

Regeneration & Community Services Performance Report



April - September 2023

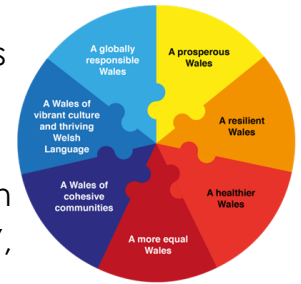
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

- a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

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Foreword

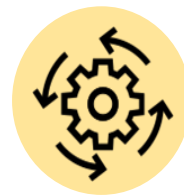
The purpose of this report is to present service activity which highlights how we are contributing to the Council's overall aim of delivering all seven national well-being goals.



The following overview pages set out Regeneration & Community Services performance for the period along with some associated achievements and challenges aligned to the priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2022/27, which are to :



Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent



An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place



Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities



Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

This report is broken down into the themes below which have been identified for the Environment Services area and support delivery of the priority areas above:

- Town Centres;
- Energy and Digital;
- Destination Management and Tourism;
- Employment and Skills;
- Housing Development;
- Improving the Local Environment;
- Healthy and Safe Communities;
- Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities;
- Managing Our Estate; and
- Managing our Highways Network and Infrastructure.

Blaenau Gwent has a rich heritage and our buildings and countryside are part of Blaenau Gwent's attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. Our local environment should be used to help improve the health and well-being of our families and communities and be enhanced for future generations to continue to enjoy. There is also a real desire to see the communities where people live kept clean, tidy and useable, creating areas that people can be proud of.



We will continue to invest in our neighbourhoods so that they are places where people are proud to live. We have prioritised economic development and regeneration in order to bring jobs, growth and opportunity to local people and businesses.

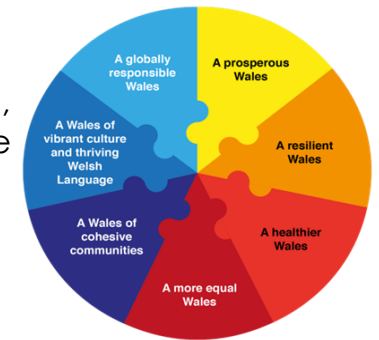


Increasing employability makes a fundamental contribution to reducing and tackling poverty and the economic status of the area. Supporting people to obtain and retain employment reduces reliance upon support services aligned to social well-being and poverty.



Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is legislation which aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The vision of this legislation is expressed in the seven National well-being goals.



The Act also puts a duty on public bodies to apply the sustainable development principle which states they 'must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The sustainable development principle is made up of the following five ways of working, pictured below:



Collaboration



Integration



Involvement

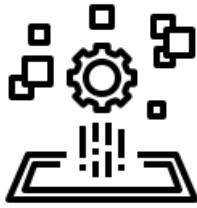


Long Term



Prevention

Throughout this report some areas of performance that meet these ways of working are demonstrated by the above images.



The following pages detail some directorate service delivery & performance, during the period April 2023 to September 2023, broken down by themes as detailed on page 3.





Town Centres



The Welsh Government's Smart Towns Programme runs until 2025

Over the course of the 'Year of Smart Towns' the Council attended a number of workshops, developed a digital action plan and

implemented pilot projects. These have been developed into case studies that have been shared within the Smart Towns Community. The programme supports businesses, councils and communities in using digital technology and data to regenerate their high streets, in line with the Transforming Towns agenda. This means helping businesses to use data to work smarter and not harder, and to identify opportunities for growth; using data to justify and inform investment, and to measure the success of any intervention.



Development of
Town Centre regeneration Plans
are ongoing



Ebbw Vale - work continues on the delivery plan. Some work on development options for key sites has commenced. Further engagement with Design Commission for Wales to be undertaken.

Brynmawr - the placemaking plan has been approved by Scrutiny and Cabinet. Work is underway on the development of the delivery plan.

Tredegar - the placemaking plan was approved in 2022. Draft delivery plan received and currently being reviewed. The delivery plan will contain the list of projects that need to be done to achieve the overall vision for the town.

Funding application has been prepared to cover costs of developing a **Blaina Placemaking Plan**.



Abertillery - placemaking plan has gone through the democratic process and has highlighted the strategic vision for redevelopment of Abertillery town centre .

From the positive improvements the community have achieved in Abertillery Park, to the ongoing work to reopen Abertillery Institute, the desire for improvements in the town are evident. This plan should be viewed as a means of mobilising this latent strength.



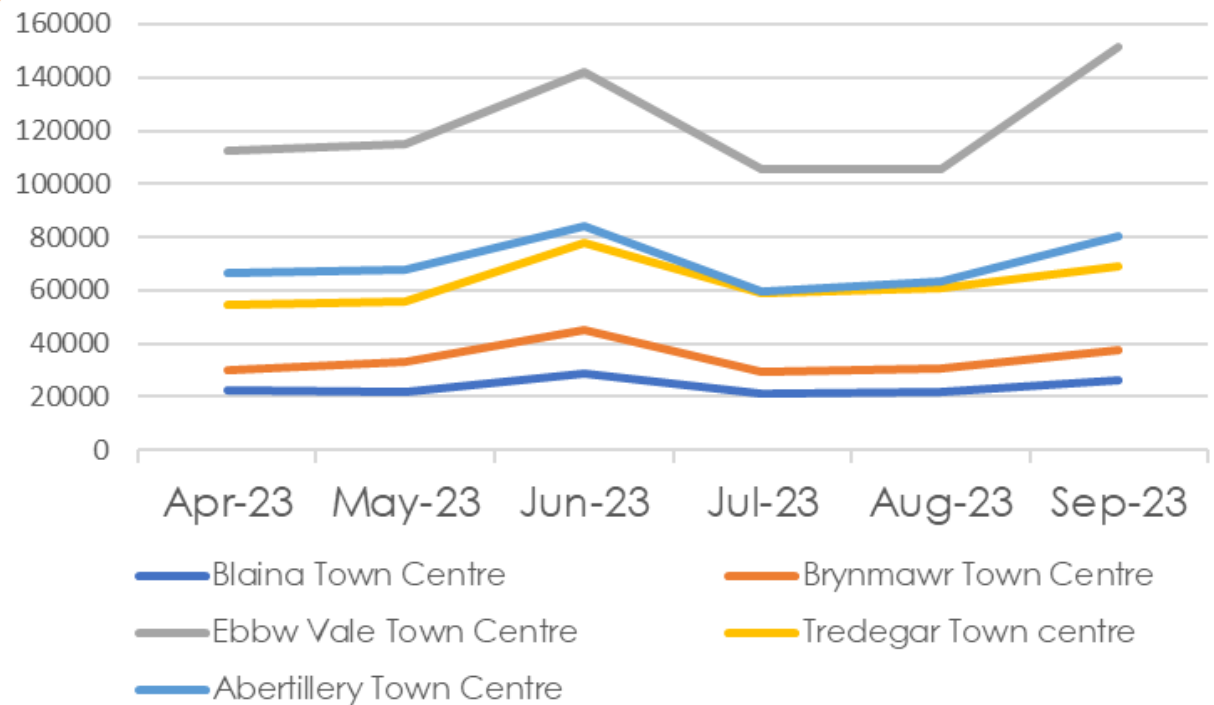
Town Centres



Footfall is an important factor influencing our town centre vitality and viability. Sensors count the number of shoppers visiting our town centres and provide analytical data on how individual town centres are performing and how shoppers are using them.

The data from footfall monitoring allows the Council to be better equipped to make evidenced based decisions on the popularity and effectiveness of current and future projects in Town Centres.

During the first six months of the year footfall has fluctuated each month with the **busiest month in nearly all towns being June**, just as it was for the same period last year.



There was a **total Blaenau Gwent town centre footfall of 1,878,996 people** over the reporting period (April 23—September 23). This was a **reduction in total footfall of 81,312 compared to the same period last year.**

Footfall counters are used across the towns within Blaenau Gwent to measure the number of people entering an area, shop or building. The technology monitors pedestrians and vehicles in any type of environment, continuously 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Visitor numbers are analysed using the very latest counting specific tracking, which is based on movement across a predefined area. At no time are images stored, with counts recorded as a value and stored as a CSV file. .

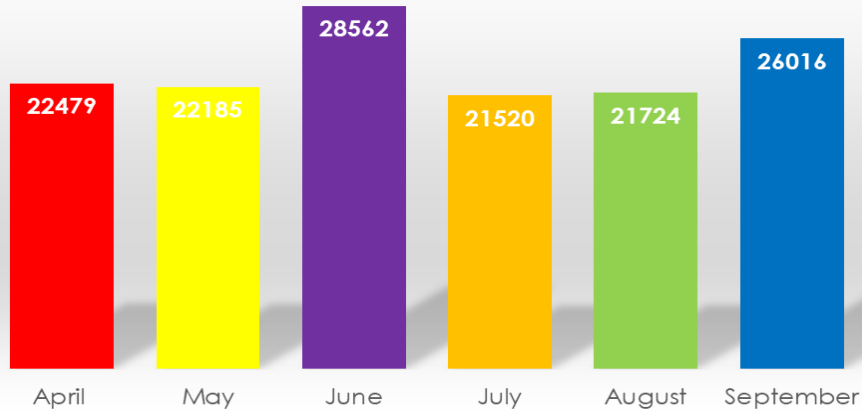


Town Centres

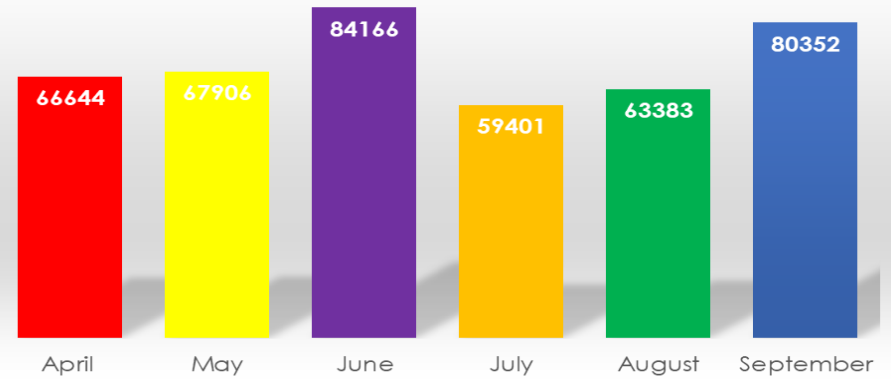


The following graphs show the amount of footfall in each of our towns each month....

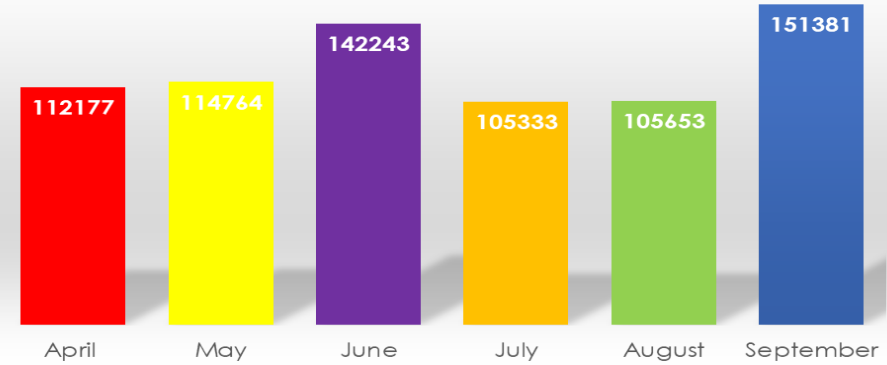
Blaina Town Footfall Data



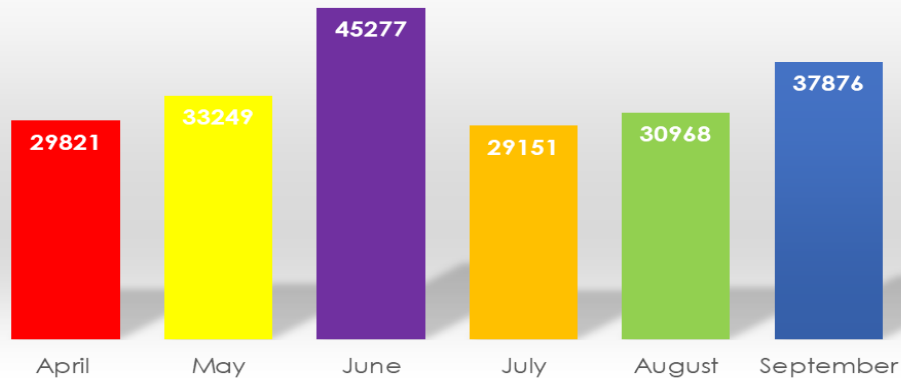
Abertillery Town Footfall Data



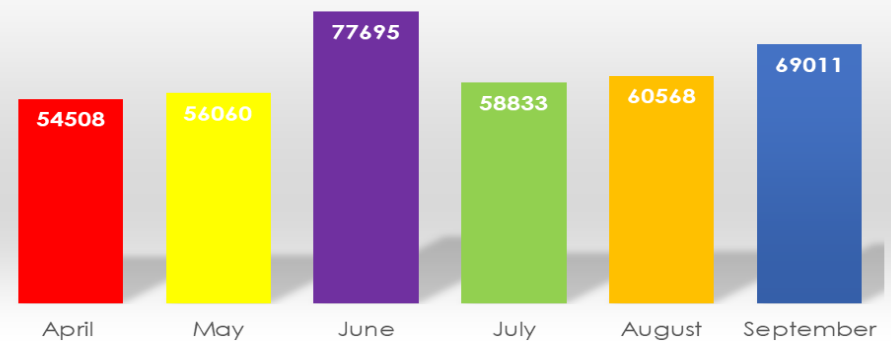
Ebbw Vale Town Footfall Data



Brynmawr Town Footfall Data



Tredegar Town Footfall Data



Internet of things technology has been used to support measuring footfall in our town centres and active travel routes



Town Centres



A range of collaborative activities and engagement have taken place during the reporting period, including the **consultation** on our **Local development plan** and **Placemaking Plans**.

The review of the existing Local Development Plan (LDP) is ongoing. Approval of a planned delivery agreement to form the updated LDP was obtained from Welsh Government along with a revised timetable for delivery due to unforeseen delays. [Open hyperlink here for further details](#)

The Local Development Plan continues to provide a long term framework for sustainable development across Blaenau Gwent, supported by key documents such as the Placemaking Plans, which when complete will support future planning decisions within the towns.



It is the intention that Placemaking Plans will all be complete or substantially complete in advance of the finalisation of the Local Development Plan.

The Town Centre Business Development Officer has been working with businesses and other stakeholders to organise events that will help draw visitors and footfall .



An **events programme** will be **developed** over the next few months **alongside applications for funding** such as Shared Prosperity Funding and Transforming Towns. Additional resources have also been identified to support implementation on the ground, as well as collaboration and co-delivery with a range of partners in particular within the People & Skills and Community & Place pillars.



Case Study - 'Meanwhile Use' Scheme supporting our Town Centres



The 'Meanwhile Use' Scheme provides new businesses with financial assistance allowing them the opportunity to take on a tenancy and test trade the market without having to commit to long term or expensive rental contracts.

Meanwhile uses can assist in the regeneration of a Town, Tillery Animal Health is one of the businesses who has taken part in this scheme.



Siobhan owner of Tillery Animal Health said:

"As a result of being made redundant in my previous role as a Veterinary Pharmaceutical Representative, I decided to utilise my animal health advisor qualifications and open a business selling animal medicines, feeds, treats, and toys. I initially started at home and quickly progressed to a local market stall. It was at this time I spoke to the Town Centre Development Officer about my aspiration of having my own premises and she told me about the 'meanwhile' scheme, which could provide financial support allowing me the opportunity to rent a small premises within Abertillery Arcade.

This was the help that I needed to allow me to make the leap from trading at home into running my own shop, within a short time I outgrew the shop and have moved into larger premises. This has allowed me to extend my product range with now includes country wear, equestrian clothing and aquatics equipment. I have been overwhelmed by the support from local residents who have become valued customers .



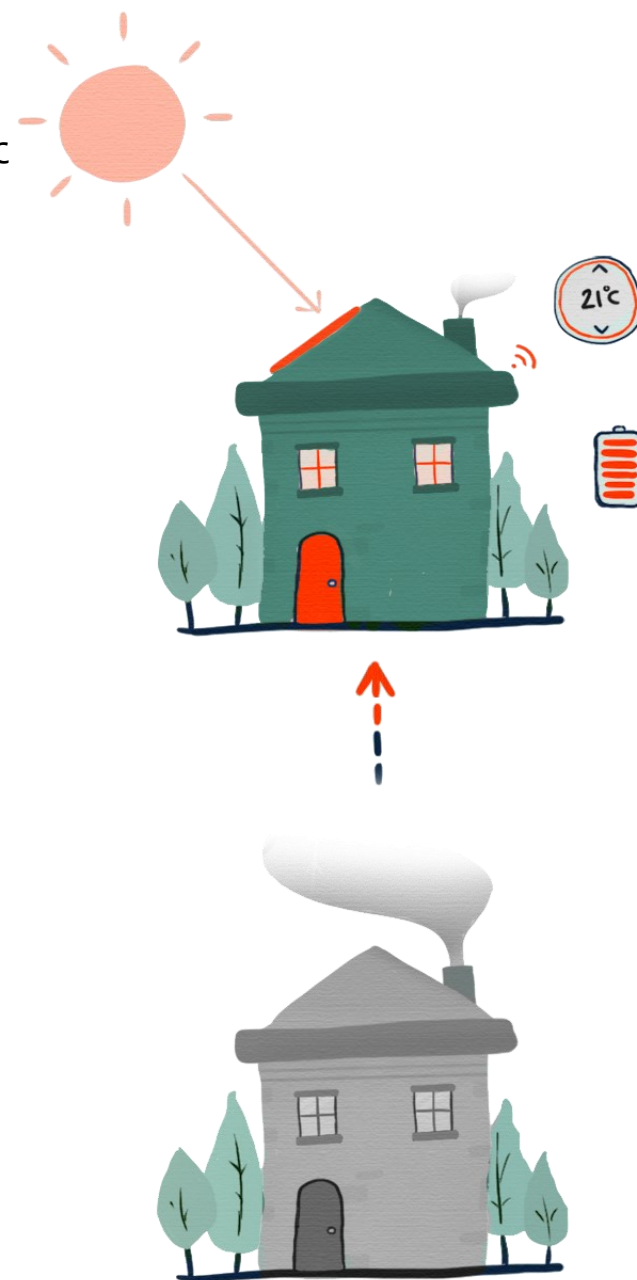
Energy and Digital



All 4 partner registered social landlords in Blaenau Gwent (Tai Calon, Linc Cymru, United Welsh and Melin) continue to deliver housing schemes supported by the funding award allocation from Welsh Government to deliver phased activity of the **Optimised Retrofit Programme**. The main theme of the programme is affordable warmth and decarbonisation achieved through the best path for each individual home.

90% of the current Welsh housing stock is predicted to remain in use by 2050.

The main challenge moving forward will be retrofitting our existing housing stock, which is particularly old, one third of Welsh homes were built before 1919 while just 6% were built in the last 30 years. A whole fabric approach to retrofit is devised with the aim of ensuring that a property operates in as energy-efficient a manner as possible, with all aspects of the building complementing each other. Retrofit largely has to take place locally. This is both a significant challenge and opportunity for Blaenau Gwent. The skills and supply chain requirements of retrofit at the scale required by Net Zero 2050 are far beyond current capacities both locally and nationally. However, they also present large-scale opportunities for jobs and businesses that have to be located in Blaenau Gwent, and there is significant potential for these benefits to be retained in local businesses and communities.



<https://www.optimised-retrofit.wales/>

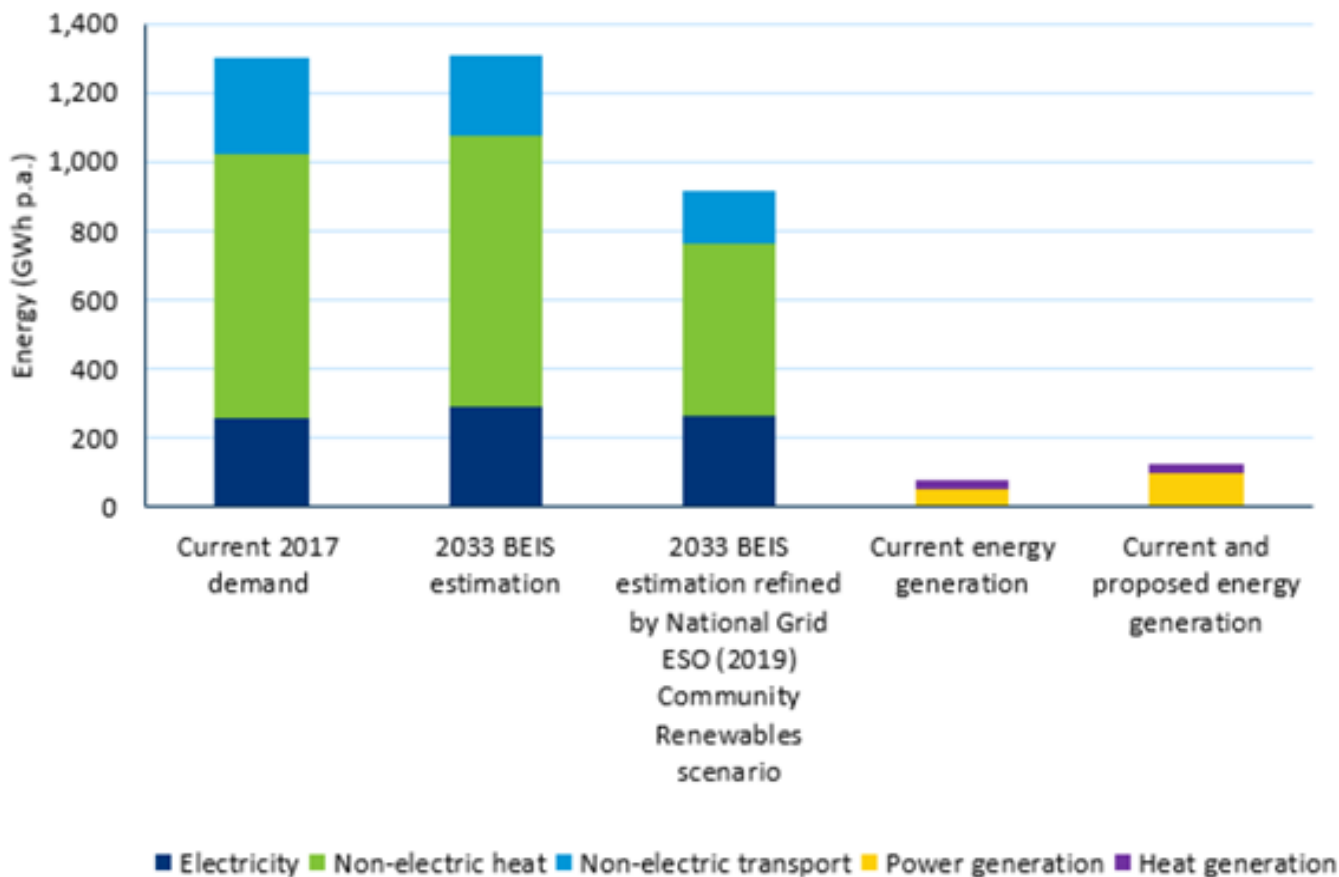


Energy and Digital



The current level of renewables from electricity generated in Blaenau Gwent is only a small proportion of our current demand, but there is enough potential resource to cover all of this demand.

Current and estimated future energy demands and current and proposed energy generation



Decarbonisation of the electricity system has made strong progress, **emissions from electricity have fallen by 50% since 2013 and 64% since 1990**, and the UK Government has a good chance of meeting its commitment to decarbonise the electricity supply by 2035. But this was largely achieved by a small number of national organisations. Emissions reductions in other areas are going to require action by far wider range of organisations, including at the local level.





Energy and Digital



Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) is a whole energy system, looking at energy from the Domestic, Industrial, Commercial, Public, Agriculture and Transport Sector across the whole local authority area. It is data driven and focuses on local energy assets and energy demand trends across Blaenau Gwent. Scenario modelling is also undertaken, mapping out expected energy demand, up until 2050, focusing on local energy assets and energy demand trends, considering local, regional and national targets and conditions to achieve net zero. The LAEP is led by the Council but involves stakeholders and Council's across boundaries to gain buy in and commitment in order to bring success.

By March 2024 every local authority area in Wales will have a LAEP

Work around developing Energy Projects continue with progress being made on the Silent Valley Wind Turbine. This will be taken to a draft planning stage where the case for investment is determined.

Work is continuing on development of infrastructure for Blaenau Gwent fleet, schools and Council buildings.

The LAEP will be funded by the Welsh Government and will contain:

Route Map - Will identify the most effective route for the local area to contribute to energy net zero by 2050 considering future energy demand.

Action Plan – describes the actions required over the next five years – to meet future energy demand by the different renewable energy sources and technologies

Outcome: A costed, spatial plan that identifies the change needed to the local energy system and built environment, detailing what, where, when and by whom. It provides the level of detail for an area that is equivalent to an outline design or master plan, additional detailed design work is required for identified projects to progress to implementation.



We are continuing to investigate opportunities around zero carbon within the Corporate Landlord portfolio and supporting others in development of energy schemes - wind turbine. Incorporating energy efficiency through BREAMM in new capital builds and retro fitting [LEDS ..] in Industrial & other units



Energy and Digital



Blaenau Gwent Council's commitment to increasing the number of Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points is throughout the borough is well underway. we are seeing a steady increase in ultra-low emission vehicles licensed across Blaenau Gwent.

Funding has been confirmed for the second phase of the delivery plan . Locations for the EV charge points will be :

- Briery Hill car park, Ebbw Vale
- Health Centre car park, Abertillery
- Lower Salisbury Street car park, Tredegar
- Somerset Street/Worcester Street car park, Brynmawr
- Arail Street car park, Six Bells
- Mitre Street car park, Abertillery
- Queen Square car park, Ebbw Vale
- Car park off Canning Street, Cwm
- Abertillery Multi Storey car park

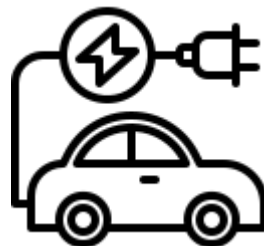


CONNECTED KERB

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGEPOINTS

NOW HERE

On a mission to create cleaner, quieter streets



The number of Installed chargers that are ready for public use are :

Confirmed site	Number of chargers at each site
Bryn Bach Park	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
Tillery Road car park, Cwmtillery	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
Llanhilleth Railway Station Park and Ride	2 x 7kW (4 bays)
Cwm Terrace car park, Cwm	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
Ebbw Vale Parkway Railway Park and Ride	2 x 7kW (4 bays)
Gwent Shopping Centre	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
ViTTC	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
Car Park opposite the General Offices, Ebbw Vale	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
General Offices car park by Ebbw Vale Town Railway Station	2 x 7kW (4 bays)
Market Square car park, Brynmawr	1 x 22kW (2 bays)
William Street car park, Cwm	1 x 7kW (2 bays)



Energy and Digital



Community Meals Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles

Effective integrated working has enabled the Social Services Community Meals service to become more sustainable, supporting the councils strategy to reduce carbon emissions.

The service provides a daily hot meal to over 160 vulnerable adults living in Blaenau Gwent and during the reporting period, the launch of the rebranded Community Meals Service took place. This included the unveiling of their new electric vehicles which were funded in part through Welsh Government grant funding.



The service has used the introduction of the new vehicles to develop an intergenerational cross curriculum project with year 7 and 8 learners from Abertillery Learning Community Secondary campus. The learners have worked alongside the staff in the Community Meals team to design and develop the new branding and logos for the service including designing the artwork on the new vans - ensuring that the vans are noticeable when out and about the streets of Blaenau Gwent. They also spent time with the Council's transport team learning about the benefits of the service moving to electric vehicles and impact on the environment.





Case Study - Councillors approve scheme to improve home energy



Blaenau Gwent Council's Cabinet has endorsed its participation in a regional scheme aimed at improving energy efficiency in the homes of the most fuel poor residents in the borough.

The Council will work in partnership with the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) and energy supplier EDF, as part of the Energy Company Obligation Scheme (ECO4 Flex), to identify domestic properties in need of energy improvement measures. Qualifying homes of property owners and privately renting tenants will be retrofitted with a range of insulation and energy improving measures as part of a 'whole house' approach.

A previous scheme saw 134 households in Blaenau Gwent benefit from measures including replacement of boilers, cavity wall, internal wall and loft insulation, first time central heating, upgrading electrical heaters and solar panel installation. A flexible element of the new scheme enables councils to tailor energy efficiency schemes to their area. Under ECO4 Flex, councils can refer private tenure households that it considers to be living in fuel poverty or on a low income and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home.

The Council's Cabinet Member for Place & Environment, Cllr Helen Cunningham says:

"As energy prices have rocketed and more families have been plunged into fuel poverty, this scheme is very welcome. It will target people living in properties with the lowest energy performance ratings and those not on the gas grid. We hope it will help reduce inequalities in living standards and in so doing deliver health, and wellbeing for people benefiting from the scheme.

It also supports the Council's aim to play our part in responding to the worldwide nature and climate crisis. We need to greatly reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy efficiency of homes as part of that."





Destination Management & Tourism



WELLBEING WORKHUB

In April remote working well being hubs were opened in Parc Bryn Bach helping to encourage people to work remotely whilst enjoying the nature reserve.

The opportunity to work remotely at the hub will help to benefit local community, businesses, individual's and the environment



We aim to bring community and business tourism to Blaenau Gwent - meetings, incentives, conferences and events. Improvements to the transport network give the ideal platform to fully embrace the opportunities that exist.



The Council continue to work with Transport for Wales on the **Abertillery rail extension** (Phase 2). This design and feasibility work is ongoing and the Council, Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are waiting to hear from the Department for Transport at UK Government for an update on funding to support the delivery of the project.



The EVR Frequency Enhancement (Phase 1) project is nearing completion with the provision of a **new rail station extension at Llanhilleth** and a new hourly service to Newport and Cardiff from Ebbw Vale starting in January 2024.



Destination Management & Tourism



Politicians came together to celebrate Wales Tourism Week and hear first-hand from businesses in a small Welsh town where the NHS was dreamed up 75 years ago. Nick Smith MP, Alun Davies MS and Cllr John Morgan, Cabinet member for Place and Regeneration met with managers of Bedwellty House and Park, The Tredegar Workmen’s Medical Aid Society Heritage Centre and the Tredegar Arms to explore what is available to visitors unearthing NHS history.



Bevan was a miner enjoying the comfort of what the local medical aid society offered its members. The society had Walter Conway as its secretary who in turn was a mentor for Bevan and was a fellow member of the local ‘Query Club’, a radical debating society in the town. This is where Aneurin Bevan sharpened his debating skills growing his intellect and shaping his principles that led to the formation of a health service, free at the point of need for everyone in the UK.



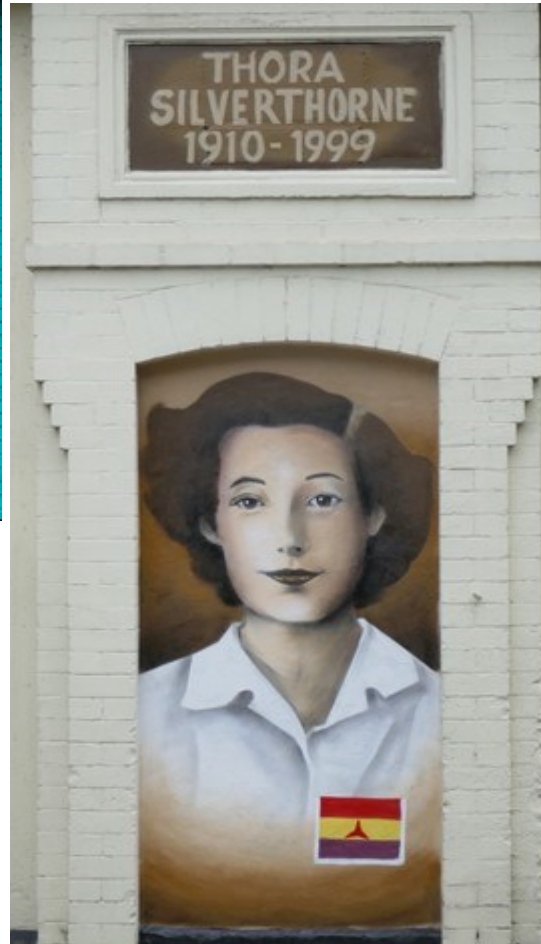
Kevin Phillips, TWASHC*, Nick Smith, MP and Jay Sweeny, TWASHC* – at the *Tredegar Workmen’s Medical Aid Society Heritage Centre, The Circle, Tredegar.

We have a proud heritage here in our communities and a history of standing up for those in need. The NHS is carved on our hearts and we want to use this its 75th anniversary to invite visitors to come and see where it all started. There is so much to see and do whether it is visiting heritage centres and museums, walking trails, listening to films, reading and learning about its roots. You can stay in friendly hotels with comfy beds, enjoy tasty food in our cosy restaurants or toast the NHS in our welcoming bars. You really should make 2023 the year to visit Blaenau Gwent

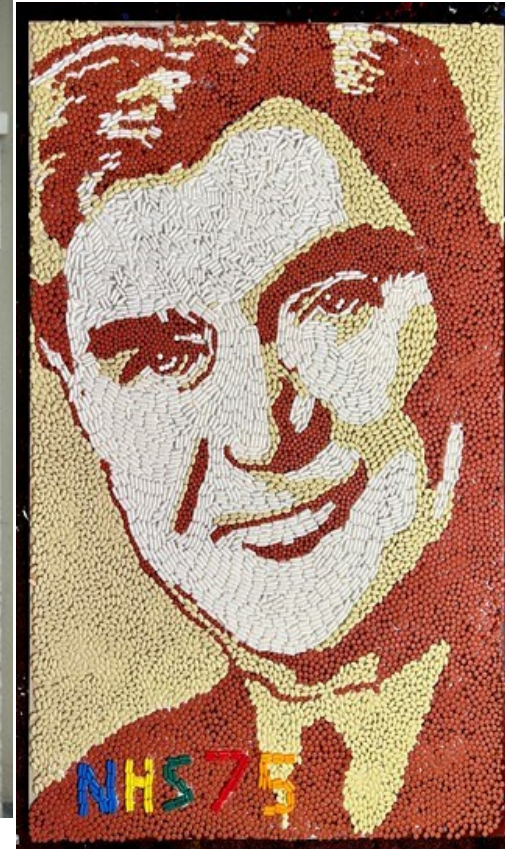
Councillor John Morgan, Cabinet Member for Place and Regeneration



Case Study - Destination Management & Tourism



Portrait of Aneurin Bevan made of out of placebo pills provided by PCI Pharma Services .



The mural is in Alma Street, Abertillery near the terraced house where Thora lived in at the start of the twentieth century

Famous artist Nathan Wyburn has created a large portrait in stones of Aneurin Bevan on a hillside above Trefil, Tredegar.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the NHS a series of artworks were commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This included artwork from the famous artist Nathan Wyburn of a large mural of Aneurin Bevan and artwork of Thora Silverthorne one of the first to sign up for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.





Employment and Skills



Business / Support to Business

The Enterprise Facilitation project was relaunched in June 2023.

Enterprise Facilitation is a free, informal, and confidential service for aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners within Blaenau Gwent. The Enterprise Facilitation® model places no time constraint on an Enterprise Facilitator's time or length of support available, which means clients will always have access to the form of support needed, as and when issues arise.



Since June 2023 the Enterprise Facilitators have been meeting with internal and external stakeholders to promote the service and working with a wide range of clients.

This includes:

- External Meetings/Intros **30**
- Internal Meetings/Intros **25**
- No of clients **62**
- No contacts identified for VRP (skills gap audit) **28**
- No of Drop-in Sessions / Business Clinics **1**

2 new Enterprise Facilitators have been recruited to deliver the Enterprise Facilitation model as well as lead on the day-to-day marketing and communications for the Business & Innovation team, including implementing new digital ways of working to improve customer experience and promote local business support initiatives and ensure local business development opportunities are maximised.

The Enterprise Facilitators will also support the development of an effective business networking forum for start-up, new and small businesses in Blaenau Gwent.



**Blaenau Gwent
Business Hub**

A marketing and social media plan is currently being developed and the re-design of the Blaenau Gwent Business Hub is underway.



Employment and Skills



Business / Support to Business



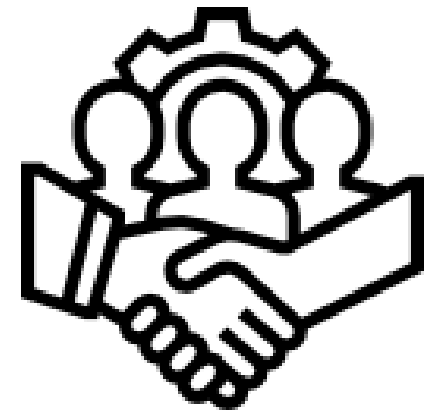
Kick Start Plus is **a joint initiative funded by UK Steel Enterprise and administered by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**. The scheme has been developed to complement the existing business start up grant initiative. The grant is aimed at supporting new businesses from 6 months up to 3 years old, to help them develop and expand.

Kick Start Plus

£10K funding secured from UKSE to continue with delivery of the Kick Start Plus programme, which is aimed at supporting new businesses from 6 months up to 3 years old, to help them develop and expand. UKSE also agreed to **increase level of maximum grant to £2,500.**



- **9 Expression of Interests received resulting in 6 applications issued.**
- **2 full applications received and 7 ongoing.**
- **2 grants approved, totalling £2,267.50.**
- **1 FTE job to be created and 2 FTE jobs to be safeguarded.**





Employment and Skills



Contractors, ISG have started work on the site of the former Monwel Hankinson factory, Ebbw Vale, to create a new multi-million hi-tech post 16 education facility.

The new **21,808 sq ft High Value Engineering (HiVE) facility** will provide state-of-the-art training and education for young people and businesses in the fields of robotics, advanced materials and manufacturing, and digital and enabling technologies.

In partnership with Coleg Gwent, and industry partners, the Council secured over **£12 million** from the Welsh Government's Tech Valleys programme and the UK Government to bring the redundant factory building back in to use and create HiVE facility.

There will be a high-quality teaching space with the capacity for **up to 600 students**, complete with classrooms, study areas and a range of workshop spaces. students, including those enrolled onto engineering courses at Coleg Gwent from Autumn 2024.

Construction starts on multi-million hi-tech post 16 education facility in Ebbw Vale



UK Government contributed over **£9 million** from its Levelling Up fund



Employment and Skills



HiVE aims to:

- Provide relevant, up-to-date qualifications for the next industrial revolution.
- Raise awareness in schools, pupils, and the wider community.
- Raise aspiration and inspire future generations.
- Improve accessibility.
- Raise attainment levels in STEM.
- Align with partners/ stakeholders to develop a skills package/offer; and
- Address the gender imbalance in Engineering.

The Centre will offer employment and skills opportunities with training, specifically allowing students to experience the world of work and equipping them with a qualification such as BTEC, HNC or HND.

It will be a Centre of academic excellence for relevant engineering qualifications up to level 6 and therefore responding to industry and their needs.



The Welsh Government has committed **£3.97** million to this proposal comprising:

- **£20,327** contribution to evaluation of need study commissioned by BGCBC from the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC).
- **£200,000** seed funding for detailed design development (specifically, activities and reports to bring architectural drawings and ecological and other surveys required to enable the planning application to be submitted this sum has been paid in full).
- **£160,000** was awarded in January 2022 to assist in de-risking detailed design work and moving from RIBA 3 to 4 in the development of tender documents.
- **£600,000** for the purchase of autonomous robotics equipment and creation of feeder / taster learning hubs in Tredegar Comprehensive School and Coleg Gwent Learning Campus.
- **£2.99 million** in March 2022 for the delivery of HiVE going forward.



Employment and Skills



The **Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme** within Blaenau Gwent is a strategic project with a number of partners; Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, Education, Industry and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The programme is set to enhance skills development within the manufacturing and engineering companies to develop business growth; whilst tackling unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people across the local authority.

External Aspire Apprentices

- Total Apprentices external 102 (16-24 year olds)
- Currently 20 Apprentices on programme Utilised Over 22 host companies within Blaenau Gwent
- Apprentices that are live in BG at 44 %
- Percentage of 90% male 10% female
- Varying Apprenticeship Pathways - within an Advanced manufacturing setting

Internal Apprentices -

- Facilitated 29 Internal apprentices - Age profile 17-42 because we could do any age apprenticeships.
- 18 Apprentices currently on programme.
- 60% Male 40% Female
- 63% live in Blaenau Gwent
- over 10 different departments including Business support, transport, social services, education etc.
- 8 apprentices have moved into employment

Aspire Children Looked - Aspire Support

- 43 referrals from 14+
- Met 31- supported with:
 - ◇ Career options
 - ◇ CV workshops
 - ◇ Job applications/ DBS
- 18 work placements/ traineeships facilitated. 7 of these now in employment



Employment and Skills



The STEM Facilitation Project is funded by Welsh Government as part of Tech Valleys initiative to establish a coordinated programme of STEM support to schools, centred on industry.

The following link contains all our latest up to date information. <https://padlet.com/BGSTEMPROJECT/stem-facilitation-project-jjw368i31d79ypnh>

Key Targets achieved between April – September:

- New Businesses engaged = 17
- Business committed to working with schools = 12
- No of Activities delivered or supported by business = 8
- No of activities delivered from other providers = 57
- No. schools engaged = 27
- STEM audits undertaken with schools = 11
- STEM sessions delivered at Secondary Schools = 4
- STEM sessions delivered at Primary Schools = 71
- STEM Events delivered = 2



Key activities between April to September are:

- STEM Facilitation Grant (Tech Valleys Initiative) – over £57k in total, awarded across all 4 secondary schools to purchase capital equipment that will enhance the STEM learning of pupils, by bringing real world, authentic work experiences into the classroom, in partnership with industry.
- Padlet launched April 2023 – updated monthly, circulated to schools, internal staff and Councillors.
- Blaenau Gwent STEM League launched May 2023 – school of the month, termly hero, school of the year. 21 schools signed up to League / 27 out of 29 schools currently engaging with us *(all schools now engaged with us)
- Launched BG STEM Business Recognition Scheme in August – businesses working with us will get points for each school intervention. If businesses do a minimum of 3 interventions per academic year, they will be referred to Careers Wales to become a School Valued Partner and enter their Annual Awards.
- Shortlisted as finalists for the Wales STEM Awards 2023 in the STEM Educational Programme of the Year (Public Sector).
- Strong relationship with Careers Wales – monthly F2F meetings held with them. Collaborative project to launch with them early 2024 – Tasty Careers.
- Creating Coding Communities – scoped out during the summer and launched October 2023. The purpose of this project is to provide an extra curricular, community based, STEM intervention that addresses educational inequality and disparity of opportunity, for children in Blaenau Gwent - **Creating Coding Communities** is currently being delivered across all 6 libraries. In September, all Blaenau Gwent Library Services staff were trained to deliver child-led coding sessions to all Yr 5/6 primary school children and is being supported by the provision of 10 Chromebooks and 20 complete micro:bit starter robotics kits for each of the 6 libraries which is included in the programme. These items will be permanently donated to each library as a project legacy gift and will help facilitate an understanding of Coding and Robotics to hitherto unachievable levels. The idea is to bring learning into the communities where children can take family members / carers to participate in coding sessions too.

 **Employment and Skills**

Blaenau Gwent
QuickStart
Work Placements

Supported Work Placements

The Quickstart Blaenau Gwent Programme offers 6 month supported paid work placements within Blaenau Gwent to anyone aged 16 + who are unemployed or economically inactive, to gain valuable experience and enhance employability skills to increase their chances of finding full time work once the placement has ended.

A host of employers in Blaenau Gwent are offering meaningful Quickstart Blaenau Gwent placements in a variety of sectors to suit individual interests. Participants will be supported throughout their placement to develop transferrable skills, undertake relevant training and increase confidence to secure future long term employment.



The **Quickstart** Programme commenced in April 2023



Quickstart was based on the principles of Kickstart –

The aim is to support 100 unemployed people over the 2 years. Already we have

facilitated 60 placements in 39 companies.



Case Study - Employment and Skills

APPRENTICESHIP IN ACTION

Aspire Blaenau Gwent Apprenticeships

Case Study

Katie Hall
Care Assistant Apprentice

Employer
Blaenau Gwent County
Borough Council



BACKGROUND

What did you do before the apprenticeship?

I'm a mum of 2. Before I had my eldest I was at college. I fell pregnant halfway through my sports level 3 course but managed to complete it. I worked in retail for a short while and did some shifts with an agency in domiciliary care.

Why did choose to do an apprenticeship?

My experience with the agency wasn't good but I knew I wanted to work in care. The council has a good reputation so I knew it would be a good chance to work with a good employer and get my qualifications. My partner started as an apprentice and is now fully qualified- that's what I want.

Why you chose this area of work?

I love making people smile! I love helping people who can't do everything for themselves- it makes their day better. Providing person centred care and helping individuals access their rights and community, giving them choice makes me very happy. I love going to work every day.



WHAT YOUR ROLE ENTAILS

What have you learnt in your role?

I've learned how to interact and communicate with people with special needs, especially those who are non-verbal. I can read their expressions and body language to understand what they want or need. I have also had med training and manual handling training.

WHAT PARTS OF THE JOB YOU ENJOY?

What support/help you get?

My team are brilliant, they answer all my questions and help me understand anything I'm not sure about. I have regular supervision with my manager who is brilliant. I also have a PA and Aspire Mentor who can help me with anything I need and my tutor for coursework.

What challenges have you faced?

The meds training. It's a big responsibility to give meds and I really had to concentrate to make sure I understood everything but I passed and feel much more confident after it.

What would you say to a friend who was interested in an apprenticeship?

Go for it- it will change your life! I've had loads of support along the way.

Plans for the future- what do you hope to do at the end of the apprenticeship?

I want to qualify as a level 5 manager! Ideally I'd like to do the level 3 in childcare next year as we will be having children in Augusta soon. I really hope I can stay in this placement and complete my qualifications as I love it.

Apprenticeships - working for you...



For further information telephone: 01495 355508 or Email: sap@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Housing Development



We are committed to the regeneration and economic future of Blaenau Gwent and to working with partners to bring disused sites in the county borough back into use.

The Social Housing Grant Programme supports delivery of affordable housing provision. In 2022/23 an increased Social Housing Grant award of **£7.1m** was allocated to Blaenau Gwent to support delivery of social housing. This will be maintained at this rate until 2025/26.

Six Bells Colliery - A partner Registered Social Landlord (RSL) has expressed an interest in developing a mixed tenure residential scheme on the site. **Discussions are at initial stages.**



Ashvale - Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Housing Viability Gap Fund has been secured, in order to bring the site forward for residential development. This will bring forward 54 open market and 6 affordable homes to the area. Commencement on site is due January 2024



Former Civic Centre Site - A high level development brief has been shared with RSL Partners in order to evoke discussions to bring forward a mixed tenure residential scheme to the site.

Abertillery Leisure Centre - Social Housing Grant has been allocated to the 22 unit scheme for 2024/25, working in partnership with Melin Homes. The scheme is due to be considered by Planning Committee early 2024.



Former Nantyglo School - Options to ensure that the former Nantyglo School is brought forward for residential development are currently being formulated.





Housing Development



The Council works to improve homes across Blaenau Gwent with the aim of increasing energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

Total of **40** adaptations completed at a cost of

£248, 237.45

4 x Home Improvement Loans applications received and going through legal process

6 x Houses to Homes Loan awaiting approval

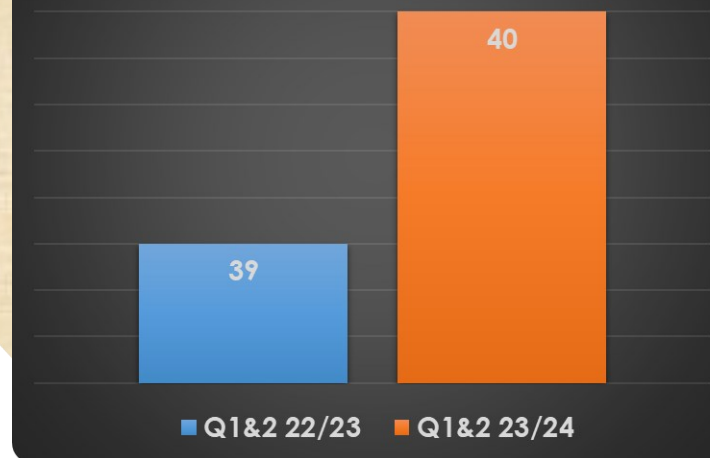
13 Empty Property Grant Surveys carried out

During the period, **2** units were delivered via the Social Housing Grant and occupied by customers.

This was on the Carn y Cefn Site.



Number of Disabled Facilities Grants Completed



Work has continued delivering **40 Disabled Facilities Grants**

(DFGs) so far this year.

This work provides major home adaptations for disabled people for the purpose of providing access into and around their homes.





Housing Development



Every 5 years, each Local Authority in Wales is to undertake a **Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA)**. The Blaenau Gwent Plan is **in the process of being completed** and is expected March 2024. The assessment will include key socio-economic demographics, including population projections, wage and rent levels, homelessness trends, care accommodation demands, the strengths and weaknesses of the housing market.

We are currently Investigating the presence of approximately 800 privately owned empty properties within the Borough. This will lead to a review of the empty property strategy.

In 2022/23, 33 empty properties (46 units) were brought back into use via direct action.

The LHMA is then used to inform the housing strategy, Social Housing Grant prospectus, market engagement, regeneration and social care plans.

There are a number of grants available from Welsh Government to help deliver new social and affordable homes, including:

- Social Housing Grant
- Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme
- Housing Care Fund
- Affordable Housing Grant
- Recycled capital grant
- Empty Homes grant
- Town centre regeneration/stalled sites fund/ land for housing scheme (loan)





Case Study - Affordable Housing



Blaenau Gwent-based Housing Association Secures £105 Million Long-Term Debt Refinancing with NatWest Group

In a groundbreaking move that promises to transform the landscape of affordable housing in Blaenau Gwent, Tai Calon Community Housing, the largest provider of homes in the region, has achieved an extraordinary milestone. The organisation recently finalised a £105 million long-term debt refinancing partnership with NatWest Group. This landmark agreement, concluded on Friday, 28th July 2023, ushers in a new era of growth and progress for Tai Calon and the communities it serves.

This refinancing deal allows Tai Calon to access a level of funding flexibility typically associated with developing housing associations. Until now, the organisation had only ventured into one small Housing First scheme and is developing a modest housing project in Ebbw Vale. With the support of NatWest Group, Tai Calon can now embark on a full-scale development program to construct new affordable homes for those in need across the county of Blaenau Gwent.

Tai Calon's journey towards securing this significant refinancing milestone was made possible by the valuable expertise and guidance of their funding advisors, 2Tix Ltd, and the dedicated legal counsel provided by Clarke Wilmott.

The successful £105 million long-term debt refinancing partnership with NatWest Group marks a significant turning point for Tai Calon. Empowered with greater funding flexibility, Tai Calon is now set to forge a brighter future for affordable housing in Blaenau Gwent.



"With the support of the NatWest Group, we can now start a development program of new affordable homes for those in need within the county of Blaenau Gwent. This is an exciting opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of our communities and address the pressing demand for quality and affordable housing."

**Howard Toplis, Chief Executive
at Tai Calon**





Improving the Local Environment



The **People and skills investment priority** of the Shared prosperity funding was based on a 3 year allocation of **£8,599,836** – Year 3 funding has been allocated and programmes were profiled over the 2-3 years within education and Regeneration. Grant funded projects were conditionally offered funding for year 3 as well. In terms of the multiply underspend we have been working with in internal departments reviewing opportunities to link – high carbon and green energy agendas to facilitate upskilling and training opportunities for internal and external teams.



The **Communities and Place investment priority** of the Shared Prosperity Fund will enable places to invest to restore their community spaces and relationships and create the foundations for economic development at the neighbourhood-level. The intention of this is to strengthen the social fabric of communities, supporting in building pride in place. Blaenau Gwent's SPF funding allocation over the 3 year delivery programme against this investment priority is **£7,837,618**. In the summer we opened up applications for funding to support projects that fit under the Community and Place pillar. This process is now concluding, and applicants are being informed of the status of their application. The community and place funding has also been used to deliver the town centre events programme.



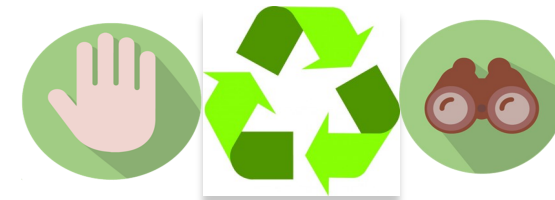
LONG TERM - Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions

The decarbonisation agenda is considered when putting individual projects together. Some of the interventions in the Community and Place investment priority of the SPF Fund support work within the community around decarbonisation and could support locally owned renewable energy projects to come forward. Likewise, the support for local business will look to help them in decarbonising their activities.





Improving the Local Environment

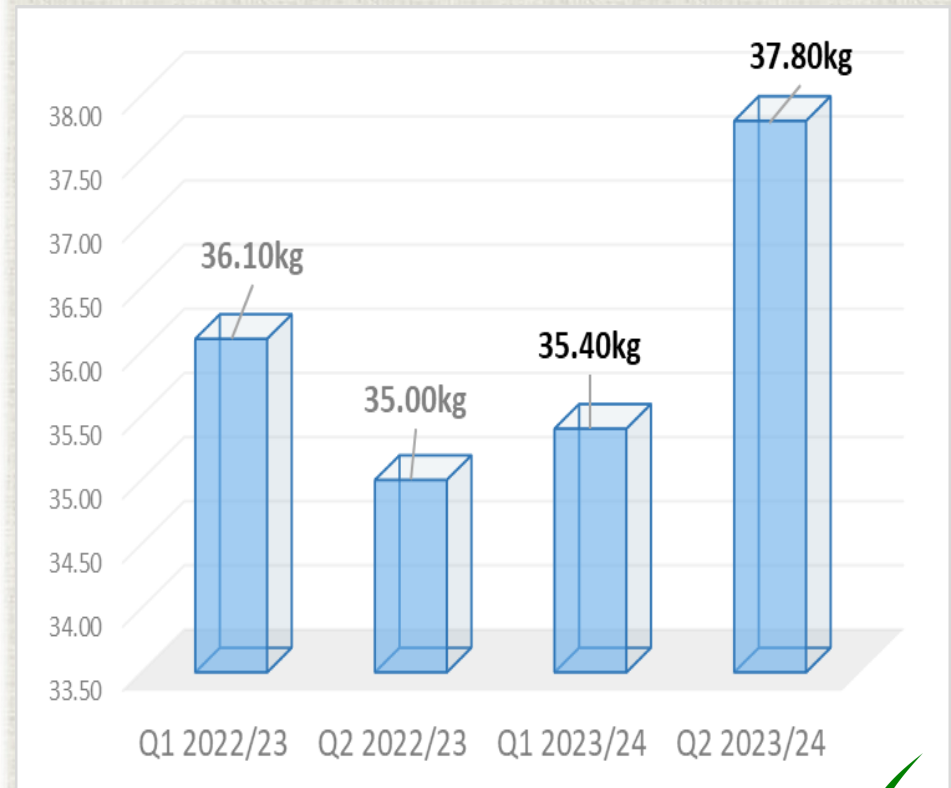


WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR WASTE?

- Municipal waste sent to landfill
- Municipal waste sent to Energy from Waste
- Waste reused, recycled or composted



Average amount of waste produced per resident during April—September (kg) - Comparison showing the period this year and last year



- 2023/24 Data unverified by Natural Resources Wales
- The Energy from Waste indicator is based on collected waste and we claim a % back from the Incinerator Bottom Ash which also contributes to our recycling rate.



Improving the Local Environment



Our recycling performance continues to support the Council's Corporate Plan in the priority of 'Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities', which is to increase the rate of recycling and achieve national targets. Welsh Government has set a national recycling rate of 70% by 2024/ 2025.



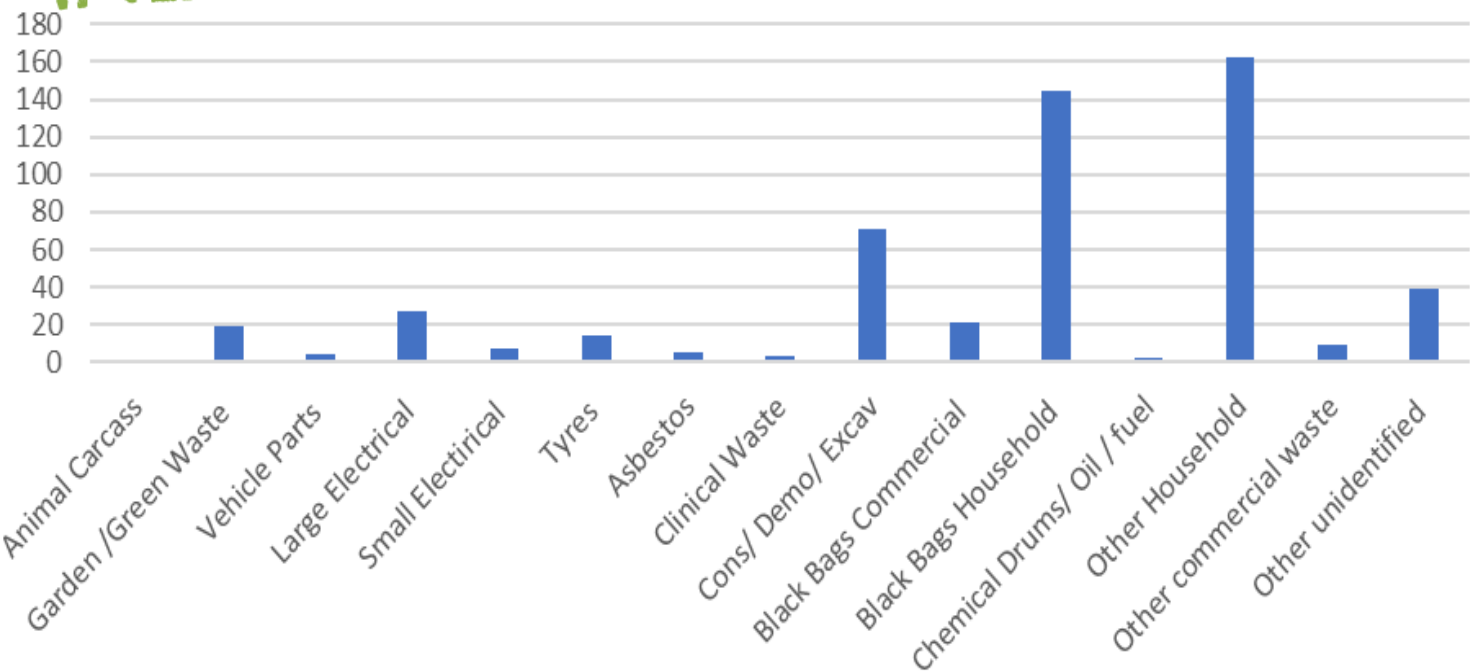
In quarter 1 our recycling rate was **70.11%** exceeding **Welsh Government target** for the first time



Prevention - CCTV units have been deployed across the County Borough to target highway lay-bys and rural locations subject to prolific fly tipping. There have been 58 incidents captured on CCTV during the April - September period.

FLY-TIPPING ACTION WALES

Incidents by Primary Waste Type



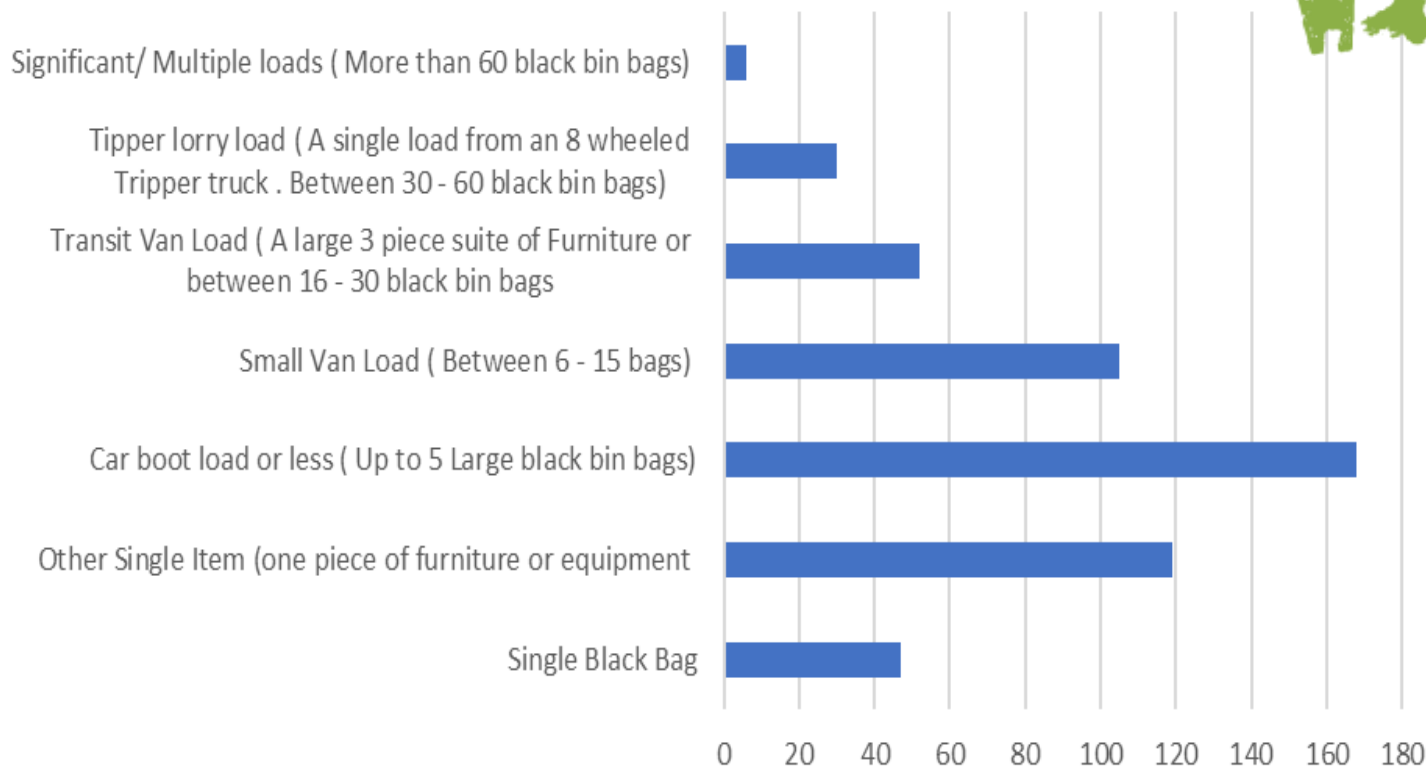


Improving the Local Environment



FLY-TIPPING ACTION WALES

Fly Tipping Incident breakdown by size



During the reporting period (April 23 to Sept 23) there were **73 £400 fixed penalty notices issued for Fly Tipping**

Provisional figures indicate a there was a **28% reduction in fly tipping from 2020/21 to 2022/23** and in the first 2 quarters of 2023/24 there was a **21% reduction in the number of incidents compared to the first 2 quarters of 2022/23**

Data unverified by Natural Resources Wales

527 Fly-tipping incidents were reported during the reporting period, the average number of days taken to clear was **5 days**

Successful prosecutions were secured against 2 individuals in September 2023 for a total of **35 separate waste offences** with a total of **£13,253 in fines** and costs issued by the Courts.





Improving the Local Environment



In June 2023 a **Food waste campaign** was launched to engage with residents of Blaenau Gwent following an analysis that **23% of residual waste was identified as food.**

Excess / Bulky cardboard is now collected when presented in dedicated “cardboard sack” following the re opening of the Authority's Household Waste Recycling Centre's in Roseheyworth and New Vale.

Our Wardens have been carrying our door to door activity with residents who are not recycling food to inform them of the benefits of food recycling and to ensure that they have the appropriate receptacles.

Monitoring is taking place to identify any increases in recycling rates.

Following the Enforcement Wardens engagement with residents on recycling Rounds 1 to 4 conducted during Q1 and Q2, there has been a 16% increase in food recycling participation.



43 warning letters have been issued from **April – September** with **4** section **46** notices served.





Case Study - Clean local environment



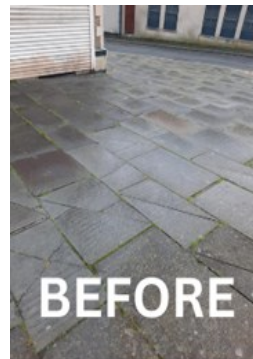
Gum Blitzer Monthly Cleaning Report August-September 2023

During the reporting period, the rotary cleaning team covered a total area of **1,650 square** meters in Tredegar.

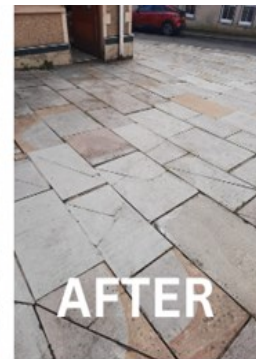
- The team worked for **33** days during this period and covered an average of **50** square meters per day.
- The rotary cleaning team focused on high-traffic areas such as bus stops, pedestrian crossings, and shopping areas as detailed on the site plan.

The rotary cleaning team needed to use a total of 20,000 litres of water during the reporting period. The team used high-pressure water jets to remove dirt, debris and other contaminants from the pavement surfaces.

26 days of Chewing gum removal was carried out during this period in Tredegar as requested using our ecofriendly steam cleaning system.



BEFORE



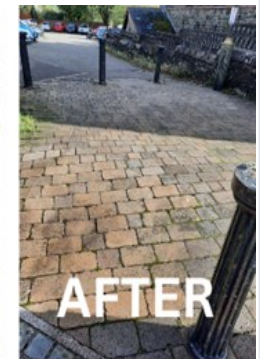
AFTER



TREDEGAR



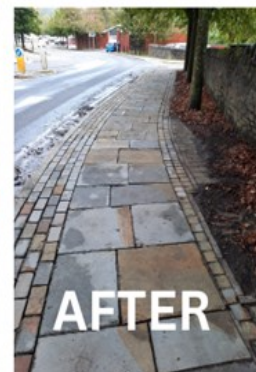
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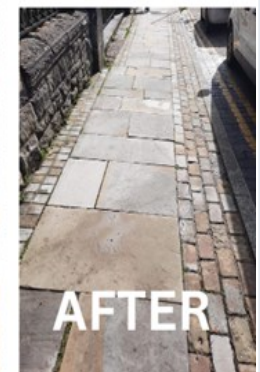
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AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



Case Study - Educational Suite



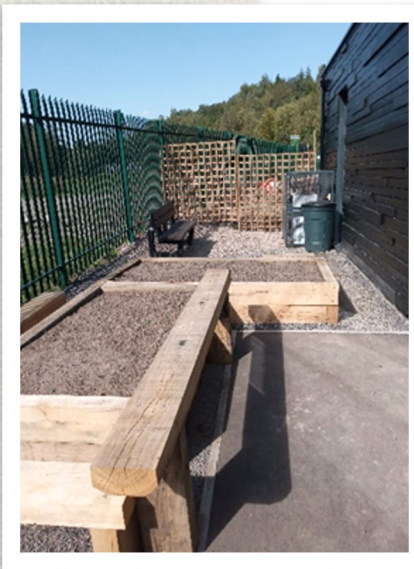
The new Educational Suite at Roseheyworth Household Recycling Centre has been completed. The charred wood effect on the building has been achieved by reclaiming wood from the recycling site. All the doors, furniture, TV, chairs, tables, and lockers were reclaimed from the Civic Centre before it was demolished which is not only a good way of reusing items but has helped to reduce the costs.



The Educational Suite will allow school children and community groups to learn about recycling and what happens to materials. We have already been approached by several partners with an interest in utilising the building for a range of activities including a Nappy Library, Repair cafes and community meetings. The Educational Suite was built with Welsh Government Circular Economy Funding.



A bid to Keep Wales Tidy for a wildlife pack was successful and has been utilised, with support from the Ecology Team, to develop the grounds for the benefit of local wildlife. An open day is planned for early November with interested parties with a view to taking bookings in the New Year.





Healthy and Safe Communities



Our Transitional Capital Funding Programme involves working with Registered Social Landlords to identify properties for homelessness/ resettlement schemes. During the year 8 additional properties have been included and a further 3 properties have been identified in partnership with Tai Calon for inclusion in the scheme for which a bid was submitted to Welsh Government for funding.



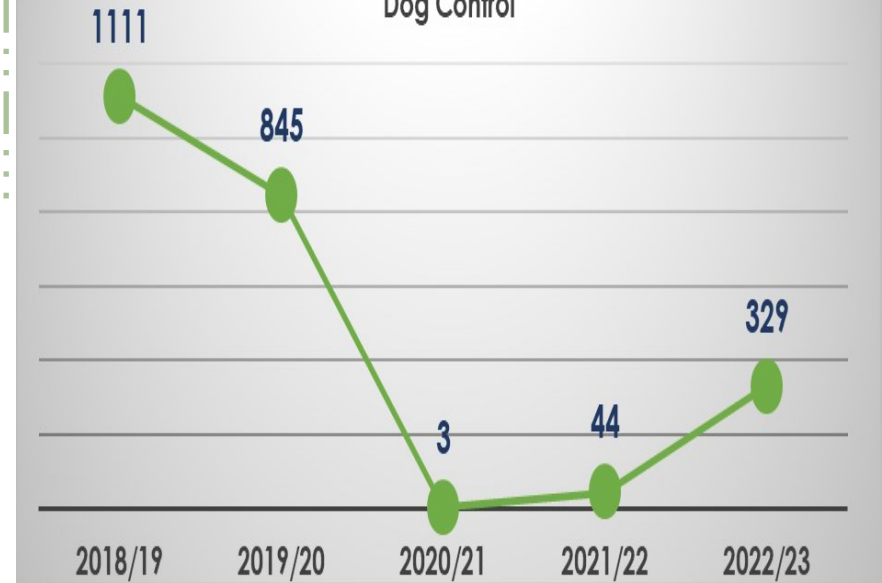
HOMELESSNESS - During the reporting period, 76 households met the threshold for being threatened with homelessness. Of these, 41 were successfully prevented from losing their accommodation - 54%.

Due to the continued lack of move on accommodation in the private and social housing sectors, combined with clients approaching the Council at crisis point, it continues to be difficult for the team to prevent homelessness and meet the target set.



LONG TERM - It is a priority for us to raise the profile of Play by improving the quality and equity of play provision throughout the Borough for all our children and young people. To achieve this we are looking to refurbish and maintain existing play provision to acceptable levels and develop new initiatives based on identified need within the Borough.

Number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) Issues for Litter and Dog Control



During the first six months of the year there were

14 fixed penalty notices issued for litter and **5** for dog control.



New **fixed penalty notice contractor**, District Enforcement Ltd have been **appointed** and to begin enforcement in the County Borough in Q3 **enforcing litter , dog control, commercial duty of care, smoking, urinating and spitting in public offences.**



Healthy and Safe Communities



In May 2023 Audit Wales published a report following a review of our Planning department which took place in February 2023. The review sought to:

“ provide assurance and insight as to whether the Council’s planning service is effectively and sustainably meeting its objectives and contributing towards the achievement of the Council’s corporate priorities”



The overall findings of the report found the planning services plays a key role in enabling delivery of the councils corporate objectives and that the planning committee performance is improving

However “ ***the service’s business planning and performance reporting do not demonstrate this important contribution***”

Idox is a software that supports the management of planning and building control . Work on Idox system continues and data migration is being explored. Work on updating the Scheme of Delegation has been completed and has been presented to the Planning Committee and Senior Management.



4 recommendations were identified following the audit :

- Include performance measures in the Development and Estates business plan to demonstrate the service’s performance ambitions and to enable effective monitoring of the service
- Include in the Development and Estates business plan the service’s contribution towards delivering the Council’s corporate objectives to demonstrate its important enabling role
- The Council needs to assure itself that the planning service has robust data quality arrangements to ensure that it reports accurate performance data so that staff, members, Welsh Government and the public can place reliance on its integrity to make accurate and informed decisions
- Full Council to consider the outcome of the scheme of delegation and planning protocol review by September 2023 and decide on future planning governance

The full report can be found here : democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=1251&Mid=2616&Ver=4&LLL=0



Healthy and Safe Communities



Environmental Health responded to **179 Housing Safety/Standards service requests** relating to sub-standard Privately Rented Sector accommodation, damp nuisance, Warm Home Nest Inspections, including the **approval of a New Landlord loan. (35k).**

Pest Control is delivered in partnership with Rentokil. 1,139 free rat treatments Were completed along with 105 treatments for other pests

Environmental Health responded to:

184 service requests related to **accumulations of waste in gardens – mostly household waste;**

51 related to **smoke from domestic fires/bonfires;**

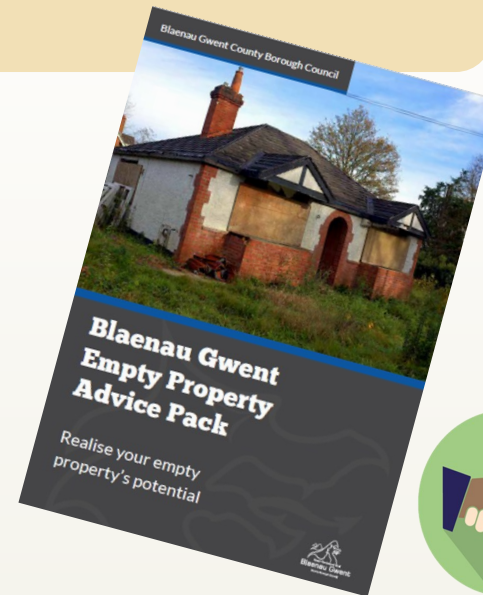
10 service requests relating to **alleged filthy and verminous premises;**

287 Noise Nuisance Complaints;

23 Other Nuisance Complaints;

132 Planning Consultations; and

32 Licensing/Temporary Event Notice Consultations.



Support has been provided for the local response relating to the resettlement scheme for Ukrainian people by **inspecting 2 properties** to ensure they are **safe and suitable.**





Healthy and Safe Communities



A range of Commercial Health & Safety interventions continue to be Delivered as outlined in the Health & Safety Service Delivery Plan 2023/24

127

inspections have taken place at food businesses across the Borough during the reporting period



During the reporting period—**51** new food businesses have been identified :

- **55** revisits have been undertaken to check that matters of non-compliance at food businesses have been remedied
- **144 written** warnings have been served to food businesses and served **9** Hygiene Improvement Notices
- **63** food samples have been taken from food businesses and 2 products have been identified which were microbiologically unsatisfactory. Action has been taken in both instances to alert the producer / supplier as they were out of county
- **6** complaints have been investigated about foodstuffs and **32** complaints about the hygiene of food premises
- **3** Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for failure to correctly display a valid food hygiene rating
- We have responded to **119 requests** for service (these include a mixture of advice requests, registration, event notifications, etc)

The Food Standards Agency is a non-ministerial government department with the main objective to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food.

An Audit was completed by the Food Standards Agency at the end of September against Services planning for recovery work of Food Law Service and to revisit any outstanding actions from previous Audits.

The results of this Audit along with next steps will be reported in the next Performance report.

SGŌR HYLENDID BWYD FOOD HYGIENE RATING 0 1 2 3 4 5 ANGEN GWELLA AR FRYS URGENT IMPROVEMENT NECESSARY	SGŌR HYLENDID BWYD FOOD HYGIENE RATING 0 1 2 3 4 5 ANGEN GWELLA YN SYLWEDDOL MAJOR IMPROVEMENT NECESSARY	SGŌR HYLENDID BWYD FOOD HYGIENE RATING 0 1 2 3 4 5 ANGEN GWELLA IMPROVEMENT NECESSARY
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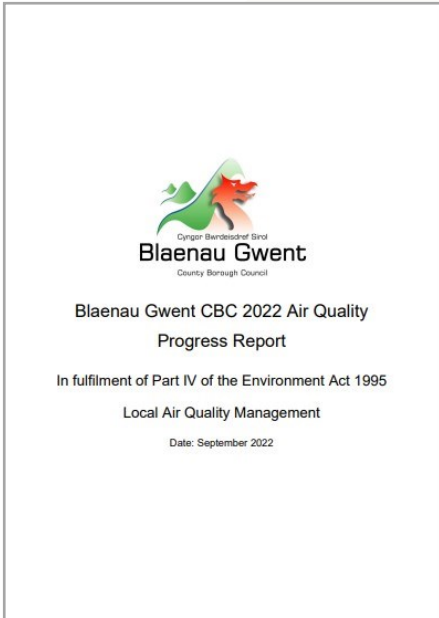
Healthy and Safe Communities



The Environmental Health Section is responsible for monitoring **air quality within Blaenau Gwent**. Air Quality is the term used to describe and classify the concentration of certain pollutants in the air. These pollutants have the potential to adversely affect human health at elevated concentrations.

An air quality management is declared when there is an exceedance of air quality standards and the local authority must take legal steps to improve the situation.

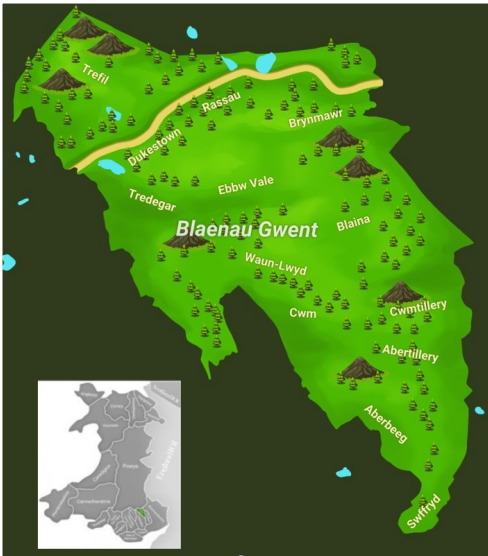
In Blaenau Gwent we have good levels of air quality so we have not declared any air quality management areas.



The completion of the 2022 Air Quality Assessment has been completed and submitted to Welsh Government

We currently carry out **air quality monitoring at 28 locations** within the borough at residential properties and schools.

These locations are selected by officers due to them being in close proximity to busy roads, industrial estates and specifically at schools due to the school run effect.



In the reporting period, one premises closed, One permit was surrendered (no longer necessary) and a new permit was awarded to a wood manufacturing company.

<https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/environmental-health/pollution/air-quality/>

Environmental Health **successfully regulated 22 industrial processes to minimise pollution** without the need for any formal enforcement action.





Healthy and Safe Communities



We have responded to a total of **77** individual cases of infectious disease

We have responded to **8** incidents of infectious disease at care and education settings (Incident = 2 or more cases)

Infectious Disease:

We continue to support the response to clusters of COVID-19 in some of our most vulnerable settings.

We have attended meetings and provided detailed feedback to Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to assist in the review of the procedure for dealing with incidents of COVID-19 at care settings

Health and Safety:

We continue to prepare for the introduction of the Special Procedures Licensing Regime. The current proposed commencement date is June 2024. We have arranged for a members briefing by Welsh Government with a focus on the impact on Licensing Committee and this is scheduled for December 2023. We continue to participate in a small working group led by Welsh Government So far in 2023/24 (all since June) we have the following:

- **4** new premises registered, **2** in process and **1** expected (currently pending planning) – **7 total**
- 6 new practitioner registered, 3 in process- **9 total**
- Compared to the figures for 2022/23 we have already had double the number of new premises apply to register compared to that for the entirety of 22/23
- We have responded to 15 notifications to the Authority as a Health and Safety regulator under RIDDOR
- We have received and responded to 65 requests to the Health and Safety service (these are a mixture of advice requests, events and complaints)
- We continue to implement the priority actions identified in the Health and Safety Workplan 2023/24





Healthy and Safe Communities



Trading Standards

Trading Standards aims to ensure a fair, safe and equitable environment for all who purchase and sell goods and services in Blaenau Gwent. This is undertaken through a range of intervention, advice and enforcement activities with businesses and consumers. We work closely with partner agencies in order to gather intelligence and enforce the legislation covering areas such as:

- Weights and Measures
- Food Labelling and composition
- Counterfeit Goods
- Product Safety
- Pricing
- Rogue Trading and Doorstep Crime
- Consumer Credit
- Misdescribed Goods
- Scams
- Age Restricted Sales

More information on the work of Trading Standards can be obtained at: <https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/> <http://www.tradingstandards.uk/>



A total of **313 inspection visits** were **carried out** by Trading Standards Officers during this period. These include visits to food businesses as required under the Food Law Code of Practice, visits to town centre/ high street retail premises, inspections of manufacturers, online businesses and car traders.

41 victims of scams were identified as potentially vulnerable and requiring a support visit. 100% of these were visited in accordance with targets agreed with the National Scams Hub.

32 Alternative Enforcement Strategies were **undertaken** with **food businesses** involving information gathering questionnaires and visits.

18 service requests during the first 6 months and all were **responded to within our target** time of 5 days.

As part of **Scams Awareness Week 3-9th July 2023**, Trading Standards Officers undertook a scam prevention presentation for vulnerable adults and disseminated social media messaging to help raise awareness of bogus sellers

347 consumer complaints received (of which 313 were received via the Citizens Advice Consumer Service)



Case Study - Trading Standards



Trading Standards Prosecution

A Blaenau Gwent resident was sentenced at Cwmbran Magistrates Court on 31/08/23 after pleading guilty to 4 offences under the Trade Marks Act 1994 relating to the sale and advertising of counterfeit clothing and trainers.

The individual had been investigated by Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards Officers after a complaint was received in March 2022. Trading standards investigations showed that she was advertising and selling a wide variety of counterfeit goods through the private Facebook group that she had set up and which had over 1500 members. The evidence showed



that the individual was responsible for purchasing the fake items from UK and foreign suppliers as well as taking orders from customers and arranging for delivery suggesting a higher category of culpability and harm.

The counterfeit goods being sold included clothing, trainers, bags, aftershaves, perfumes, jewellery and other accessories bearing fake branding such as Nike, Adidas, North Face, Stone Island, Hugo Boss, Rolex and Ugg.

A warrant was executed on 13/07/22 at the person's home address where counterfeit goods were found ready to be sent to customers. Further forensic examinations of mobile phone following the warrant showed that the business was organised and extensive with large volumes of customers all over the UK.

Magistrates sentenced the individual to 240 hours of unpaid work which was reduced to 160 hours the person's early guilty plea, a victim surcharge of £114 and costs of £1200.00.



Managing Our Estate



Work is to be undertaken on the General Offices. Architecture Services have been tasked with considering proposals to improve the area, as an environmental space, subject to approval, this would be supported by grant funding. A Specialist Surveyor has been engaged to undertake a Condition Survey of the GO to undertake an appreciation of schedule of costs for the medium and long term

As we have moved to a more agile model, we have had less staff using our offices on a daily basis and will need to look at how we meet the future needs of our staff. A review of accommodation, with the potential view to reduce it further, is currently being considered in order to protect jobs and cut costs.

A corporate property management group has been established to look at the medium to long term position of council buildings.



From April – September over 14 SABS inspections took place by the team

Land Drainage Maintenance & Improvement continued including :Kingstreet & Ladies Row (cleansing); Valley View Road (repair); Old Blaina Road (hatch repairs) Yard Row (Repair drainage pipe), Gelli Road (New Culvert), Marine St Cwm (jettted culverts), clearance work undertaken at various locations.

Notice has been served at George Street in Brynmawr to undertake works, there has been a failing to comply with the notice so further remedy is currently being sought

PREVENTION - Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010 requires surface water drainage for new developments to comply with mandatory National Standards for sustainable drainage (SuDS). It also requires surface water drainage systems to be approved by a SuDS Approving Body (SAB), before construction work with drainage implications may begin.



Managing Our Estate



Good progress has been made during the reporting period on all fronts in managing our estate with key participation in developing the New Operating Model & the review of Blaenau Gwent Property needs moving forward.

- ✓ We continue to lead on Income Generation projects supporting neighbouring Authorities in key Educational and other capital schemes.
- ✓ We continue to support on Community Asset Transfers with regular engagement and meetings in place.
- ✓ 21st Century Band B Projects - Glyncoed progressing well with final contractual arrangements being finalised for Welsh Medium Primary school in Tredegar / HIVE commenced in September / Continue to support Schools in Road Safety Education, Waste & Biodiversity initiatives.



Work is ongoing to investigate opportunities around zero carbon within the Corporate Landlord portfolio and supporting others in development of energy schemes - wind turbine Incorporating energy efficiency through BREAMM in new capital builds and retro fitting [LEDS ..] in Industrial & other units

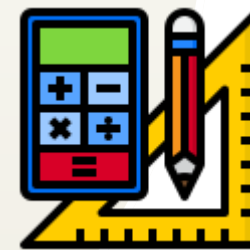




Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



- The Shared Prosperity Fund is the UK Government replacement for European funding (European Structural Investment Fund ESIF) following the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union in 2020.
- The primary aim of the fund is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. Underpinning this aim are three investment priorities: **communities and place; supporting local business and people and skills**. There is a dedicated and ring-fenced element of the UKSPF called Multiply which seeks to improve adult numeracy skills as part of the People and Skills priority
- As part of the Multiply programme Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council invited organisations to bid in a competitive process to deliver the bespoke numeracy activities to Blaenau Gwent residents, aged 19+ and who do not currently have a level 2 qualification in numeracy, GCSE Maths grade 4/C or higher.



BGCBC's SPF allocation over the 3-year programme against each priority is as follows:

- **Community and Place - £7,837,618**
 - **Supporting Local Businesses - £6,682,246**
 - **People and Skills - £8,599,836**
 - **Multiply - £3,874,171**
- Total - £26,993,871



Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council are the Lead Local Authority regarding the administration and delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



The Regeneration Team continues to receive a number of property enquiries ranging from new business start-ups, expansions, and relocations into Blaenau Gwent.

During the reporting period 62 property enquiries were received with property searches for Council and private sector units all completed.

The Team **received and dealt with 392 business enquiries** relating to financial support, start-up or property over the past 6 months



As at the end of September 23:-

89% of the business units on the Council's portfolio were **occupied** (92% of floor space occupied).



The Council's business units remain in demand – stock remains an issue, with demand for units of 300 – 3000 sq. ft. high

There have been

162

new companies registered from April—September 23 in Blaenau Gwent.

A welcome pack has been sent to all newly registered businesses.

Constrained Business Units Security

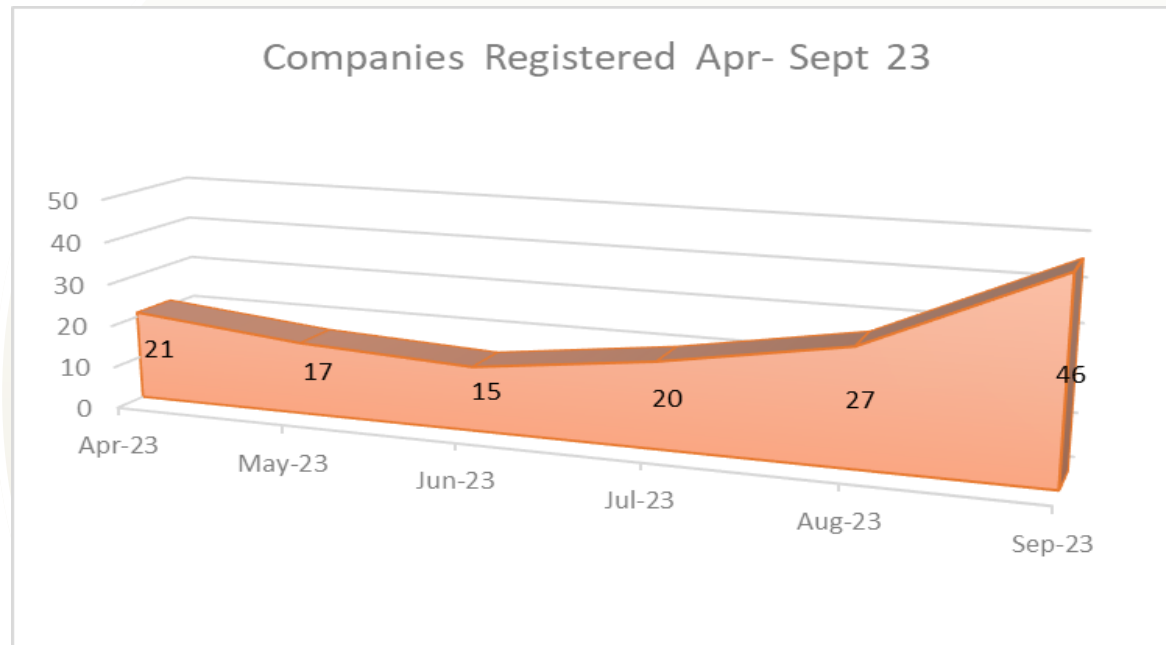
Installation of security gates have proved to be extremely successful on some of our business units, with no antisocial behaviour or fly tipping, being reported. The remaining sites without security are now being considered as a whole project. Tech Services have been unable to obtain quotes due to conflicting priorities, however, it is anticipated that they will be rolled out across other estates by end of the financial year.



Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



There has been **29.9%** more businesses start-ups in Blaenau Gwent during the first eight months of this year compared with the corresponding period of last year, according to latest data from BankSearch. This growth rate ranks Blaenau Gwent at 2 out of the 22 Welsh districts



Business Start up grant: 27 start up support enquiries received.

- 13 Expression of Interests received, resulting in 11 applications issued.
- 7 BG Effect applications approved, totalling **£5,874.40**.
- **10.5 FTE** jobs to be created.



Business

Development Grant:

- 53 Expressions of Interest received resulting in 46 applications issued.
- 23 Full applications received – 8 withdrawn or ineligible.
- 14 Grants approved, totalling **£257,831.55**.
 - o £310,839.05 of private sector investment
- **21 FTE jobs to be created and 60.5 FTE jobs to be safeguarded.**



The B&I team's company tracking database, Beauhurst, highlights approximately **1,784** ctive companies operating within the area.

Social Enterprise Grant

- 15 Expressions of Interest received resulting in application issued.
- 14 Full applications received – 8 withdrawn or ineligible.
- 1 Grant approved, totalling £4049.50.
- 1.5 FTE jobs to be created.
- £4049.50 of private sector investment (50%).



Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



There are currently a number of **building Contracts, over £500k, that are ongoing**. These projects support the development and/or re development of buildings and infrastructure across the authority, thus providing better facilities and highways for use by the community and members of the public.

New Glyncoed Primary School and Childcare Facility -

Works are progressing well on the new build to provide a 360 place primary school and separate childcare facility in Ebbw Vale, despite a contract delay of 10 weeks.

The work programme was affected due to approvals for the Welsh Water main sewer diversion works and an Extension Of Time has been agreed with an anticipated **completion date of April 2024**. This with other off-site issues and utility diversions have also increased the anticipated **final cost to £13,700,000.00, an overspend of approx. £650k**.



This is being managed by the project delivery team within the funding envelope as part of Band B.





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



New Enterprise Hub and managed Workspace, 'Regain 2', Mill Lane, The Works, Ebbw Vale - The team are working with Tech Valleys to develop an Enterprise Hub for Blaenau Gwent. The facility will support individuals and new businesses by creating a managed workspace with hot and warm desk spaces and will also include separate offices for hire.

Works are progressing well, with completion likely in late Autumn.



Remedial works at Newtown Bridge Ebbw Vale - Newtown Bridge is Grade II listing. A contract was undertaken for strengthening work to the arch in the form of steel reinforcement and also the installation of interstitial grouting to the arch ring to provide a water-controlled barrier. Newtown Bridge project has **now been completed on site and is now in Defects Period**. Delays of 9 weeks and additional costs were incurred on the project due to meeting the Cadw specification requirements for a Grade 2 listed structure.

**Final Cost -
£1,202,825.55**





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



Work to **build a 52,582 sq. ft. manufacturing unit at the Rhyd y Blew industrial site at Ebbw Vale** is underway and is **on target for completion Autumn 2023.**

The **£8.5m** Welsh Government **Investment** forms the first phase of a wider site masterplan, and helps satisfy huge demand for such industrial space in the South East Wales area.

Companies in the automotive and food sector have already expressed an interest in the development, which also sits within the Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone.





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



HIVE - as referred to on page 22



HIVE Project - Several on site issues relating to existing floor slab, drainage & steelwork are being addressed but have resulted in delays to the program.





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



New 210 place **Welsh Medium Primary School, inclusive of a Welsh-medium childcare provision, at Chartist Way, Sirhowy Tredegar.** The Council has secured £13.4million of capital funding via the Welsh Government Welsh Medium Capital Grant and Childcare Capital Grant schemes to progress with the school build and will also incorporate a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), a forest play area, a growing orchard and wild-flower meadows. The school will also be climate conscious with solar panels and electric vehicle charging points. A play area on the site will also be relocated as part of the project on the same site and be furnished with new play equipment.

The project has progressed to appointment of contractor, ISG, in July 2023 and the works on site commenced September 2023 to investigate the adits and commence Drilling and Grouting. Anticipated ground work commencement will be early 2024 with completion being expected early 2025.

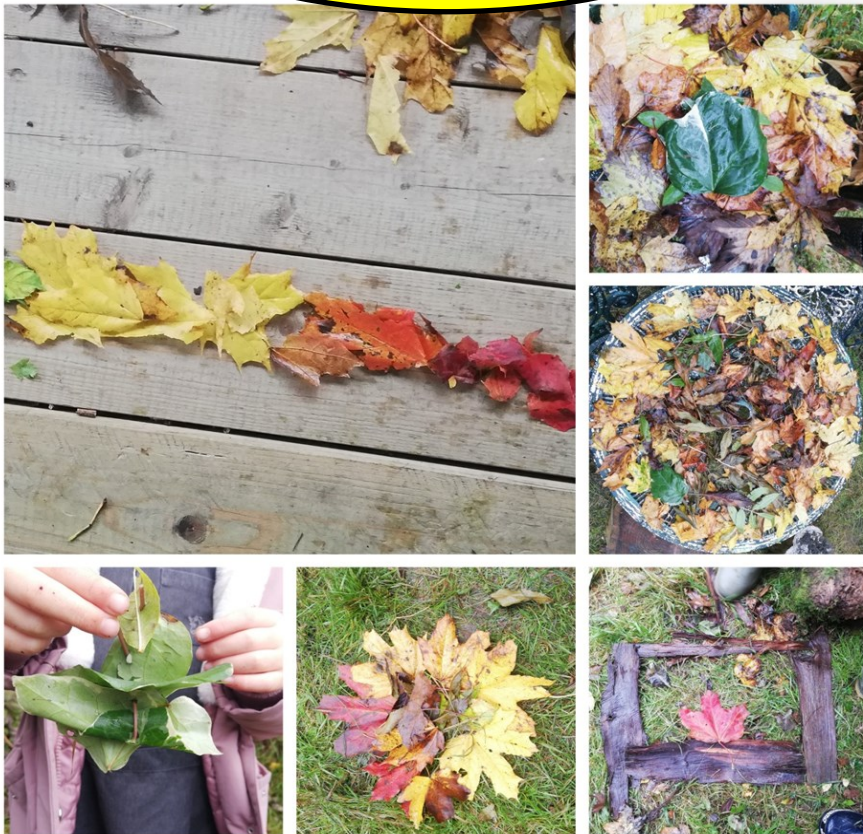




Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



Schools' biodiversity events continue to be delivered across Blaenau Gwent Schools to **1,412 pupils** between April – Sept 2023

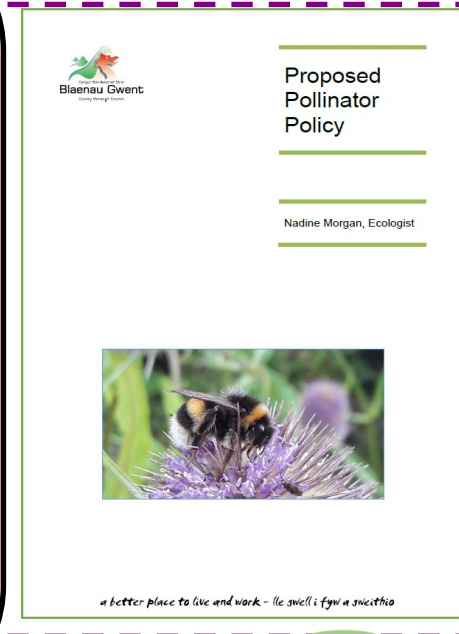


Name of school	Activity	Number of pupils engaged per activity	Total no. of pupils engaged with per school
St Joseph's Primary	Multiple inc signs of Spring	73	73
Bryn Bach Primary	Birds, Bugs	75, 73	148
Pen Y Cwm	Nature walk focus, birds/ bugs	8, 7, 8, 16	39
Beaufort Hill	Orchard maintenance	4, 23, 4, 24	55
Georgetown	The Lost Words, Pond Dip	54, 56	110
Blaen Y Cwm	Pollinators	67	67
ALC – Six Bells	Pollinators and Bugs	109, 151	260
Rhos Y Fedwen	Gardening, bugs, ponds	8, 8, 22	38
ALC – Tillery St	Pollinators and Bugs	148, 136, 118	402
ALC - Roseheyworth	Pollinators and Bugs	143	143
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg	Pond Dipping	57	57
St. Illtyd's	Trees	20	20
Overall Totals		No. of workshops 25	No of pupils 1,412



The Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Section 6, The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

A draft Pollinator Policy has been developed which promotes the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The policy will go through the democratic process and be reported within the next reporting period.



Biodiversity Projects

We are supporting partners of Pentref Tyleri, supporting the group in delivering a Wetland Creation Project. The group were successful in securing approx. £52,000 from NRW's Resilient Communities Fund. The project is promoting awareness of enhancing resilient ecological networks; demonstrating a continued sustainability of natural resources and principles for the local community, and will also contribute to the evidence base for future conservation action as part of the Local Nature Recovery Plan in Blaenau Gwent



Fit
count
survey
4th
April



Pentref
Tyleri
Wetland
creation
project





Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



*Grassland management
at entrance to Beaufort
Woodlands LNR*



*Grassland
management
at Ebbw Vale
Cemetery*



*Love your
burial
ground
Bioblitz*

Volunteer days	Number of Volunteers
Pond Spawn survey was carried out at Parc Bryn Bach	9
Flower and Insect Timed (FIT) surveys at Parc Bryn Bach	5
Flower and Insect Timed (FIT) surveys at Beaufort Woodlands	4
Flower and Insect Timed (FIT) surveys at Beaufort Woodlands	4
Flower and Insect Timed (FIT) surveys at Trevor Rowson	10
Scrub clearance to restore area of heath at Beaufort Woodlands	13
Trevor Rowson	13
Love your Burial Ground Event- Biodiversity survey at Ebbw Vale Cemetery	3
Bioblitz at Tredegar Sports Centre.	1
Bioblitz at Six Bells	2
Bioblitz at Roseheyworth	0



2 year funding has been secured from the local and nature fund from Welsh Government :

- **23/24: Capital £353,900**
- **24/25: Capital £389,500**



Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



The following events took place over the reporting period :

- 20th May Greater Gwent Goes Wild at Bailey Park-Abergavenny event was as part of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership;
- Go Wild 29th July at Bryn Bach Park- held during Wales Nature Week. 1700 visitors;
- 2nd August Wildlife Wednesday at Bryn Bach Park. Pond dipping;
- 16th August Wildlife Wednesday at Bryn Bach Park. Bug Hunt;
- 17th August Nature Session at Cefyn Golau Together; and
- SHEP school summer events.



The Ecology and Biodiversity team delivered a children's activity and **engaged with over 70 families at Greater Gwent goes wild**





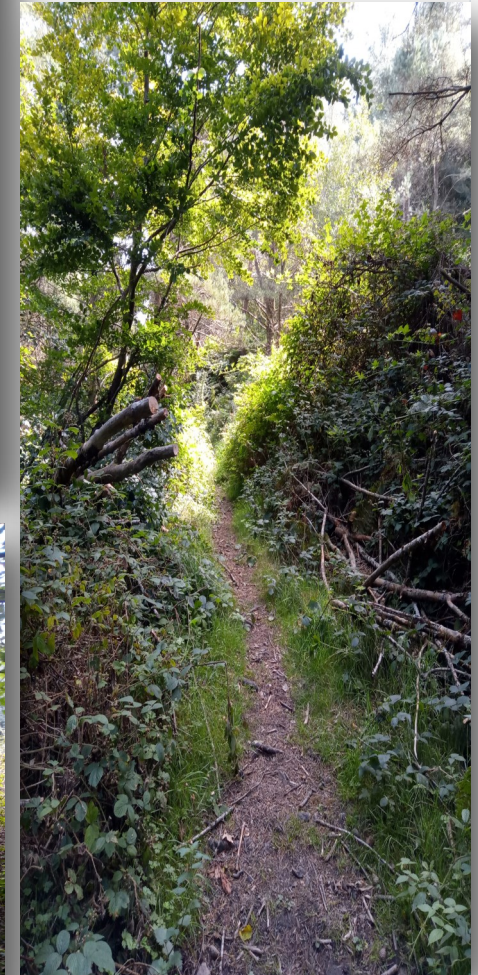
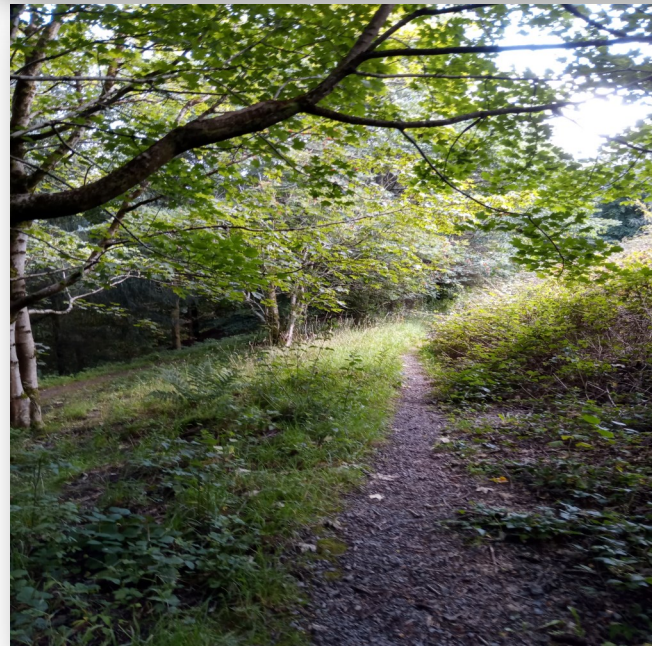
Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



Access routes and entrances to the site at Garden City have been enhanced and improved, opening up the reserve to local people and groups. This work has included clearing paths of bramble and vegetation, allowing easy access to the orchard. Damaged infrastructure was repaired or replaced where needed, and in other areas removed. A replacement footbridge and new steps allow access to a pond which can now be managed for biodiversity.

These works were delivered by Tillery Action For You, a social enterprise based in Ebbw Vale. The group works with participants and volunteers from Blaenau Gwent providing volunteering and training opportunities for disadvantaged participants to develop new skills while undertaking activities. The project will be maintained by a new ranger team and funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund. The community will also be encouraged to be involved in management activities.

Opening up access to this site has enabled local residents to exercise on their doorstep, reducing the need to travel to improve their health and well-being. This reduced need to travel also reduces carbon emission from exhaust fumes, helping to improve air quality. The improved access allows easier biodiversity and ecological management of the area.



Garden City



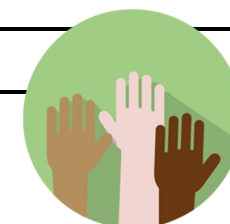
Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



To celebrate 75 years of the NHS a range of activities and events took place across Blaenau Gwent. Events were organised in collaboration with a wide range of community groups, schools and trade unions.



Date	Activity
27 th June	Tredegarise portrait at Gwent Shopping Centre
28 th June	Gwent Archive Lectures
29 th June	The records of Pen-y-Fal Hospital. This talk provided a brief overview of the history of Pen-y-Fal Hospital, Abergavenny and an introduction of the records held at Gwent Archives.
1 st July	Classic Car Show, Tredegar
2 nd July	Bevan Day at Bedwellty Park
3 rd July	Meducators Healthcare Workshop at Abertillery Learning Community. Unveiling of Placebo Portrait by Nathan Wyburn Pharma and NHS supply chain Recognition Awards with Minister Economy
4 th July	Tredegar Comp piloted a day in the home of the NHS School visits - Carousel of activities linked to Home of the NHS including Memorial Stones, Bedwellty House, Bevan Trail, Tredegar Museum, Tredegar Medical Aid Society Heritage Centre etc. (130 pupils)
5 th July	PCI Open Day 10-12.30 Photo Collage By Nathan Wyburn appears at locations across EV. Clap for the NHS – At council buildings across BG Design a Teams Background comp for schools. Artwork created at 10 the Circle by STEWY.
6 th July	School debate Bedwellty House School debate – event for secondary schools to promote debating.
7 th July	Social Media Takeover Day – Poetry competition
8 th July	Parkrun – C25K graduation, guest runners with music from Ebbw Valley Brass Film Premier of 14 films made by students of Blaenau Gwent Film Academy. The story of the Tredegar Task Force.
9 th July	Singing Festival, Bedwellty Park, Tredegar, Tredegar Town Council
13 th July	Dr. Henry Naunton Davies -Rhondda Colliery Doctor Speaker: Ceri Thompson" by BG Heritage Forum





Case Study- Improving the Well-being and Resilience of our Communities



The old steps leading to Rhiw Wen car park at Glyncoed have been refurbished by a local contractor: the old, worn timber risers have been replaced with new concrete risers. The old fencing has been replaced and a new handrail has been installed along the northern side of the steps to assist users. A new cycle wheeling channel and signage has been installed to assist cyclists to transport their bikes up and down the steps. We have received positive feedback from members of the public and are currently developing designs to extend the existing Active Travel route south.



At Blaina, we have designed a scheme to **improve the Active Travel Links** of the area east of Ystruth Primary School. The existing footpaths will be widened and street lighting will be installed to improve the walking and cycling connections in the area. Construction is programmed to commence early 2024 subject to Planning and SAB approval.



Managing our Highways Network and Infrastructure



Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council
Highway Asset Management Plan
2023 – 2028
01 June 2023



Significant progress has been made over the past 10 years on improving the Highway network, however the absence of Welsh Government funding for 2023/24 & the end of the Prudential Borrowing Programme has curtailed Capital investments in the highway network. The completion and formal adoption of the HAMP 2023 - 2028 will support and drive the Authority's approach to maintenance over the next 5 years

The Senedd passed the legislation (The Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022) to bring in the new default speed limit across Wales by an almost two-thirds majority. From September 2023 approximately 35% of the roads in Wales (by length) have become 20mph. This is arguably the biggest change to Welsh roads since the wearing of seatbelts was made compulsory in 1983.

The Highway Asset Management Plan (HAMP) was approved by Council in September. The HAMP describes how the Council will maintain the road network under its control. It details the procedures used to plan and execute all works and functions associated with the management, operation and maintenance of the highway asset including how the activities are monitored to ensure compliance with council policies.

