Economic Development and Regeneration

Quarter 1 & 2 (April - September 2019) Performance Report









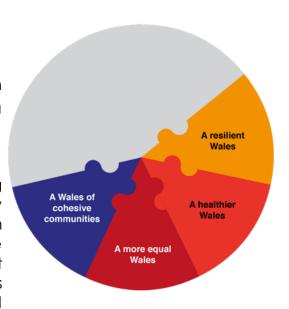


Foreword

The purpose of this report is to present service activity from April 2019 to September 2019 which highlights how we are contributing to the Council's overall aim of delivering a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales and a Wales of more cohesive communities.



The following overview pages set out our performance for the period along with some associated achievements and challenges aligned to the priority areas identified in the Corporate Plan 2018/22, which are: ▶ To work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords and private developers to provide a variety of homes, ▶ To work with partners to provide effective employment support and access to skills development, ▶ To increase the start-up business rate, retention and growth of local businesses and attract new inward



investment, ► To develop digital infrastructure and improve connectivity by promoting digital participation, ► To develop a portfolio of potential energy opportunities to deliver economic, business and community benefits, and ► To work with partners to develop a new vision for our town centres ensuring their long term future.



This report is broken down into the themes below which have been identified for the Regeneration and Economic Development Service area and support delivery of the priority areas above:

- Housing;
- Employment and Skills;
- Destination Management and Tourism;
- Energy and Digital; and
- Town Centres.

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:



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

Housing

Positive work to support the housing delivery element of the Growth and Investment Bridging Strategy has continued to include projected development numbers and associated council tax return.

The Social Housing Grant Programme supports delivery of affordable housing provision within Blaenau Gwent

2019/20

An additional allocation of £1m has been received, raising the Social Housing
Grant funding to

£2.7m

There are six schemes on site and two at development stage, , as part of the Housing Programme Delivery which Plan will d e l i v е approximately

188

affordable homes over the life span of the projects Tai Calon have also now been brought into the programme and will deliver

23 Units

which are

social rental housing

On the former Glanffrwyd Site.

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

The following two schemes target improvements to homes where households are more likely to be living in severe fuel poverty. The scheme also provides a range of advice to help householders reduce their energy usage and utility bills:



ECO/LAFLex Energy Efficiency scheme progressing well with

71 enquiries received.

93 successful applications now completed and in receipt of Improvements.

▶ The Arbed 3 scheme -

Consultation was completed to identify fuel poverty areas where the greatest impact can be made and the area identified was **Lower Ebbw Fach.** An assessment on each property was carried out and individual works to properties is ongoing with approximately

Properties being improved so far.

Housing

The Discover Blaenau Gwent Housing Prospectus was successfully launched in May 2019 by the Executive Member for Regeneration. The event was attended by over 20 representatives from the housing sector including Registered Social Landlords, Private Limited Companies, Small Medium Enterprises and planning consultants. The launch has generated land enquiries from perspective developers and continued liaison is being undertaken to investigate the possibility of bringing forward developments, by the Housing Delivery Group.



Collaboration - We continue to explore collaborative working opportunities to stimulate development opportunities, including new developments, self build opportunity and empty properties. Following the launch of the Housing Prospectus one of the sites (BKF Plastics) identified within the prospectus sits directly adjacent to authority owned land and is now being progressed through a partnership approach to increase the overall size of the development site. A number of surveys have been commissioned, to support the sales particulars which are currently being prepared and will be released to the market in the near future.

The LDP identifies where new developments such as housing, employment, community facilities and roads, will go. A review of our plan is underway with the following progress being made in the reporting period -

- Integrated Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulation Assessment, and Population and Household consultants appointed and work progressing.
- Pre Deposit Engagement including 2 sets of workshops has been completed.
- Population and Employment Land Reviews have been completed.
- Integrated Sustainability appraisal of the options has been completed.
- Work has now commenced on expert assessments of all Candidate Sites.



Completed house builds

Planning applications determined within timescales

99%

59 households met the threshold for being threatened with homelessness. Of these, 41 were successfully prevented from losing their accommodation - 69.5% This high prevention rate has been achieved by targeting early intervention initiatives to prevent homelessness at a very early stage.



Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme -

Recruitment and induction of apprentices has been successful, including a team building event at Glyn Neath Waterfall for all current Aspire Apprentices.

- 13 have commenced the programme and their joint employment with host companies.
- 3 new host companies are also engaged on the programme,
- 2 of which are **Small Medium Enterprises**.

4

Internal
Apprenticeships,
within Blaenau
Gwent County
Borough Council,
are being delivered
through Aspire and
a further 4 are
planned.

Involvement - Blaenau Gwent annual stakeholder event took place in July 2019 which included a session focused on looking to the Future- Maximising opportunities for prosperity. The Employment and Skills Stakeholder Event followed on and complemented this, proving to be a successful and interactive session which involved over 70 attendees, with representation from Education, Further / Higher Education, Business, Employment and the Public Service Board, who's input will

feed into the final employment and skills strategy and associated action plan.

Delivery of the **Employment Liaison Project** establishes a demand led, work ready employment pool that meets the needs of the local manufacturing and engineering sector. There has been successful delivery of recruitment and training support from April to September for existing businesses and future inward investors.

17
Companies engaged

31
Signposted to training

individuals took up internal training individuals took up external training



Industrial units, office accommodation and commercial land property portfolio is currently operating at an 86%

Effect Grant assistance of up to £2,000 can be offered towards business start-up costs for someone who is thinking of starting up a new business in Blaenau Gwent.

The Effect grant scheme has supported 25 new business and 31 full time position start-ups in

Blaenau Gwent since the start of the grant programme in 2017/18.

These vary from sole traders in beauty, photography and financial services to community gyms, food and allergy testing and energy procurement providers.



occupancy rate.

45.9% more businesses started up in Blaenau Gwent during the first four months of this year, compared with the corresponding period of last year.. This growth rate ranks Blaenau Gwent second out of the 22 Welsh districts.

The Box Works project is ongoing, currently at the tender stage.



When completed 23 modified shipping containers will act as a technical hub for knowledge-based businesses in the creative industries, digital technologies, research and development, energy, technical and professional business services. These 'Enterprise pods' will be unique, innovative and reflect a change in the Council's product offering, compared to traditional industrial workshops/units and office

accommodation. The units will act as a hub for businesses to develop and then graduate into the higher value office provision.

The proposed **Lime Avenue Business Unit development** aims to provide high quality hybrid style business units on land just north of the Regain Building on the Works. The proposed project will provide new accommodation to support the development of small and medium enterprise (SMEs). Key project outcomes will include new enterprise and job creation. Works will commence on site from mid-February 2020 over a 10 month duration.

This proposed operation aims to contribute the following;



- Land Developed 0.7 Ha
- Premises created 2000 m2
- Jobs Accommodated 50
- SME's Accommodated 8



A **Collaborative** approach has been taken to develop and deliver a draft Enterprise & Innovation Plan for Blaenau Gwent The final plan will encourage business innovation aligned to wider strategies such as Tech Valleys, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, and Prosperity for All: economic action plan.



Aneurin Bevan Stones – TAFY/ BGCBC

A £30k environmental enhancement scheme was recently completed that secured a range of community benefits including;

- 1 new employment opportunity created local resident referred from the Job Centre Plus secured this position.
- 12 individuals enrolled on the project and participated in various training initiatives whilst gaining practical skills onsite at the Aneurin Bevan Stones.
- The contractor **utilised 10 local companies** and spent £14,868.42 within the local supply chain.







Procurement and Supply Chain

An application to the Welsh Government Foundational Economy Challenge Fund has been submitted, if successful the application would provide resource to explore the Councils current procurement spend, percentage awarded to local (Blaenau Gwent) businesses and opportunities moving forward to support businesses and position them for tendering contract opportunities. This project could ultimately support local business sustainability, associated employment and retention of spend within the local economy. The bid aligns with a similar proposal from the 4 locally operating Registered Social Landlords that could create further opportunity.

in partnership with the local Head Teachers group. The proposal will be submitted and considered during Quarter 4 with a view that funding could be awarded to deliver a STEM focus project, utilising school facilitators and a industry liaison officer to deliver a coordinated programme of activity utilising business and partners to inspire and raise awareness of opportunity amongst young people and children.

STEM delivery in schools - CITB, linked with Aspire to Be and Go Construct have developed two new initiatives as a response to the construction industry workforce needs, linking directly with schools, through construction led programmes (Minecraft) and resources. A free pilot programme and resources were secured for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council primary schools;

- Teachers from 7 schools have successfully completed a 5 day minecraft training programme, with Aspire 2 Be with 3 schools attending a regional Buildathon alongside Cardiff primary schools. The principles have been embedded within schools through "Minecraft" workshops and afterschool clubs.
- Teachers from **9 schools attended the STEAM focus day** which will provide schools with free training and introduced a range of contextualised lesson plans and resources to teachers to use in the classroom.





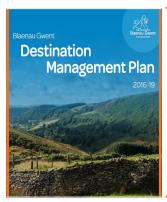


As part of the £100m Tech Valley Investment opportunity a range of initiatives and associated funding applications are being developed for submission in the autumn including;

Skills Academy - Refurbishment of the Monwel building to host a flexible skills academy that could include;

- be an industry led centre of excellence supporting existing and future business to meet current and long term skills requirements
- provide capacity for higher level training delivery from HE and FE for Business in existing and future/emerging technologies
- provide a 'maker space' to support inward investment and business start-ups by offering companies access to latest technologies
- have an apprenticeship programme that will generate engineers and technicians for the future
- provide a "first level or back to work" employment experience
- support the culture of enterprise through the establishment of a Tech Lab

Destination Management & Tourism



We strive to maintain a thriving and vibrant welcome to residents and visitors alike. Delivery of The Destination Management Plan ensures improved visitor experience and growth in the visitor economy. We work with event organisers to promote their events and also work with new Ebbw Vale Business Group to establish regular events throughout the town centres.

19 Autumn events held plus week long activities at 3 sports centres and 2 parks. The value of events to the tourism sector is increasingly evident. Many smaller local events are growing as is the support needed to run them safely and successfully.



We have developed many Local walking trails and we continue working with Cwm a Mynydd Local Action Group to develop trails that link to the train.

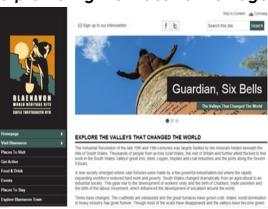
There is a need to continue to improve connectivity, with works to increase rail services on the Ebbw Valley rail link and completion of the A465 dualling. We are looking to also link these to walking and cycling trails.

Rail to Train at Llanhilleth





"We have continued to work with 'The Valleys That Changed the World' developing and promoting the Industrial Heritage".



Destination Management & Tourism

To ensure a thriving and vibrant tourist economy we work with individual businesses to maximise their potential. We recognise that sharing knowledge, gaining new skills and teaming up to form a cohesive way forward is important and enhances the destination offer.

> We continue to engage with town centre local businesses to support and

> > assist with business promotion.

37 accommodation developments are ongoing such as The Tredegar Arms which has opened this autumn.

Supported the opening of 1 new cafe in the circle Tredegar who now also provides the community with regular events in Welsh, book clubs etc.

The following National data was taken from the STEAM

Tourism Impact Report:

Economic impact up 4% to £54.9m;

Visitor days up 5% to 947,000;

Visitor numbers up 7% to 1723,000:

Employment down 3% to **662 FTE**; and

Spend per visitor day down 1%.

A Project to maximise the tourism potential of Blaenau Gwent as the Home of the NHS and Aneurin Bevan has been completed.



This year there were 7 walks, 5 taking place in Blaenau Gwent.

Numbers per walk ranged from 5 to 15.



12 new businesses (now 83 in total) are Linked to our new Business hub, a smart digital platform dedicated to Blaenau Gwent businesses and start-ups, enabling businesses to connect with each other and discover local opportunities.



Collaboration

Wales Valleys Walking Festival – a partnership with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Merthyr councils.

Energy and Digital

The

Blaenau Gwent Energy Prospectus

has been drafted. This will require agreement at Council before it can be distributed out to the market to identify investment opportunities and secure funding for delivery of these energy opportunities.



Providing electric vehicle charging points helps work towards a greener, cleaner environment and the views of residents contributed to planning future provision.

Blaenau Gwent together with four neighbouring authorities have secured up to £450,000 of funding for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV) for the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points across 30 sites within the five Local Authority areas.

Blaenau Gwent will act as lead Authority on behalf five other Local Authorities including Caerphilly, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport.







Energy and Digital

Work has commenced on delivery of a **£4.1 million programme 'ReFit'** to install energy efficiency measures in buildings throughout the Council's portfolio. Buildings included within the programme are Corporate Buildings, Schools, Leisure Trust Buildings and Street Lighting. Lighting Schemes have been completed in:

Willowtown Primary School -Energy Efficient LED Lighting & Solar PV Panels

- Guaranteed Energy Savings of £7,631.10 per year
- Improved lighting levels and better quality of lighting
- •Installation of Solar PV
- A long-term source of renewable technology
- •38,000 kWh saved between March and November
- •21,000 CO2 Savings saved in the same period









Bert Denning







Ebbw Vale Sports
Centre – Energy
Efficient LED
Lighting





Silent
Valley
Waste
Transfer
Station
- Solar
PV
Panels



Engagement with schools is continuing

Libraries

Learning
Action Centres



Energy and Digital

GovTech Catalyst project -

Working together with Durham County Council and Government Digital Service we are looking at how we can use our assets to collect information about what is going in the streets and relay that information to help deliver public services more efficiently.

'Eyes on the Street': enabling Blaenau Gwent Borough Council's vehicle fleets to collect and report data as they travel around the borough concerning recycling participation, deterioration of the highways as well as monitoring and identifying highways violations.

Phase one is now completed which included:

- detection of potholes using camera technology mounted on refuse, recycling fleet - no driver intervention required
- Detection of recycling participation levels



We aim to develop digital infrastructure and improve connectivity within the borough by promoting digital participation.

Blaenau Gwent Council is involved in

The PENTAGON Project

at The Works site on the former steelworks in Ebbw Vale, as part of efforts

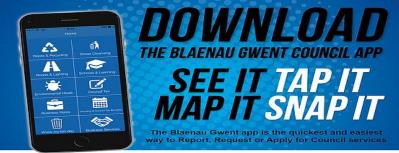
to reduce fuel poverty

in the county borough.

The project is now in its final year and aims to deliver a new generation of eco-districts that exploit a wide range of renewable energy generation sources and also investigates the use of energy conversion technology (including power to gas) to improve flexibility of energy supply.



The Thales Project is ongoing and continue to work towards the delivery of the new £20m National Digital Exploitation Centre (NDEC) based in Ebbw Vale which will be the first research development and facility of its kind in Wales, and will provide the perfect setting for SMES an d microbusinesses to test and develop their digital concepts. The centre design currently in design stage with construction scheduled to start in May 2020 with the facility set to be in full operation by April 2021.



Available to Download from the App Store, Windows Store and Google Play



Town Centres

Project delivery of Tredegar Townscape Heritage Initiative continues

£3.6m funding secured from Lottery Heritage Fund

Tredegar Arms

works nearing completion with the owners officially opening the building on the 23rd October 2019. The total project cost is £1.8m which has been from various funding sources including private investment from the building owners.

Merthyr Tydfil

Cardiff
Newport

Work is ongoing to engage with

potential town centre properties across Blaenau Gwent to participate in the town centre loans and grants scheme. Due diligence into potential applications is being carried out by the Regeneration Opportunities Team, a Quantity Surveyor from Technical Services and the Property Solicitor from Development and Estates.

The Regeneration
Opportunities team are
continuing to engage with
potential projects to utilise
the **town centre loan**opportunities available.

A further £190,000 has been secured as a result of underspends across other Local Authorities and 3 potential projects have been identified and loan agreements are currently being developed.

There will be a further phase of funding available for town centre loans which has money available of up to £1 million

Regeneration is by nature long term and collaborative with social outcomes. We collaborate internally with colleagues in other departments and externally with private and public sector partners. All of our projects reflect this and we are always looking for further ways to collaborate to get the best results.



Works due to start on site for the NCB building (the building is Grade 2 listed) in early October.



Long Term by 2033, Blaenau Gwent's Local Development Plan will support delivery of a network of connected sustainable, vibrant valley communities that support the wellbeing of current and future generations.



Case Study - Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Businesses Join

Businesses from Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent along with members from successful business networking clubs Torfaen Business Voice and the Blaenau Gwent Effect Network, are forging closer trading partnerships following an event earlier this month.

The recent event was the first of its kind, created and hosted by Torfaen Economy & Enterprise and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's Economic Development Unit and was held at the General Offices, Ebbw Vale.

Over 65 businesses from across a wide range of sectors took advantage of the free opportunity to introduce their businesses to each other over both informal and facilitated networking, and a buffet.



Councillor Richard Clark, Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Economy, Skills and Regeneration at Torfaen Council said

"It was a real pleasure to attend and speak at this event. Forging business relationships across county boundaries is a really positive step towards strengthening our local economy. I hope this is just the beginning of a number of successful joint initiatives that will help build and capitalise on the fantastic energy and commitment local businesses in this part of south east Wales have."

Blaenau Gwent Councillor David Davies, Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development, said:

"The 'meet your business neighbour' event for businesses in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen, which was hosted in the General Offices Ebbw Vale, provided local business with the chance to interact with new contacts and suppliers. It was also an opportunity to share best practice and keep up to date with political, legislative and economic developments.

This is such a good example of how businesses from neighbouring boroughs can engage and work together, which is not only beneficial for the local economy but also strengthens business networks in the region".

Case Study - Tredegar Regeneration

A significant local Tredegar building is about to be re-opened. The Tredegar Arms received an extensive refurbishment following a grant offer from the National Lottery. Today the building will open its doors to the community as a hotel and restaurant.

The Tredegar Arms forms a key part of a historic landscape of buildings that were constructed out of the town's growth from the iron industry and in recent times had fallen into a state of disrepair. It was previously used as a coach house and had become derelict since 2012. The building was in a poor state of repair, with fire damage to the upper levels. The owners had received a funding offer from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to aid the conservation's sensitive refurbishment in order to provide a restaurant and hotel facility in Tredegar. Major renovation works commenced in 2017.

Following two years of refurbishment work and significant investment, the Tredegar Arms will offer restaurant and bar facilities, hotel with 10 bedrooms, and a function room of high standard with disability access.



With Project Management support from members of the Regeneration Opportunities Team over the last few years, the project has been funded by a number of partners, including the owners, THI grant contributions being made up from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Welsh Government's VVP Tackling Poverty Programme, Cadw, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Town Centre Loan (TCL) Private Funds and Tourism Grant Micro Small Business Fund Welsh Government (MSBF WG).

The funding has been utilised to refurbish the exterior with traditional materials and techniques to allow the building to appear and function as it was originally designed. There is a new slate roof, lime rendering and timber sash windows along with a sensitively designed and integrated entrance portico which was originally part of the building but was removed during previous building work.

It is one of a number of buildings being improved within the area of the Circle in Tredegar and we look forward to providing future updates as other buildings make progress.

AFTER:-



Case Study - Bringing New Homes and Prospects to Blaenau Gwent.

The construction of new homes at Golwg y Bryn, Ebbw Vale is well underway. This is the result of Blaenau Gwent CBC's positive partnership working relationship with one of the country's leading house developers – Lovell and Melin Homes an experienced social landlord, to bring much needed quality homes to Blaenau Gwent. The collaboration has ensured the exciting venture being brought to fruition backed with the support of Welsh Government funding.

With the aim of creating opportunities for local suppliers and skilled craftsman to engage with a major house builder, an extremely successful "Meet The Buyer" event was facilitated by Blaenau Gwent's CBC Regeneration Team. A & M Brick Laying and Taylor Lane are two Local Companies that are already on site as a direct result from the event. Local employment, apprenticeships and wider community benefits are all future opportunities we hope to secure from this exciting development.







Golwg Y Bryn, Ebbw Vale
£17m Mix Tenure Development comprising 100 units
Commencing Spring 2019

A MORGAN SINDALL GROUP COMPANY

The development, which will see 70 open market homes and 30 affordable, including shared equity, has recently been launched from a neighbouring site with a hugely positive response, from residents looking to secure their choice of home. Several plots have already being reserved and plans are underway to officially open the exquisite show home on site later this year.

Case Study - Inspire Regional Management Team

An **annual conference** was co-ordinated by the Regional Management Team for Inspire2Achieve on 9th July

at Llancaiach Fawr.

There were **89 attendees** on the day with representatives from all of our 8 joint beneficiaries along with the **6 members** of the Regional Management Team.

The day was designed as an opportunity for the Joint Beneficiaries to receive any updates from the Regional Management Team, to discuss any issues that they are having with delivery and to allow them to share ideas for best/transferrable practice between themselves and how delivery models work in different areas.



Questions	Total Agree / Strongly Agree		Unsure		Total Disagree / Strongly Disagree	
Q1 - Overall I found today's session informative	62	81%	14	18%	4	5%
Q2 - The workshop topics were appropriate	56	73%	19	25%	2	3%
Q3 - The workshop helped answer my queries	49	64%	19	25%	9	12%
Q4 - The workshop helped me gain a better understanding	63	82%	9	12%	7	9%
Q5 - The session was organised and presented well	66	86%	10	13%	2	3%
Q6 - I would be interested in attending further workshop sessions	51	66%	22	29%	6	8%