

**BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION
DRAFT HEARINGS PROGRAMME AND LIST OF SESSIONS**

Website: <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/business/17460.asp>

THIS IS A DRAFT PREPARED FOR DISCUSSION AT THE PRE-HEARING MEETING. IT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

26 June 2012

Week 1

Day 1 1000 hours

Inspector's opening statement

Council's opening statement

1020 hours

SESSION 1 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY/ VISION

1. Does the Plan provide an appropriate vision and spatial strategy for Blaenau Gwent? To what extent can the vision be considered to be locally distinctive? Might the vision and spatial strategy be considered to be an aspiration rather than one that is credible and capable of being delivered over the Plan period? Can the vision and spatial strategy therefore be considered to be sound?
2. What research and evidence base underpins the regeneration and growth strategy the Council has chosen (refer SD20)? What alternative strategies could the Council have considered?
3. Does the vision and spatial strategy strike the right balance between encouraging new development, seeking development contributions from investors and securing other goals such as enhancing the environment? In broad terms, would the scale, type and distribution of allocated lands in the Plan contribute to the sustainable future development of the borough?
4. How is the strategy consistent with the Wales Spatial Plan, other national guidance, regional Plans and strategies and the Plans and strategies of neighbouring authorities?
5. Is the proposed geographic distribution of new housing and retail development appropriate? What are the consequences of the proposed focus of new development in and around Ebbw Vale on the south of the county borough?
6. How have the settlement boundaries to manage sustainable growth been drawn? Is the boundary for Cwmtillery soundly drawn?
7. Are the detailed policies that support the strategy locally distinctive? Do any of the policies repeat national guidance? If so, should these policies be amended or deleted? Do the policies contain an appropriate element of flexibility?

Close 1300 hours

Inspector: Vincent Maher MA (Cantab) MSc MCD MBA MRTPI

Programme officer: Jeanette John

Website: <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/business/17460.asp>

ED. 7

Day 1 **1400 hours**
SESSION 2 **HOUSING (policy, numbers and phasing)**

The Council has responded to a number of specific detailed questions posed by the Inspector in February 2012 (refer INSP001). The agenda for this session has been prepared in the light of information provided by the Council.

1. What evidence underpins the case for the Plan's proposed housing target and phasing in the light of recent construction rates, population movements, national guidance and policy? Does the Council's current target represent a realistic and soundly based target or is it an aspirational figure?
2. How do the figures in the proposed site allocations match the various figures in Policies SP4 and SP5?
3. To what extent will the amount of new housing anticipated rely on windfall development?
4. Does the Council's target seek to promote too much housing without the increased employment base needed to support the level of population growth anticipated?
5. What are the implications of increasing the overall supply of housing in the county borough on other Council initiatives such as its empty homes strategy?
6. Should the Council's target for new housing be higher? If not, why not? Should the target be lower? If not, why not?

Close 1700 hours

27 June 2012

Day 2

0930 hours

SESSION 3 AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOUSING FOR GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS (Policies SP4 and DM10)

Affordable housing (Policies SP4 and DM10)

1. What is the evidence base to justify the Plan's target of "at least" 10% of all developments that exceed the relevant threshold? Is the term "at least" unclear? If so, what are the implications for developers when seeking planning permission?
2. What is the logic for different sites being required to provide different levels of affordable housing?
3. What is the logic for the two thresholds chosen for requiring affordable housing? Why has the Council chosen the area based threshold of 0.28 ha? What does the term "gross site area" mean? Should Policy DM10 state more clearly a mix of tenures sought that is consistent with the findings of the LHMA (SD62)?
4. Should the Council rely on a greater proportion of off site affordable housing payments to enable it to deliver other projects, for example, a reduction in the number of vacant homes?
5. Which settlements within the county borough would be covered by the rural exceptions sites policy (Policy DM9)?
6. Is the affordable housing target deliverable and appropriate given current economic challenges, the proportion of housing allocations on brownfield sites within the county borough and other items of infrastructure provision sought in the Plan?

Gypsy and travellers' housing (Policies SP4, DM10 and GT1)

7. Should the Plan make provision for the needs of travelling showpeople as well as gypsies and travellers? If not, why not?
8. What is the logic for the reduction in the number of additional pitches for gypsies and travellers from six to four over the Plan period?
9. What is the logic for the focussed change (FC) to criterion (b) of Policy DM10? How is the term "primary highway network" defined in criterion (f) of Policy DM10? Should the glossary state what this term means?

Close 1230 hours

Day 2
SESSION 4

1330 hours
HOUSING SITES

1. Is the allocation of housing sites based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal including testing of reasonable alternatives and does it represent the most appropriate strategy in the circumstances? Have the site selection and policy designation processes been based on appropriate criteria supported by a clear audit trail?
2. Are sites H1.2 (Cartref Aneurin Bevan), H1.5 (Warm Turn, Six Bells) and H1.20 (Land at Farm Road, Swffryd) appropriate for housing? If not, why not?
3. What is the logic for deleting site allocations H1.4 (Jesmondene Stadium, Cefn Golau) and H1.5 (Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach)?
4. Is there a need to identify any additional or alternative sites for housing and/or live-work activity? Are the alternative proposals put forward by other representers (for example, AS(N)17 – land at Tanglewood, Blaina; AS(N)18 – Ffoesmaen Road; and AS(N) 21 – Ty Pwdr) appropriate and deliverable? Have these sites been subject to sustainability appraisal compatible with that for the allocated sites in the Plan?

Close 1545 hours

28 June 2012

Day 3

SESSION 6

1000 hours

EMPLOYMENT

1. What is meant in Objective 9 of the Plan by the phrase "By 2021, 50 hectares of employment land and a range of premises have been delivered"? How might this term "delivered" be interpreted? Is this a precise target? What evidence base underpins this figure?
2. What are the implications of pursuing an employment land allocation of this scale in the context of forecast declines in some sectors, especially manufacturing and other Use Class B2 activity? Does the Council acknowledge that some vacant stock may not be developed for employment or other uses during the lifetime of the Plan? What actions are the Council and others taking to improve the take up of employment land within the county borough relative to neighbouring boroughs?
3. Why is the Council seeking to promote the regeneration of so much employment land when other initiatives (e.g., improved transport accessibility) might improve access to jobs for local people outside of Blaenau Gwent?
4. What is the logic for the different categories of employment land use (strategic sites, primary and secondary sites and business parks)? What evidence underpins the case for retaining all of these sites for employment? How should the Plan respond to other uses that might complement employment activity (e.g., training)?
5. How will criteria (f) and (g) of Policy SP8 be implemented? Is the Council's policy and allocations for employment land use realistic and soundly based?
6. Is there an overlap between criteria (3) and (4) of Policy DM11 and criterion (3) of Policy DM21?
7. What level of support should the Plan give to the expansion of new sectors such as tourism? How do the various policies in the Plan (for example, Policy SP8 and TM1) give positive land use planning support for the development of the county borough's tourism offer? Has the Plan neglected any other significant potential employment-generating tourist facilities?
8. How does the Plan help implement national policies (for example, in "Economic Renewal: a new direction" (W17)) to support priority sectors including ICT; energy and the environment; advance materials and manufacturing; creative industries; life sciences; and financial and professional services)?

Close 1330 hours

Day 3
SESSION 7

1430 hours
EMPLOYMENT AND MIXED USE SITES

1. Is the allocation of employment and mixed use sites based on a sound process of sustainability appraisal including testing of reasonable alternatives and does it represent the most appropriate strategy in the circumstances? Have the site selection, policy designation and site boundaries drawn been based on appropriate criteria with a clear audit trail?

Site MU1

1. The Delivery and Implementation section of the Plan identifies some public sector grant for the delivery of MU1, the largest allocation of employment land to be "delivered". To what extent is the delivery of this project dependent on public sector grant? Is the necessary public sector funding package in place to secure private sector investment?
2. What is the likely impact of developing MU1 on Rhyd y Blew and Bryn Serth SINC's? Will the development result in a significant loss of biodiversity and, if so, will it be necessary to conduct mitigation or compensation measures for any biodiversity loss?
3. Is it necessary to amend the site designation of MU1 including on the Proposals Map to identify green links? Are the boundaries of this site appropriately drawn?

Site MU3

1. Are the boundaries for this site soundly drawn? What would be the implications of amending them to incorporate adjacent land?

Close 1700 hours

29 June 2012

Day 4

1000 hours

SESSION 8

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT AND TOWN CENTRES

Retail hierarchy including principal and district town centres

1. Is there a sound framework for the development of the borough's current centres? What is the logic for the hierarchy of centres set out in the plan? What is the effect of linking Brynmawr district town centre to the new retail provision at Lakeside Retail Park?
2. What evidence underpins the location and quantum of new retail development sought within the lifetime of the plan identified in Policy R1? What impact will further retail development in Ebbw Vale - on top of existing commitments - have on the vitality and viability of the county borough's other centres?
3. Should the information on need in paragraph 8.20 of the Plan be incorporated into specific SP or DM policies to enable a direct comparison between the needs identified and the provision sought?
4. What is the logic for the boundaries of the primary retail areas on the proposals map? Are such extensive boundaries appropriately supported in the Council's evidence base?
5. Who will implement the measures identified in section 2 of Policy SP3? Who will pay for these initiatives to be undertaken?
6. Does Policy DM6 provide an appropriately clear set of controls to manage the county borough's principal and district town centres? What is the land use planning case for restricting the percentages of hot food take aways and public house in these centres? How is the term "close proximity" to be interpreted?
7. Should paragraph 7.48 of the plan be inserted into Policy DM6 as opposed to the reasoned justification for the policy? If not, why not?

Close 1200 hours

Day 4
SESSION 9

1300 hours
BLAINA LOCAL TOWN CENTRE

1. Does Policy DM7 provide an appropriate set of controls to manage changes of use within Blaina local town centre?
2. What is the land use planning case for restricting the percentages of hot food take aways and public houses in Blaina?
3. Does criterion (b) of Policy DM7 clearly indicate when a change of use of the ground floor premises to housing would be supported?
4. Should the boundaries of this centre be altered to reflect the submission in AS (A) 12? What would be the planning policy consequence of this alteration?

Close 1430 hours

Week 2

3 July 2012

Day 5

1000 hours

SESSION 10

MINERALS (Policies SP12, DM19 and M4)

1. How does the Plan translate national minerals planning policy down to the local authority level? Should the Plan seek to identify a **minimum** 10 year landbank? Is there merit in seeking to pursue up to 6 million tonnes of minerals and aggregate extraction over the lifetime of the Plan? Should the county borough accommodate a proportion of the minerals allocated to the Brecon Beacons National Park? If not, why not?
2. Does the Plan adequately distinguish between energy generating and non-energy minerals and aggregates?
3. What is the logic for the minerals safeguarding areas? Are they soundly drawn?
4. What is the logic for the Minerals Buffer Zones identified in Policy M2 and the sites identified in Policy M4? Why are these zones identified in different policies? Are these buffers soundly based?
5. What is the logic for the identification of areas in Policy M3 where minerals or aggregates working will not be acceptable? In identifying areas where minerals and aggregates working would not be acceptable, should the Council have taken account of the county borough's proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park? If not, why not?
6. Should mining legacy areas or coal mining referral areas be shown on the constraints map?
7. Is the drafting of Policy SP12 soundly based? What is the logic for criterion (e) of this policy? Is the term "acceptable proven safe limit" clear in its intention? Why does the FC version of the Plan distinguish between residential areas and areas that are "deemed exceptions"? Should the policy state more positively that prior extraction will be encouraged on appropriate sites including housing sites? If not, why not?
8. Does Policy DM19 contain significant overlaps with other national policies? If so, what does this policy add in its current form that is not contained elsewhere?

Close 1300 hours

Day 5 **1400 hours**
SESSION 11 **MINERALS SITE ALLOCATIONS**

Review of sites

1. What are the consequences of identifying land adjacent to Trefil Quarry (M4.1) for expansion on the local environment including heritage interests and the Brecon Beacons National Park? Is this site allocation soundly based?
2. What is the logic for identifying Tir Pentwys Tip (M4.2) as a preferred area for aggregates? Is this site allocation soundly based?

Close 1500 hours

Day 5 **1530 hours**
SESSION 12 **WASTE**

1. How does the Plan translate national and regional waste policy down to the local authority level? What is the logic for seeking to allocate between 0.4 and 4 hectares of land for waste management purposes?
2. Do Policies SP13 and W1 provide sufficient sites to accommodate the county borough's contribution to waste management?
3. How might the siting of waste facilities in criterion (3) of Policy DM21 be consistent with other initiatives to support employment growth?
4. What does criterion (6) of Policy DM21 add that is not covered by other policies in the Plan?

Close 1730 hours

4 July 2012

Day 6 0930 hours
SESSION 13 COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL LIFE (open space, play, community cohesion)

1. Does the Plan provide an appropriate policy framework for considering the provision for and planning of social and community infrastructure to address the changing needs of the population?
2. Does Policy DM12 provide a satisfactory definition of community facilities? How would criterion (a) of this policy be assessed?
3. What is the logic for requiring developers to provide 2.4 hectares of recreational space per 1000 projected population in developments of 10 or more homes to comply with Policy DM13? Which parts of the county borough have a quantitative deficiency in open space? How should the term "qualitative deficiency" be interpreted?
4. Why should the Council seek to protect all open space within the county borough? Does criterion (c) of Policy DM14 provide a clear indication of when it may be appropriate to allow the development on some open space?
5. What does Policy SP9 seek to achieve? Has the Council allocated sites in such a way as to increase the percentage of the population within 400m of green space?
6. Is the Council's proposed allocation of land for cemetery space soundly based? Would the proposed extension of Dukestown Cemetery (ENV5.2) result in the loss of high quality agricultural land?
7. What measures are in place in the Plan to support the Welsh language?

Close 1230 hours

Day 6 **1330 hours**
SESSION 14 **SECURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
(Environmental assets, water quality, flood risk, climate change)

1. How has the Plan translated national policies into local action and does it provide adequate policy support for protecting the borough's environmental assets? Would the Plan be unsound if SSSIs and LNRs were not shown on the supporting proposals map?
2. What constraints are there on development within the county borough given its proximity to the Usk Bat Sites SAC and other European designated sites (Cwm Clydach Woodlands, Aberbargoed Grasslands; Sugar Loaf Woodlands)?
3. What is the likely cumulative effect of developing a range of sites for employment use (for example, MU1; EMP1.5 - Rassau Platform B; and EMP1.8 - Crown Business Park Platform A) and transport projects (for example, T6.1) on the commuting and foraging opportunities for bats? Does the Plan provide sufficient policy guidance to address any significant potential impact such development might have on protected species?
4. What is the purpose of Policy DM5? What does it seek to achieve that is not covered by other policies?
5. What plans are in place to increase the amount of the county borough's electricity and heat requirements from renewable and low/ zero carbon technologies to support Policy SP7? Should the Plan make site allocations for new renewable and low/ zero carbon development including wind energy? What mechanisms are in place to increase the proportion of energy from low carbon and renewable sources?
6. Does Policy SP7 provide sound guidance on when it may be appropriate to release greenfield land for new development?
7. Why has a new criterion (b) been added to Policy DM3? Does FC criterion (c) of this policy repeat Policy DM1?
8. Is there any conflict between the siting of development and infrastructure identified in the Plan and the areas of flood risk identified as Zone C (refer TAN 15)?
9. Do Policies SP10 and DM3 provide clear guidance on how development should aspire to improve water quality?

Close 1800 hours

5 July 2012

Day 7 1000 hours
SESSION 15 TURNING HEADS – SECURING QUALITY DESIGN
(Urban design, place making, heritage, environmental improvements)

1. What initiatives does the Plan include to promote place making? Does Policy DM2 effectively stifle innovative development? Should the Plan identify policies in connection with the control of advertisements?
2. How would roller shutters make a positive contribution to the street scene?
3. Does Policy DM18 place too much emphasis on the preservation of heritage that is not statutorily listed over the desire to promote regeneration?
4. Does the Plan provide an appropriate policy framework to assess development proposals in the Bedwellty House and Park Conservation Area and any prospective Conservation Areas created?
5. What is meant by the term “land reclamation schemes” in Policy ENV4? How will these schemes be funded? By way of example, is it appropriate to identify sites such as Llanhilleth Pithead Baths, Llanhilleth (ENV4.4) without a clear indication of what the reclamation scheme might entail and how it would be funded?

Close 1200 hours

Day 7
SESSION 16

1300 hours
TRANSPORT

1. Which of the various transport projects in the Plan are aspirations and which ones have a realistic chance of being delivered over the lifetime of the Plan? Which transport projects are critical to the delivery of the spatial strategy and the other targets in the Plan? Are there robust plans in place to deliver them? When will they be delivered?
2. Does the Plan give sufficient emphasis to the desire/ need to promote sustainable forms of transport including cycling?
3. How will Policy SP6 be implemented?
4. Should the Plan contain detailed policies concerning the levels of on site car parking, cycling and the facilitation of public transport that might be associated with new development? If not, why not? Should the Plan identify locally sensitive areas where transport assessments might be expected to be submitted along with planning applications?
5. FC11 seeks to amend cycle route T1.7. What is the logic for this amendment? Has this amended route been drawn having regard to surrounding land uses including farmland used for sheep grazing and an appreciation of the number of existing gateways?

Close 1500 hours

Day 7
SESSION 17

1515 hours
DELIVERING INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Is there a clear delivery and implementation plan including funding arrangements to guide the policies and delivery of site allocations set out in the Plan?
2. What measures are in place for the Council and its partners to deliver the infrastructure pledges in the Plan? Are delivery mechanisms and responsibilities clearly defined between partners?
3. Are there any "show stoppers" that would jeopardise the vision and the implementation of policies to support the vision if they were delayed or not delivered through a lack of funding? Are the dependencies and the implications of any delay understood and provided for? What contingency measures are in place?
4. Is it always viable to impose requirements on developers for contributions that will add to the cost of development (e.g., affordable housing, provision of open space) on top of other site costs associated with the redevelopment of previously developed land? Should the Council prioritise where it will seek to secure S106 contributions where such contributions put into doubt the viability of a development?
5. How does the Plan cater for the county borough's need for telecommunications development?

Close 1800 hours

Week 3

Monday 9 July 2012

Day 8 1000 hours

SESSION 18 MONITORING INDICATORS

1. Is the monitoring framework for the Plan (as amended by the Council's focussed changes) fit for purpose?

It is anticipated that the Inspector will review the progress of the examination before closing for the day.

All representors are invited to attend this session.

Close 1230 hours

The Inspector will conduct site visits for the rest of the week.

He has already toured the county borough but will go to the sites allocated in the Plan as well as alternatives suggested by other participants that form part of the examination. He expects to conduct all site visits unaccompanied but would welcome accompanied site visits to Six Bells Colliery site, MU1 and Trefil Quarry. Jeanette John will contact relevant participants in the examination to arrange times for a visit.

The Council will be expected to use the rest of this week to review any changes they may wish to make following the two week examination.

Week 4

17 July 2012

Day 9 0930 hours
SESSION 19 RESERVE SESSION

This is a reserve session. It will be kept free in the event that any of the other hearing sessions overrun.

Day 9 1330 hours
SESSION 20 CLOSING ISSUES

The agenda for this session will be finalised closer to the end of the examination in public.

This session will be used as an opportunity to address any other outstanding soundness matters not raised in earlier sessions of the examination.

The Council will have an opportunity to explain any matters arising changes (MACs) that it may wish to promote as a result of the hearings. It will also confirm the arrangements for publicising any MACs. The Council will then be invited to make a closing statement.

All participants are welcome to attend this session.