

Caerphilly County Borough
2nd Replacement Local Development Plan 2020-2035

EB31: Landscape Designations Review

October 2026

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL CAERFFILI

INTRODUCTION

This landscape assessment summary presents the conclusions in regard to Special Landscape Areas (SLA) and Visually Important Local Landscapes (VILL) as part of the Deposit Plan for the 2nd Replacement Local Development Plan (2RLDP) within Caerphilly County Borough.

Our landscapes are fundamental environmental resources that contribute to the identity, character and distinctiveness of the County Borough. Beyond their visual qualities, landscapes reflect the interaction of natural, cultural and historic influences over time, shaping the settings of communities, heritage assets and ecological networks.

High-quality landscapes provide a range of environmental, cultural, social, and economic benefits, supporting biodiversity, recreation, tourism, health and wellbeing, and climate resilience. Protecting important landscapes through the planning system helps to conserve their special qualities, maintain local sense of place, and ensure that development is delivered in a manner that respects and enhances the character of the natural and built environment for current and future generations.

The Council's Adopted Local Development Plan (2010) designated six SLAs and four VILLs within the County Borough as local non-statutory sites. These areas are recognised for their landscape value but do not have the legal status afforded to other national designations such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Their primary purpose is to highlight landscapes that are particularly valued at the local or regional level and to ensure their qualities are considered through the planning process.

ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Natural Resources Wales identifies LANDMAP as the principal evidence-based dataset for the identification and assessment of Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) in Wales. LANDMAP Guidance Note 1: LANDMAP and Special Landscape Areas (2017), sets out a consistent and transparent methodology for recognising landscapes of local and regional importance.

This assessment focuses on scoring in five areas for landscapes which are:

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

This is followed by a four-stage assessment which focuses on establishing search criteria, identifying broad search areas, defining specific boundaries, and providing a statement of value and significance.

This approach enables local planning authorities to identify landscapes that demonstrate a concentration of special qualities, including scenic value, distinctiveness, cultural significance and environmental importance. The use of LANDMAP provides a robust, comprehensive and nationally consistent framework for informing SLA designation and ensuring that valued landscapes are appropriately recognised and considered within the planning process.

EXISTING DESIGNATIONS

The Adopted LDP (2010) designated six Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) at the following locations.

These were:

- Upper Rhymney Valley
- Gelligaer
- Mynydd Eglwysilan
- North Caerphilly
- South Caerphilly
- Mynyddislwyn

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Special Landscape Areas

The designation of the six SLAs as part of the Adopted LDP was informed by an SLA study undertaken by TACP consultants in 2008. This was part of a wide project involving local authorities within the region to develop a set of consistent criteria for the designation of non-statutory sites. The criteria was later agreed and published.

While the SLA study was prepared some time ago, the underlying methodology, evidence base and assessment principles remain robust and relevant. The fundamental characteristics, qualities and functions identified within the study have not materially changed and continue to provide a sound basis for understanding the resource and informing planning decisions. Although there have been some updates to the LANDMAP dataset, national planning policy, the strategic conclusions and overall designation rationale remain valid and continue to reflect the area's landscape and environmental value.

It is therefore the position of the local planning authority to retain the existing SLA designations, which will be included with the Deposit Plan for the 2RLDP. The boundaries of each SLA designation have however been amended where major development has taken place or received planning consent.

The Council's Green and Blue Infrastructure Assessment (GIA) recognises the County Borough's landscapes as a key component of the area's green and blue infrastructure network, highlighting the importance of SLAs in supporting ecological connectivity, landscape character, cultural heritage, recreation and community wellbeing. The assessment demonstrates that many of the County Borough's valued landscapes perform a strategic multifunctional role, contributing to climate resilience, nature recovery and sustainable placemaking. As such, the findings reinforce the importance of protecting and enhancing our landscapes with non-statutory designations.

Visually Important Local Landscapes

Visually Important Local Landscapes (VILLs) are areas within the County Borough that make a significant contribution to the setting, character and visual amenity of settlements and are therefore considered worthy of additional protection from inappropriate forms of development. VILLs are non-statutory local landscape designations and are not specifically identified within current planning legislation or national planning policy. They are areas of the County Borough that scored highly for their visual characteristics, but not other assessment criteria.

However, these characteristics provide a sense of place and backdrop. Therefore, the VILL designation was created for these areas of local importance. Consequently, they carry the same policy weighting as Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) as local non-statutory designated landscapes.

Historically, landscape assessment and designation focused primarily on visual quality and the contribution that landscapes make to the character and setting of an area. However, the introduction of the Natural Resources Wales LANDMAP methodology has established a more comprehensive approach to landscape assessment, recognising landscape value through a range of visual, cultural, historic, ecological and perceptual factors rather than visual qualities alone.

Reflecting this approach, SLAs within the Adopted LDP (2010) were identified using the LANDMAP framework and are considered the principal local landscape designation.

However, in light of the former SLA study, a separate VILL study was undertaken by TACP to determine whether any landscapes of particular visual importance warranted additional designation. The study identified four areas that met the criteria for designation as VILLs, all of which were subsequently incorporated into the Adopted LDP. Although the study predates the current review, its methodology, findings and rationale remain relevant and robust.

Therefore, as with SLAs within the County Borough, it is the local planning authority's view that these designations be retained within the Deposit Plan for the 2RLDP. The boundaries of each VILL designation have however been amended where major development has taken place or received planning consent.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing upon the findings of the sections above, the following policy recommendations have been identified for the Deposit Plan of the 2RLDP. These policies seek to strengthen the protection and enhancement of the County Borough's local landscapes.

LS1: Special Landscape Areas (SLAs)

The following areas are designated as Special Landscape Areas:

LS1.1 Upper Rhymney Valley
LS1.2 Gelligaer
LS1.3 Mynydd Eglwysilan
LS1.4 North Caerphilly
LS1.5 South Caerphilly
LS1.6 Mynyddislwyn

Relevant proposals within designated Special Landscape Areas will only be permitted where they meet the following criteria:

- *A The proposal must conserve or enhance the distinctive character and qualities of the SLA.*
- B *The design must respect the local vernacular in terms of form, materials, and detailing, and sensitively integrate the development into the surrounding landscape.*

LS2: Visually Important Local Landscapes (VILLs)

The following areas are designated as Visually Important Local Landscape (VILLs):

LS2.1 Northern Rhymney Valley
LS2.2 Manmoel
LS2.3 Abercarn
LS2.4 Rudry

Relevant proposals within designated Visually Important Local Landscapes will only be permitted where they maintain or enhance the distinctive visual and sensory landscape features or characteristics of the VILL.

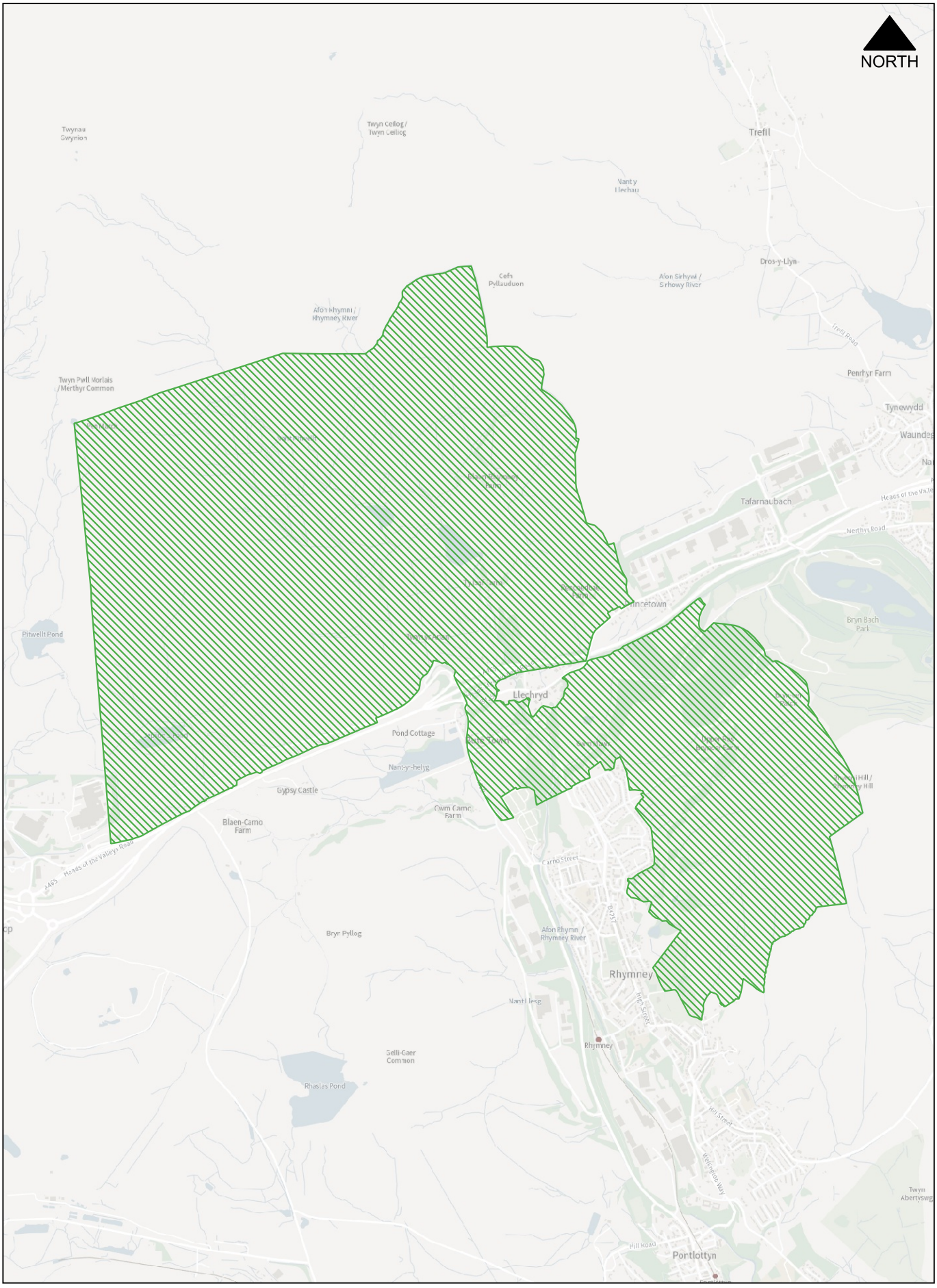
For further information on these policies and the reasoned justification, please consult the Deposit Plan, Written Statement.

Each non-statutory designation has had its boundaries mapped and can be found in the appendix of this report. Each designation can also be found on the Deposit Plan Proposals Map.

Appendix 1: Special Landscape Area (SLA) Maps

LS1.1
Site Name: Upper Rhymney Valley
Site Area: 918.74 Ha

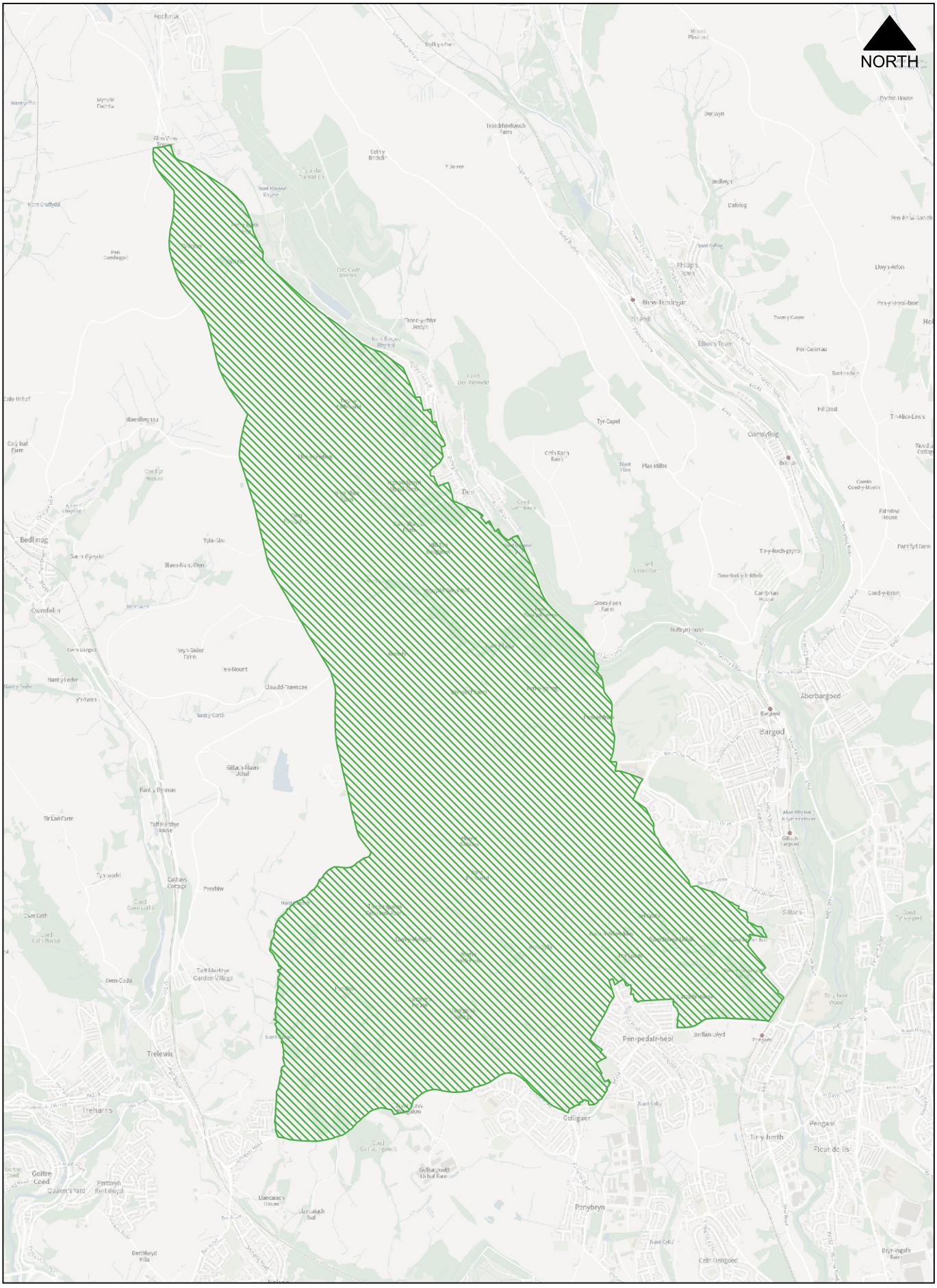
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LS1.2
Site Name: Gelligaer
Site Area: 1450.28 Ha

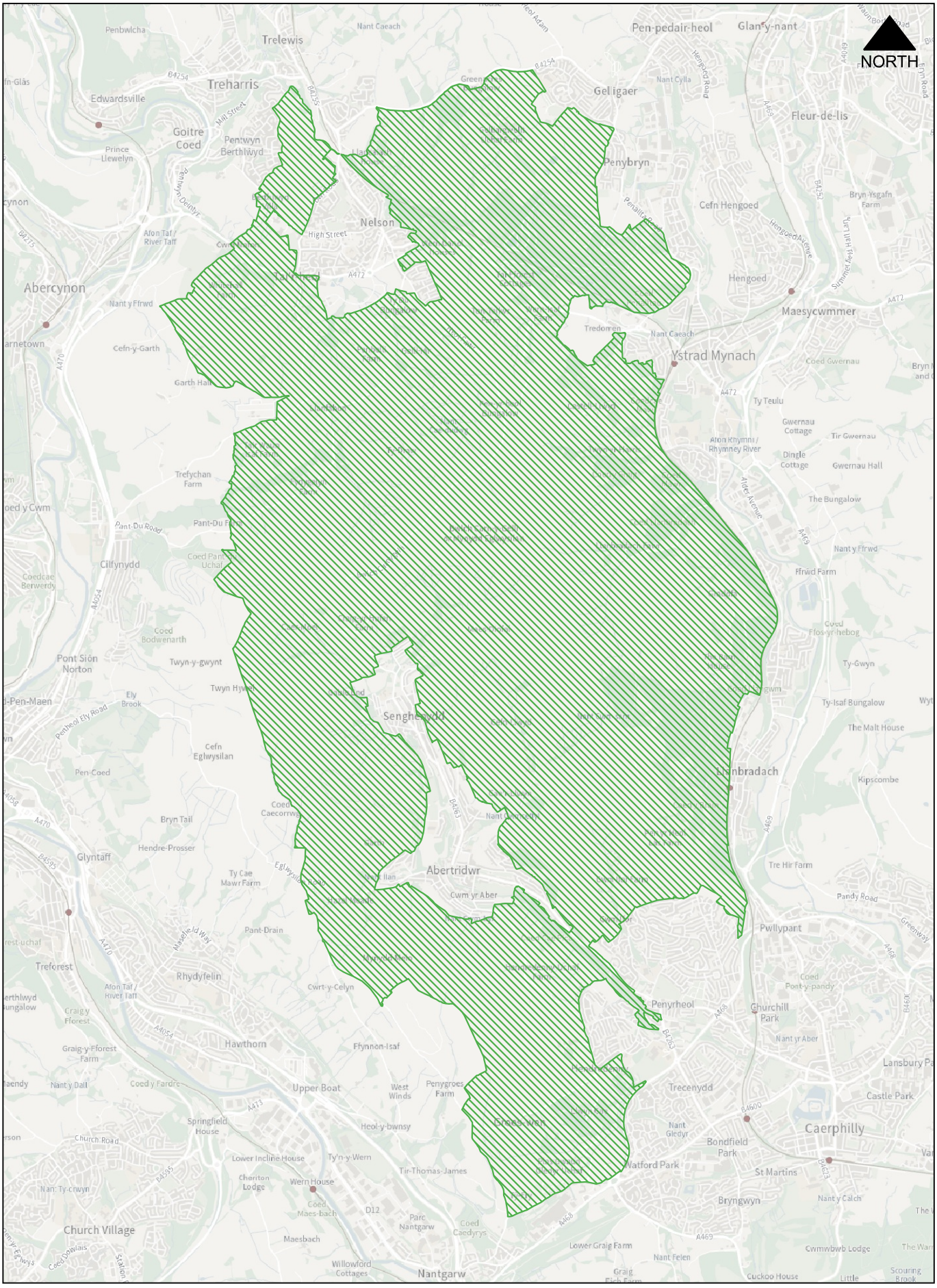
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LS1.3
Site Name:Mynydd Eglwysilan
Site Area: 3493.94 Ha

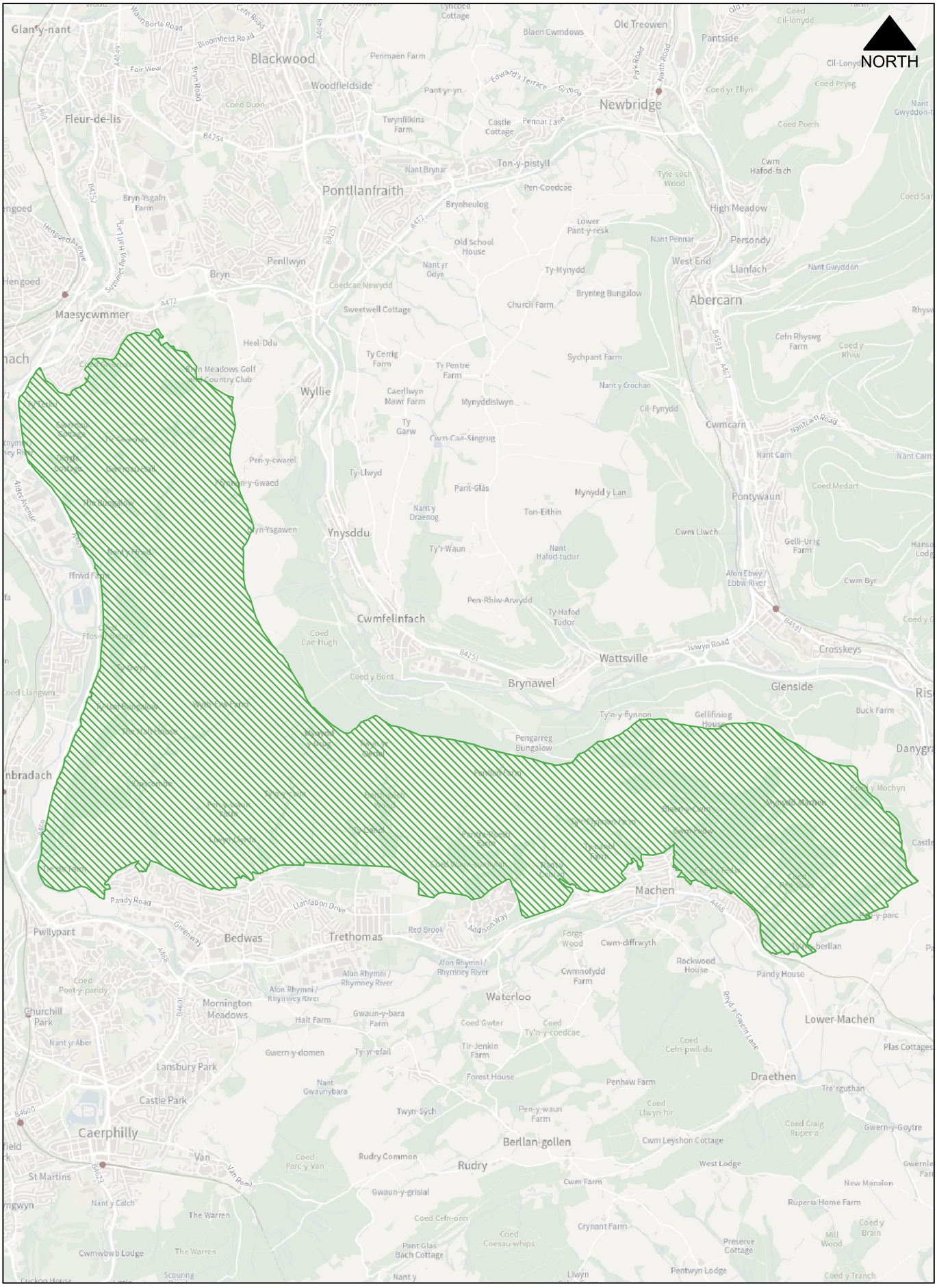
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LS1.4
Site Name:North Caerphilly
Site Area: 1833.92 Ha

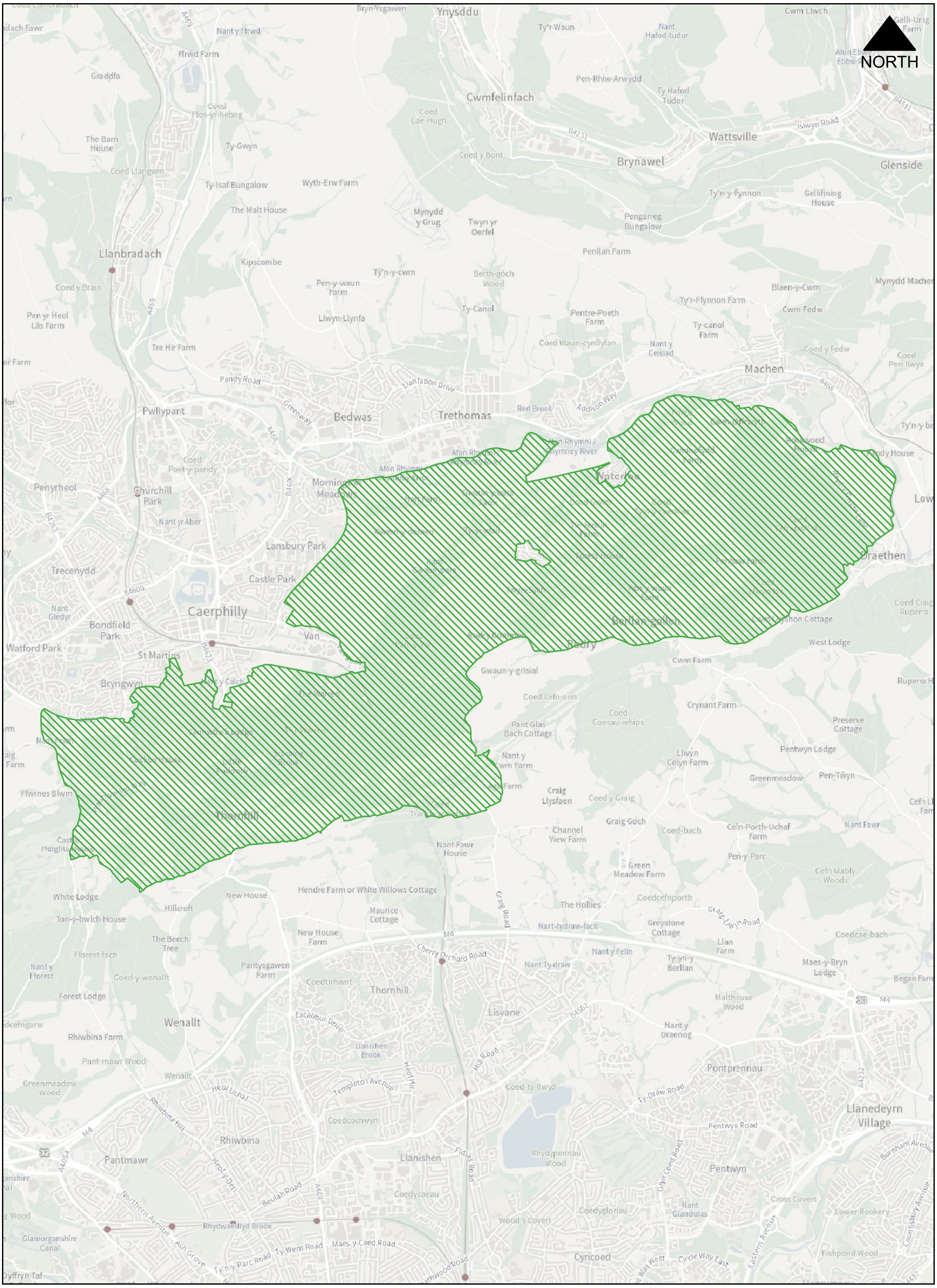
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LS1.5
Site Name: South Caerphilly
Site Area: 1637.55 Ha

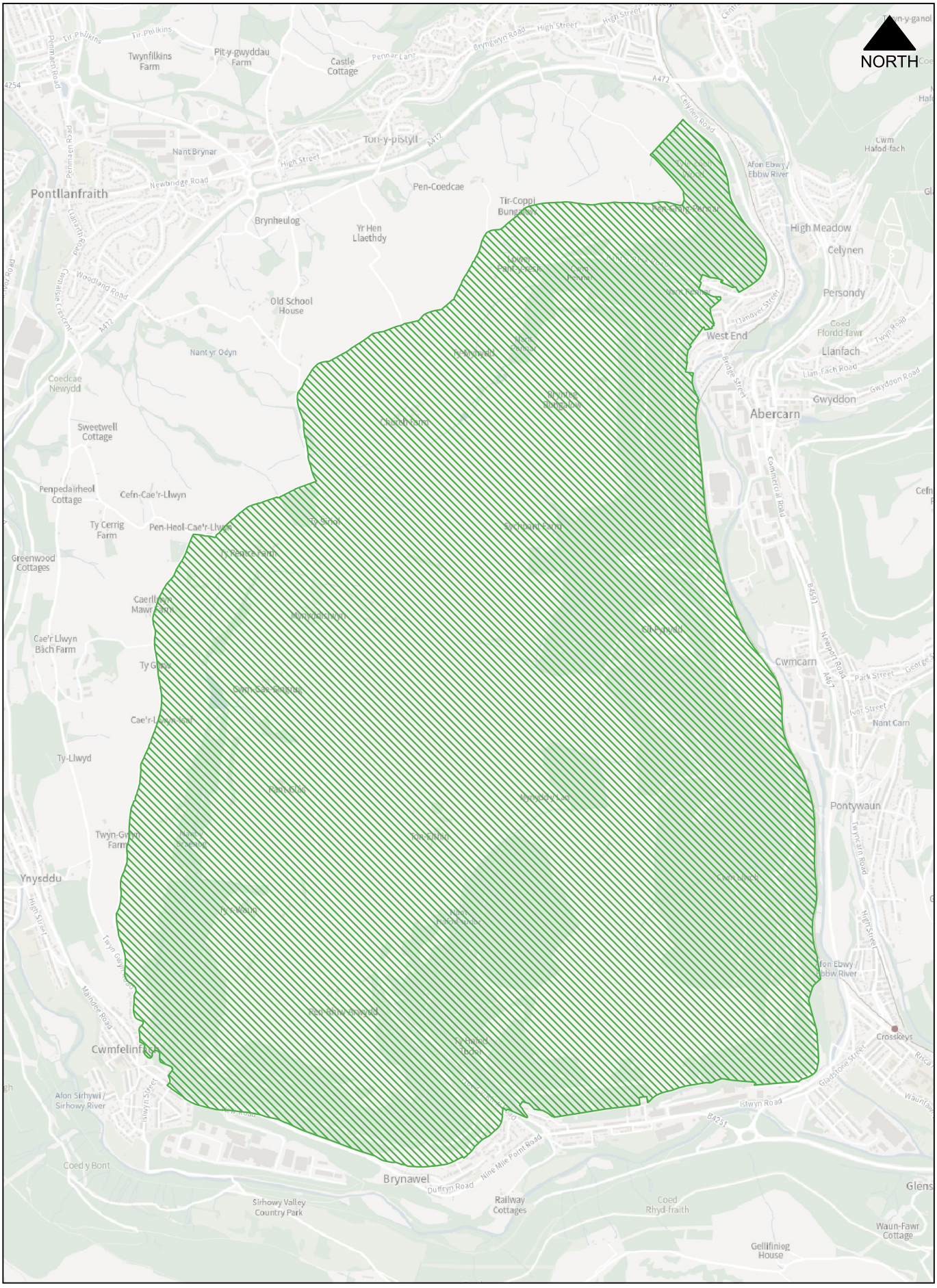
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LS1.6
Site Name:Myynddislwyn
Site Area: 1154.41 Ha

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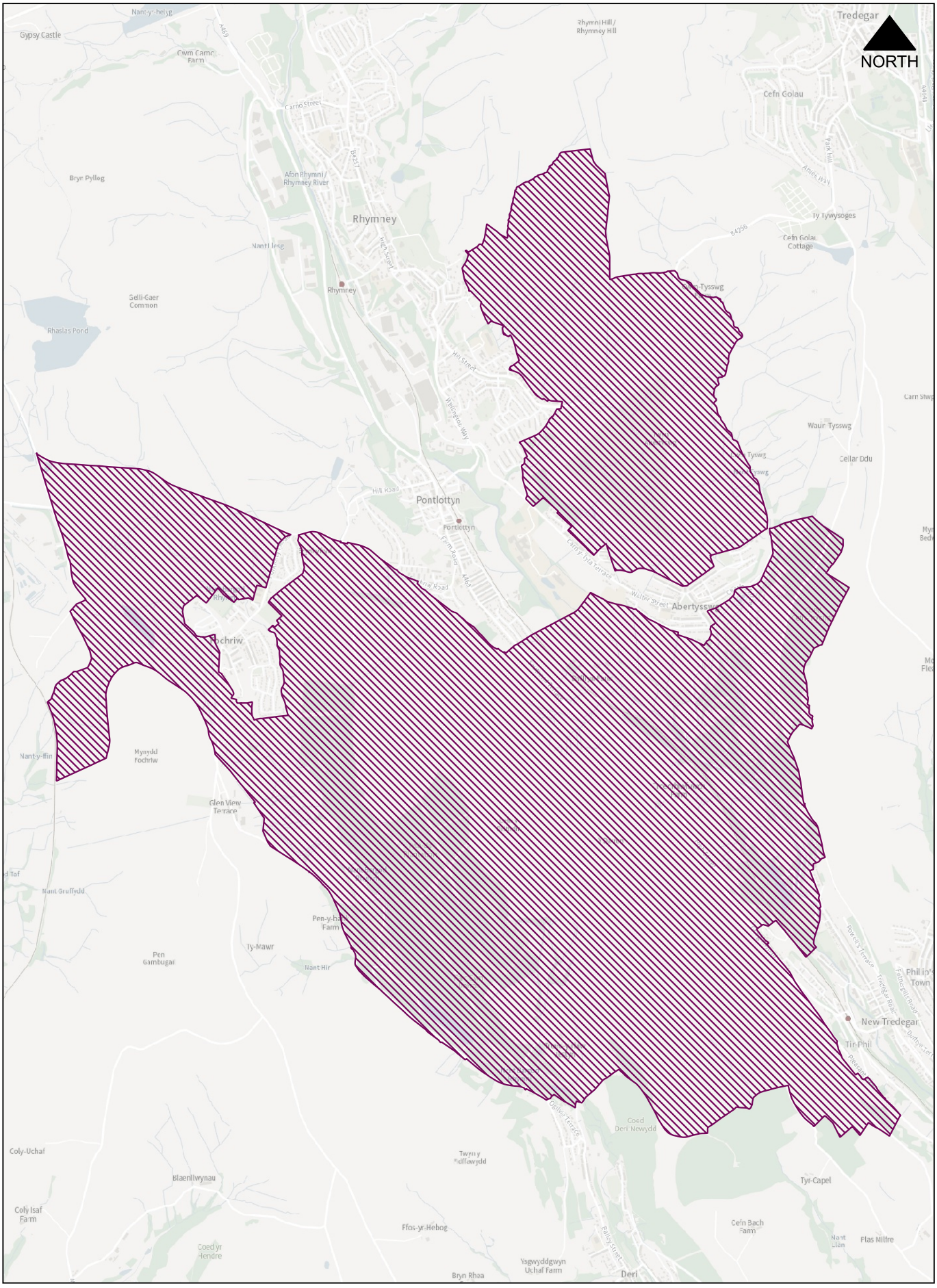


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Appendix 2: Visually Important Local Landscapes (VILL) Maps

LS2.1
Site Name: Northern Rhymney Valley
Site Area: 1237.2 Ha

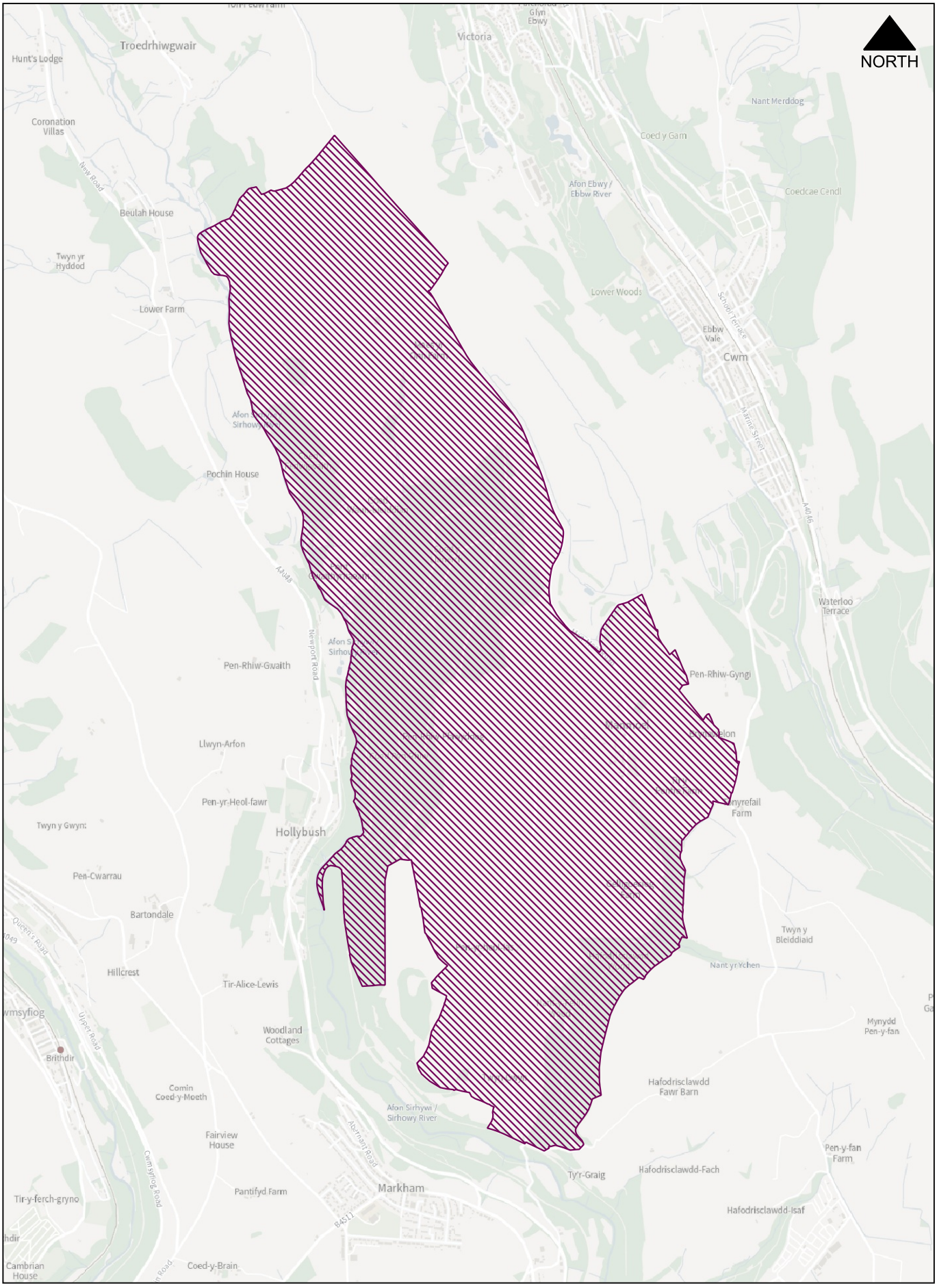
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LS2.2
Site Name: Manmoel
Site Area: 575.43 Ha

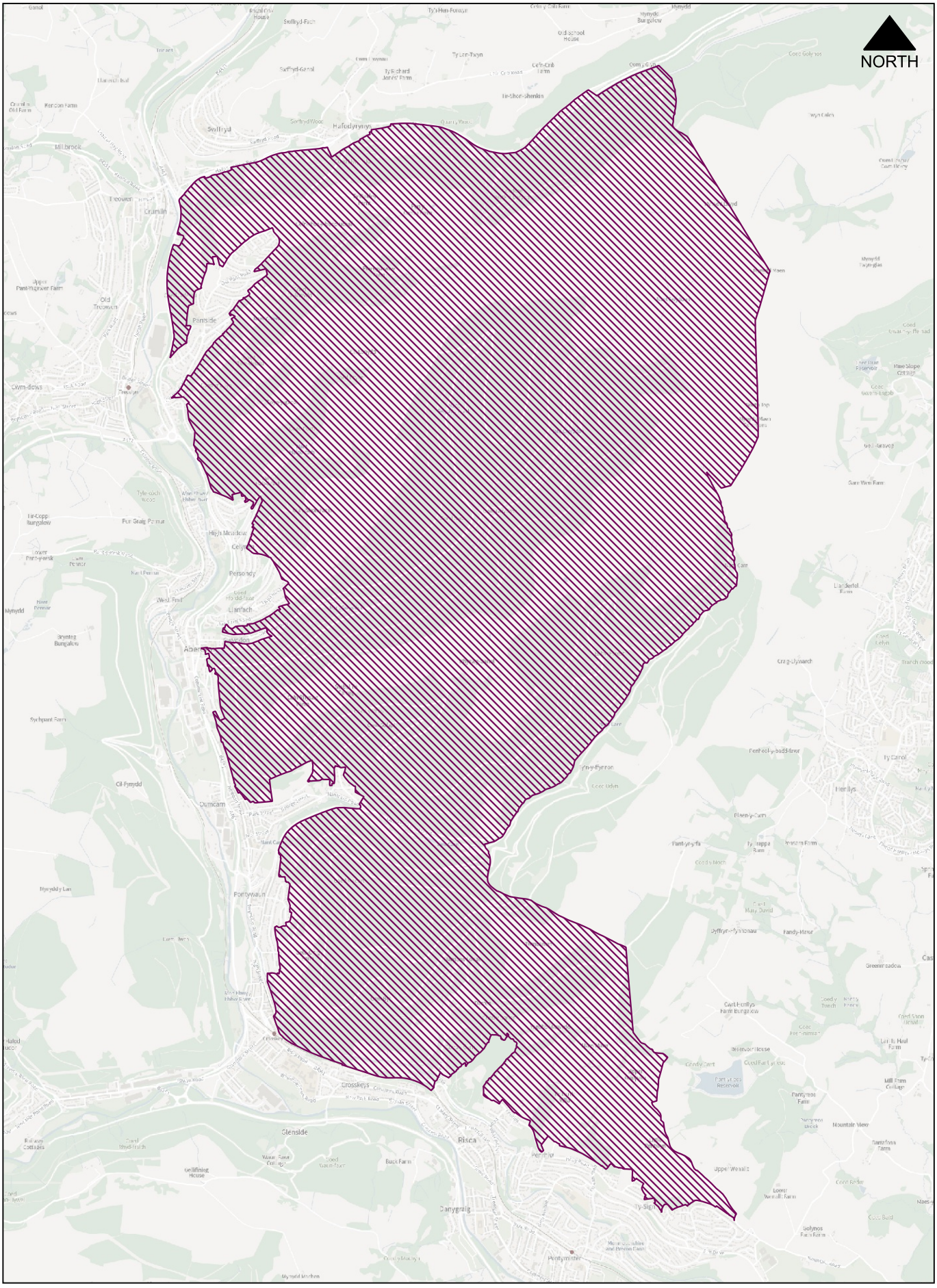
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LS2.3
Site Name:Abercarn
Site Area: 2492.86 Ha

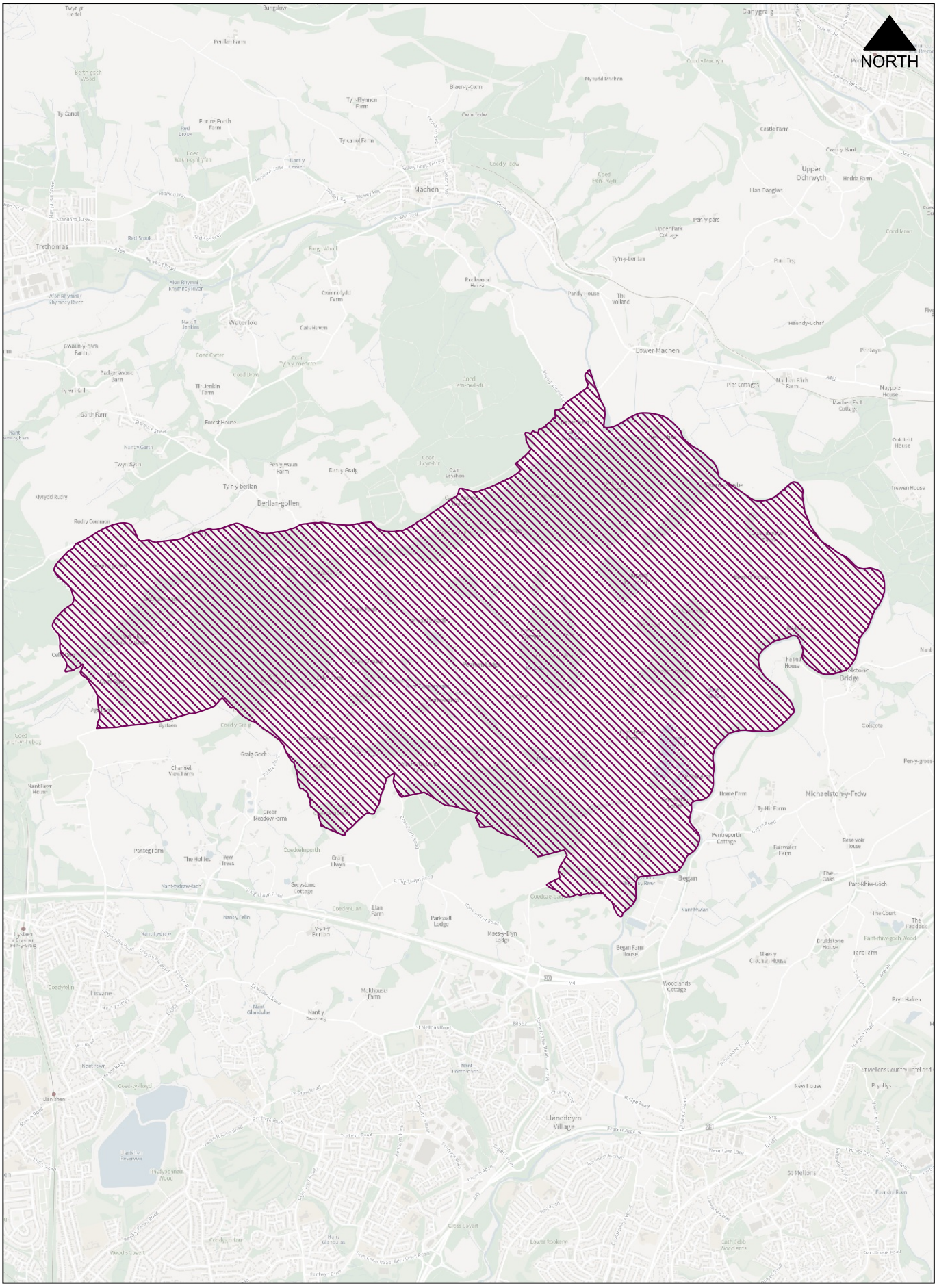
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LS2.4
Site Name:Rudry
Site Area: 1340.58 Ha

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