



# **Blaenau Gwent Planning Service**

## **Annual Performance Report 2019**



# Foreword

We have pleasure in presenting the 5<sup>th</sup> Blaenau Gwent Planning Annual Performance Report (APR).

This report covers the period October 2018 to October 2019.

The document is an opportunity to reflect on the past year's performance and see what we did well and where we can improve the service.

As Executive Member for Regeneration & Economic Development responsible for the Local Development Plan and Chair of Planning, Regulatory & General Licensing Committee which deals with planning applications and enforcement, we remain committed to continually evaluating what we do and identify areas for improvement.

This report confirms that this Council continues to perform strongly when measured against most indicators but there remain some areas where we must do better.

We welcome constructive feedback which can be sent to: [planning@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:planning@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk)



**Cllr. Bob Summers**  
Chair: Planning  
Regulatory & General  
Licensing Committee



**Cllr. Dai Davies**  
Executive Member  
Regeneration & Economic Development

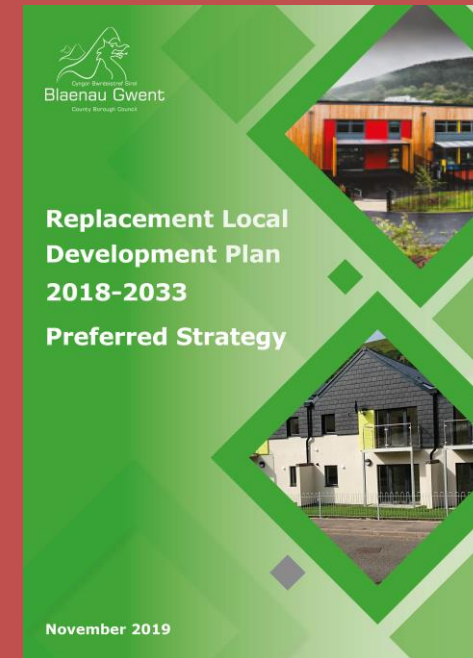
# Staffing

- Following a Departmental restructure, the Development Team (Development Management, Development Plans and Building Control) has now been joined by the Estates & Asset Management Team.
- At the time of writing, the Estates team are in the process of relocating to the Civic Centre from a satellite office.
- The staff structure within the planning service is stable. There are currently no vacant posts.
- The Heritage Officer retired in 2019. The post has been deleted from the structure in an effort to achieve a saving target. This is in part mitigated by a service level agreement with Mon CC to provide limited service provision and advice for Listed Building Applications.
- A DM member of staff who was seconded to Mon CC returned in April 2019. There are currently no vacant posts.
- The allied Council services that are critical to frontline planning service remain under pressure. The Council has one highways officer who comments on planning applications, one ecologist, one landscape architect, one structural engineer and one drainage engineer. These officers also have other duties outside of their advisory role to the LPA. They are single points of failure and therefore the performance of the planning service is subject to periods of reduced capacity for reasons outside of its control
- The Council has no heritage/conservation officer, GIS officer, rights of way officer, urban design specialist or Arborist. This presents challenges to the frontline delivery of the planning service.

# Local Development Plan



Work has started on the new LDP. This Council will consider the Preferred Strategy late 2019 prior to consultation early in 2020.



The Annual Monitoring Report for the current LDP was submitted to Welsh Government on time in October 2019.

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, we were 1 of 23 (out of 25) Welsh LPA's that have a Local Development Plan in place.

The APR shows we had 1.3 years of housing land supply, making us 1 of 19 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 year supply.

Work on the new LDP was delayed to consider working with other Council's to prepare a joint LDP at WG's request.

# Development Management

## Income (1,000's)

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19
Projected	£279.7	£279.8	£283.2	£209.2	£209.2
Actual	£246.8	£254.2	£180.3	£178.3	£349.5
Deficit	-£32.9	-£25.6	-£99.9	£-30.8	+£140.3

## Planning Applications

- On average, it took us 71 days to determine each application. This compares to the Welsh average of 77 days.
- 97% of all applications were determined on time, the 4<sup>th</sup> best return in Wales.
- We decided 10 major applications in the year. These took on average 20 weeks each to decide. This compares to the Wales average of 33 weeks.

## Enforcement / Appeals

- 97% of enforcement cases were investigated within 84 days. Across Wales, 77% were investigated in the same period.
- The average time to pursue positive enforcement action was 282 days.
- We successfully defended 64% of appeals, this is marginally below the Wales average of 66%.

## Quality

- Our Planning Committee decided 10% of applications received. This compared to a Welsh average of 6%.
- 29% of Planning Committee decisions were contrary to officer advice. In Wales, the average is 9%.
- Costs were awarded against us in one appeal, making us 1 of 10 Council's where that occurred.



## *What the public and Town Councils said*

*Officers very helpful and responsive.*

*Blaenau Gwent have a positive helpful attitude to planning applications and are always keen to see the merits in proposals. They then assist to make the proposals the best for their area*

*The team were very friendly and helpful and we hope to make applications again in the future. I do think some parts of the website could be improved a little bit to make them easier to navigate. I cannot fault the team however, I thought they were polite, helpful, reasonable and thoughtful at all times and really took the time to understand our needs.  
Thank you.*



*Town and community councils should be more involved in the decision making process*

*Make more information should be available online*

# *Progress on last year's APR & new priorities*

<b>What we did well in 2019</b>	<p>We achieved our savings targets with minimal impact on frontline service delivery.</p> <p>The LDP Annual Monitoring Report 2019 was delivered on time.</p> <p>Work has commenced on the new LDP.</p> <p>Performance in Development Management remains strong in most areas.</p> <p>We completed an internal review of enforcement and adopted a new Enforcement Policy</p> <p>We commenced work on improving decision making Planning Committee. We visited a neighbouring LPA and agreed outputs with the Chair and Vice.</p> <p>We completed a review of the local planning preliminary advice service.</p>
<b>Where we need to improve</b>	<p>Our appeal record is slightly below Welsh average.</p> <p>We will work to bring down the average number of days for deciding applications.</p> <p>The return for “decisions contrary to officer recommendation” remains too high. We will strive to improve performance.</p> <p>We will work towards improving our enforcement performance in terms of days to pursue positive action.</p>
<b>Some targets for the year ahead</b>	<p>To look at our back office software system and investigate alternative delivery.</p> <p>Finally deliver online planning application data.</p> <p>To progress the LDP in line with the Delivery Agreement with Welsh Government.</p> <p>Maintain good performance when measured against performance indicators.</p>

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE		WALES AVERAGE	BG LAST YEAR	BG THIS YEAR
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No		Yes	Yes	Yes
LDP preparation deviation from date specified in the original DA (months).	<12	13-17	18+		73	N/A	N/A
Time to commence revision of LDP following triggering of Reg 41 (months).	<12	13-17	18+		17		23
Has LDP Revision Delivery Agreement been submitted/agreed with Welsh Gov?	Yes		No		Yes		Yes
LDP review deviation from the dates specified in the original DA (months).	<3		4+		1		N/A
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption.	Yes		No		Yes	Yes	Yes
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years.	>5		<5		6 of 25	1.3	1.3
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required.	>60	50.1-59.9	<50		68	100	100
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days.	Not set	Not set	Not set		232	109	139
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required.	>80	70.1-79.9	<70		88	98	97
Average time taken to determine all applications in days.	<67	67-111	112+		77	69	71
Percentage of Listed Building Consent apps determined within time.	>80	70.1-79.9	<70		75	100	100
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice.	<5	5-9	9+		9	17	29
Percentage of appeals dismissed.	>66	55.1-65.9	<55		68	75	64
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period.	0	1	2+		0	1	1
Does the BG allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No		Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the BG have an officer on duty to provide advice the public?	Yes		No		Yes	Yes	Yes
Online register of applications which public can track progress/view content?	Yes	Partial	No		Yes	No	No
% enforcement cases investigated (decided whether a breach has occurred and, if so, resolved whether enforcement action is expedient) less than 84 days.	>80	70.1-79.9	<70		77	97	97
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action.	<100	101-200	200+		167	201	282