

VALE OF GLAMORGAN  
REPLACEMENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-  
2036

# GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST

November 2025



BACKGROUND PAPER - BP29



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## **Executive Summary**

- i. This background paper provides details on the continuation of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast (GHC) designation and policy within the Replacement Local Development Plan 2021-2036.
- ii. The GHC was initially designated in the early 1970s and covers approximately 14 miles (22.5 kilometres) of coastline that stretches from Porthcawl in the west to Gileston in the east and spans the local authority areas of Bridgend County Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council respectively.
- iii. The GHC designation recognises the area's national importance as an area of attractive undeveloped coast and seeks to ensure that the special character and natural beauty of the coastline are protected and improved while enabling and enhancing its enjoyment and facilitating its continued use for agriculture and other established and appropriate economic activities.
- iv. Originally one of three heritage coast pilot projects in the United Kingdom, heritage coasts have become established throughout the United Kingdom as nationally important coastlines that warrant special protection and the GHC is now one of 14 heritage coasts in Wales that cover approximately 42% of the Welsh coastline, and one of 43 heritage coasts located around the United Kingdom.
- v. While their status as heritage coasts carries no legal protection, planning authorities must take the designations into account when making development decisions and PPW directs that development proposals should aim to protect or enhance the natural or historic character and landscape of undeveloped coastlines.
- vi. Since its designation in 1974 various development management plans, including early coastal plans and County Structure Plans to more recent Local Development Plans, have endorsed the principle of the GHC and included policies which safeguard and protect the special characteristics and features for which it was originally designated.
- vii. This position will be maintained in the Vale of Glamorgan Replacement Local Development Plan 2021 - 2036 with policy DNP3 – Glamorgan Heritage Coast.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) will guide development in the Vale of Glamorgan between 2021 and 2036. The RLDP will identify locations where new development, such as housing and employment will be permitted, whilst also seeking to protect other areas from development. Once adopted, *inter alia*, the RLDP will establish the level of growth needed within the Vale of Glamorgan over the plan period and will form the basis for decisions on individual planning applications.
- 1.2 This background paper is one of a series produced by the Vale of Glamorgan as part of the evidence base for the Deposit Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) and provides further information on the Glamorgan Heritage Coast policy contained within the Deposit RLDP.
- 1.3 Each background paper can be read in isolation or together to gain a wider understanding of how the policies and/or allocations in the RLDP have been developed to address issues facing the Council.

## 2. Background

2.1 The Glamorgan Heritage Coast (GHC) comprises approximately 14 miles (22.5 kilometres) of coastline which stretches from Porthcawl in the west to Gileston in the east and spans the local authority areas of Bridgend County Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Council respectively. With an inland boundary that primarily follows the line of the B4265 around 1-2 kilometres from the coast, the GHC encompasses a large area of high-quality agricultural land within the Vale of Glamorgan and the extensive sand dune system of Merthyr Mawr Warren in Bridgend.

**Figure 1: Glamorgan Heritage Coast Boundary – Vale of Glamorgan**



2.2 Although the primary feature of the GHC is the spectacular limestone cliffs of the Southerndown Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which dominate this area of coastline, the area also includes isolated beaches and coves such as Southerndown and Dunraven Bay that provide habitats for wildlife and recreational opportunities for visitors, as well as a wide range of cultural heritage assets including historic landmarks, medieval settlements and castles. The GHC also supports an extensive range of biodiversity and includes the Dunraven Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the population of Shore Dock present on the limestone cliffs.

2.3 Located between Swansea and Cardiff, the unspoilt nature of the GHC is readily accessible to a large proportion of the south Wales population. While the resort of Porthcawl and Aberavon to the west and Barry and Penarth to the east have catered for more formal tourism activities, the natural beauty of the GHC has long attracted people pursuing quieter and more informal recreational activities. However, even these informal activities have intensified and changed

since the GHC was first established in the early 1970's and there is continuing pressure for new forms of recreation and tourist accommodation within the GHC which require management and control that could not have been envisaged when the GHC was identified.

### **Origins of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast**

2.4 In 1970, the then Countryside Commission published 'The Planning of the Coastline' and 'Coastal Heritage' documents. These were closely followed by the publication in 1972 by the Joint Department of the Environment and Welsh Office Circular of 'The Planning of the Undeveloped Coast'. These documents supported the concept of Heritage Coasts within England and Wales and recommended that local authorities prepare non-statutory interim plans pending preparation of Structure and Local Plans. The Glamorgan Heritage Plan Statement was approved and published in 1976, and subsequent County Structure Plans for Mid and South Glamorgan incorporated the principles of conservation and management set out in the Plan Statement.

2.5 Initially defined as one of three pilot projects (Dorset, Suffolk and Glamorgan) between the Countryside Commission and the relevant coastal authorities in 1974, the initial Plan Statement for the Glamorgan Heritage Coast prepared jointly between the four local authorities at that time (West Glamorgan County Council, South Glamorgan County Council, Bridgend Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council) and a range of partners and organisations, and identifies the primary objectives of the GHC to be:

- *To conserve the natural undeveloped character of the coastal scenery and to improve it where necessary.*
- *To encourage a general appreciation of the high quality of the coastline and to highlight the need for community concern in its protection.*
- *To protect for posterity the most valuable parts of the coastline in terms of agriculture, archaeology, ecology and geology.*
- *To make the best use of the coastal resources in order to manage efficiently the area in the interests of all users, including farmers, residents, conservationists and visitors.*
- *To promote enjoyment of the natural qualities of the coast by the encouragement or provision of appropriate recreational facilities which are consistent with the conservation of nationally important scenery.*
- *To monitor and review the progress of the project and the continuing exercises, in order to provide a basic future programme for the implementation of effective management proposals.*

## Regional Context

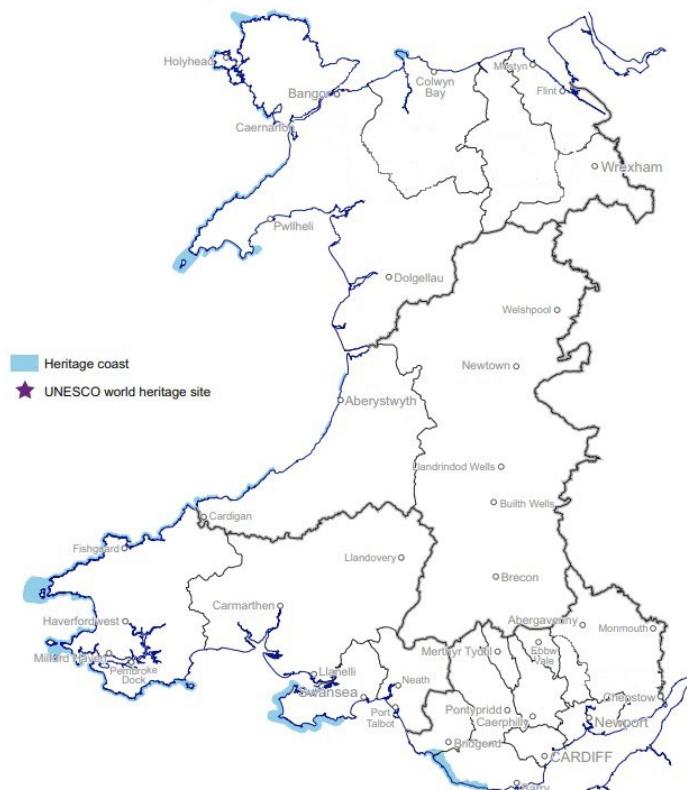
2.6 Since their original identification in the early 1970s, heritage coasts have become established throughout the United Kingdom as nationally important coastlines that warrant special protection.

2.7 While their status as heritage coasts carries no legal protection, planning authorities must take the designations into account when making development decisions. PPW paragraph 6.5.12 states that:

*'Designation as a heritage coast does not directly affect the status of the area in planning terms, however, the features which contributed to the designation of such areas will be important considerations in development plans and in making development management decisions. Heritage coasts are defined by local authorities in consultation with NRW and provide a management tool for balancing the requirements of conservation and access in the coastal zone.'*

2.8 In Wales, 14 heritage coasts cover approximately 42% (roughly 500km/300 miles) of the Welsh coastline, and often these non-statutory designations run contiguous with other national designations such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding National Beauty, further extending the protection that is afforded to the Welsh coastline.

**Figure 2: Heritage Coasts in Wales**



Source: Adapted from Future Wales: The National Plan 2040

## **Heritage Coasts in Wales**

Aberffraw Bay	Llyn Coast
Ceredigion Coast	Marloes and Dale
Dinas Head	North Anglesey Coast
Glamorgan Heritage Coast	South Pembrokeshire
Gower	St Davids Bay
Great Orme	St Davids Peninsula
Holyhead Mountain	St Dogmaels and Molygrove

2.9 Since its designation in 1974 various development management plans, including early coastal plans and County Structure Plans to more recent Local Development Plans, have endorsed the principle of the GHC and included policies which safeguard and protect the special characteristics and features for which it was originally designated.

### **3. National Planning Policy and Legislative Context**

#### **Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (2021)**

3.1 Future Wales is the national development framework for Wales and sets the direction for where Wales should be investing in infrastructure and development for the greater good of Wales to 2024. It is a development plan with a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

3.2 Through its policies on the sustainable management of resources, protection and enhancement of coastal communities and ecosystems, tourism and cultural heritage, climate change and carbon reduction and well-being, it sets a strategic framework that directly supports the preservation, enhancement and sustainable use of the GHC and seeks to ensure that the unique landscapes, ecosystems and cultural assets of the GHC remain protected whilst contributing to a vibrant and resilient future for Wales.

#### **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

3.3 The Environment (Wales) Act provides a framework to enhance the sustainable management of Wales' natural resources and ecosystems. Central to the Act is the need to adopt a new, more integrated approach to managing natural resources to achieve long-term sustainability. The Act establishes several principles and duties including the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, promoting the resilience of ecosystems to enhance biodiversity and climate change adaptation and mitigation all of which directly support the objectives of heritage coasts in Wales.

#### **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

3.4 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to ensure sustainable development in Wales through considering the needs of both current and future generations. The Act places a legal duty on public bodies to work towards seven well-being goals, which include:

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of cohesive communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- A globally responsive Wales.

3.5 The Act aligns closely with the management and preservation objectives of heritage coasts providing a framework for sustainable development. Heritage coasts support several goals set out in the act including:

- A resilient Wales, heritage coasts help to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, contributing to ecological resilience and climate adaptation through natural habitats and coastline management.
- A healthier Wales, heritage coasts provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, improving physical health and well-being.
- A prosperous Wales, heritage coasts support and promote sustainable tourism and recreation which can contribute to local economies without compromising the natural environment.

#### **Welsh National Marine Plan (November 2019)**

3.6 The Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP) sets out the Welsh Governments long term vision for the sustainable development of the seas and coastal areas around Wales. In respect of heritage coasts, the WNMP provides a strategic framework that ensures that marine and coastal activities support the protection, enhancement and sustainable use of heritage coasts.

#### **Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12) (February 2024)**

3.7 Planning Policy Wales PPW directs that planning authorities should clearly establish what the coast means for them and develop, or apply, specific policies through their development plans which reflect the characteristics of their coastlines.

3.8 For some authorities this may mean identifying areas likely to be suitable for development as well as those subject to significant constraints and considered to be unsuitable for development. Areas subject to constraints or considered unsuitable for development may include those where:

- Conservation or enhancement of the natural and historic environment requires development to be limited.
- Visual intrusion and inter-visibility between land and sea will need to be carefully considered.
- There are specific policies to be pursued in Heritage Coast areas.
- Access to coastal paths should be protected; and
- There may be risks of erosion, flooding or land stability.

3.9 PPW is clear in that development should not normally be proposed in coastal locations and that in particular, undeveloped coastal areas will rarely be the most appropriate location for development. PPW states that while designation as a heritage coast does not directly affect the status of an area in planning terms, it recognises the importance of undeveloped coastlines and in respect

of heritage coasts, directs that the features which contributed to the designation of such areas should be important considerations in development plans and in making development management decisions and that the particular landscapes of the coastline should be recognised and protected where they represent significant characteristics of place.

#### **Lavernock Point to St. Ann's Head Shoreline Management Plan (SMP2) (January 2012)**

- 3.10 Shoreline Management Plan (SMPs) provides a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal erosion and flooding at the coast and present policies to help manage these risks to people and to the developed, historic and natural environment in a sustainable manner. SMPs form an important part of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) strategy for managing risks due to flooding and coastal erosion. They are non-statutory, high level policy documents for coastal flood and erosion risk management planning that take account of existing planning initiatives and legislative requirements and are intended to inform wider strategic planning.
- 3.11 Government guidance for SMPs requires them to identify sustainable and deliverable policies for managing coastal risks, promote management policies for the coastline for the next 100 years, to achieve long-term objectives that are technically sustainable, environmentally acceptable and economically viable and to be realistic and consider known legislation and constraints.
- 3.12 Along with the GHC the Lavernock Point to St. Ann's Head SMP2 includes three other heritage coast designations.

#### **Technical Advice Note 13: Tourism (1997)**

- 3.13 TAN 13 provides guidance on the tourism related issues in planning including matters relating to hotel development, holiday and touring caravans and seasonal and holiday occupancy conditions. As with PPW, the TAN recognises the contribution that tourism makes to the Welsh economy through employment and the benefits that it brings to local economies and communities particularly in rural areas.

#### **Technical Advice Note 14: Coastal Planning (1998)**

- 3.14 TAN 14 provides guidance on the sustainable management of coastal areas and establishes principles for protecting coastal environments, addressing development pressures and managing ultimately the impact of climate change resulting from sea level rise and increased erosion. The basic principles of TAN 14 ensure that the natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural significance of the GHC are protected, aligning with the broader Welsh Government policies to balance nature conservation and sustainable use of resources.

#### **Technical Advice Note 15: Development, flooding and coastal erosion (December 2021)**

- 3.15 TAN 15 provides planning guidance for managing development in areas at risk of flooding and coastal erosion in Wales. It identifies areas of high-risk zones for flooding and requires that planning decisions consider the likelihood and consequences of flooding in development proposals. It also requires planning authorities to address coastal erosion risks and take into account long-term climate impacts such as sea level rise and increased storm frequency, prevent development in high-risk areas of flooding unless it can be justified in the public interest, align with SMP2s, protect ecosystems and natural defences.
- 3.16 Publication of the revised TAN has been temporarily suspended pending revisions following the public consultation exercise.

### **TAN 16 Sport & Recreation**

- 3.17 TAN 16 Sport & Recreation provides guidance on the role of planning in delivering and protecting sport and recreational facilities and informal open spaces. It emphasises the importance of safeguarding existing open spaces and ensuring the adequate provision of new facilities through the planning process. The TAN directs that local development plans should set out a strategic vision for the authority regarding providing, protecting and enhancing facilities for sport, physical activity, open space and recreation, and provide clear area-based or criteria-based policies. The TAN recognises the importance of green corridors and informal or amenity open space to achieving well-being benefits.
- 3.18 The objectives of TAN 16 have been significantly enhanced through recent changes to PPW relating to a stronger and more coordinated approach to green infrastructure, net benefits for biodiversity and enhanced protection for protected sites and trees and woodlands.

#### 4. Local Planning Policy

Since its designation in 1974, local planning policy documents prepared and adopted by the then South and Mid Glamorgan County Councils, the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council and Bridgend County Borough Council have sought to protect and enhance the special qualities for which the Glamorgan Heritage Coast was originally designated.

##### **Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan 2011-2026**

- 4.1 The current adopted Local Development Plan for the area covering the GHC is the Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan 2011-2026 (LDP) which was adopted on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 2017.
- 4.2 As well as strategic policies covering the natural environment and tourism (SP10 & SP11 refer) and more detailed policies on protected ecological designations the protection of biodiversity and the landscape, the adopted LDP includes a specific policy, MG27 - Glamorgan Heritage Coast, which continues this approach and seeks to limit development within the GHC to that which maintains the areas special qualities or which is required for coastal defence, agriculture, nature conservation, informal recreation, tourism or coastal access.

##### **POLICY MG27 - GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST**

The special environmental qualities of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast will be conserved and enhanced. New development will be restricted to:

1. Development that is necessary for coastal defence as identified within the Lavernock Point to St Ann's Head shoreline Management Plan 2;
2. Development that is essential for agriculture, nature conservation, informal recreation, low impact tourism or coastal access;
3. Development within settlement boundaries; or
4. Other appropriate and sustainable development that accords with National Policy.

Development that unacceptably affects the special environmental qualities of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast will not be permitted.

- 4.3 Historically therefore, local planning policy has provided a strong policy framework, in accordance with national policy, for protecting the GHC and the special qualities for which it has been designated. These policies have sought to ensure that development within this nationally valued landscape is carefully managed to preserve its natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural significance, recognising the unique sensitivities of the coast whilst also promoting sustainable tourism and recreation and enabling local economic opportunities that accord with the areas long held conservation objectives.
- 4.4 As detailed above, the GHC extends into the adjacent local authority of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) and the importance of the GHC is

similarly recognised in the BCBC Replacement Local Development Plan in RLDP policy SP17: Conservation and Enhancement of the Natural Environment which along with the historic landscape of the Kenfig and Merthyr Mawr Warren specifically recognises the GHC as a nationally important landscape. Development proposals within these areas that have an adverse impact on the areas landscape character, biodiversity and habitats and the quality of the natural resources within them including water, air and soil, will not be permitted. The BCBC RLDP was formally adopted by the authority on the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

## 5. Key Issues and Objectives

- 5.1 Despite its status, the GHC continues to face a range of issues and challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability and environmental integrity. Since its inception, the management of the GHC has sought to protect its special character and environmental qualities, however in protecting the environmental integrity of the coast, the management has always sought to balance the needs and interests of all users including new development proposals, agricultural practices, recreation and access and tourism.
- 5.2 While the original issues and threats facing the GHC remain relevant today, the social, environmental and economic context of the GHC has evolved and the issues and pressures have intensified and shifted from traditional issues to more complex challenges often related to climate change, increased public access and changing land-use patterns.
- 5.3 At inception, the main environmental issues of the GHC were centred around localised erosion and the visual impacts of development however today, climate change has emerged as a dominant driver in coastal change and with rising sea levels and more frequent storm events accelerating coastal erosion and increasing flood risk, these challenges have shifted management priorities from preservation to resilience and adaptation.
- 5.4 During the early years of the GHC conservation focussed mainly on protecting visible landscape features and specific habitats. Since this time, biodiversity decline and habitat fragmentation has increasingly required more active interventions and protection with more focus on broadening and reconnecting coastal habitats and restoring natural processes through habitat restoration and nature recovery plans. Similarly, the initial tourism and recreational issues associated with the GHC centred around a few intensively used sites such as Cwm Colhuw, Dunraven and Ogmore where visitors were encouraged with the remainder of the coast perceived as a remote zone.
- 5.5 In recent decades however, visitor numbers have risen dramatically, particularly with the completion of the Wales Coastal Path and the increased popularity of domestic tourism, and while this growth has brought benefits, it has also presented management challenges including path erosion, parking pressure and disturbance and impact on wildlife. Likewise, the original tourism offer of the GHC centred on the natural environment and the primary recreational areas detailed above. Today, the economic benefits associated with tourism can be considerable, helping to support local communities, agricultural enterprises and individuals. However, the nature and scale of tourism have changed and while early 1970 tourism centred on traditional largely simple, low cost and low-key seaside recreation, today's coastal tourism is more diverse and may be centred on experiences, sports or leisure attractions. While many of these enterprises remain low-key and require little or no infrastructure or cater to small visitor numbers, others require buildings

or ancillary features and attract larger visitor numbers which bring management challenges, and which could adversely impact the GHC.

5.6 Therefore while the issues and challenges facing the GHC have evolved since the GHC was originally designated, they remain relevant and there is still a need to ensure that the special character and natural beauty of the coastline is protected and improved. Similarly, while the original objectives of the GHC today may seem limited they remain relevant and have largely been integrated into the wider national planning and environmental policy framework covering sustainability, climate change and resilience, biodiversity and ecological networks and future well-being objectives.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 6.1 It is clear that the issues and objectives defined for the original GHC designation and set out in the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Plan Statement remain relevant.
- 6.2 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) is clear that the undeveloped coast should be preserved and that development should not normally be proposed in a coastal location. Development within these areas should be strictly controlled to protect landscape character, coastal habitats and public enjoyment of natural beauty. PPW directs that planning authorities should clearly establish what the coast means for them and that they should develop or apply specific policies through their development plans which reflect the characteristics of their coastlines including specific policies which should be pursued within Heritage Coasts.
- 6.3 The character and quality of the GHC designation is long established and its importance and relevance has only increased since its designation with further heritage coast designations across Wales and the UK.
- 6.4 The Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) will therefore build upon the established principles and objectives of the GHC while incorporating and addressing new challenges such as climate resilience, coastal change and recovery ensuring a continuation of the long-term protection and enhancement of the GHC. The proposed policy is set out below:

### DNP3 – GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST

**The special environmental qualities of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast will be conserved and enhanced. New development will be restricted to:**

1. Development that is necessary for coastal defence as identified within the Lavernock Point to St Ann's Head Shoreline Management Plan 2;
2. Development that is essential for agriculture or nature conservation purposes or supports the local economy;
3. Development that supports sustainable recreation and tourism or enhances coastal access for walking, cycling and other low-impact recreational activities.
4. Development within settlement boundaries; or
5. Other appropriate and sustainable development that accords with National Policy.

**Development that has an adverse impact on the special environmental qualities of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that:**

6. There is a compelling national need that cannot be met elsewhere.
7. The benefits outweigh the likely harm.
8. Appropriate mitigation measures are in place to minimise adverse impacts.

## DNP3 – GLAMORGAN HERITAGE COAST

**A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will be required where development is considered likely to have a significant impact on the surrounding landscape, townscape or seascape character of the site, visual amenity or the special qualities of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast.**



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