

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012. As part of the statutory development plan process the Council is required to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> of April to 31<sup>st</sup> of March every year. The AMR will provide the basis for monitoring the effectiveness of the LDP objectives and strategic policies, the Plan's sustainability credentials and identify any significant contextual changes that might influence implementation.

## Key Findings of the Annual Monitoring Process

### Contextual Changes

This section looks at local, regional, national and international factors that have had an influence on land use development in Blaenau Gwent and subsequently on the implementation of the LDP. These include:

#### External Conditions

##### Economy

- The economic forecast for the UK indicates that economic growth is to stay modest at 1.4% in 2019 and 1.3% in 2020. Though there is great uncertainty as these projections assume that a Brexit deal is eventually agreed leading to an orderly exit from the EU.
- Wales has improved its unemployment rate standings when compared to the other nations and is now higher than Northern Ireland.
- Blaenau Gwent is below the Wales average in almost all socio economic indicators though has made a number of improvements in relation to employment this year.

##### Housing

- The UK housing market growth is moderating.
- Wales completion rates have slightly decreased this year and remain well below those rates experienced before the recession.
- The number of housing completions in Blaenau Gwent this year is higher than last year but still remains very low.

#### Policy, Legislation and Statistical Change

##### National Policy and Legislation

- Publication of Planning Policy Wales Edition 10
- Disapplication of paragraph 6.2 of Technical Advice Note 1
- Planning for Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople Sites Circular 005/2018 - new

##### Regional Policy

- Strategic Development Plan for South East Wales – work to progress this is expected in 2019/20

## Local Policy and Legislation

- Gwent Homelessness Strategy 2018-2022 Blaenau Gwent Local Action Plan - new

## Statistics

The mid-year estimate for Blaenau Gwent has decreased slightly and now stands at 69,700 (2018).

## Local Development Plan Monitoring

The results of the monitoring exercise provide a varied picture of development in Blaenau Gwent. Some of the most notable results are:

### Theme 1: Create a Network of Sustainable Vibrant Valley Communities

- The delivery of the strategy for Growth and Regeneration is behind target;
- **1,286** new dwellings were built in the period 2006-2019, which is well below the expected figure of 1,900 homes by 2016 and the plan requirement of 3,500 by 2021;
- In the period 2018-2019 (April to March) **75** new dwellings were built in the County Borough which is an improvement on the previous year;
- **No** employment allocations have been delivered this year;
- **No** retail allocations have been delivered to date;
- **No** transport schemes were delivered this year leaving the total schemes completed at 12;
- Retail vacancy rates across Blaenau Gwent average **17.4%** which is a 1% increase from last year and 4.4% above the Welsh average;
- The population of Blaenau Gwent has **increased slightly** from **69,609** in 2017 to **69,700** in 2018;
- **31** affordable dwellings were built in 2018-19;
- The housing land supply for Blaenau Gwent in 2019 was **1.48** years up by 0.2 years from last year though remains under the 5 year requirement;
- **52%** of LDP allocations have been granted planning permission whereas we are now 80% through the plan period;
- **87%** of development permitted in 2018-19 was on brownfield land, higher than the 80% target;

### Theme 2: Create Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Growth and the Promotion of Learning and Skills

- The latest economic activity rate is **74.5%** which is up by 7.4% from last year, decreasing the gap with the Wales average to 2.2%;
- The latest figure for the economically inactive wanting a job is **23.2%** down by **1.5%** from last year closing the gap to 1.4% above the Welsh average;
- Between 2016 and 2017 Blaenau Gwent had no job losses within manufacturing. Overall there has been a net loss of **1,300** jobs since 2008 (baseline date);
- Between 2016 and 2017 Blaenau Gwent lost **400** jobs in construction, with an overall net loss of **300** jobs since 2008;
- Between 2016 and 2017 Blaenau Gwent lost **15** jobs in services, with an overall net gain of **160** jobs since 2008;

### Theme 3: Create Safe, Healthy and Vibrant Communities and Protect and Enhance the Unique Natural and Built Environment

- The Fields in Trust (FIT) Standard for outdoor play space provision remained at **0.99** ha which is well below the target of 2.4 ha;
- There has been no loss of Listed Buildings or historic sites this year;

### Theme 4: Create Opportunities to Secure an Adequate Supply of Minerals and Reduce Waste

- The Plan has a **6** year land bank which is behind the target of ensuring there is a minimum 10 year land bank; and
- **59%** of waste was recycled last year, this is an increase from the year before and has now exceeded the Welsh Government target of 58% for 2016 and is working towards the target of 64% by 2021.

Detailed consideration of the results of the monitoring exercise has allowed the Council to make an informed judgement about the nature of the progress that has been made during 2018-19, in delivering the LDP targets and therefore its policies. As a visual aid in showing the monitoring outcomes, a simple colour coded system has been devised, as shown below.

<b>G</b>	The monitoring aim is on-going, being met or exceeded
<b>A</b>	The monitoring aim is not currently being achieved but the situation can be ameliorated without immediate intervention or sufficiently progressed not to require direct intervention
<b>R</b>	The monitoring aim is not being achieved and it is unlikely that this will be addressed without specific intervention

The result of the delivery of each of the monitoring aims is shown in the table below:

LDP Monitoring		Result
Policy		
<b>THEME 1: CREATE A NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE VIBRANT VALLEY COMMUNITIES</b>		
<b>SP1</b>	<b>Northern Strategy Area – Sustainable Growth and Regeneration</b>	
	To ensure sustainable growth and regeneration in the North of the Borough	<b>R</b>
<b>SP2</b>	<b>Southern Strategy Area – Regeneration</b>	
	To ensure regeneration in the South of the Borough	<b>R</b>
<b>SP3</b>	<b>The Retail Hierarchy and the Vitality and Viability of the Town Centres</b>	
	(a) To ensure town centres thrive through the implementation of the retail hierarchy	<b>R</b>
	(b) To ensure the improvement of viability in town centres	<b>A</b>
<b>SP4</b>	<b>Delivering Quality Housing</b>	
	(a) To secure the construction of 3,500 net additional dwellings and halt population decline	<b>R</b>
	(b) To ensure the delivery of 1,000 affordable dwellings, 335 of which through planning obligations	<b>R</b>

<b>SP5</b>	<b>Spatial Distribution of Housing Sites</b>	
	(a) To ensure that housing is delivered in all areas in accordance with the Strategy	<b>R</b>
	(b) To ensure that housing is delivered in accordance with the strategy to increase build rates over the Plan period	<b>A</b>
<b>SP6</b>	<b>Ensuring Accessibility</b>	
	To ensure improved connectivity within Blaenau Gwent and with the wider area	<b>A</b>
<b>SP7</b>	<b>Climate Change</b>	
	(a) To ensure that more of the County Borough's electricity and heat requirements are generated by renewable and low / zero carbon energy	<b>G</b>
	(b) To ensure the efficient use of land	<b>A</b>
	(c) To avoid development in areas at high risk of flooding	<b>A</b>
<b>THEME 2: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING AND SKILLS</b>		
<b>SP8</b>	<b>Sustainable Economic Growth</b>	
	(a) To ensure sufficient employment land is provided to increase economic activity	<b>A</b>
	(b) To ensure the diversification of the economic base	<b>A</b>
<b>THEME 3: CREATE SAFE, HEALTHY AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE UNIQUE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT</b>		
<b>SP9</b>	<b>Active and Healthy Communities</b>	
	To increase opportunities for people to participate in active and healthy communities	<b>G</b>
<b>SP10</b>	<b>Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment</b>	
	To ensure the protection, preservation and enhancement of the natural environment	<b>G</b>
<b>SP11</b>	<b>Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Environment</b>	
	To ensure that listed buildings and archaeological sites are protected, preserved and where appropriate enhanced	<b>G</b>
<b>THEME 4: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO SECURE AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF MINERALS AND REDUCE WASTE</b>		
<b>SP12</b>	<b>Securing an Adequate Supply of Minerals</b>	
	To ensure a minimum 10 year land bank and provision of at least 3Mt of aggregates	<b>A</b>
<b>SP13</b>	<b>Delivering Sustainable Waste Management</b>	
	To ensure the delivery of sustainable waste management	<b>G</b>

The results of the monitoring process for 2018-19 indicate that the targets in respect of 5 out of 19 core monitoring aims are on-going, being met or exceeded (annotated in green) and 8 are not currently being achieved but the situation can be overcome without immediate intervention or are sufficiently progressed not to require direct intervention

(annotated in amber). The remaining 6 (annotated in red) are currently falling short of the required pattern of delivery and actions have been identified to address them.

Generally the issues arise due to development levels being far lower than planned which is as a result of external factors beyond the Council's control in relation to the economic recession, the poorly performing housing market and issues around viability.

Trigger levels were identified in the Plan to indicate where a policy had diverged to such an extent that it could be identified as failing to be implemented and needs to be amended. The number of triggers breached this year is the same as last year. The following triggers were breached this year:

- The vacancy rate for Tredegar town centre at 24% has breached the trigger of 17%.
- The net number of additional affordable and general market dwellings built at 1,286 is 32% below the target of 1,900 (2016 outcome) and has therefore breached the trigger of 30%.
- The number of net additional affordable houses secured through S106 at 71.7 is behind the target of 224 and breaks the trigger of being below 20% of this target.
- The trigger of not having a 5 year housing supply has been breached (1.48 years).
- In terms of the requirement for no permissions for highly vulnerable or emergency services development within flood zone C2, as the Plan permitted 1, a trigger point has been breached.
- In terms of the requirement for 23.8 ha of employment land to be delivered by 2016, with 1.08 ha of employment allocations delivered, the Plan has breached the trigger of -20%.
- In terms of the number of years land bank of permitted reserves and the requirement of 100% provision of a 10 year land bank, according to the latest available information (2018) the Plan only has 6 years and therefore the 100% requirement trigger has been broken.

## Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Monitoring

The key findings of the SA Monitoring Process are outlined below:

### Economy

- The average weekly earnings for full time workers in Blaenau Gwent is **£479.10** which is down by **£12.20** since last year and is **£29.90** less than the average figure for Wales;

### Social

- All social housing within Blaenau Gwent meets the Welsh Housing Quality Standard;
- Blaenau Gwent has the highest proportion of communities in the most deprived 10% in Wales;

### Environment

- Carbon Dioxide emission tonnes per Capita have decreased from **6.1** in 2007 to **4.1** in 2017;
- **0** MW of renewable energy and low carbon energy capacity has been installed this year;
- There has been no decrease in air quality; and

- 0% of Special Landscape Area has been lost to development.

The result of the delivery of each of the SA monitoring objectives is shown in the Sustainability Monitoring table below. As a visual aid in showing the monitoring outcomes, a simple colour coded system has been devised, as shown below.

<b>G</b>	The Plan is having a positive impact on the monitoring objective
<b>A</b>	The Plan is not having an impact, or is having a mixed impact on the monitoring objective
<b>R</b>	The Plan is having a negative impact on the monitoring objective

Sustainability Appraisal Monitoring		
	SA Objective	Result
<b>Economic</b>		
1.	To promote economic growth and strengthen and diversify the economy	<b>R</b>
2.	To increase levels of local employment and ensure distribution of opportunities	<b>G</b>
3.	To enable the development of a strong tourism economy in Blaenau Gwent, complementary to the regional offer	<b>A</b>
4.	To enhance the vitality and viability of town centres	<b>A</b>
<b>Social</b>		
5.	To meet identified housing needs	<b>A</b>
6.	To improve the quality of Blaenau Gwent's housing stock	<b>G</b>
7.	To secure the delivery and maintenance of quality affordable housing	<b>G</b>
8.	To improve educational attainment and increase skill levels	<b>A</b>
9.	To improve accessibility to education, leisure, employment, health, homes and community services for all sectors of the community	<b>A</b>
10.	To promote community health, social care and well-being	<b>A</b>
11.	To reduce crime, social disorder and fear of crime	<b>G</b>
12.	To encourage modal shift from private transport to sustainable transport	<b>A</b>
<b>Environment</b>		
13.	To protect and enhance biodiversity across Blaenau Gwent	<b>G</b>
14.	To conserve and enhance the heritage assets of Blaenau Gwent and their settings	<b>G</b>
15.	To make the best use of previously developed land and existing buildings to minimise pressure for greenfield development, where this will not result in damage or loss in biodiversity	<b>A</b>
16.	To conserve soil resources and their quality	<b>G</b>

17.	To reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, in particular carbon dioxide	<b>G</b>
18.	To reduce waste generation and maximise reuse and recycling	<b>G</b>
19.	To maintain current air quality	<b>G</b>
20.	To maintain current low levels of vulnerability of all development to flooding	<b>A</b>
21.	To promote the use of sustainably sourced products and resources	<b>A</b>
22.	To increase energy efficiency and generation and use of renewable energy across the County Borough	<b>G</b>
23.	To conserve and enhance surface and ground water quality	<b>A</b>
24.	Protect the quality and character of the landscape and enhance where necessary	<b>G</b>

The results of the monitoring process indicate that the Plan is having a positive impact in respect of 12 of the sustainability objectives (annotated in green), is not having a positive or is having a mixed impact on the majority 11 (annotated in amber); and is having a negative impact on 1 objective (annotated in red).

Overall, the plan is having a positive impact.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The current economic situation, the lack of confidence in the housing market and viability issues has undoubtedly had an impact on the delivery of the Plan. Progress on delivering the Strategy of Growth and Regeneration continues to fall short of expectations.

This year the Plan was found to be meeting 5 out of 19 monitoring aims which is the same as last year. The number of monitoring aims identified as not being achieved and needing intervention decreased to 6 this year. Also the number of trigger levels breached remained the same as last year. Whilst improvements have been made this year the Plan is still not performing in areas such as retail, housing, and employment.

The Council is currently preparing a Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).to address these matters.

### Recommendation

As a result of the findings of the Annual Monitoring Report for 2018-19 it is recommended that:

1. The Council progresses work on a Replacement Local Development Plan