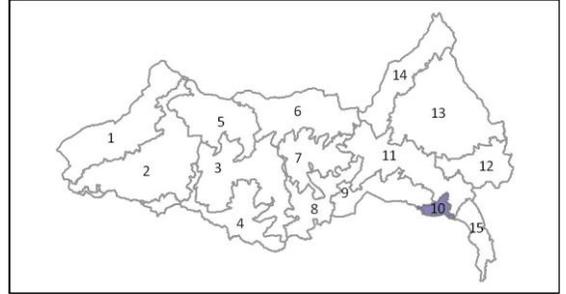


**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREA 10: *CLYDACH GORGE*****Broad Landscape Type: *SETTLED VALLEYS******Description*****Location and Context**

This small LCA is located towards the eastern end of the National Park, on its southern boundary. It includes the Clydach Gorge between the settlements of Brynmawr and Gilwern, and also Gilwern Hill. The A465 'Heads of the Valleys Road' runs through the gorge. To the north-west is Mynyddoedd Llangatwg and Llangynidr LCA and to the north-east is the Eastern Usk Valley LCA. Blorenge Hills and Slopes LCA is to the east.

**Summary Description**

This distinctive LCA is characterised by its dramatic and deep gorge. Beech woodlands cling to its steep sides, and contain remains of the area's rich industrial past, including viaducts, tramroads, quarries, ironworks and lime kilns. In the bottom of the gorge, the River Clydach leaps over rocks and waterfalls. Despite its steep topography, this is a settled landscape, with a busy main road running through the gorge, and lines of terraced houses along the hillside. Above is Gilwern Hill, also an important industrial site, with views across and into the gorge below. This part of the area is within Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.

*Clydach Gorge from Gilwern Hill***Historical Development of the Landscape**

The area's exposed mineral resources, woodlands and water supply provided all the requirements for early industrial exploitation. Records of this begin in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, but industrial processing may have begun earlier. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Clydach Gorge was used for iron ore extraction, charcoal production, iron production, stone quarrying and lime production. The remains of these industries, and their associated settlements, buildings, transport routes and spoil tips create an exceptionally rich historic landscape.

### Distinctive Characteristics

- Complex underlying geology ranging from Brownstones at the foot of the gorge, through Carboniferous Limestone, and Marros Group sandstones and mudstones to South Wales Lower Coal Measures on the higher ground to the south. The rocks contain many caves.
- A spectacular, steep-sided gorge, falling from 350m ASL to 100m ASL over a distance of approx. 5km. Gilwern Hill on the south side of the gorge rises to over 440m ASL.
- Fast-flowing River Clydach running along the base of the gorge, fed by tributary streams and waterfalls down steep valley sides.
- Contemporary land use a mixture of woodland, settlement, moorland and derelict industrial land. Some pasture on shallower slopes.
- Enclosed fields generally limited to the shallower slopes at the gorge's eastern end. Here, small semi-regular fields are divided by walls or hedges.
- Extensive beech woodlands covering the valley floor and sides. Bluebell carpets in spring.
- Examples of regeneration of habitats on abandoned spoil tips and opencast sites.
- Semi-Natural Habitats of Principal Importance to Wales including broadleaved woodland, acid and calcareous grasslands, and heath (on Gilwern Hill).
- Outstandingly rich industrial archaeology of iron working, coal mining and quarrying, and their associated settlements and transport routes. Pen-fford Goch contains evidence of some of the earliest coal extraction processes around Pen-ffordd-goch.
- A well-settled landscape, including industrial villages and more recent development. Also a key transport route, including historic tramways and railways. The Heads of the Valleys Road (constructed in the 1960s) snakes down the gorge. Pylon lines also run through the gorge.
- A dramatic sense of enclosure at the base and sides of the gorge, contrasting with the more open feel of the hill tops above. Beech woods and limestone outcrops create a strongly textured, complex landscape with seasonal colour changes.

### Landmap Components (See Appendix 3 for components of all LANDMAP Aspect Areas)

<b>Key Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas</b>	Clydach Gorge (H); Gilwern Hill (O); Llanelly hill tip (M); TRFNVS030 (M); A465 (L); Clydach Scree Slopes (M); Langattwg Mountain (O); Clydach valley (M); Tredegar town (M); A465 (M); Twyn Blaen-nant (L)
<b>Key to Landmap evaluation criteria:</b> (O) Outstanding: of international importance. (H) High: of regional or county importance. (M) Moderate: of local importance. (L) Low: of little/no importance	

### Settlements

Settlements within the gorge itself (for example Clydach and Cheltenham) are generally linear in form, following the contours of the hillsides. They are industrial in their origins, containing workers' housing (usually terraced) and associated buildings such as chapels and pubs. On the flatter land above the gorge, settlements such as Llanelly Hill have developed in a much more scattered and piecemeal fashion.

### Key Views

These include dramatic views across the gorge from the surrounding higher land, and from within the gorge itself (for example from the Heads of the Valleys road). Many views are framed by trees, and/ or include archaeological features such as viaducts, tramways or spoil tips.

**Evaluation****Special Qualities**

The natural beauty and recreational factors that make this landscape special are summarised in the table below, along with examples of their sensitivities to landscape changes:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Special Qualities for this Landscape Character Area</b>	<b>Sensitivities</b>
<b>Scenic quality and Sense of place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spectacular landform, combined with woodland and industrial archaeology creates a strong sense of place which is unique within the National Park.</li> </ul>	<p>Development which detracts from the physical grandeur of the gorge (e.g. roads; pylons), results in woodland loss, or damages/ detracts from the area's archaeology and its setting.</p> <p>Ad-hoc development on high ground (e.g. Llanelli hill) is visually intrusive in views from this LCA and the Eastern Usk Valley.</p>
<b>Perceptual qualities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The steepness of the landform creates a strong sense of awe, whether experienced from the bottom of the gorge or looking across it.</li> </ul>	As above
<b>Artistic and cultural associations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literary legend that William Shakespeare may have written 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in a cave in Clydach Gorge.</li> </ul>	
<b>Rarity or representativeness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A rare surviving assemblage of industrial archaeology concentrated within a small area, partially designated World Heritage Site, and representing a microcosm of the Welsh industrial past.</li> </ul>	<p>Loss of archaeological sites through neglect, 'redevelopment'/clearing-up or natural processes of revegetation and erosion. The settings of archaeological sites are also vulnerable to inappropriate development.</p>
<b>Natural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Of importance for nature conservation, with four SSSIs, designated for their geological interest, habitats and/or importance to bats. Two sites (Cwm Clydach Woodlands and part of Mynydd Llangatwg) are also designated SAC. Ancient beech woodlands contain rare whitebeam trees, unusual fungi assemblages and rare vascular plants including orchids.</li> </ul>	<p>Decline in woodland management resulting in a loss of biodiversity and woodland condition.</p>

<b>Cultural heritage features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several Scheduled Monuments and a large number of non-scheduled sites reflecting the area's rich industrial heritage, including iron works and furnace remains, quarries, limekilns and industrial settlements with their associated buildings (e.g. chapels, pubs etc.). Included in the Register of Landscapes of Special Historic Interest in Wales (Areas 16+52)</li> <li>• A concentration of transport routes including tramroads, railways and viaducts, and the canal embankment at Gilwern where the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal crosses the gorge.</li> </ul>	<p>As above.</p> <p>Archaeological sites and historic buildings in private ownership are particularly vulnerable to damage or neglect.</p>
<b>Opportunities for landscape enjoyment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The landscape can be appreciated by walking, cycling and by vehicle along the lanes (often following historic tramroad routes) and from the dramatically-sited A465. Caving offers further recreational opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p>Difficulties of access: the A465 acts as a barrier to safe crossing of the gorge floor, and does not link with the lanes providing access to the sides of the gorge.</p>
<b>Recreation provision and access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footpaths, the Taff Trail and Cwm Clydach National Nature Reserve enable public access into the gorge. Gilwern Hill is open access land.</li> </ul>	<p>As above</p>

### Contribution to Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure (refer to sections 4.6 & 4.7 for terminology)

The River Clydach provides fresh water, and surrounding woodland provides a source of wood fuel and timber production. In common with the rest of the National Park, this LCA also contributes to cultural services such as spiritual enrichment, cultural heritage, recreation and tourism and aesthetic experiences.

Main Green Infrastructure assets include the River Clydach corridor which is flanked by deciduous woodland and the Cwm Clydach Nature Reserve. There are numerous cultural heritage assets associated with former industry in the area.



*Clydach Gorge ironworks (Scheduled Monument) in the base of the gorge.*



*Woodlands and viaduct on valley side*



*Revegetating spoil tips on Gilwern Hill*

## ***Forces for Change in the Landscape***

### **Local Forces for Change and Their Landscape Implications**

(See also the general forces for change described in section 6.0)

#### ***Past and Present***

- Overhead high-voltage power lines are very dominant in views, particularly where they are seen against the sky.
- Construction of the A465 'Heads of the Valleys Road' along the gorge in the early 1960s. As well as its visual impacts and the physical barrier the road presents, traffic noise levels are very high as sound rebounds off the sides of the gorge.
- Relatively recent ad-hoc development (e.g. at Llanelly Hill) is visually intrusive, particularly on high ground.
- Past quarrying, coal working, and other industrial processes have left scars in the landscape, but also contribute to its sense of history.
- Loss/ dereliction of industrial and other heritage sites, particularly where it is in private ownership.
- Lack of appreciation of importance of sites (e.g. abandoned tips which are not necessarily visually appealing, but are of great importance for their archaeology and/or nature conservation interest).
- Abandonment of valley-side fields.
- Lack of management of upland areas (heath, grassland, etc) resulting in a loss of biodiversity.
- A scrappy, urban fringe appearance (e.g. poor-quality buildings, *Leylandii* hedges etc.), particularly on higher land.
- Incidence of anti-social behaviour such as fly-tipping.
- Positive management related to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.

#### ***Future***

- Proposals to dual the A465 Heads of the Valleys Road through the gorge.
- Continued development pressure.
- Continued woodland management issues (e.g. loss of species diversity due to climate change, storm damage and lack of management).
- Continued loss/ damage to archaeological sites and built heritage, particularly those which are not visually appealing.
- Improved management and interpretation of the area's industrial heritage through closer associations with the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.



*Elevated modern development and pylons at Llanelly Hill seen from across the gorge. This development can also be seen from across the Usk valley.*



*Neglected industrial building alongside former railway line.*



*The Heads of the Valleys Road runs through the gorge, creating noise and visual impacts. Dualling of the road is currently being proposed.*

## Strategy

### Overall Strategy

**To enhance the special qualities of the area, whilst encouraging appreciation of its landscape value, biodiversity and archaeological importance.** The area's rich archaeological heritage is protected, managed and recorded. The biodiversity of its woodlands, grasslands, upland habitats and derelict sites are retained and enhanced where necessary. Local people and visitors are encouraged to visit the area and access to its natural and heritage sites is improved. Any future development is used as a positive force for landscape change, through good design, siting and compensatory measures

### LCA-Specific Management Guidelines

#### Protect

- Protect the **dramatic appearance of the landform** and its sense of scale.
- Protect (through appropriate management) the area's rich **archaeological landscape**, including its industrial features.
- Protect the area's **built heritage** (and its settings where appropriate).

#### Manage

- Manage **archaeological sites and features** with regard to the recommendations of the World Heritage Site Management Plan where relevant. Particular care should be given to the management of less appreciated and/ or understood sites.
- Manage **woodland** (using traditional techniques such as coppicing where appropriate) to retain its biodiversity and to increase age and species diversity.
- Manage **upland areas and remnant farmland** to enhance their biodiversity.
- Manage **urban fringe issues** to avoid damage to sensitive habitats and archaeological features, and minimise any appearance of neglect.

#### Plan

- Plan to work with engineers/ designers from the earliest stages to ensure that proposals to dual the **A465 through the gorge have the minimal possible negative impacts** on the landscape, and where possible **enhance the special qualities** of the area (e.g. by improving access, enabling motorists to stop and appreciate the landscape, and reducing road traffic noise).
- Plan to ensure that any future development **fits with the grain of the landscape** and enhances its dramatic appearance.
- Plan to put **high-voltage power cables underground** where feasible.
- Plan to **reduce incidence of anti-social behaviour** such as fly tipping through **community education and involvement** in the management of the area.
- Plan to develop the area's relationship with the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape **World Heritage Site** and to extend the proportion of the area associated with it.