



# A Countryside Strategy for Caerphilly County Borough



# Introduction to the Strategy

## Our Shared Vision

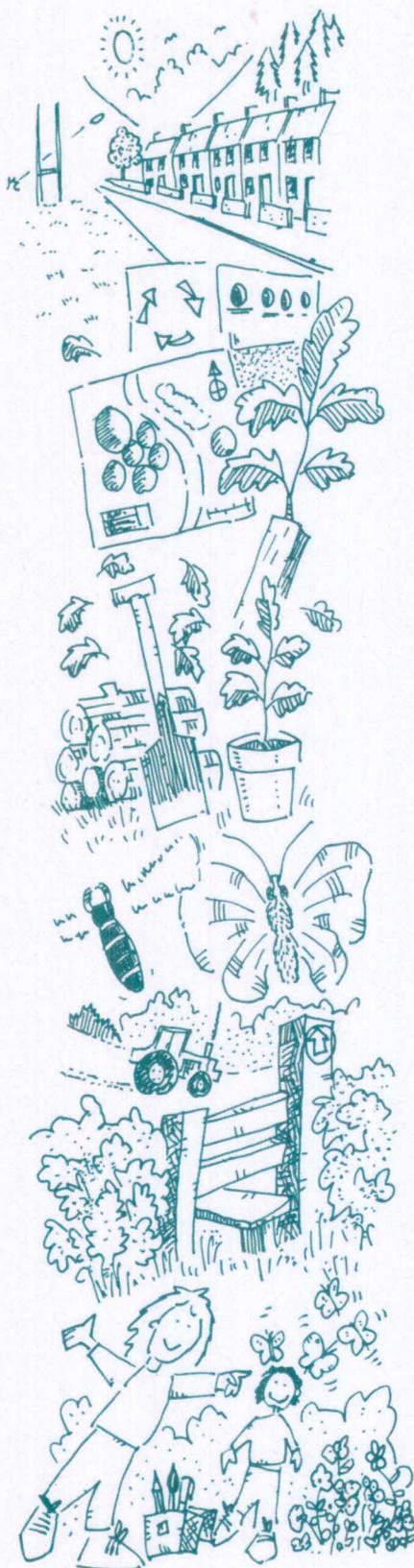
Caerphilly County Borough will be a place where

*“the management of the countryside is based on sustainable principles - a diversity of landscapes, habitats and species managed within a thriving rural economy; our countryside will provide enjoyment, relaxation and inspiration for local people and visitors, confirming a sense of ‘place’, a distinct local identity and an expression of cultural heritage.”*

## Purpose

The Strategy will

-  provide a clear policy framework for countryside initiatives in conjunction with other Council strategies
-  identify a rolling programme of action to implement the policies in co-operation with our partners
-  provide a basis for securing the co-ordinated funding of new countryside initiatives



# Context and Strategic Issues

## Description of area

Caerphilly County Borough lies in the South Wales valleys between Cardiff and Newport to the south and the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north. With a population of 170,000 (1991 Census), it covers an area of 28,000 hectares, over 75% of which is used for agriculture or forestry.

The landscape of the County Borough is varied, ranging, in the north, from the upland moorland of Pen March and the open Commons of Gelligaer and Mynydd Maen to the dramatic steep sided valley slopes of the Ebbw, Sirhowy and Rhymney rivers. To the south is a softer landscape covering the more traditional patchwork of agricultural fields of the Mynyddislwyn plateau and the mixed agricultural and woodland landscapes of the Machen and Rudry areas.

## Scope of the Strategy

The Countryside Strategy has been prepared within the context of the Local Agenda 21 process which is the development of local policies to meet people's needs and improve their quality of life without damaging the environment. The process involves building partnerships with the local community, voluntary organisations and businesses.

The Strategy focuses on those matters which the County Borough Council can directly influence by its own actions, in partnership with other public agencies, voluntary bodies or with the private sector. It will be realised through the implementation of an Integrated Action Programme.

The Council will seek to involve all partners in the process of planning, implementation and review of the Countryside Strategy and Integrated Action Programme.

## Key Issues

**In the preparation of the Strategy the following were identified as issues -**

-  the increasing demand for access for recreation and enjoyment in the countryside particularly on upland commons
-  the growing awareness of environmental issues
-  the influence of the economic pressures faced by farming and forestry
-  the pressure to develop greenfield sites for housing and employment
-  the continuing loss and degradation of habitats
-  the lack of complete information on which to take decisions

## Opportunities

**Opportunities now exist to -**

-  work more closely with farmers and landowners, building on the existing relationships and goodwill established through the work of previous authorities
-  work within the development plan process to address the issue of development in the countryside
-  use the opportunities presented by the new organisational structures to build up data and monitor trends in habitat loss and creation
-  build on growing corporate and public awareness of environmental issues to turn appreciation into action



# Landscape Conservation and Enhancement



## Landscape

Caerphilly County Borough has a very attractive landscape which is subject to pressure from a variety of sources including changes in agricultural and forestry practices and from new development.

The Council recognises the importance of this green backcloth and realises that a well managed and living landscape can benefit the economy, safeguard and create wildlife habitats and add to the general public amenity and perception of the area. To this end it is implementing the landscape strategies that were prepared for the former Islwyn and Rhymney Valley areas.

The Council also recognises the major roles that agriculture and forestry play in managing the landscape. Other agencies have complementary roles in implementing local environmental initiatives, particularly those that emphasise community involvement.

Fly tipping, vandalism, litter and pollution are causes of environmental concern in the County Borough. Actions are undertaken to clean up the environment and to reduce the creation of litter and pollution by the Council and through the support of other bodies such as the Environment Agency and Keep Wales Tidy.

## Historic Environment

The human character of the countryside is the product of man's activity over thousands of years. Agricultural practices, the Industrial Revolution and more recent building developments have left their mark to form elements of what we now call the historic environment a combination of landform, archeological remains and buildings of past centuries.

Some of these structures and their surroundings continue to be used by today's communities; others provide extensive physical evidence of the activities of former generations and societies. This built and

cultural heritage cannot be replaced and so its conservation needs to be given special weight if the practice of sustainable development is to be followed.

Caerphilly County Borough has a variety of archeological remains, buildings and landscapes of interest. Industrial archaeology is particularly important and since it is often associated with derelict land, features can be conserved and enhanced as part of land reclamation schemes.

## Trees, hedgerows and woodlands

Trees, hedgerows and woodlands are an integral part of the landscape of towns and villages, the urban fringe and rural parts of Caerphilly County Borough.

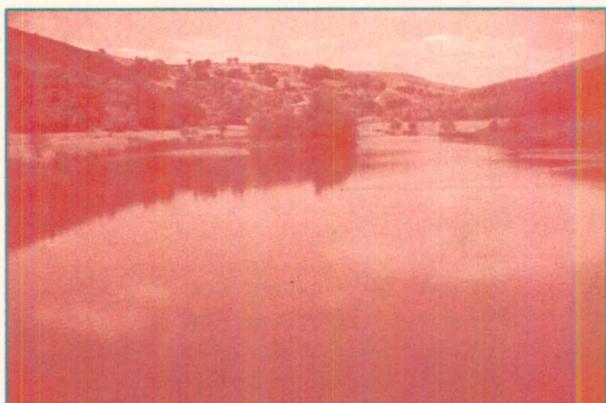
In addition, woodland is an important wildlife habitat while hedgerows provide a linear network of trees that link the woodland habitats together.

Woodlands provide many opportunities for informal recreation both in urban and rural locations. Forest Enterprise, the body which manages the land owned by the Forestry Commission, has recognised this and has launched the Valleys Forest Initiative in South Wales, providing opportunities for local community involvement and the development of further public use of its woodlands.

Woodlands have for centuries been recognised as a valuable resource and have been managed to produce timber for a variety of uses. Today the value of these woodlands as stores of carbon dioxide, one of the "greenhouse gases", is another important consideration.

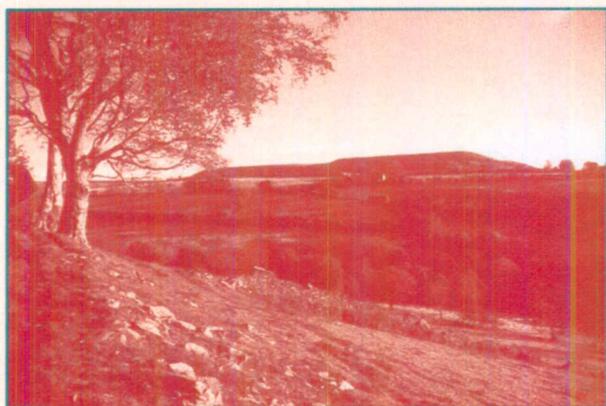
The survival of native broadleaved woodland is being promoted successfully by Coed Cymru, an all Wales initiative which gives practical advice and help to farmers, woodland owners, community groups, individuals and local authorities on the management and marketing of this timber resource.





## Objectives

-  to protect and enhance the landscape quality and character of Caerphilly County Borough; in particular, to encourage the protection and enhancement of special or threatened landscape types and features
-  to support the role of the farming community and woodland managers in maintaining the varied landscape of the County Borough and to integrate access and recreation with the needs of the owners and occupiers of the land
-  to support the role played by other bodies in carrying out schemes to maintain and enhance the quality of the urban and rural environment
-  to maintain and enhance the quality of the historic environment



## Policies - Landscape

-  landscape strategies will be used to ensure that development is well integrated into its surroundings and to secure the protection and enhancement of key landscape features
-  encouragement and support will be given to farmers, landowners and managers of land in their efforts to maintain and enhance environmental features within their control
-  the restoration of derelict land will be used to provide the opportunity to create new landscapes and a diversity of habitats which are well integrated into their surroundings
-  reclaimed land retained in County Borough Council ownership will be managed to maintain and enhance its amenity and wildlife value
-  landscape advice, project design and supervision will seek to ensure that environmental improvement schemes achieve a degree of sustainability; schemes will be encouraged which reflect the character of their surroundings, have low maintenance requirements and make minimal use of materials such as pesticides or peat
-  the proper management of common land in Caerphilly County Borough will be supported
-  countryside management services will be supported in conjunction with funding partners
-  support will be given to projects which seek to manage land in the ownership of the Council such as school grounds and open spaces within industrial or housing estates, for the purposes of nature conservation, environmental education and landscape enhancement



## Historic Environment

 landscapes and sites of archeological, architectural, historic or cultural interest will be protected and practical initiatives to maintain and enhance them will be supported

 support will be given to the Glamorgan Gwent Archeological Trust to ensure that an up to date record of historic sites and monuments and a professional advisory service is maintained

 support will be given to Cadw in the preparation of the Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales



## Trees, hedgerows and woodlands

 a woodland strategy will be prepared to provide a policy framework for the planting and management of trees and woodlands in Caerphilly County Borough

 the management of woodland, in particular ancient semi natural woodland, will be encouraged, to ensure natural regeneration

 the retention and enhancement of the biodiversity of woodland habitats and their associated species will be encouraged

 the positive management of trees, hedgerows and woodlands on land owned by Caerphilly County Borough Council will be undertaken

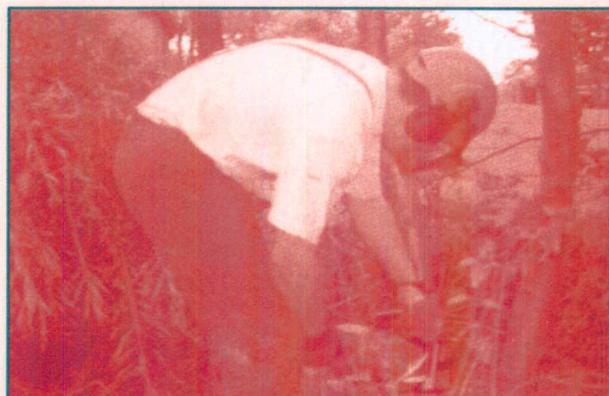
 the work of Coed Cymru will be supported

 an up to date record of Tree Preservation Orders will be maintained and this will be regularly reviewed

 important hedgerows in the County Borough will be identified and protected

 the creation of community woodlands will be encouraged, particularly in urban fringe locations, to provide increased opportunities for recreation and access; the involvement of the local community and schools in their management will be supported

 encouragement will be given to the management of riverside trees to maintain river habitat diversity





# Nature Conservation

The County Borough of Caerphilly supports a wide and rich diversity of wildlife and habitats. There are nine Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for their national nature conservation or earth science importance. In addition, there are three Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and several hundred Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) that are of local nature conservation value.



Wildlife has no respect for boundaries; whilst the greatest diversity will continue to be found in rural areas, important habitats can be found in towns and villages and even in individual buildings.

The habitats on which the wildlife depend, such as derelict land, former mineral workings, old railway lines and agricultural land on the urban fringe, are under pressure from numerous directions, including demand for development and changes in management practices.



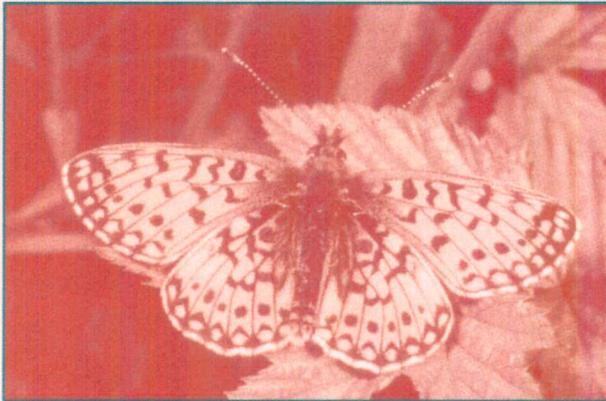
The loss of ancient woodlands, un-improved pasture, moorland and hedgerows, and the draining of wet meadows and marshes are all particular concerns. Habitat degradation due to grassland improvement, reduced grazing of common land and the invasion of species such as Japanese Knotweed are also issues. SSSI or LNR designations are no guarantee of absolute protection for species or habitats and SINCs have no statutory protection.

The value of wildlife, for its own sake, is increasingly being recognised. The design of new landscapes, and the sympathetic management of existing habitats within landscapes, such as woodlands, can contribute significantly to the maintenance of biodiversity and the enhancement of wildlife habitats throughout the County Borough.



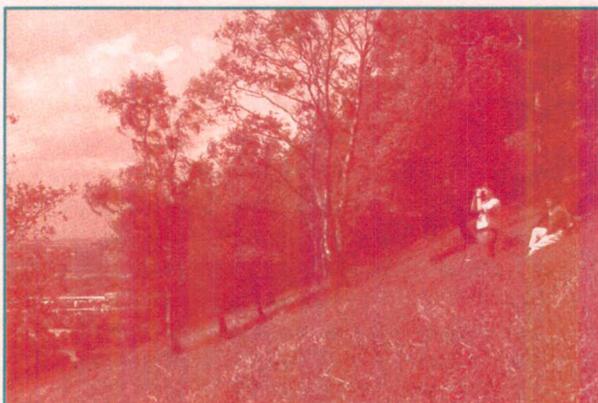
Countryside management projects, grant aided schemes and initiatives such as Coed Cymru make positive contributions to this process. Environmental education is also vital in raising awareness of the necessity for appropriate habitat management and in encouraging schools and local communities to take an active role in the management of habitats in their locality.





## Objectives

-  to support the maintenance and enhancement of the wildlife value of sites through planning policies and practical initiatives
-  to support initiatives which encourage appropriate habitat and species diversity and meet the objectives of the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan
-  to provide ecological advice to the Council and other agencies



## Policies

-  every effort will be made to maintain and enhance the diversity of the wildlife of the County Borough and ensure the sustainability of its habitats, natural ecosystems and important geological and geomorphological sites
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Council ownership will be maintained and enhanced and encouragement will be given to the appropriate management of sites in private ownership
-  the Council, with the support of landowners, will designate Local Nature Reserves in appropriate locations
-  an up to date schedule of Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs) will be maintained; encouragement will be given to landowners and occupiers to safeguard these sites through the preparation and implementation of management plans
-  sites of geological and geomorphological interest throughout the County Borough will be identified and protected
-  in partnership with others, support will be given to the establishment of a local biological record centre
-  the retention of habitats that support rare or endangered species will be encouraged
-  projects which identify the extent of invasive species, such as Japanese Knotweed, in the County Borough and programmes which seek to secure their eradication will be supported
-  where appropriate, the creation of new habitats particularly wetland habitats, will be encouraged
-  encouragement will be given to the maintenance of obvious key wildlife corridors such as streams, rivers and hedgerows and the establishment of new corridors





# Countryside Access and Enjoyment

Caerphilly County Borough offers a range of opportunities for access and enjoyment; from rivers to canal tow paths and footpaths to country parks. The Council and other agencies such as Groundwork and Forest Enterprise have been active in providing for countryside recreation. Individually and jointly, a wide range of projects and sites are managed which encourage formal and informal access to the countryside. The Council runs three country parks, Parc Cwm Darran, Pen-y-fan Pond Country Park and Sirhowy Valley Country Park. It is also developing two more, Bargoed and Penallta. In addition, it currently contributes to the annual expenditure of Parc Bryn Bach, which straddles the boundary of the County Borough. It also operates Cwmcarn Forest Drive Visitor Centre, the Llancaiach Fawr Living History Museum, Drenewydd Museum, Elliot Colliery and the Ynys Hywel Farm.

The Council is actively working with its partners to improve access to the countryside for those without cars. The provision of access to the urban fringe is therefore seen as a high priority. For instance, it is involved with Sustrans and other local authorities in South Wales in developing the Millennium cycle route from Newport to Kidwelly. This will form part of the National Cycle Network.

The development and promotion of long distance walks including the Ebbw Valley Walk, the Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk, Northern Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Walk and the Sirhowy Valley Walk are also a priority. Shorter circular walks such as those around Manmoel and Rudry are also popular and more will need to be developed.

The demand for certain types of countryside recreation is growing within the County Borough. Countryside management is increasingly necessary to manage these demands and reduce conflicts with conservation. It is important that a balance is achieved between the growth of access and recreation and the need for conserving the countryside. The countryside services run by the County Borough Council, are seen as the focus of the Authority's action in the countryside, working in co-operation with Caerphilly Groundwork, Forest Enterprise, landowners and the community.

## Objectives

-  to provide encouragement and opportunities for countryside recreation for all sectors of the community
-  to encourage additional visits by the management and development of facilities for recreation, taking into account the needs of other countryside interests and land users



## Policies

-  support will be given to improving the opportunities available for accessible countryside recreation in country parks, on Public Rights of Way, through the provision of cyclepaths and the use of disused railway lines, forest tracks and canal towpaths
-  access by public transport will be promoted and encouraged
-  continued support will be given to the Caerphilly Countryside Access Forum
-  the use of continued public access agreements for land affected by the Forest Enterprise disposals programme will be supported
-  where appropriate assistance will be offered in resolving conflicts relating to recreational activities



# Environmental appreciation and Understanding



*In recent years there has been a substantial shift in European Union and Government policy regarding the environment, reflecting global concerns and the need for sustainable development in the context of Local Agenda 21.*

*The growth of public interest in environmental issues has resulted in an increasing demand for information. The Government and the European Union have passed legislation to ensure that environmental information is made available to the public on request. In addition to providing information, the Authority has a duty to inform the public about environmental matters. The opportunity now exists to make a co-ordinated approach to the provision of information and to make it more accessible, through, for instance, using libraries.*

*Environmental education for both young and old is a vital tool for presenting the conservation message, creating understanding and instilling confidence in people. In the County Borough the work of the countryside management services has shown that an understanding of the issues encourages care for the environment. By interpreting countryside issues and experiences through enjoyable and exciting means, such as WATCH Clubs and MAFF Farmlink, appreciation and understanding can follow. Agricultural shows, Open Days and other local events provide ideal vehicles for passing information and creating understanding.*

*Community partnership, action and practical involvement, particularly for young people and the disabled, can also make an important contribution. School wildlife gardens, playschemes, small landscaping schemes, litter clearance projects and tree planting, when undertaken by local groups can encourage a sense of identity and instil pride in an area.*



## Objectives

-  to promote and encourage a greater understanding of Local Agenda 21 and wider global environmental issues
-  to support initiatives which interpret and provide information on sustainable development, environmental and planning matters in the County Borough
-  to support the development of environmental education at all levels
-  to encourage public participation of all sectors of the community in the environmental process



## Policies

-  environmental information (as specified in the Environmental Information Regulations 1992) will be made available to the public on request
-  community partnerships to implement Local Agenda 21 initiatives will be supported
-  opportunities to encourage a greater understanding of Local Agenda 21 and wider global environmental issues will be supported
-  through the countryside services the Council will continue its programme of environmental education
-  community involvement and the participation of volunteers through the countryside services will be encouraged
-  opportunities for people with learning difficulties to undertake environmental work will continue to be developed
-  appropriate staff training and continuing professional development will be supported





# Implementation of the Strategy

## Procedure for monitoring reviewing and updating the Strategy

The Countryside Strategy itself has been prepared to cover 5 years and will be continually monitored with a review every 3 years.

The effectiveness of the policies written in the Strategy will be measured in two ways:

An Integrated Action Programme (IAP) has been prepared for a 3 year period but will be subject to annual review and updating. This sets measured targets for the countryside management services and landscape service to achieve each year.

Other more general policies, which will not be expressed as specific actions in the IAP will, where appropriate, be given individual targets which will be monitored annually, for example, visitor numbers to country parks.

It is recognised that reviews will require sound information. Where data has been lacking in certain key areas, this has been identified in the Strategy itself.

It is essential for the Authority to establish partnerships to ensure the implementation of countryside objectives at a time when resources are limited. The existence of a good communications network of key partners supported by an emerging data base is seen as a vital resource which will need to be developed further and used effectively.



## Roles of all partners

Within the County Borough Council this work is managed by the multi-disciplinary Countryside and Landscape Services Group in the Planning Division. Based within the Technical Services Directorate, it provides professional and technical support for the field staff. Joint working arrangements and partnerships are vital to the successful operation of the Countryside Service. Within the Authority, strong links have been established with the Directorates of Social Services and Housing, Education and Leisure and the Chief Executive's Department.

In implementing the Strategy the Council will lead by introducing good management practice and through the sensitive management of land under its control. Its countryside management services in the Caerphilly Mountain area and the Ebbw Rhydney and Sirhowy Valleys will continue to work with local communities, landowners and occupiers to improve access for recreation, protect and enhance habitats and landscape features and provide opportunities for environmental education.

### Partners can also assist in the implementation of the Strategy -

**National agencies such as Cadw, CCW, Forest Enterprise, Forestry Authority, Environment Agency, Sports Council for Wales, Welsh Development Agency, Welsh Office Agriculture Department, Wales Tourist Board can assist by**

-  close liaison and co-operation
-  partnership arrangements
-  joint initiatives
-  sustainable land reclamation
-  management of their own landholding in accordance with the Strategy
-  long term maintenance and management



**National interest groups such as Ramblers' Association, RSPB, British Horse Society, Farmers Union of Wales, Country Landowners Association, National Farmers Union can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives

**Regional bodies such as the electricity, water and rail companies can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- management of their own landholding in accordance with the Strategy

**Neighbouring local authorities can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- sustainable land reclamation
- environmental education

**Community Councils can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- practical voluntary work

**Local interest groups and voluntary organisations can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation

- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- practical voluntary work

**Other local projects such as Groundwork Trusts can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- practical work
- environmental education

**Individuals and commercial enterprises such as landowners, farmers, local and other businesses can assist by**

- close liaison and co-operation
- partnership arrangements
- joint initiatives
- practical voluntary work
- management of their own land in accordance with the Strategy

## Identification of potential sources of funding

Although funding will come from within the County Borough Council's existing and future capital and maintenance budgets, the Authority recognises that Government controls on local authority funding will affect the level of direct investment in the County Borough. Grant aid will therefore be particularly important in securing the implementation of proposals where direct public involvement is needed and the Authority will rely heavily on grants from bodies such as the Countryside Council for Wales, the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board, the Environment Agency, the National Lottery and the European Union.

It is important that wherever schemes are undertaken there is a commitment for future maintenance.



# Appendix

## List of Consultees -

- Aber Valley Community Council  
ARC, South Wales  
Argoed Community Council  
Bargoed Town Council  
Bedwas and District Conservation Association  
Bedwas, Trethomas and Machen Community Council  
Blackwood Community Council  
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Brecon Beacons National Park  
British Association for Shooting and Conservation  
British Coal Opencast  
British Coal Properties  
British Gas Properties  
British Horse Society  
British Mountaineering Council  
British Rail Property Board  
British Telecom  
British Wind Energy Association  
BRO  
Bryn Bach Park  
Bus and Coach Council  
Byways and Bridleways Trust  
Cadw  
Caerphilly Commoners and Brinkers  
Caerphilly County Borough Access Group  
Caerphilly Town Council  
Campaign for a Better Caerphilly  
Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales  
Cardiff County Council  
Cardiff Cycling Campaign  
Cardiff Railway Company  
Celtic Energy  
Civic Trust for Wales  
Country Landowners Association  
Countryside Council for Wales  
Cyclists Touring Club  
Darran Valley Community Council  
Development Board for Rural Wales  
Environment Agency  
Farmers' Union of Wales  
Federation of Small Businesses  
Forest Enterprise  
Forestry Authority  
Friends of the Earth - Caerphilly  
Gelligaer Community Council  
Gelligaer Greencare  
Gelligaer and Merthyr Commoners Association  
Gelligaer Ramblers  
Glamorgan Badger Group  
Glamorgan Bat Group  
Glamorgan Bird Club  
Glamorgan Gwent Archeological Trust  
Glamorgan Wildlife Trust  
Green Doorstep, Caerphilly  
Groundwork Caerphilly  
Gwent Badger Group  
Gwent Bat Group  
Gwent Ornithological Society  
Gwent Police - motorcycle section  
Gwent Wildlife Trust  
Keep Wales Tidy  
LARA  
Llanbradach Community Council  
Machen Action Group  
Maescwmmer Community Council  
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council  
Mynydd Eglwysilan, Mynydd Meio and Graig Evan Leyshon  
Brinkers Association  
Mynydd y Grug and Dimlaith Commoners Association  
Mynydd Maen Amalgamated Commoners Association  
National Farmers Union  
National Grid Company  
National Power  
National Trust  
National Wind Power  
Nelson Community Council  
Nelson and Llancaiach Fawr Civic and Historical Society  
Newport County Borough Council  
New Tredegar Community Council  
Oxford House Industrial Archaeology Society  
Penyrheol, Treceenydd and Energlyn Community Council  
Powergen  
Powys County Council  
Railtrack  
The Ramblers  
Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council  
Rhymney Community Council  
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Rudry Community Council  
Rudry Local History Group  
South Wales Electricity  
Sports Council for Wales  
Sustrans  
Timber Growers UK  
Torfaen County Borough Council  
Tourism South and West Wales  
Trigen Wind Power Ltd  
Van Community Council  
WAYC  
Wales Council for the Disabled  
Wales Tourist Board  
Welsh Cycling Union  
Welsh Development Agency  
Welsh Historic Gardens Trust  
Welsh Office Agriculture Department  
Welsh Trail Riders Association  
Welsh Water  
Woodland Trust  
Youth Hostel Association

