

Blaenau Gwent Council Response to Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly Recommendations

Since the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly took place in March the assembly recommendations and report have been considered through the democratic process by councillors, and assembly members have also presented the recommendations to a special information session for all councillors. The Assembly report has also recently been discussed in length at a special meeting of our senior leadership team, with these discussions informing this response.

Blaenau Gwent Council has already been part of the initial response to the Climate Assembly recommendations as a member of the Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board (PSB). We will not repeat the full detail of the PSB response ([link](#)), but will briefly recap, and state our support for, the main points of that response:

- We support the five Assembly recommendations, thank the participants in the Assembly for their time and effort, and we commit to continuing and accelerating meaningful action on climate change in response.
- The work of the Assembly makes clear that Climate action is not just a narrow technical fix to reduce emissions, it is about actions that will improve wider well-being by ensuring people in Blaenau Gwent have more ownership of the changes needed and by creating new opportunities.
- Implementing the assembly recommendations is part of a larger ongoing process to tackle the Climate Emergency. We can't solve everything locally, but working together we can make a meaningful difference.
- We are playing an active role in PSB Workshops taking place in November to develop detailed responses and actions to the five official recommendations of the Assembly.
- The PSB committed to report on progress on the recommendations on a regular and ongoing basis, we will do so as a council as well.

Format of this response

The main focus of this response is on the areas where we as the council can have the greatest direct influence, while the PSB considers the wider picture of Blaenau Gwent as a whole. Therefore, the focus of this response is on the wider set of 24 recommendations, and in particular on those where the council is either itself one of the lead delivery organisations, and/or where we have a significant role to play in providing support to residents taking action themselves. With our partner organisations from the PSB, we are currently developing more detail for the five official recommendations, which will also feed into our future actions.

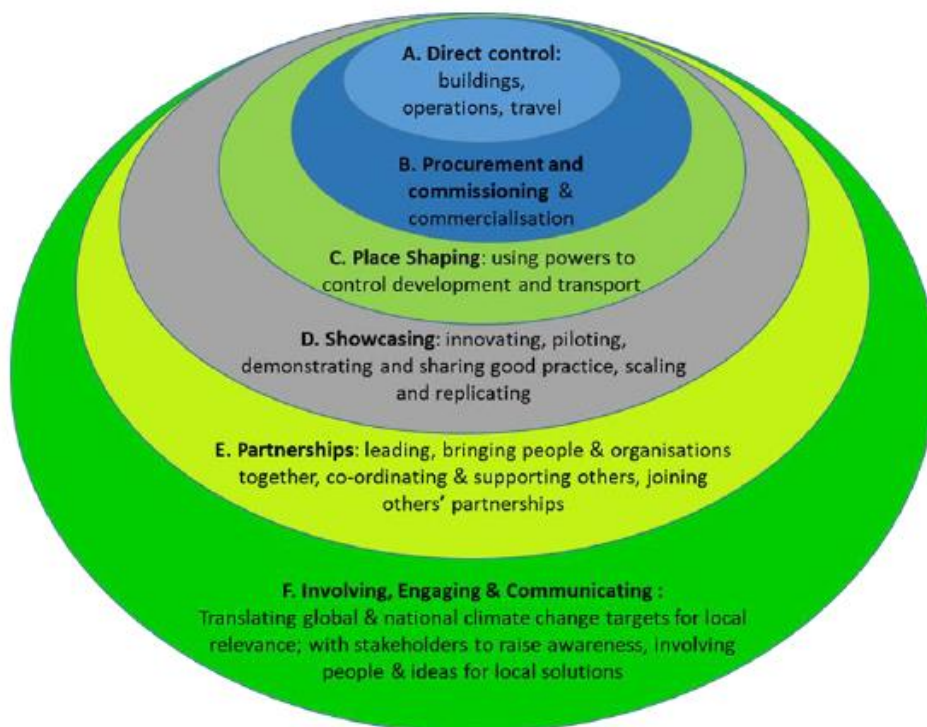
Another reason for the wider scope of our response is that we feel that it is important to recognise that the Climate Assembly did a large amount of important work and thinking beyond the five recommendations that achieved 80% support during the Assembly. Achieving 80% support for the type of detailed recommendations that the Assembly produced, particularly within the limited time available, is challenging. The final voting scores reflect the level of consensus that Assembly members were able to achieve within the time available, they are not a ranking of the relative importance of the issues they considered. We believe that these other 19 recommendations, many of which received the

support of a substantial majority, cover a range of other issues that are very important for residents. Therefore, they represent an important basis for developing future climate actions, which should not be lost. We are keen that Assembly members and wider residents continue to be engaged in developing these actions (see below).

How is the council responding to climate change?

Last September we declared a Climate Emergency at the same time as adopting our Decarbonisation Plan 2020-2030 (link). The Decarbonisation Plan is about our organisational emissions, the carbon we release from our own operations (heating our buildings, our fleet, staff travel etc.) The plan sets out how we intend to play our part in the ambition for a Net-Zero Public Sector in Wales by 2030.

There is another Net Zero target for Wales as a whole by 2050. This 2050 target relates to territorial emissions, which means all the emissions released in an area (housing, transport, business etc.) It is these territorial emissions that were the main focus of the Climate Assembly. We have an important role to play in tackling these emissions in Blaenau Gwent, the diagram below shows some of the ways we can influence them, but these emissions are not something that we, or anyone else, can solve on their own.



Last year a Climate Mitigation Steering Group was established by the PSB, chaired by our Managing Director, bringing together local partners to develop a plan to address territorial emissions in Blaenau Gwent. The Assembly recommendations are helping to drive development of this plan.

More generally our approach to climate action recognises the scope of the challenge we face and how far reaching the actions required, something reflected in the range of the assembly recommendations. We do not think that, in most cases, these actions can be

delivered by separate stand-alone climate projects. Rather our approach is about mainstreaming zero carbon into all our activities, a process that is already underway. For example, we do not have a separate low carbon vehicle budget, our aim is all our fleet budget will be low carbon.

We also recognise that some of the things we need to do to achieve zero carbon will be more expensive (at least in the short-term), and many individuals and organisations, including the council, will need support and additional resources to deliver them. The appointment of the new Climate and Deputy Climate Ministers in Wales (Julie James and Lee Waters), who both spoke to the Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly, indicates Welsh Government are taking this need for investment seriously, and we will be continuing to work with partners to push for further support for climate action in Blaenau Gwent.

Responding to the Recommendations

The table below shows the Climate Assembly recommendations where we have a role as a lead local delivery organisation and/or in supporting people to take action. This response does not attempt to go through each of these recommendations one by one, but instead identifies some key themes that cut across multiple recommendations.

Develop a local Climate Change Communications Strategy for promoting climate change action within the community at all levels by 2022 to be reviewed annually.	67	Develop a community owned/part-owned green energy programme e.g. solar farms, wind farms, or hydro electric. Supported by community green bonds. Making sure bonds are accessible and provide beneficial return.	74
Employ dedicated local Communication Officer(s) to lead on the Climate Change Communication Strategy.	53	Set a goal and support schools to source Welsh/British, sustainable produce and increase the use of these products over time, to include more vegetarian options.	74
Set up a Climate Change Communications Network that oversee the evolving Strategy (to be cross sector including citizens and youth representatives) sharing best practice, information and knowledge.	63	Establish an affordable, integrated road & rail transport system accessible throughout BG. A one ticket system that links to bus, rail & cycle schemes - inclusivity for purchasing of tickets (digital or paper). Accessible all hours with safety via lighting, CCTV and to keep maintained.	91
Make climate change and its impacts mandatory, interactive (e.g. competitions, prizes, rewards), relevant to the local area in the school curriculum. The council should assist schools with projects relevant to the age and practical involvement by the young people with the wider community.	62	Set up an enhanced information website, newsletter & community boards to promote transparency and sharing of information about recycling and how to access these services - this would improve awareness for future consultation on these issues.	63
Blaenau Gwent must create an accessible, practical, well publicised information platform for all (an upgraded website, an app, information lines and local one stop 'retrofitted shops/hubs' for advice and demonstrations on all things green throughout the area.	70	Reinstate community skips - to robustly address fly-tipping & litter - siting of more litter bins that are emptied more often. Install & monitor more CCTV/enhanced measures at known fly-tipping spots. Re-direct fly-tipping & CCTV costs to community skips and in time it would pay for itself.	65
Providing centralised grants to improve energy performance of all homes and reduce fuel poverty and energy usage by 2027.	70	Establish local Repair hubs to Re-use/re-purpose/upcycle items.	79
Providing advice, space and funding for communities to create their own local hub with a network of Outreach Officers.	58	Implement a programme of woodland preservation and reforestation of BG, using the right tree in the right place for the right reason, increasing opportunities for jobs, biodiversity and connecting woodlands. Making sure the skills are available so we can create green jobs, e.g saw milling and timber framed housing.	86
Prioritize brown field sites over green belt for new builds and ensure green space created within new developments	79	Create roles for coordination, cultivation and support of the use of green spaces (allotments, woodlands and urban green spaces) by the community to benefit all generations and create a sense of community ownership. Supporting communities in activities including food growing, recreation, bio-diversity, green prescribing, green space planning and aesthetics (e.g Blaenau Gwent in Bloom).	77
Establish & improve a safe, easily maintainable infrastructure for walkers & cyclists, for either recreational or work purposes, with access to the public transport network. Including lighting & CCTV & storage for bikes.	88		

We are already taking significant action across many of these recommendations. Examples include, the proportion of waste recycled in Blaenau Gwent have increased to 62%, thanks

to the efforts of residents, leading to the amount of CO₂ being saved increasing by over 3,500 tonnes CO₂, in the last 4 years. Further actions to reduce waste are being taken including the opening of the new Den Reuse Shop at Roseheyworth ([link](#)). The latest round of Arbed warm homes scheme completed this year saw £2.7 million spent on improvements to the energy efficiency of 577 homes within the Lower Ebbw Fach area. In recent years our valleys have become far greener, with the active involvement of community groups in many of these green spaces, including three Green Flag community awards this year. A process that is ongoing, for example, with the recent creation of the Ebbw Fawr trail, improving active travel links for walking and cycling, and consultation on a 10 year Active Travel Strategy having just been completed.

A range of pilot projects and plans are already being developed or already underway. This year the council launched a pilot community green bond scheme to support our Energy Prospectus ([link](#)). A pilot Fflecsi bus scheme was launched this year, operating Monday to Saturday between 5:15am and 10:35pm, to improve links to work and services. £70 million has been made available to us to reopen the link between Newport and Ebbw Vale, to secure four trains per hour and a new station in Abertillery. Climate action will also be a central consideration in informing development decisions, including through the new Local Development Plan and the placemaking approach to develop Town Centre Strategies.

£30,000 a year over a three-year period has been secured to support the appointment of a Local Environmental Quality Officer to work with existing Litter champions and groups along with engaging with schools and community groups to deliver the new Blaenau Gwent Litter and Fly-Tipping Strategy for 2021-2026 ([link](#)). £2.7 million has been secured for a Gwent wide project Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing (ENRaW), to facilitate better woodland management and creation and take action to protect and enhance vital habitats for pollinators and make improvements to green spaces, urban and country parks, cycleways and public rights of way.

In addition to these actions relating to the Assembly recommendations highlighted in the table above, we are also taking action across a range of other areas of climate change. 62 new dual fast charging public Electric Vehicle Charging Points have been installed at 34 sites across Gwent, supported by a grant of £465,000. Cardiff Capital Region City Deal have secured £1.3million for the delivery of infrastructure to support taxis in the transition to low emission vehicles.

Work is ongoing on the Blaenau Gwent Energy Prospectus ([link](#)) to promote opportunities for renewable energy, including the recent expansion of The Works District Heating Network in Ebbw Vale to additional business units. We have also been involved in the development of the Cardiff Capital Region Energy Strategy ([link](#)), which aims to reduce emissions from our regional energy system by 55% by 2035. We are developing a pilot project to demonstrate solutions to decarbonising business parks, including renewable energy generation and installing new equipment including battery storage, solar PV, heat pump and Artificial Intelligence (AI) controls.

We are also taking action to address our own carbon footprint. We have invested over £4 million, supported by Welsh Government Energy Service, in lighting, heating, controls and building integrated renewables across 20 properties saving 26,500 tonnes of CO₂ and reducing the council's energy bills by £9 million over the project's lifetime. An outline business case for a New Depot was presented in July. The design will include solar panels on the main buildings, rainwater capture for use in vehicle washing, and charging points to facilitate the decarbonisation of our fleet, including the recent purchase of our first electric vehicles, four small electric vans for £95,000. Since March 2020 the council has operated agile working arrangements based on digital platforms, initially in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Staff and members have responded positively and supported the move to a new operating model, which is having a significant positive impact on our carbon footprint: reduced commuting to and from work; less business travel; the closure of the Civic Centre (an old energy inefficient building), plus a more efficient digital way of working. We are also currently reviewing our Procurement Strategy to address our climate impact and strengthen our existing commitment to buying local.

However, we also recognise that we do not currently have a complete overview of how these actions fit together, and most importantly we can't say how the total impact of these actions compares to the total action needed to reach net zero. We are committed through the PSB mitigation steering group to producing a data driven plan for reducing territorial emissions in Blaenau Gwent. This will allow us to produce clear pathways from the actions we are already taking, to delivering on the recommendations of the Climate Assembly and achieving Net Zero.

Similarly, it can be difficult for residents to get a clear picture of what is going on across all these areas and what they can do themselves to take action on climate change.

Communication is a common theme across many of the recommendations, and we recognise this is not just about telling residents about the things we are doing already, or reproducing generic information about climate actions that is already available from a number of other sources. Keeping accessible Blaenau Gwent specific information up to date and providing opportunities for two-way communication are important elements of responding to these recommendations that will require consistent resourcing to make a climate communication strategy meaningful.

Building on the Success of the Climate Assembly

The Climate Assembly demonstrated both the widespread support for climate action in Blaenau Gwent and the potential for in-depth input from the public. While it is not possible, or necessary, for this level of engagement to be maintained at all times, we are keen to continue this process. A standing group and/or process for public input into decision making about climate change, will require clearly defined purpose and support, to ensure that, like the Climate Assembly, it has meaningful outcomes. We are keen to work with residents and partners to create a permanent successor to the Climate Assembly.

Accompanying this document is a brief questionnaire ([link](#)) through which both Assembly

members and other residents can give us feedback about both this response and possible options for continuing the work of the Climate Assembly on an ongoing basis.