

ES2.1



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Local Development Plan

VACANT HOUSING PAPER

Examination 2012

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Submission

Examination Statement Reference No:	ES2.1
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**BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION**

VACANT HOUSING PAPER

1. Estimate the current proportion of housing that is vacant and confirm the basis for reaching this figure.

For the financial year 2011/2012, the Council currently has a total of 1,576 (4.9%) long and short-term vacant houses within the Borough of Blaenau Gwent.

The total figure of long-term vacant houses is 776: long-term vacancy is classed as a property being empty for 6 months or more. This figure is made up from 519 privately owned vacant properties, 23 privately owned commercial properties that the Council are working on to bring back into use as residential properties/developments and 234 vacant social rented properties. This figure is based on the Council Tax data for the area, in accordance with the guidance produced by the Welsh Government.

2. Identify any geographic concentrations of vacant housing in the county and where they are (identify on a map)

Area	Social/ Private
Tredegar - Peachaven	Social – Sheltered Housing
Cwm - Llandaffal Court	Social – Sheltered Housing
Beaufort - Glanyafon Court	Social – Sheltered Housing
Brynmawr - Fynnon Court	Social – Sheltered Housing
Llanhilleth - Grace Pope Court	Social – Sheltered Housing
Brynmawr - Brynfarm	Social – Sheltered Housing and other social housing
Swffryd	Social – Sheltered Housing
Llanhilleth	Social
Aberbeeg	Social
Cwm	Social
Cwm	Private

Attached at Appendix 1 of this paper is a map identifying the concentrations of vacant housing.

The spatial distribution of private vacant properties is unknown as this is not currently available on a geographic information system. However based on past data there is a known concentration of vacant properties in Cwm.

3. Offer a plausible explanation for concentrations of vacant properties.

The residential areas of Llanhilleth, Aberbeeg and Cwm are classed as low demand areas with low rental values and where the Council has difficulty in letting social housing. In particular they are places where only people who have lived in these areas all or most of their lives tend to want to remain there. The Council has found that residents from other areas within the Borough are reluctant or unwilling to move into the area.

Cwm in particular also has a high concentration of vacant private commercial properties located in Marine Street. This area was once a viable commercial /shopping area but progressively over time has become a predominantly residential area.

Bryn Farm, Brynmawr has a reputation of anti-social behaviour and this has been the main factor why there is a concentration of vacant properties within this area. This has been a long-standing problem but improvements to the area, to meet Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), is making a difference.

With regards to the sheltered housing schemes, Tai Calon has stated that the reasons for the low demand may be due to a prevalence of bedsit accommodation, out of town provision and the changing housing aspirations of older people. Tai Calon are currently in the process of undertaking a review of all their sheltered housing schemes to get a true picture as to why they cannot fill these types of property.

4. Confirm whether there are concentrations of vacant housing by tenure.

The foremost concentration of vacant housing is in the social housing sector in particular sheltered accommodation. There is a concentration of private commercial vacant properties in Marine Street, Cwm. The largest number of vacant properties, are privately owned residential properties, these are dispersed across the Borough with one known concentration in Cwm.

5. Is there a realistic prospect of this housing being occupied in current economic conditions or over the lifetime of the Plan? If not, what other options are open to the Council?

There is a realistic prospect of housing being occupied in the current economic conditions and over the lifetime of the Plan. Commitment from Welsh Government with an investment of £5 million into the new 'Houses into Homes' national programme has a set target of bringing 5,000 vacant properties back into use across Wales. The programme will enable local authorities to offer interest free recyclable loans to owners of vacant private properties in order to renovate empty properties and return them back into use as homes, either to sell or rent.

Blaenau Gwent presently has 519 vacant private properties which are owned by individuals who either have no experience of being part of the housing market and have bought at the wrong time when there is no profit in property, has run out of money or simply does not know what to do with the property. Council Officers within the Borough offer tailored packages to assist owners in bringing properties back into use through various schemes. Last year the Council aided vacant property owners into bringing 21 vacant properties back into use. Using this as a base figure, over the remainder of the Plan this would bring 189 (21x9) properties back into residential use.

United Welsh Housing Association are also seeking to recruit an Empty Homes Officer who will lead on identifying vacant properties to negotiate and facilitate their reuse. The Officer will also take a lead role in collaborative working with partners and Local Authorities including Blaenau Gwent to bring long term empty properties back into use by identifying and maximising all sources of available funding.


There is potential for the figure of 21 properties to increase over the Plan period.

In terms of the 23 vacant commercial properties, the Council is currently developing a plan to deal with these in partnership with a registered social landlord and the local community through regeneration schemes to bring them back into use as residential properties.

With regards to the 234 vacant social rented properties, Tai Calon has stated that they have already reduced the total net number of empty homes by approximately 35% since the housing stock transfer in 2010, which suggests that approximately 123 vacant houses have been bought back into use to date. Their aim is to reduce the figure to below 100 over the next two years.

Tai Calon are currently assessing a way forward with their vacant sheltered homes. It is likely that some of the homes will be improved and let as sheltered housing, others improved and let as general needs homes, others improved and let to a different customer group, and the remainder demolished and the land redeveloped as general needs housing.

In total there is a real prospect of reducing the figure by 312 over the remainder of the Plan period. This is in addition to what has already been delivered and any likely increase due to WG commitment to reducing empty properties.

<p>Date : 17/05/2012</p>	<p>Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council</p>	 <p>Dyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council</p>
<p>Scale : 1:75000</p>	<p>Areas of Vacant Houses</p>	
		<p>Regeneration Division</p>

