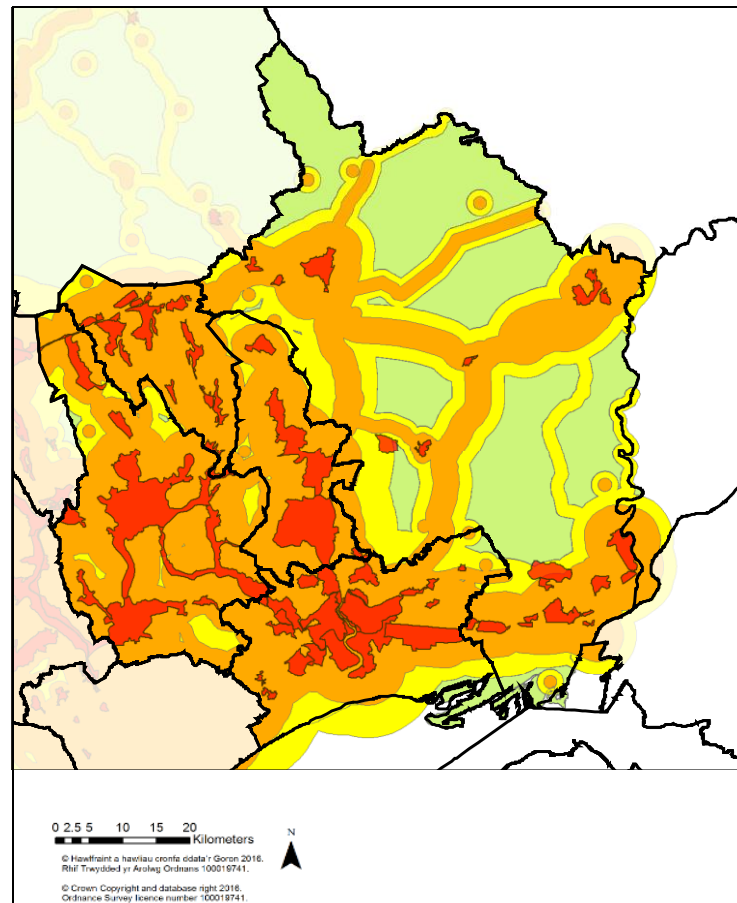
The **Wye Valley** and gorge is of outstanding scenic quality, reflected in its **AONB** designation. The AONB extends across the border, with two-thirds in England. The meandering River Wye, wooded scarps and limestone cliffs provide a setting for well-known historic towns and features such as Chepstow, Monmouth and Tintern Abbey. The tranquil rural valley is important for walking and fishing and has a very strong sense of place.

The scenic, tranquil valley of the River Usk includes the historic towns and castles at Usk and Abergavenny, where the distinctive peaks of the Blorenge and Sugar Loaf provide a strong sense of place, giving way to the ridges of the Black Mountains to the north. The Offa's Dyke National Trail traverses the area from the Hatterall Ridge to the Wye at Monmouth, through a patchwork of rolling hills and valleys dotted with historic villages and castles.
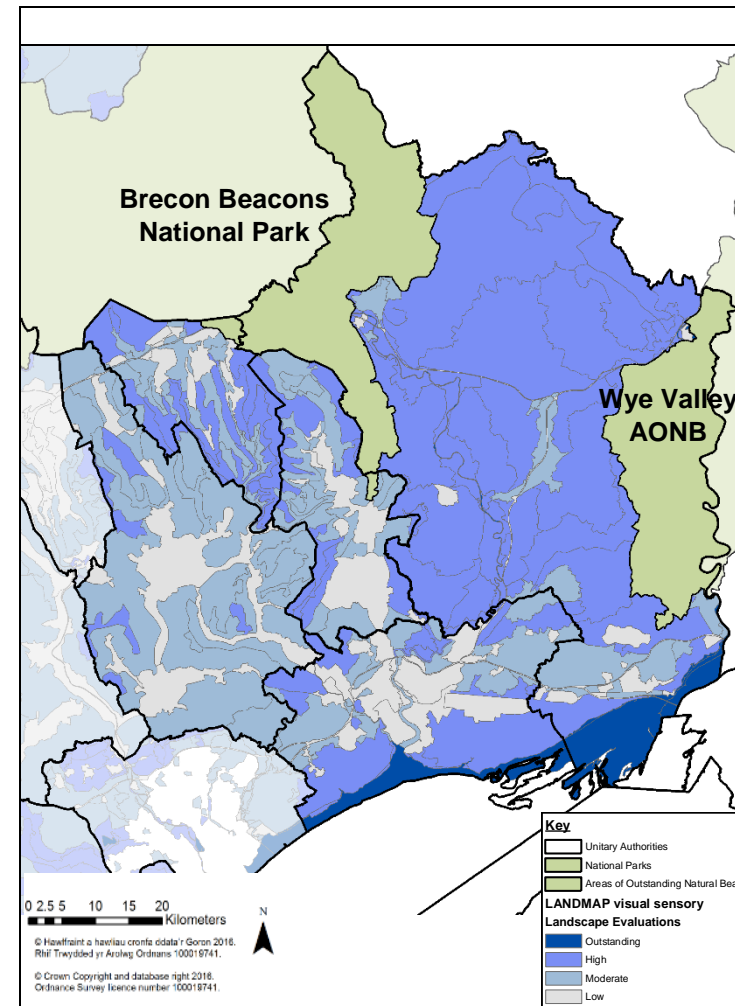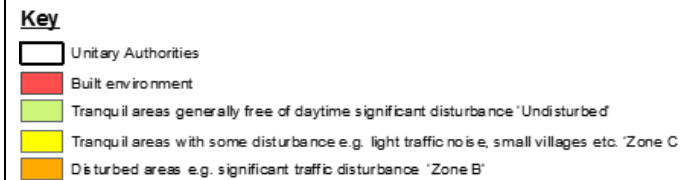

Lower Wye Valley Gorge Meanders © John Briggs

LANDMAP Visual & Sensory Landscape Evaluation

Visual & Sensory

- 10% (153km^2) is evaluated as a **nationally outstanding** visual & sensory landscape, associated with both uplands and lowlands
- 49% (790km^2) are evaluated as **high, regionally important** landscapes (26% lowland, 22% upland)
- A slight increase in High and Outstanding evaluations in both lowlands and uplands is recorded
- Development landscapes are generally evaluated as **low** in Visual & Sensory terms, the contribution of a LNR, trees and green spaces raised an evaluation from low to moderate
- Conserve and enhance outstanding and high landscapes
- Enhance lower quality landscapes to contribute to wellbeing

Tranquillity

- Tranquil areas have decreased by 14% over a 12-year period, equating to a loss of 60km^2

- Monmouthshire, including the Wye Valley AONB, is a significant contributor to tranquil landscapes retaining 350km^2 of tranquil landscapes in 2009

- Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent both have <1km^2 tranquil landscapes, over 94% of their landscapes are significantly disturbed
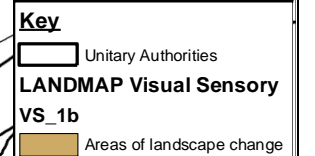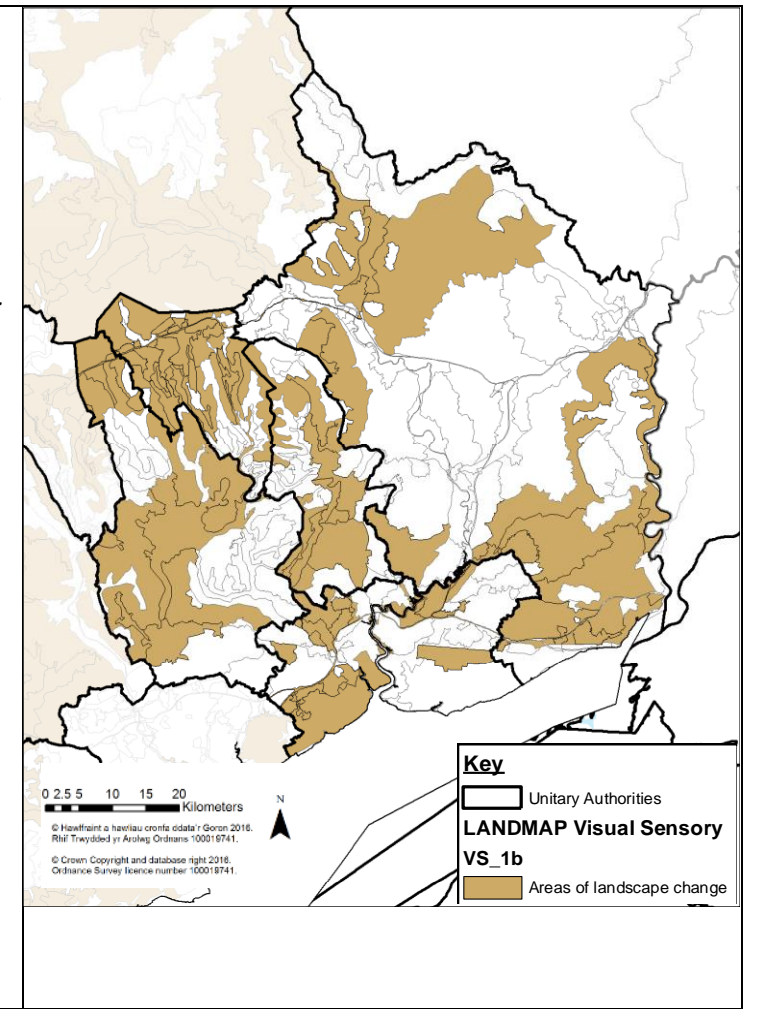
Landscape Change

- Settlement expansion is evident. Increased housing and commercial developments are mostly within existing built land. Development is affecting the historic landscape near Blaenavon World Heritage Site, common land, and the Gwent Levels. Change is evident along M4 corridor and A465 upgrades
- Industrial changes include quarry extensions, poor views to extensive re-workings and coal washery reduces landscape value. Demolition and redevelopment of industrial works and coal reclamation, more varied vegetation is evident as restored land re-vegetates. Some reprofiling to reduce noise.
- Cumulative impacts on views from wind turbine and solar developments. Increased off road activity affects tranquillity
- Habitat mosaics, acid grassland and bracken on valley sides have all increased. Decline in mire and bog, upland mosaics are at risk of losing diversity from drying. Much felling and replanting, mixed woodland replacing conifers in many second rotation plantations
- Positive improvements arise from landscape partnership schemes and projects (Overlooking the Wye, Forgotten Landscapes), new LNR, Historic Park and Garden. Improvements to sense

of place and open spaces (Tredegar, Six Bells, Ebbw Fach Trail)	