

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**DESIGNATION OF VISUALLY IMPORTANT LOCAL
LANDSCAPES****APRIL 2008****TACP
10 Park Grove
Cardiff CF10 3BN****Project no: 8247
Project Status: Rev 1**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 TACP Consultants were commissioned in July 2007 by Caerphilly County Borough Council to carry out a review of the Special Landscape Area (SLA) designations within their administrative area (Figure 1.0). This was to use the recently approved methodology developed by the South East Wales Local Authority Consortium which utilises data from within the LANDMAP Information System.

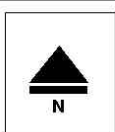
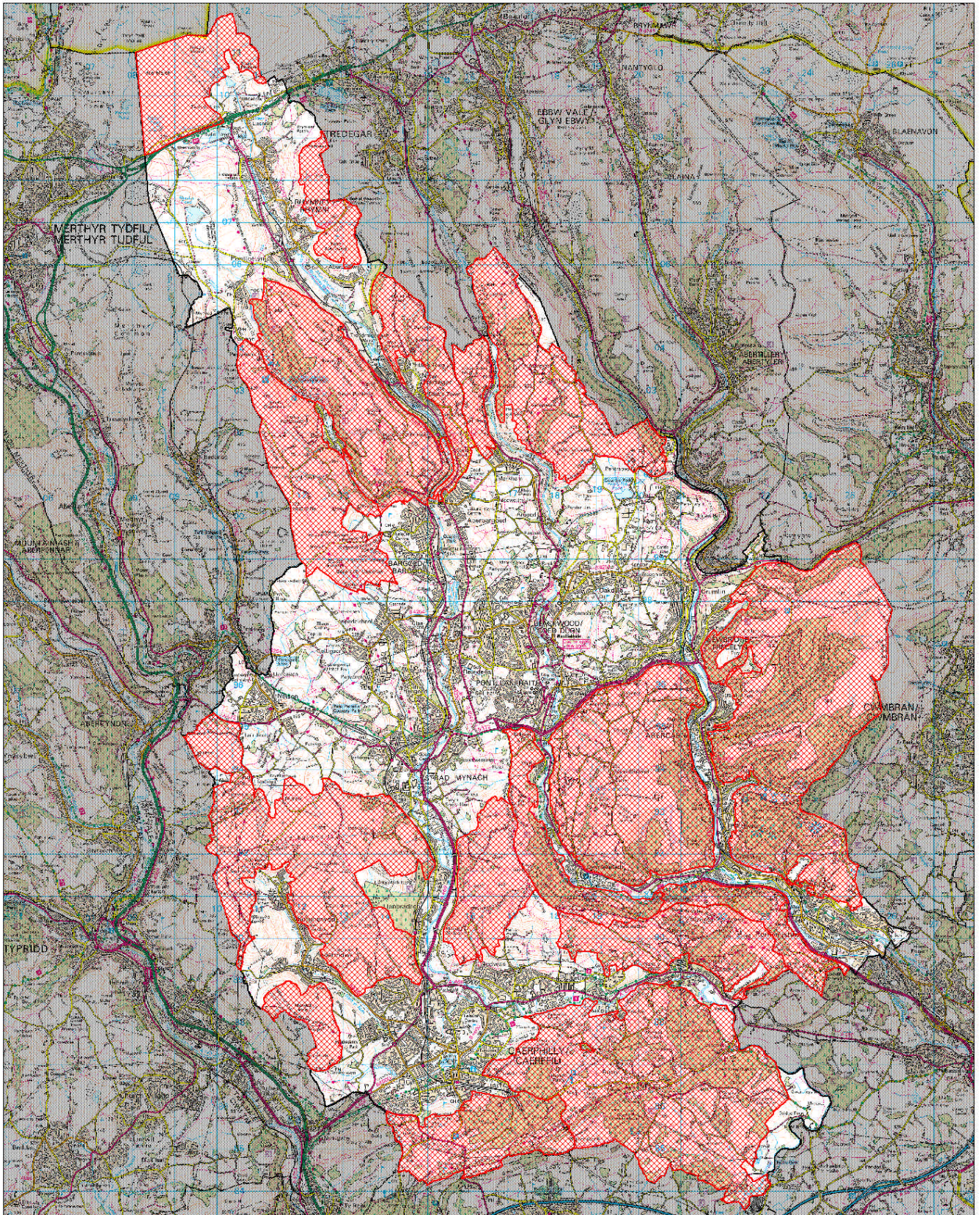
1.2 The study reviewed all of the County Borough and included an overview of the existing SLA designations (which had been based primarily on an appreciation of the visual qualities of the landscape) developed for the former district authorities of Rhymney Valley and Islwyn which constitute Caerphilly County Borough Council.

1.3 The LANDMAP Information System divides the landscapes into component elements known as aspect topic layers which are of equal importance and are assessed in terms of their character and value against a standard set of criteria. The aspect topics are as follows:-

- Geological Landscapes
- Landscape Habitats
- Visual and Sensory Landscapes
- Historic Landscapes
- Cultural Landscapes

For each of the aspect topic layers, discrete geographical known as aspect areas are identified and mapped and a data set is developed that includes a description, classification and evaluation of quality. The evaluation level is based upon a review of a number of sub-criteria, the number of which differ for the five aspect topic layers. The LANDMAP system is advocated as the preferred method of landscape assessment by the Welsh Assembly Government in Planning Policy Wales.

1.4 A number of areas have been highlighted as warranting designation as SLAs. However, the new SLA boundaries exclude areas previously so designated. These areas were generally those of some Visual and Sensory importance but that did not rate sufficiently in conjunction with other aspects to justify inclusion within the new SLA system. However, it is felt that these areas require some form of protective designation, for which the title of Visually Important Local Landscape (VILL) has been created (Figure 2.0).



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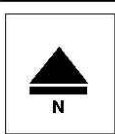
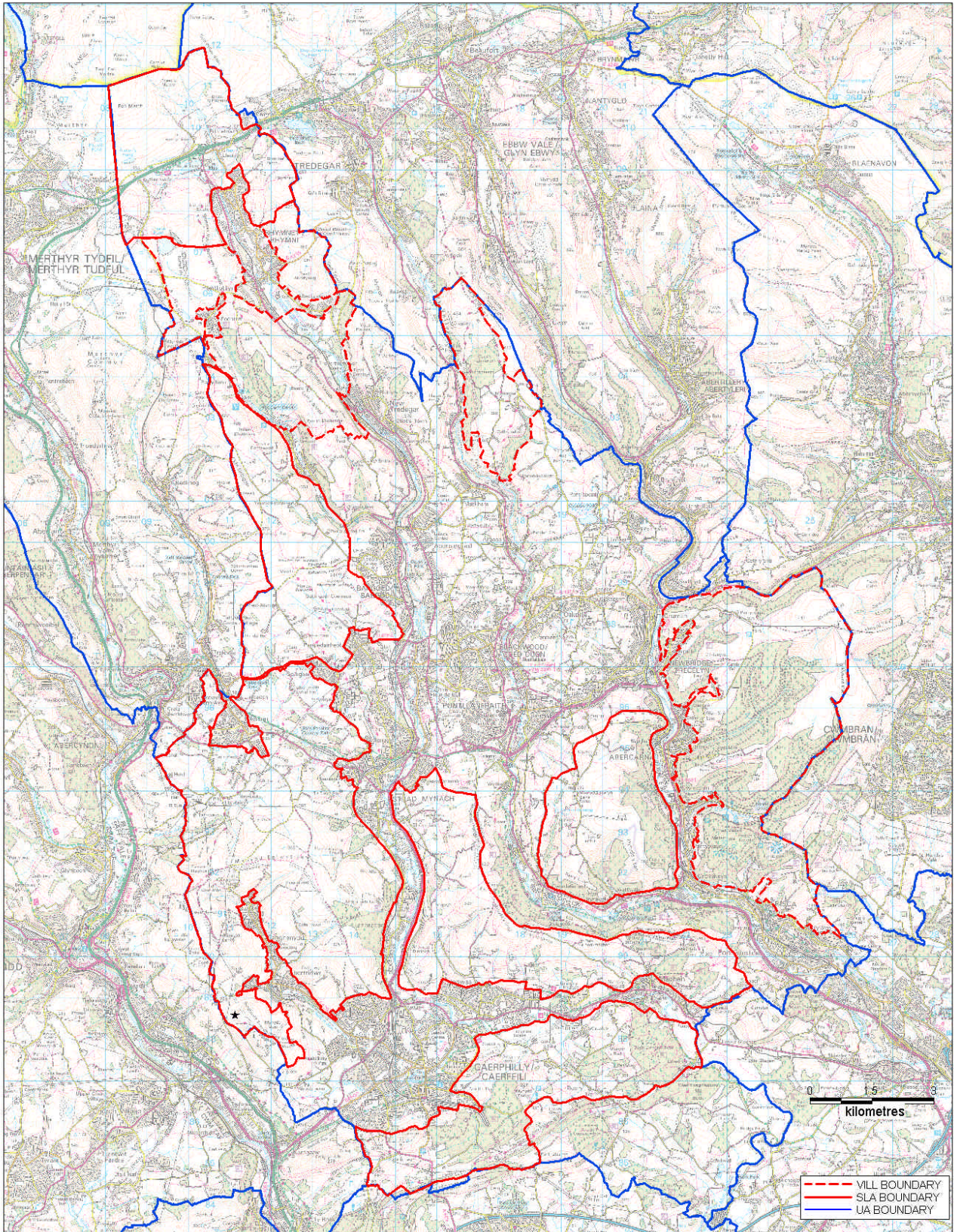
Existing Special
Landscape Areas

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NOT TO SCALE DATE JANUARY 2008

FIGURE / DRAWING NO.
1.0

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NOTES

Proposed SLA
and VILL Boundaries

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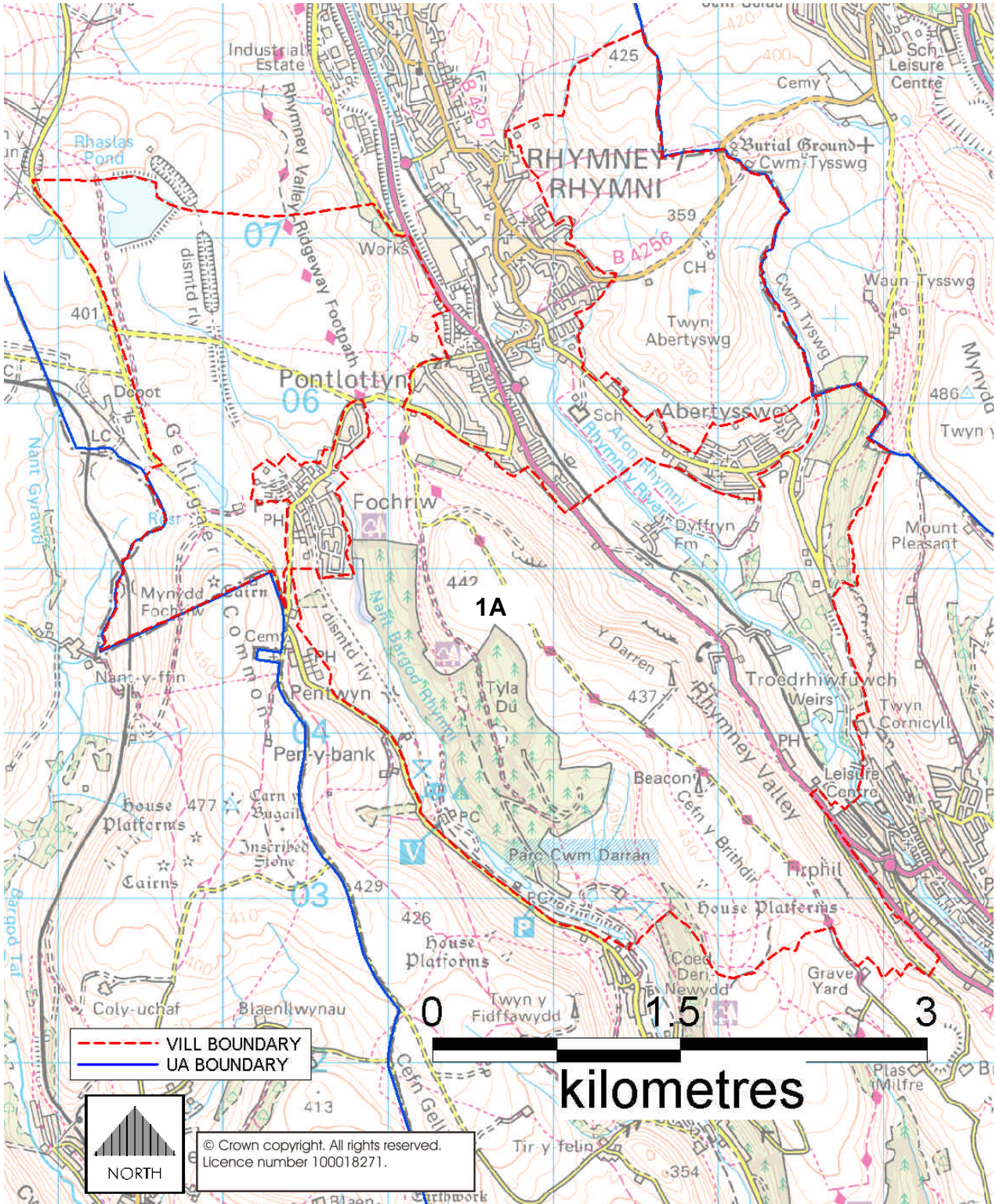
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2.0 Visually Important Local Landscapes

- 2.1 The concept of the VILL designation has been to identify those areas of the Borough that contribute to the visual qualities of the landscape but do not meet the criteria for designation as SLAs. This has arisen from the inclusion of the information from the five LANDMAP aspect topics rather than the reliance on a review of the visual qualities of the landscape.
- 2.2 Consequently the definition of VILL boundaries has used the LANDMAP Visual and Sensory Aspect Topic information. This has included all of the aspect areas not within a SLA which includes those identified as having both 'High' and 'Moderate' value. The latter level is defined as being 'locally important' and therefore warrants further consideration. Areas with 'Outstanding' evaluations are generally, as in this case, already included within the SLAs.
- 2.3 The areas identified as VILLs included all of those with a 'High' evaluation and the further review of the 'Moderate' areas; in particular the sub-criteria that underpin the overall evaluation level.
- 2.4 The potential VILL sites generally fell within the previous Council SLA areas. Each VILL was assessed against the three Strategic Criteria used for SLA designation for consistency and continuity of process. Inconsistencies between new VILL and previous SLA boundaries were further examined by ground truthing. Boundaries were finally defined on the basis of defensibility and coherence.

NORTHERN RHYMNEY VALLEY VILL LOCATION (Plan)



Photograph(s)



From Cefn y Brithdir looking east

Relevance against strategic criteria

- **Need**

The proposed VILLs about the Rhymney and Gelli-gaer SLAs. These areas did not fulfil the new criteria required for SLA designation but several aspects (or their sub-criteria) are of High Visual and Sensory evaluation and therefore would benefit from VILL designation. Two of the VILL aspect areas are included within the Rhymney SLA. The Visual and Sensory values are frequently only reduced by the adjacent urban development and VILL designation should serve to protect the landscape from further degradation. These areas are also currently of importance to those urban areas for their views out.

- **Coherence**

The area has two proposed VILLs, separated by the urban development of Abertysswg. Adjacent areas of Moderate evaluation are included within the VILL boundaries for cohesion and their locally important status. County, development and adjacent SLA boundaries form the VILL boundaries. The north-west of 1A follows a road to exclude a depot site.

- **Consensus**

Three aspects within the proposed VILL were previously designated SLAs. The boundary needs to be confirmed with relevant stakeholders.

Primary Landscape Qualities and Features

The proposed VILLs are predominantly open and exposed grassland. The aspect area of High Visual and Sensory value has a strong sense of place, being the largely unspoilt hill/valley landscape of Cefn y Brithdir, of large scale and with attractive views down the Rhymney Valley. To the east is a distinctive rocky hillside. Views across the valley give it a strong upland character, occasionally limited by topography and/or vegetation.

To the north, Gelli-gaer Common is an area of marshy grassland. The upland sense of place is complicated by urban edges and visual detractors (pylons) but increases with elevation and views out.

Surrounding this aspect area is a complex mix of broadleaf/coniferous woodland. Adjacent to the Nant Bargod Rhymni, Parc Cwm Darran is a very scenic area with high quality traditional buildings and good facilities in excellent repair.

Rhymney and Bedwellte Common are pleasant and have been included for coherence.

Key Policy and Management Issues

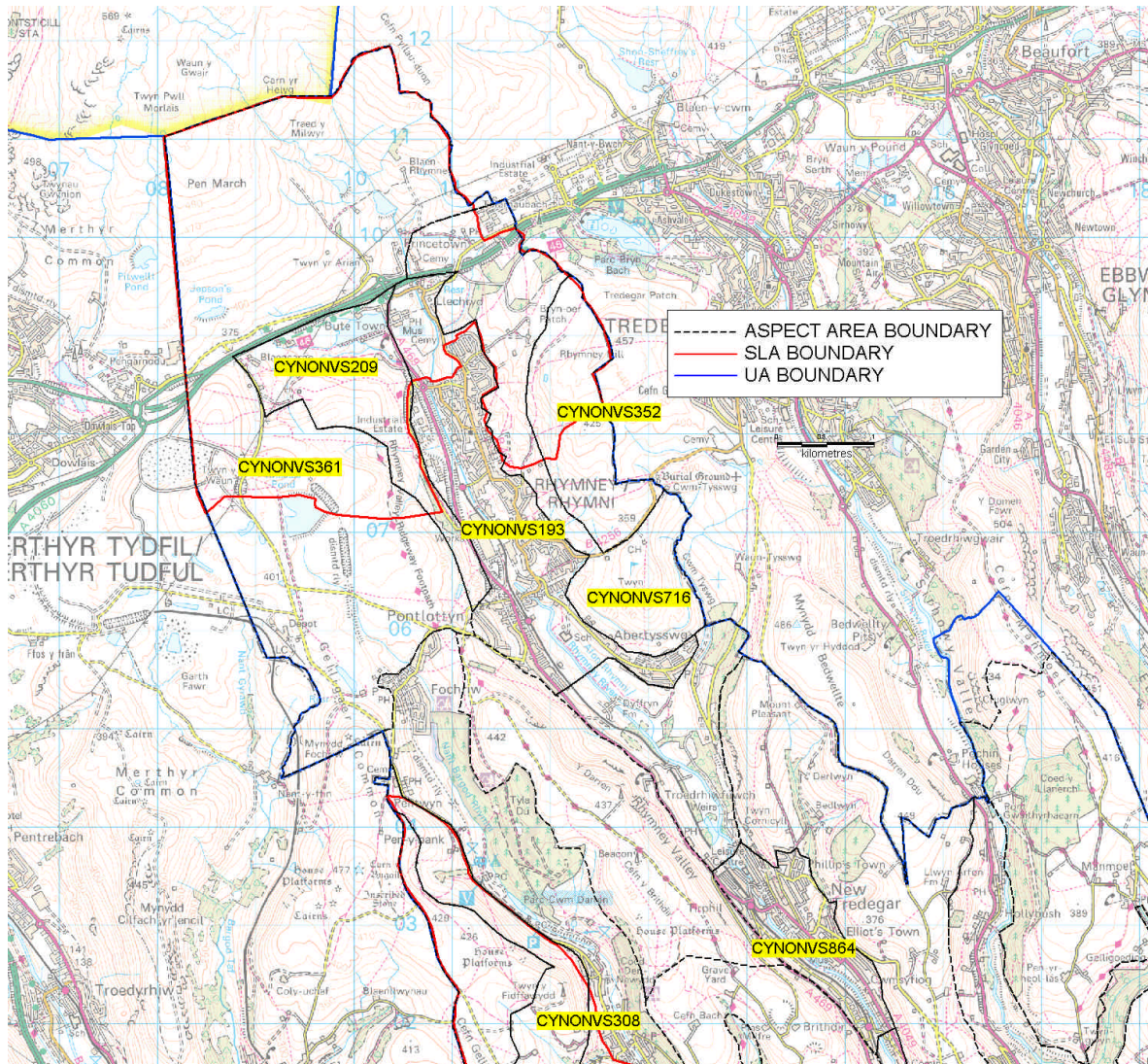
- Sheep overgrazing and agricultural management practices
- Spread of bracken and coniferous plantations
- Visual detractors such as pylons/industrial debris
- Noise from A465
- Fly tipping
- Conserve openness

Boundary Justification

The VILL boundaries are formed by county, development and adjacent SLA boundaries. The north-west of 1A detours and follows a road to exclude a depot site.

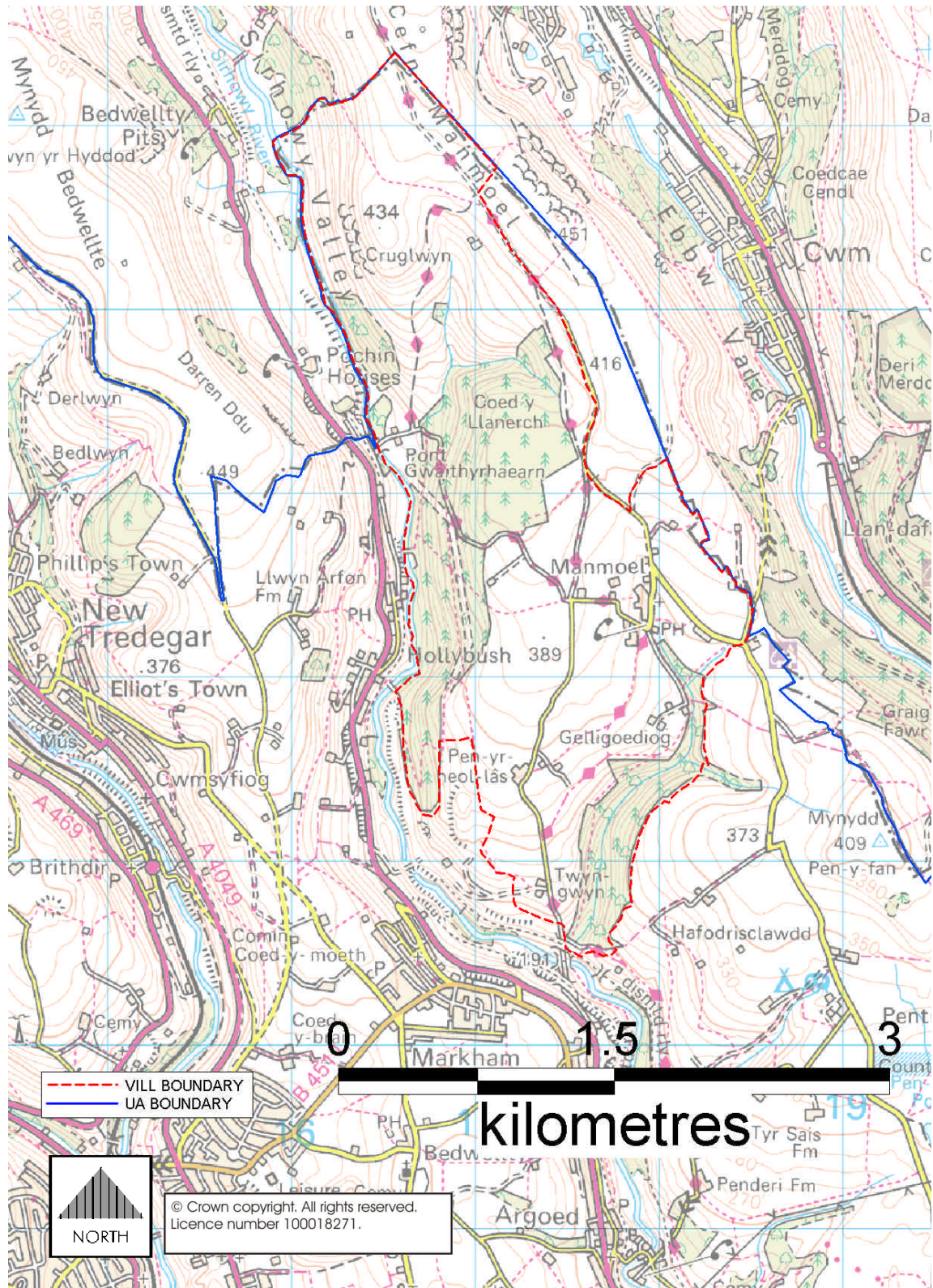
TITLE: Northern Rhymney Valley

ASPECT AREA LOCATIONS (Plan)



VILL - Rhymney	Visual & Sensory Aspect Area	Evaluation	CRITERIA			
			1	2	3	4
	VS 209	Moderate	M	M	M	M
	VS 308	Moderate	M	M	M	M
	VS 352	Moderate	M	M	H	M
	VS 361	Moderate	H	L	M	M
	VS 605	High	H	H	H	M
	VS 716	Moderate	M	M	M	M
	VS 785	Moderate	M	M	M	M

MAN-MOEL VILL LOCATION (Plan)



Photograph(s)



Cefn Manmoel looking south-west



Typical grown-out hedge pattern near Man-moel



Grown-out hedges and typical walls in poor state of repair, near Man-moel

Relevance against strategic criteria

- **Need**

This area is of High Visual and Sensory value. Despite High evaluations within other criteria, the size of the potential SLA designation was too small to be coherent. However, some designation is still required.

- **Coherence**

North, east and west boundaries are formed by the UA boundary. The south boundary generally follows the Visual and Sensory aspect boundary and field edges.

- **Consensus**

The proposed VILL closely follows the larger previously defined SLA. Ground truthing established the extent of the designation, excluding the less distinctive field pattern area to the south. The boundary needs to be confirmed with relevant stakeholders.

Primary Landscape Qualities and Features

The northern tip of the proposed VILL is part of Manmoel Common, a landscape of rough grazed grassland and heath. It is open in character and affords views down valleys and to plantation woodland. This plantation is transient in nature and long-term management needs to bear this in mind. To the immediate south-east of this area is reclaimed land, the man-made appearance of which prevents its inclusion.

The landscape to the south is a rolling, hilly landform with a distinctive field pattern/mosaic of grown-out beech hedging and typical stone walls. The condition of these is poor but the former gives the impression of dense woodland from outside the area and has a strong, sculptural quality. The character here will differ greatly when trees are in leaf, feeling much more enclosed. Field patterns are becoming threatened by unsympathetic division into paddocks. The south boundary is mostly defined by woodland and the landscape beyond this is of much more open and common field patterns, of different character.

Key Policy and Management Issues

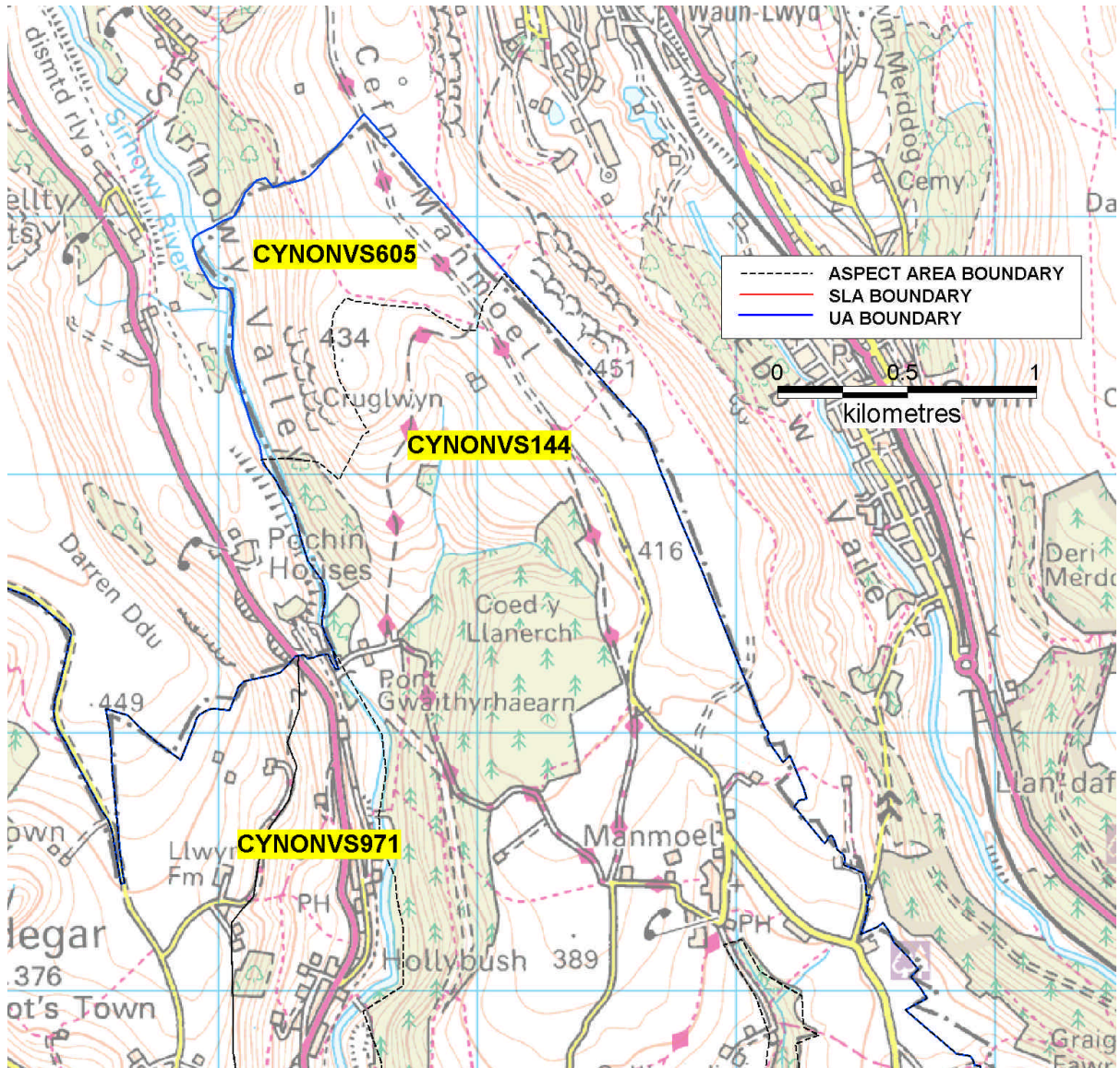
- Overgrazing and vegetation management (hedges/woodlands)
- Spread of bracken
- Consideration of a structured approach to boundary management, particularly the cycle of hedgerow cutting to maintain the distinctive pattern of hedgerow trees.
- Field pattern conservation/sense of openness

Boundary Justification

North, east and west boundaries follow the UA boundary. The south boundary generally replicates the Visual and Sensory aspect boundary and field edges.

TITLE: Man-moel

ASPECT AREA LOCATIONS (Plan)



VILL - Manmoel	Visual & Sensory Aspect Area	Evaluation	CRITERIA			
			1	2	3	4
	VS 144	Moderate	M	M	M	M
	VS 605	High	H	H	H	M
	VS 971	Moderate	M	M	M	M

ABERCARN VILL LOCATION (Plan)

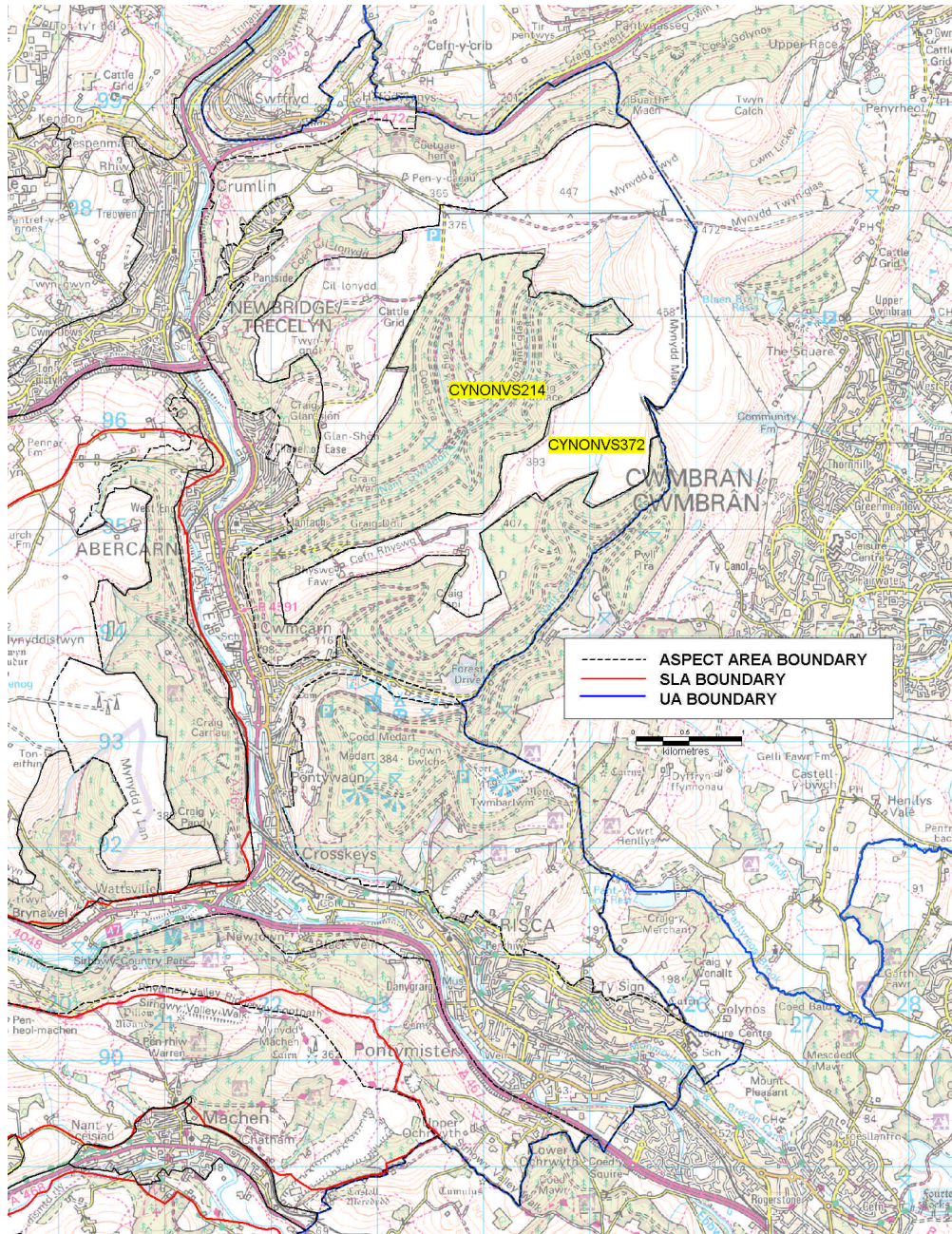


Photograph(s)

<p>Relevance against strategic criteria</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need <p>The proposed VILL was previously an SLA. Forested areas are of High Visual and Sensory value for Rarity in the regional context. The overall evaluation of Moderate is locally important.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence <p>The east boundary is defined by the UA boundary and the others by development (Abercarn and Risca) and roads.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus <p>The VILL closely follows the previously designated SLA. The boundary needs to be confirmed with relevant stakeholders.</p>
<p>Primary Landscape Qualities and Features</p> <p>An upland area of ridges and valleys, much of which consists of a woodland mosaic of conifers (providing winter greenery) and mixed woodland, giving a sense of enclosure. Some views are restricted by forestry but open ridgelines afford views across adjacent wooded valleys.</p> <p>Coniferous plantation flanks areas of heath (which provide autumn colour) and grassland. This heath land and its views to the uplands should be conserved. The visual values of these aspects are, in part, dependent upon the contrast with each other. Visual detractors (vertical elements including pylons) on the open ridgeline have reduced the Visual and Sensory evaluations for both.</p>
<p>Key Policy and Management Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forestry/agricultural management • Encroachment of forestry into heath land • Forestry – maximise opportunities for planting broadleaf species to soften edges • Field pattern conservation/quality of intrusion • Value is below potential largely due to intrusion of pylons/vertical elements
<p>Boundary Justification</p> <p>The east boundary is defined by the UA boundary and the rest follows main roads, excluding development and quarries from the VILL.</p>

TITLE: Abercarn

ASPECT AREA LOCATIONS (Plan)



VILL - Abercarn	Visual & Sensory Aspect Area	Evaluation	CRITERIA			
			1	2	3	4
	VS 114	Low	L	L	M	L
	VS 190	Low	M	L	L	L
	VS 214	Moderate	M	M	M	M
	VS 372	Moderate	M	M	M	H