

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted on 22nd November 2012. As part of the statutory development plan process the Council is required to prepare an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) covering the period 1st of April to 31st of March every year. The AMR provides 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. This is the final AMR covering the Adopted LDP plan period (2006 – 2021).

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 UK economy shrank by 0.6% in June 2022. Although the economic output stood at 0.9% above pre pandemic levels in February 2020, some regions struggles to reach the pre-pandemic levels.
- The growth outlook has deteriorated. It is expected that, two years of slow or even negative GDP growth will be experienced post 2022.
- 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 is strong with house prices rising. Wales saw the highest house price growth at 15.8% and was the strongest performing part of the UK for the first time since the Nationwide data began in 1973.
- The number of housing completions in Blaenau Gwent is rising but still remains lower than expected.

Policy, Legislation and Statistical Change

National Policy and Legislation

- Suspension of Technical Advice Note 15: Development Flooding and Coastal Erosion (December 2021)
- Development Quality Requirements for Housing Associations and Local Authorities 2021

Regional Policy

- Strategic Development Plan for South East Wales – update

Local Policy and Legislation

- There has been no change in the local policy framework.

Statistics

- There have been no mid-year estimates published this year.
- The 2021 population Census figures have been released. In Blaenau Gwent, the population size has decreased by 4.2%, from around 69,800 in 2011 to 66,900 in 2021.

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;
- **1,643** new dwellings were built in the period 2006-2022, 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 2021-2022 (April to March) **124** new dwellings were built in the County Borough which is slightly below the previous year.
- **0.28 ha** of employment allocations have been delivered during 2021 and 2021;
- **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 **14.6% (2021-2022)** which is a 2.3% decrease from 2020-2021. The Blaenau Gwent vacancy rate is lower than the Wales vacancy rate of 17.7%;
- The 2021 census data has been released and the population figure is 66,900 which is a 4.2% decrease from 69,800 in 2011.
- **27** affordable dwellings were built in 2021-22;
- Only **62.3%** of LDP allocations have been granted planning permission;
- **94%** of development permitted in 2021-22 was on brownfield land which is higher than the target figure of 80%;

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

- The latest economic activity rate is **71.1%** which is up by 0.1% from 2020-21, decreasing the gap with the Wales average to 2%;
- The latest figure for the economically inactive wanting a job is **19.5%** down by 1.4% from 2020-21 and 2.4% higher than the Welsh average;
- Between 2019 and 2020 Blaenau Gwent witnessed a decrease of 500 jobs within manufacturing. Overall there has been a net loss of **1,300** jobs since 2008 (baseline date);
- Between 2019 and 2020 Blaenau Gwent lost **100** jobs in construction, with an overall net loss of **100** jobs since 2008;
- Between 2019 and 2020 Blaenau Gwent lost **250** jobs in services, with an overall net loss of 725 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 **1.00 ha** in 2022 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 **3-year** land bank which is behind the target of ensuring there is a minimum 10 -year land bank; and
- **64.9%** of waste was recycled during 202-210, this is a slight decrease from the years before but it above the Welsh Government 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.

G	The monitoring aim is on-going, being met or exceeded
A	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
R	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	
Policy	Result
THEME 1: CREATE A NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE VIBRANT VALLEY COMMUNITIES	
SP1	Northern Strategy Area – Sustainable Growth and Regeneration
To ensure sustainable growth and regeneration in the North of the Borough	R
SP2	Southern Strategy Area – Regeneration
To ensure regeneration in the South of the Borough	R
SP3	The Retail Hierarchy and the Vitality and Viability of the Town Centres
(a) To ensure town centres thrive through the implementation of the retail hierarchy	A
(b) To ensure the improvement of viability in town centres	A
SP4	Delivering Quality Housing
(a) To secure the construction of 3,500 net additional dwellings and halt population decline	R
(b) To ensure the delivery of 1,000 affordable dwellings, 335 of which through planning obligations	R
SP5	Spatial Distribution of Housing Sites
(a) To ensure that housing is delivered in all areas in accordance with the Strategy	R

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

The results of the monitoring process for 2021-22 indicate that the targets in respect of 4 out of 19 core monitoring aims are on-going, being met or being 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 7 (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 Covid-19 pandemic, 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 has decreased from 9 to 6 in 2020-21. The following triggers were breached this year:

- The net number of additional affordable and general market dwellings built at 1,643 is 46% below the target of 3,500 (2021 outcome) and has therefore breached the trigger of 30%.
- The number of net additional affordable houses delivered through S106 per annum and the outcome requirement for 335 by 2021, having only delivered 4 and secured a total of 71 units the Plan has failed to meet the 2021 requirement. It also breaks the trigger of being below 20% of the 335 target for 2021.
- In terms of the change in viability no trigger has been broken as sales value per sq metre are not 10% less than the original sales values.
- There has been an under delivery of cumulative housing completions since the beginning of the Plan period and so the trigger of under delivery on two consecutive years has been broken.
- In terms of the requirement for 23.8 ha of employment land to be delivered by 2016 and 50 ha by 2021, with 3.35 ha of employment allocations delivered, the Plan has breached the trigger of -20%.
- In terms of the number of year's land bank of permitted reserves and the requirement of 100% provision of a 10-year land bank, according to the latest available information (2019) the Plan only has 3 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 was **£523.30** (2021) which has increased by £69.10 since 2020 and is **£47.60** (2021) less than the average figure for Wales;

Social

- The National Survey for Wales included a question on the satisfaction of the local area as a place to live. People who live in Blaenau Gwent were 68% satisfied, the lowest rate of 22 local authorities in Wales which was significantly lower than the next lowest ranked local authority;

Environment

- Carbon Dioxide emission tonnes per Capita have decreased from **6.1** in 2007 to **3.9** in 2020;
- **0.84** 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.

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

Sustainability Appraisal Monitoring		
	SA Objective	Result
Economic		
1.	To promote economic growth and strengthen and diversify the economy	R
2.	To increase levels of local employment and ensure distribution of opportunities	G
3.	To enable the development of a strong tourism economy in Blaenau Gwent, complementary to the regional offer	R
4.	To enhance the vitality and viability of town centres	A
Social		
5.	To meet identified housing needs	A
6.	To improve the quality of Blaenau Gwent's housing stock	X
7.	To secure the delivery and maintenance of quality affordable housing	G
8.	To improve educational attainment and increase skill levels	A
9.	To improve accessibility to education, leisure, employment, health, homes and community services for all sectors of the community	A
10.	To promote community health, social care and well-being	A
11.	To reduce crime, social disorder and fear of crime	G
12.	To encourage modal shift from private transport to sustainable transport	A
Environment		
13.	To protect and enhance biodiversity across Blaenau Gwent	G
14.	To conserve and enhance the heritage assets of Blaenau Gwent and their settings	G
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	A
16.	To conserve soil resources and their quality	A
17.	To reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, in particular carbon dioxide	G
18.	To reduce waste generation and maximise reuse and recycling	G
19.	To maintain current air quality	G

20.	To maintain current low levels of vulnerability of all development to flooding	A
21.	To promote the use of sustainably sourced products and resources	A
22.	To increase energy efficiency and generation and use of renewable energy across the County Borough	G
23.	To conserve and enhance surface and ground water quality	A
24.	Protect the quality and character of the landscape and enhance where necessary	G

The results of the monitoring process indicate that the Plan is having a positive impact in respect of 10 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); is having a negative impact on 2 objectives (annotated in red) and there is no update available for one (annotated with an X).

Overall, the plan is having a mixed impact against the SA objectives.

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. Although, it is important to note that the Council are starting to see some positivity in the housing market with more housebuilding taking place than ever and significant private sector interest in the County Borough.

This year the Plan was found to be meeting 4 out of 19 monitoring aims which is one less than last year. The number of monitoring aims identified as not being achieved and needing intervention remained at 8 this year. The number of trigger levels has decreased this year, although 6 trigger levels remain breached. The Plan is 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 2021-22 it is recommended that:

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