

# Public Document Pack



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Usk  
NP15 1GA

Tuesday, 19 November 2024

Dear Councillor

## INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

Notice is hereby given that the following decisions made by a member of the cabinet will be made on Wednesday, 27 November 2024.

1. **MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PLANNING SERVICE'S ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR)** 1 - 54

**Division/Wards Affected:** All Wards  
**CABINET MEMBER:** County Councillor Paul Griffiths

### **AUTHOR/CONTACT DETAILS:**

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Yours sincerely,

**Paul Matthews**  
Chief Executive

### CABINET PORTFOLIOS

County Councillor	Area of Responsibility	Ward
Mary Ann Brocklesby	<p><b>Leader</b> Lead Officer – Paul Matthews, Matthew Gatehouse</p> <p>Whole Authority Strategy and Direction Whole authority performance review and evaluation Relationships with Welsh Government, UK Government and local government associations Regional Relationships with City Regions and Public Service Board Strategic Procurement Local Food production and consumption, including agroforestry and local horticulture</p>	Llanelly
Paul Griffiths	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development Deputy Leader</b> Lead Officer – Frances O'Brien</p> <p>Economic Strategy Local development plan and strategic development plan including strategic housing sites Homelessness, affordable housing delivery and private sector housing (empty homes, leasing scheme, home improvement loans, disabled facilities grants and adaptive tech) Supporting Town Centres including car parking and enforcement Development Management and Building Control Skills and Employment Broadband connectivity</p>	Chepstow Castle & Larkfield
Ben Callard	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Resources</b> Lead Officers – Peter Davies, Frances O'Brien, Jane Rodgers</p> <p>Finance including MTFP and annual budget cycle Benefits Human resources, payroll, health and safety Land and buildings Property maintenance and management Emergency planning</p>	Llanfoist & Govilon
Martyn Groucutt	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Education</b> Lead Officers – Will McLean, Ian Saunders</p> <p>Early Years Education All age statutory education Additional learning needs/inclusion</p>	Lansdown

	<p>Post 16 and adult education  School standards and improvement  Community learning  Sustainable communities for learning Programme  Youth service  School transport</p>	
Ian Chandler	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Social Care, Safeguarding and Accessible Health Services</b>  Lead Officer – Jane Rodgers</p> <p>Children’s services  Fostering &amp; adoption  Youth Offending service  Adult services  Whole authority safeguarding (children and adults)  Disabilities  Mental health and wellbeing  Relationships with health providers and access to health provision</p>	Llantilio Crossenny
Catrin Maby	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Climate Change and the Environment</b>  Lead Officer – Frances O’Brien, Ian Saunders</p> <p>Decarbonisation  Transport planning, public transport, highways and MCC fleet  Active travel  Waste management, street care, litter, public spaces, and parks  Pavements and back lanes  Flood alleviation, management and recovery  Countryside, biodiversity, and river health</p>	Drybridge
Angela Sandles	<p><b>Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement</b>  Lead Officers – Frances O’Brien,, Matthew Gatehouse, Jane Rodgers, Ian Saunders</p> <p>Community inequality and poverty (health, income, nutrition, disadvantage, discrimination, isolation and cost of living crisis)  Citizen engagement and democracy promotion including working with voluntary organisations  Citizen experience - community hubs, contact centre, and customer service and registrars, communications, public relations and marketing  Leisure centres, play and sport  Tourism Development and Cultural strategy  Public conveniences  Electoral Services and constitution review  Ethics and standards  Welsh Language  Rights of way  Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Public</p>	Town

	Protection, and Licencing	
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# Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

## Our Purpose

- to become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

## Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced;
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency;
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in;
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued;
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential

## Our Values

**Openness.** We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

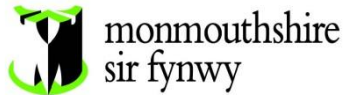
**Fairness.** We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

**Flexibility.** We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

**Teamwork.** We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

**Kindness:** We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.





<b>SUBJECT:</b> MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PLANNING SERVICE'S ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR)
<b>MEETING:</b> INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION – CLLR. P. GRIFFITHS
<b>DATE:</b> 27 NOVEMBER 2024
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b> ALL

## 1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the Cabinet Member for Planning & Economic Development with a report on the performance of the Council's Planning Service for the financial year period 2023/24.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 To note the contents of the Annual Performance Report for submission to the Welsh Government and recommend the APR for submission without any changes (see Section 10.0 below).

## 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Welsh Government(WG) normally requires all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales to submit an Annual Performance Report for their planning service by the end of November each year (albeit that this requirement was relaxed during the reporting periods affected by the Covid pandemic). This requirement links with the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, and the Welsh Government's objective of creating a positive and enabling planning service.
- 3.2 This is the tenth Annual Performance Report (APR). The APR looks at the performance of the Planning Service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government (WG) targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance over the previous year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available. The objective of the APR is to reflect on and celebrate good performance, identify areas for improvement, and look across Wales to identify potential areas of best practice that Monmouthshire could learn from or share with others. Recently there was no requirement from WG to submit an APR and no all Wales comparative data has been provided as it was previously. Again, this year WG have not provided national benchmarking figures to enable the council to review its current status against the Wales average. This is unfortunate as the comparison being made is no longer accurate or reflective of the status of planning services across Wales during 2023/24. Issues such as resources limitations and environmental considerations such as water quality in rivers

would have an impact on local planning authorities across Wales and therefore the comparison is flawed. Despite that, Monmouthshire's Planning Service decided to continue to commit to submitting an APR but had to base the assessment of our performance over those two years against the Welsh average in 2018/19 (the last year the national data was published).

- 3.3 The APR is divided into sections, with the format and appearance being consistent throughout Wales, and all LPAs reporting on the same performance indicators. The report looks at where the Planning Service sits corporately, local pressures, customer feedback and performance. Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:
- Plan making (omitted from the APR in recent years as no performance data was provided by WG and the issues are more than adequately covered by the LDP Annual Monitoring Report);
  - Efficiency;
  - Quality;
  - Engagement; and
  - Enforcement.

This Framework was established by the Welsh Government in partnership with local planning authority representatives. Performance is ranked as 'good', 'fair' or 'needs improvement'.

- 3.4 The Annual Performance Report is provided at Appendix 1.

#### **4.0 KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 The purpose of the Planning Service is 'To plan for, advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development', that links directly to all six of the Council's Corporate objectives. The service is directly involved with wider corporate projects such as 21st Century Schools and forms an enabling tool to help address some of the challenges and issues identified corporately.

- 4.2 Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

- Carrying out a replacement of the Monmouthshire LDP.
- Preparing and co-ordinating thematic supplementary planning guidance to help to foster the interpretation and implementation of LDP policy.
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with both internal and external partners.
- Monitoring and evaluating development plan policies, including preparing the statutory LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- Maintaining the LDP evidence base and ensuring fitness for purpose for future LDP revision.
- Providing pre-application advice to customers;



- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
- Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development;
- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB and the Brecon Beacons National Park;
- Providing a heritage service for our neighbouring colleagues in Blaenau Gwent County Borough that works in a manner that is consistent and as well-resourced as the one provided for Monmouthshire.
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable in the public interest.

## **5.0 MAJOR PROJECTS FROM 2023/24**

### **5.1 During the reporting period these included:**

- In October 2023 Council endorsed updates to the Preferred Strategy following the statutory consultation/engagement in December 2022- January 2023. Work is currently progressing on the preparation of the Deposit Plan which is due to be completed in September 2024. It is anticipated that political reporting to seek endorsement of the Deposit Plan for public consultation and subsequent statutory engagement/consultation will take place in Autumn 2024. The revised RLDP timetable will be set out in an updated Delivery Agreement which will be reported to Council at the same time as the Deposit Plan.
- Over the last two reporting periods the work pattern has adapted from 100% of our staff working from home to a more hybrid arrangement with officers using collaboration spaces in County Hall to meet as a group, normally on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Support Team colleagues normally using the original space in the office to meet, scan and train colleagues. Site visits for planning applications have continued although we suspended visits for pre-application advice submissions until our resources were back to full capacity. During the pandemic we had let agents know that all applications to be submitted should be done so electronically as the office was temporarily closed and paper forms of submission could not therefore be scanned for the case officer and consultation purposes. This appears to have produced a shift to almost 100% electronic submissions. Planning Committee has reverted to a hybrid arrangement with some Members preferring to attend in County Hall (others opting to attend virtually).
- We have continued providing a joint heritage service for Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Councils. This commenced in January 2019 and has provided our neighbouring authority with expert heritage advice without the need to employ its own officer or commission a consultant. MCC manages the service for BGCBC via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and provides the staff to deliver a resilient heritage service assisted by BGCBC funding.
- Towards the end of the 2021, as a planning authority we were faced with a new constraint of riverine phosphate pollution. Within Monmouthshire it was identified that within the River Usk 88% of the river's water bodies failed to

meet the required water quality target and within the River Wye 67% failed to meet the target. As a result of this failure NRW issued detailed planning guidance (updated in July 2023) to ensure that the environmental capacity of the rivers (which are designated special areas of conservation) do not deteriorate any further. Any proposed development within the catchment areas of the rivers that might increase phosphate levels need to clearly evidence within a planning application that the development can demonstrate phosphate neutrality or betterment in its design and/or its contribution to the water body. In most cases there will be limited capacity to connect to the public sewerage system and an alternative solution will have to be found. This requirement on drainage considerations has impacted on all development that increases the volume or concentration of wastewater. We have been working through the guidance and applying it to all new applications in those Wye and Usk catchment areas. This has sometimes delayed applications and many were on hold until the Council had developed a clear strategy for dealing with such issues. We continue to work with a wide range of agencies including WG, NRW, Welsh Water and other authorities (including new nutrient management boards) to find sustainable solutions to this significant environmental problem. Recent work has seen DC-WW commit to providing phosphate stripping technology at Monmouth and Llanfoist waste water treatments works by April 2025. This, allied to NRW's recent review of environmental permits for the main settlements' waste water treatment works, has led to the identification of solutions that will help bring forward much needed development (including affordable housing) in the main towns of Monmouth and Abergavenny as well as smaller settlements in the County.

- Delivering our bespoke pre-application advice service for potential applicants, as well as offering pre-purchase certificates and completion certificates.
- Successfully recruiting new staff and training them to adapt to their new roles in the DM and Policy Teams.
- Implementing prioritised elements of the Team's Digital Plan to improve our processes and customer experience – including upgrades to the Idox Document Management System (DMS) and Public Access (PA).
- Securing detailed planning permissions for two major housing schemes on sites at Vinegar Hill, Undy and at Raglan - both housing sites allocated in the LDP, a 46-home affordable housing scheme north of Caldicot School, a significant employment development (B1, B2 and B8) at Severnbridge Industrial Estate, a major active travel scheme at Castle Meadows, Llanfoist and a 1km closed velo track at Llanfoist.

## **6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF OUR 2023/24 APR**

6.1 Based on the performance information in Section 6 and Appendix A of the APR, we can be pleased with the service we deliver. During this period:

- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales was good at 67%, and was above the Good target of 60% (2 out of 3 applications);
- The end-to-end period for determining major planning applications increased from 120 days in 2022/23 to 436 days in 2023/24; this

related to just three applications – one being the approved velo park at Llanfoist that was significantly delayed by phosphate pollution issues (including a Welsh Government holding request for a potential call-in, subsequently withdrawn) and another related to an industrial development at Caldicot on an allocated site that was held up by flood assessment issues for a protracted period;

- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales remained high at 93%, an improvement on the previous year (89%) demonstrating the effective recruitment and training up of new officers in the Applications team;
- The proportion of applications we approved remained high at 97%;
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service, and followed our advice 100% were approved;
- We ‘won’ eight out of ten appeals against our decisions to refuse planning permission, well above the ‘Good’ standard of 66% or more;
- We dealt with a large number of applications for listed building consent (51 applications) and 84% of these were determined within agreed timescales;
- Enforcement performance improved for the measure relating to the percentage of enforcement cases investigated in 84 days (rising from 65% to 83%) which is now rated ‘Good’, and the performance significantly improved in respect of the average time to take positive action which fell from 123 days to 91 days, also rated ‘Good’. We investigated 286 enforcement cases and served 13 notices.
- Significant s106 monies (approx. £1.2M) were received towards important community infrastructure schemes including the Magor Hub and the velo park proposal as a result of granting permission for major developments such as those at Rockfield Farm/ Vinegar Hill - Undy, Deri Farm - Abergavenny and Grove Farm - Llanfoist.

6.2 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. Of the 12 ranked indicators, 10 are ranked ‘Good’, while 2 are ‘Fair’ and none are ‘need improvement’.

This shows that the team is working effectively and has overcome the longer-term effects of vacancies and significant constraints such as phosphate pollution. Our performance has been very good and our pre-application advice service is effective.

The Previous APR’s actions involving reviewing the Enforcement Team’s performance and implementing measures to improve output, initiating the Buildings at Risk Strategy, digitising our enforcement register and upgrading our back office software systems to process applications more efficiently were all completed.

	<b>Number of indicators</b>
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is ‘good’	<b>10</b>

Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'fair'	2
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance 'needs improvement'	0

### 6.3 Four actions are identified going forwards.

Action 1 – a) Digitise information in relation to older planning applications that are held on microfiche to enable the public to self-serve, reducing the demand on staff time and to reduce the need for travel.

b) Digitise re-surveyed data relating to trees covered by Tree preservation Orders so that the information is accurate and available online and the public can research their enquiries themselves rather than seek this from our Tree Officer, Support Team or Duty Officer.

Action 2 – To finalise and seek political approval for a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.

Action 3 – To continue to invest in our staff to ensure professional qualifications are achieved and professional development takes place – this includes the accreditation of two of our heritage officers so that the Senior Officer can determine applications for listed building consent involving grade II\* buildings without reference to Cadw and the Heritage Officer can determine grade II-related applications.

Action 4 – improve communication and relationships with our community and town councils by providing training on the Planning process with an emphasis on enforcement matters.

### 6.4 Value of Planning

RTPI Cymru has published a toolkit which measures the value generated by a local authority planning service. The tool has been developed to capture the economic, social and environmental value at a local planning authority level across Wales. The tool and its 'Value Dashboard' have been designed to provide RTPI Cymru and the Welsh Government with a platform to demonstrate to local authorities, national policy makers, the private sector, researchers and other broader policy and media audiences, the value planning contributes and how planning is positively contributing to Wales' seven well-being goals. The data has been updated to reflect planning permissions and completions in the current reporting period, 2023/24. The toolkit has been a very useful means of promoting the good work undertaken by the department that is often taken for granted. Over this period, the toolkit concludes that the service has contributed £68.6M to the local economy by the allocation of sites in the LDP, the safeguarding of land, the granting and implementation of planning permissions, the operation of its enforcement function and the securing of planning obligations. In the two previous reporting periods this equated to approximately £85M – that higher figure reflecting

more construction activity compared to 2023/24 because of the lifecycle of the LDP and the impact of the phosphate pollution issue.

We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods, although it is fair to say that the parameters behind the model are now several years out of date and may undervalue the socio-economic contribution of the local planning authority. We will enquire with the RTPI and Welsh Government as to whether the data assumptions behind the toolkit are proposed to be updated. The 'Dashboard' data summarises the Planning Service's contribution below:

# Value of Planning in Monmouthshire 2023/24

## Planning service key data



30 FTE jobs in planning service



956 applications handled



£0.8m collected in fees

## LDP Land Safeguarded

- 20 369 ha Green Wedge
- 3,174 ha Local Nature Reserve
- 434 ha open space
- 7,942 ha minerals

## LDP Land Allocated

- Residential** 111 ha
- Commercial** 244 ha
- Retail & leisure** 0 ha
- Waste** 0 ha

## LDP Value

**£2.1m uplift value**  
*(based on land allocated for whole plan period)*

**Value adding policies 89%**

## Applications

- 7 major
- 949 minor
- 0 other

0 Statutory 0 Discretionary

- 0 DCOs dealt with
- 2 DNS dealt with
- 51 LBC applications granted
- 10 refusals appealed
- 0 judicial reviews

## Decisions

7 934 approvals (98%)

x 22 refusals (2%)

150 xxx

### Refusals

Delegated Committee

### Approvals

Delegated Committee

## Permissions

### Permissions

0 Conditional local plan

0 Dependent from local plan

### Residential

219 units

£8.8m uplift value

35% affordable

### Retail & leisure

2,560 m<sup>2</sup>

£0.1m uplift value

### Tourism

500 bedspaces

1000 self catering

### Commercial

5,737 m<sup>2</sup>

£0.1m uplift value

### Renewables & other

2 MW

0 tonnes waste

0 tonnes minerals

0 ha remediation

5 ha formal open space

## Contributions

### Section 106 income

£1.2m

#### Breakdown

- Traffic and employment
- Sports and leisure
- Environment
- Community facilities
- Formal open space
- Primary health
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Active travel
- Highways
- Affordable housing

### CIL income



£0 total value

## Completions

### Residential

291 units

26% affordable

£50.9m uplift value

£0.4m council tax p.a

### Retail & leisure

1,150 m<sup>2</sup>

£1.3m uplift value

18 gross FTE jobs

#N/A

### Commercial

8,200 m<sup>2</sup>

£5.2m uplift value

132 gross FTE jobs

#N/A

### Renewables

1 MW

£5,000 community benefit

### Tourism

500 167 FTE jobs

800 self catering

## Enforcement

- 286 enforcement complaints
- 4 planning contraventions
- 6 enforcement notices
- 5 breach of condition notices
- 0 stop notices
- 2 section 125 notices



## Wider indicators

£84,000 spend on consultancy fees



£10,000 health benefits of affordable housing provision p.a

11 internal consultees



£90,000 recreational benefits from open space created p.a

1 Energy statements

0 EqIAs

3 Environmental statements

2 Travel plans

0 HIAs

4 Transport assessments

In 2021/22 the total value of planning was

**£68.6m**

SOURCES: Planning function outputs (LPA or dev), Land and property value data (JLL estimates), business rates valuations (Valuation Office Agency), employment data (Office for National Statistics), Council tax rates (Stats Wales), Health benefits of Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal database), Community benefits from renewables (Renewables UK Cymru). Some of the calculations require highly specific assumptions (for example, the 100m<sup>2</sup>/ha) where possible, benchmarks have been employed otherwise reasonable assumptions have been used. FTE jobs are gross full-time and gross FTE jobs estimates based on assumption of 100% occupancy and do not factor in any displacement. Numbers of applications and decisions are unlikely to match up as these can take place in different financial years for a single application. 'Value adding policies' refers to the proportion of policies the team has identified as adding tangible value that are included in local plans. Approvals and refusals do not sum to 100% due to applications carry across years. The total value of planning only incorporates some of the metrics presented in the dashboard.



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## **7.0 OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD**

The following opportunities for the coming year have been identified as a result of this Annual Performance Report, our LDP AMR and our Service Business Plans:

- Continue to roll out the project management of major planning applications, where appropriate, via planning performance agreements to seek, by best endeavours, timely and well-managed processing of such applications, providing a good customer experience for the customer;
- To digitise the information held by the Council in microfiche or paper form to improve the web site experience for customers and improve customers' pathways to information (Action 1 a and b);
- To finalise and implement a Buildings At Risk Strategy to safeguard some of our most precious but vulnerable heritage assets (Action 2);
- Continue with the replacement Monmouthshire LDP because of the need to facilitate the identification/ allocation of additional housing land as well as addressing the demographic and employment challenges of the County;
- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups, including the Welsh Government, the WLGA and the RTPi
- To support our colleagues via training opportunities, regular reviews and one-to-ones to invest in their careers, ensure their well-being and mental health are resilient and their productivity remains high, helping to meet the challenge of retaining our officers in a currently highly dynamic job market in the built environment professions (Action 3).
- To provide training and support for our colleagues in community and town councils to enable them to engage with the planning process more effectively (Action 4).
- To respond to the challenges raised by the economic squeeze on households and enterprises to ensure our County's communities and local economy can be resilient and can thrive.
- To manage the threat of phosphate pollution in our two main rivers to reduce environmental damage, while finding new ways of managing this issue that will still allow sustainable development to take place in those catchment areas.

7.2 Progress will be measured via our 2024/25 Annual Performance Report, 2024/25 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2024 - 2027 Service Business Plan.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

8.1 Officer time and costs associated with the preparation of this APR are met from the Development Management budget and work is carried out by existing staff.

## **9.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:**

9.1 Sustainability, equality and well-being considerations are central to the planning service's activities. This report is a review of the previous year's performance against targets and benchmarking information, however the

proposed five actions for future improvements seek to improve service delivery to the benefit of our customers and communities.

9.2 An Equality and Future Generations Evaluation is attached as an appendix.

## **10.0 OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

10.1 There is normally a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to undertake an Annual Performance Report and to submit it to the Welsh Government by 31 October in a given year. Unfortunately, this year WG have been unable to provide the benchmarking figures to enable the council to review its current status against the Wales average. Issues such as the continued impact of the pandemic, resources limitations and environmental considerations such as water quality in rivers would have an impact on Local Planning Authorities across Wales therefore it is unfortunate that this data is not available to enable a fair comparison of our performance. We could decide not to conduct the APR for this reason however we do consider it useful to carry on with this work to help us continue to improve our service. Consequently, the following options were considered:

- 1) Recommend the APR for submission without any changes;
- 2) Recommend the APR for submission but with changes to the proposed actions for the coming year.

10.2 The APR provides a useful reflection on last year's performance against targets and benchmarking information. The proposed actions seek to continue that journey of improvement, given the resources available to us. Consequently, option 1 is the preferred option.

## **11.0 HOW WILL SUCCESS BE MEASURED?**

11.1 The Planning Service is measured against a number of clear and consistent (across Wales, and over time) performance indicators allowing aspects of a successful service to be measured. These indicators need to be viewed in the context of other factors, including customer and stakeholder feedback, outcomes (which are not always captured by performance indicators), and whole Council priorities.

11.2 The Council's Performance & Overview Select Committee scrutinised the APR via a report considered on 19 November 2024.

11.3 We strive to deliver the best service possible, and our mission is to advise on, give permission for, and ensure the best development possible.

## **12.0 CONSULTEES**

- Planning Committee and the Performance & Overview Select Committee
- SLT
- Communities and Place DMT

## **13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:**



None.

#### **14.0 AUTHOR & CONTACT DETAILS:**

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#### Appendices

1. Annual Performance Report and its related Performance Framework
2. Equality and Future Generations Evaluation

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<p><b>Name of the Officer</b> completing the evaluation Philip Thomas</p> <p><b>Phone no:</b> 01633 644809 <b>E-mail:</b> philipthomas@monmouthshire.gov.uk</p>	<p><b>Please give a brief description of the aims of the proposal</b></p> <p>Submit the Monmouthshire Planning Service’s ninth Annual Performance Report (APR) to the Welsh Government in accordance with statutory requirements and publish the Report on the Council’s website.</p>
<p><b>Name of Service</b></p> <p>Planning Services (Planning Policy and Development Management)</p>	<p><b>Date Future Generations Evaluation</b> form completed</p> <p>28 October 2024</p>

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6. **Are your proposals going to affect any people or groups of people with protected characteristics?** Please explain the impact, the evidence you have used and any action you are taking below.

The APR identifies areas for improvement within the Development Management Team of the Council. Actions outlined to achieve this should bring positive benefits to all members of Monmouthshire’s population. A more efficient and effective Development Management service will secure the aims of the Welsh Spatial Plan, namely Promoting a Sustainable Economy, Valuing our Environment and Respecting Our Environment, be it through timely approval of planning proposals for sustainable forms of development or by preventing harm to acknowledged interests, such as amenity, public safety, health or biodiversity by either refusing permission for inappropriate development or by taking timely and reasonable enforcement action.

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Age	See statement above	None at this stage	See above

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Disability	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Gender reassignment	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Marriage or civil partnership	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Pregnancy or maternity	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Race	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Religion or Belief	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Sex	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Sexual Orientation	See statement above	None at this stage	See above
Welsh Language	<p><i>.Under the Welsh Language measure of 2011, we need to be considering Welsh Language in signage, documentation, posters, language skills etc.and also the requirement to promote the language.</i></p> <p>Welsh is treated on equal terms as English in the planning process</p>	None at this stage	See above

Protected Characteristics	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has on the protected characteristic	What has been/will be done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Poverty	See statement above	None at this stage	See above

2. **Does your proposal deliver any of the well-being goals below?** Please explain the impact (positive and negative) you expect, together with suggestions of how to mitigate negative impacts or better contribute to the goal. There's no need to put something in every box if it is not relevant!

Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
<p><b>A prosperous Wales</b> Efficient use of resources, skilled, educated people, generates wealth, provides jobs</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> The APR seeks to shape an efficient and engaging development management process providing support and guidance for customers to ensure the best development possible for the benefit of local communities and to protect the character and appearance of Monmouthshire. Planning can provide economic investment and growth, and can protect acknowledged interests such as local amenity and townscape. Identifying areas for improvement and learning what works well elsewhere can ensure that customers are getting effective advice early in the process which is critical in securing positive outcomes and appropriate forms of development.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> Some areas for improvement may necessitate customers having to pay for elements of</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> The APR identifies areas for improvement to make the development management process more responsive and efficient for our customers' applications for developments that are of a high standard.</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> Care will be taken to improve the planning process via interventions set out in the associated report. The team will focus on positive outcomes rather than being process driven. We will continue to monitor performance through the actions we take, relevant performance measures and 1:1s with case officers.</p>



Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
	the service which can be considered to be costly by some customers.	
<p><b>A resilient Wales</b> Maintain and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems that support resilience and can adapt to change (e.g. climate change)</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> An effective and efficient DM service allows case officers to consider the implications of any development on biodiversity and ecosystems at an early stage in the application process. Officers who are the decision-makers are able to consider the impacts of decisions on ecological interests. This system would not deteriorate as a result of the proposed revisions to the DM process and indeed may provide a more effective system.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> None identified.</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> The actions identified should speed up the delivery of sustainable development.</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> None</p>
<p><b>A healthier Wales</b> People's physical and mental wellbeing is maximized and health impacts are understood</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Actions to improve the DM process would enhance support and guidance for customers when submitting a planning application and provide the opportunity for officers to add value to development proposals and provide acceptable forms of the development, which should improve Monmouthshire citizens' access to local services, such as shops, health and recreational/ play facilities, or prevent inappropriate development from harming the amenity of an area, or indeed the health of local people. Development should promote active travel to ensure it is sustainable.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> None identified.</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> The approval and delivery of development proposals can have a positive impact on health and well-being and foster social and community pride in their communities.</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> None</p>
<p><b>A Wales of cohesive communities</b> Communities are attractive, viable, safe and well connected</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> The area of work undertaken by the Planning Team directly and indirectly influences the</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> The timely approval and delivery of sustainable development</p>




Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
	<p>appearance, viability, safety and connectivity of communities via planning policy and land use planning decisions. Providing clear and effective guidance and support to customers at an early stage in the planning process is more likely to lead to positive outcomes that enable the best forms of development possible. This is critical in providing sustainable communities. Taking timely and reasonable enforcement action against inappropriate development can reduce impact on local amenity and health.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> None identified.</p>	<p>proposals can have a positive impact on the character and appearance of an area, promote well-being and foster social and community pride.</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> None</p>
<p><b>A globally responsible Wales</b> Taking account of impact on global well-being when considering local social, economic and environmental wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> The area of work undertaken by the planning section directly and indirectly influences local social, economic and environmental well-being via planning policy and land use planning decisions. The approval of renewable energy proposals will allow Wales to play its part in tackling the effects of climate change.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> none.</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> None</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> None</p>
<p><b>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language</b> Culture, heritage and Welsh language are promoted and protected. People are encouraged to do sport, art and recreation</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Planning decisions promote the value and significance of the historic built environment by ensuring that it is a direct consideration in planning policy and land use planning decisions. Planning decisions generally facilitate the provision of tourist and recreation development, including playing fields</p>	<p><b>Better contribute to positive impacts:</b> Timely planning decisions will ensure that proposals foster civic pride through well-designed development in historic areas or through the removal of development that has a negative impact on a heritage designation via enforcement action.</p> <p><b>Mitigate any negative impacts:</b> None</p>

Well Being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive and negative impacts.	What actions have been/will be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
	<p>and built development. The Welsh language is now a material planning consideration.</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> none.</p>	
<p><b>A more equal Wales</b> People can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances</p>	<p><b>Positive:</b> Appropriate and timely development management decisions should bring positive benefits to all members of Monmouthshire's population through policies that seek to achieve the five main aims of the Wales Spatial Plan, namely Building Sustainable Communities, Promoting a Sustainable Economy, Valuing our Environment, Achieving Sustainable Accessibility and Respecting Our Environment</p> <p><b>Negative:</b> none.</p>	None.



3. How has your proposal embedded and prioritised the sustainable governance principles in its development?

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p>Long Term</p> <p>Balancing short term need with long term and planning for the future</p>	<p><i>We are required to look beyond the usual short term timescales for financial planning and political cycles and instead plan with the longer term in mind (i.e. 20+ years)</i></p> <p>The LDP covers the period 2011-21. The Council's Development Management function which makes planning decisions seeks to implement the policies of the LDP which promotes sustainable development. By its nature, therefore, it cannot look beyond the next five-year period but the SA/SEA of the LDP would have ensured consideration of the impact on future generations. The revision to the LDP will seek to adopt land use planning policies up until 2033 taking into account the county's socio-economic challenges.</p>	<p>Ensure that the LDP and its policies have been subject to an appropriate level of scrutiny. This also applies to the current revision of the LDP.</p>
 <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Working together with other partners to deliver objectives</p>	<p>Monmouthshire's Planning Service believes in working with its customers (which include not just applicants but the public, other Council departments, other local authorities, third sector agencies and businesses) to improve its offer to its customers to meet their needs. This APR identifies areas for improvement to achieve this aim. It is subject to scrutiny and endorsement by Members of both the Council's Performance &amp; Overview Select Committee and Planning Committee. Members and officers of the Council have a specific interest in the subject to ensure that sustainable forms of development are carried out in Monmouthshire.</p>	<p>Any observations offered by Committee will be taken into account as part of the submission process to Welsh Government.</p>

Sustainable Development Principle	Does your proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not explain why.	Are there any additional actions to be taken to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
 <p data-bbox="136 488 297 517">Involvement</p> <p data-bbox="349 264 517 448">Involving those with an interest and seeking their views</p>	<p data-bbox="546 256 1312 320"><i>Who are the stakeholders who will be affected by your proposal? Have they been involved?</i></p> <p data-bbox="546 352 1323 504">The APR is subject to consultation with Members of the Performance and Overview Select Committee and Planning Committee whose Members have a specific interest in the subject, as well as senior officers of the Council.</p>	As above.
 <p data-bbox="136 775 297 804">Prevention</p> <p data-bbox="349 539 506 839">Putting resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse</p>	<p data-bbox="546 539 1323 799">The APR's aim is to identify areas for improvement in the Planning Service and to initiate actions for meaningful improvement. This would provide the basis for timelier decisions to secure much needed sustainable development. Taking timely and reasonable enforcement action against inappropriate development can reduce impact on local amenity and health.</p>	N/A
 <p data-bbox="136 1121 297 1150">Integration</p> <p data-bbox="349 879 517 1142">Considering impact on all wellbeing goals together and on other bodies</p>	<p data-bbox="546 879 1301 1015"><i>There is space to describe impacts on people, economy and environment under the Wellbeing Goals above, so instead focus here on how you will better integrate them and balance any competing impacts</i></p> <p data-bbox="546 1046 1317 1150">The work undertaken by the Planning Service directly relates to promoting and ensuring sustainable development and its three areas: environment, economy and society.</p>	Improvements to the DM process would facilitate the implementation of the LDP which has been subject to a Sustainability Assessment that balances the impacts on Social, Economic and Environmental factors.

4. Council has agreed the need to consider the impact its decisions has on the following important responsibilities: Social Justice, Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding. Are your proposals going to affect any of these responsibilities?

	Describe any positive impacts your proposal has	Describe any negative impacts your proposal has	What will you do/ have you done to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Social Justice	None.	None at this stage	n/a
Safeguarding	None.	None at this stage	n/a
Corporate Parenting	None.	None at this stage	n/a

**5. What evidence and data has informed the development of your proposal?**

The APR has been written having regard to data and evidence provided by the following:  
 The Development Management Quarterly Survey 2023/24; the Council's Local Development Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24; the Planning Service's Business Plan 2023-26 and the MCC/ Public Service Board Well-being Plan.

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**SUMMARY: As a result of completing this form, what are the main positive and negative impacts of your proposal, how have they informed/changed the development of the proposal so far and what will you be doing in future?**

*.This section should summarise the key issues arising from the evaluation. This summary must be included in the Committee report template*

The work undertaken by the Council's Planning Service, and in particular the Development Management function, directly relates to promoting and ensuring sustainable development. The APR 2023/24 would enable the service to identify areas of improvement in the processing of applications and in the enforcing of planning matters, and to engage with customers at an early stage of the planning process to ensure the most appropriate forms of development are approved within Monmouthshire. The planning process promotes sustainable forms of development, helping to create jobs and investment, while protecting material interests such as amenity, public safety and biodiversity.

**7. ACTIONS: As a result of completing this form are there any further actions you will be undertaking? Please detail them below, if applicable.**

What are you going to do	When are you going to do it?	Who is responsible
See actions in the APR	See APR	See APR

**8. VERSION CONTROL:** The Equality and Future Generations Evaluation should be used at the earliest stage, such as informally within your service, and then further developed throughout the decision making process. It is important to keep a record of this process to demonstrate how you have considered and built in equality and future generations considerations wherever possible.

Version No.	Decision making stage	Date considered	Brief description of any amendments made following consideration
1	Performance & Overview Select Committee (with Planning Committee Members invited)	19/11/2024	TBC

## **Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority**

### **PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2023 –24**

#### **PREFACE**

I am very pleased to introduce the tenth Annual Performance Report for Monmouthshire County Council's Planning Service.

This report shows that Monmouthshire's Planning Service continues to perform effectively, with none of the thirteen indicators in need of improvement against the Welsh Government's targets. We are performing well in dealing with all types of planning applications and I am pleased to note that the committee process, which has involved a cohort of newer Members, is working effectively showing a very good relationship between Members and officers in this authority. The whole team has worked with great commitment and the positive impact of several members of staff recruited over recent reporting periods is evident. The good performance is also encouraging given the backdrop of the significant resource issues in organisations who respond to consultations on our planning applications.

Where we think there are areas that could be improved, we have clear actions to address those elements of the service.

Good planning is central to the Council's purpose of achieving a zero carbon County and supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life, while also generating growth in the economy and protecting the heritage and landscapes that make our County the beautiful place it is. Good planning is key to achieving our well-being objectives for everyone who lives, works and spends time in our beautiful County. As part of this, Planning has a major role in tackling climate change, placemaking, delivering affordable homes for those in housing need and assisting the local economy to overcome current economic pressures.

Councillor Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is Monmouthshire's tenth Annual Performance Report, which looks at the performance of the Planning Service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government (WG) targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance last year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available to us. The objective of the APR is to reflect on and celebrate good performance, identify areas for improvement, and look across Wales to identify potential areas of best practice that we could learn from or share with others.
- 1.2 The nature of the performance indicators means their focus is on decision speed and customer service rather than measuring whether or not better outcomes have been achieved. It has not yet been possible to identify an objective way of measuring outcomes, however we seek to prioritise securing the best scheme possible rather than traditional indicators relating to speed of decision-making. Research has identified that our customers' priority is securing planning permission: customers generally understand the benefits of good design and, within reason, do not see the time taken as a priority.
- 1.3 For the purposes of this report, performance is analysed across the four key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in WG's Planning Performance Framework:
- Efficiency;
  - Quality;
  - Engagement; and
  - Enforcement.

The performance of the Local Development Plan is more than adequately covered in the Annual Monitoring Report, which will be submitted to WG in Autumn 2024. For the other areas in the Planning Performance Framework, performance data has been obtained by Monmouthshire officers from the Development Management Quarterly Returns and our own back-office system. Comparisons have been made with the Welsh average performance for each measure over 2018/19 (the latest reporting period for this national data) as well as our own performance against the measures over 2023/24. Performance is ranked as 'good', 'fair' or 'needs improvement'.

- 1.4 Based on the performance information in Section 6 and Annex A, we can be very pleased with the service we deliver given the challenges we have faced. During this period:
- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks, or an agreed timescale, improved compared to the year before rising from 89% to 93% and remained well above the WG target of 80%;  
The average time to determine all applications reduced to 100 days (from 110 days in 2022/23) as the team worked through newer solutions (including the NRW review of environmental permits) that addressed the phosphate pollution issue that had contributed to delays in determining many applications in the central and northern parts of the County;

- The proportion of major applications determined within agreed timescales was 67% and involved just two out of three applications, slightly below the pre-pandemic Welsh average in 2018/19 (68%);
- 84% of listed building applications were determined within approved timescales, an improvement on the previous period (75%) and we provided a valued Heritage service for Blaenau Gwent Council;
- The percentage of applications that were approved was 97%, an indicator that our pre-application advice service is working well;
- During this reporting period, we closed 263 applications seeking pre-application advice. 282 submissions for pre-application advice were received in 2023/24. Of these 35 led to planning applications, and 34 of these were approved and one was withdrawn. Consequently, we have a 100% success rate of applications that went to decision stage and followed our pre-application advice.

1.5 A summary table of our performance can be found in Annex A.

The two enforcement measures which had been in need of improvement over previous reporting periods are now both 'Good' (green). There has been sustained improvement in this element of the service for over two years.

## 2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the Local Planning Authority operates, both corporately and in terms of Monmouthshire as a county, for the 2023-24 period.

### Corporate Context

2.2 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and submitted its ninth Annual Monitoring Report to Welsh Government in October 2023.

2.3 We contribute to delivering the Council's high-level objectives, set out in the Council's Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28. The objectives we contribute to are:

MCC Purpose	A zero carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life
CC Objectives	A Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced; A Green place to live and work, with reduced carbon emissions, and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency; A Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres, where businesses can grow and develop; A Safe place to live where people have a home and community where they feel secure; A Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued; A Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.

2.4 The Planning Service's purpose, 'To plan for, advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development', links directly to all six of these objectives. The Planning Service sits within Communities and Place Directorate.

2.5 The Planning Service is made up of i) the Planning Policy and ii) the Development Management (DM) teams. The primary purpose of the Planning Policy team is to prepare and monitor the statutory Local Development Plan (LDP) and assist in its effective implementation through the Development Management (planning application) process. This ensures that the land use and sustainable development objectives of the Council are met ensuring the provision of an adequate supply of land in sustainable locations for housing, retail, education, recreation, tourism, transport, business, waste and other needs, whilst protecting the county's valued environmental, heritage and cultural assets. This work aligns directly with achieving the Council's objectives.

2.6 Key areas of work for the Service include:



- Carrying out a replacement of the Monmouthshire LDP.
- Preparing and co-ordinating thematic supplementary planning guidance to help to foster the interpretation and implementation of LDP policy.
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with both internal and external partners.
- Monitoring and evaluating development plan policies, including preparing the statutory LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
- Maintaining the LDP evidence base and ensuring fitness for purpose for future LDP revision.
- Providing pre-application advice to customers;
- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
- Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development;
- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB and the Brecon Beacons National Park;
- Providing a heritage service for our neighbouring colleagues in Blaenau County Borough that works in a manner that is consistent and as well-resourced as the one provided for Monmouthshire.
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable in the public interest.

2.7 The main customer of the Planning Service is the applicant of any planning application, however there are numerous stakeholders including individuals, communities, businesses, third sector organisations, other Council Services and elected Members.

### **Local Context**

2.8 Located in South East Wales, Monmouthshire occupies a strategic position between the major centres in South Wales, the South West of England and the Midlands. The County shares a border with the neighbouring Local Planning Authorities of Newport, Torfaen and Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) in Wales and Gloucestershire, the Forest of Dean and Herefordshire in England, with Severn crossing links to South Gloucestershire. The County forms the gateway to South Wales and is part of the Cardiff Capital City Region. This location gives the County a distinctive identity.

### **Our people**

2.8.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 93,000 in 2021<sup>1</sup>. Almost 8% of residents reside within the BBNP area of the County. The County has a low population density of 1.1 persons per hectare – significantly lower than the South East Wales average of 5.3 persons per hectare – reflecting the area's rural nature. Only 53% of the population lived in wards defined as being urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).

2.8.2 Our population has been increasing steadily, up 7.6% between 2001 and 2011 compared with the Wales average of 5.5%. The increase from 2011 to 2021<sup>2</sup> represents a lower

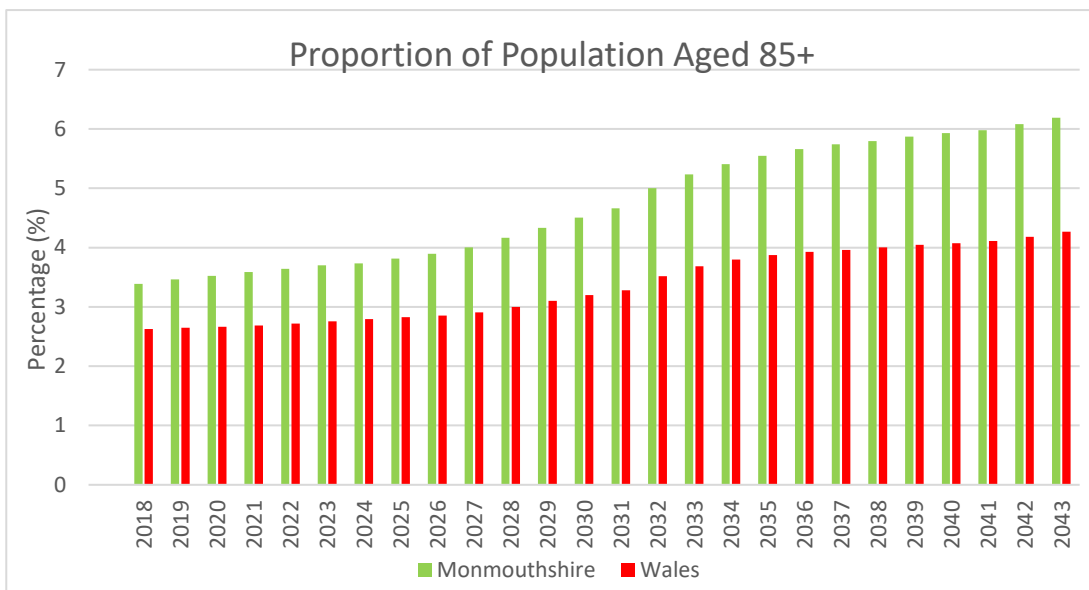
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<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 2021

<sup>2</sup> Source: Census 2021

increase at 1.8%, however, this is marginally higher than the growth for Wales over the same period of 1.4%. This increase is wholly attributable to inward migration, with natural change showing negative growth. The County has a relatively high and increasing proportion of older age groups, and a lower and decreasing proportion of younger adults compared with the UK and Wales averages. The graph below illustrates the proportion of those aged 85+ in Monmouthshire in comparison to Wales, based upon the 2018-based local authority population projections for Wales, 2018 to 2043. It shows that the trend in the ageing demographic is likely to continue. The 2021 Census suggests the proportion of those aged 85+ is 3.4% in Monmouthshire compared to 2.7% in Wales.

Source: Office for National Statistics, Stats Wales

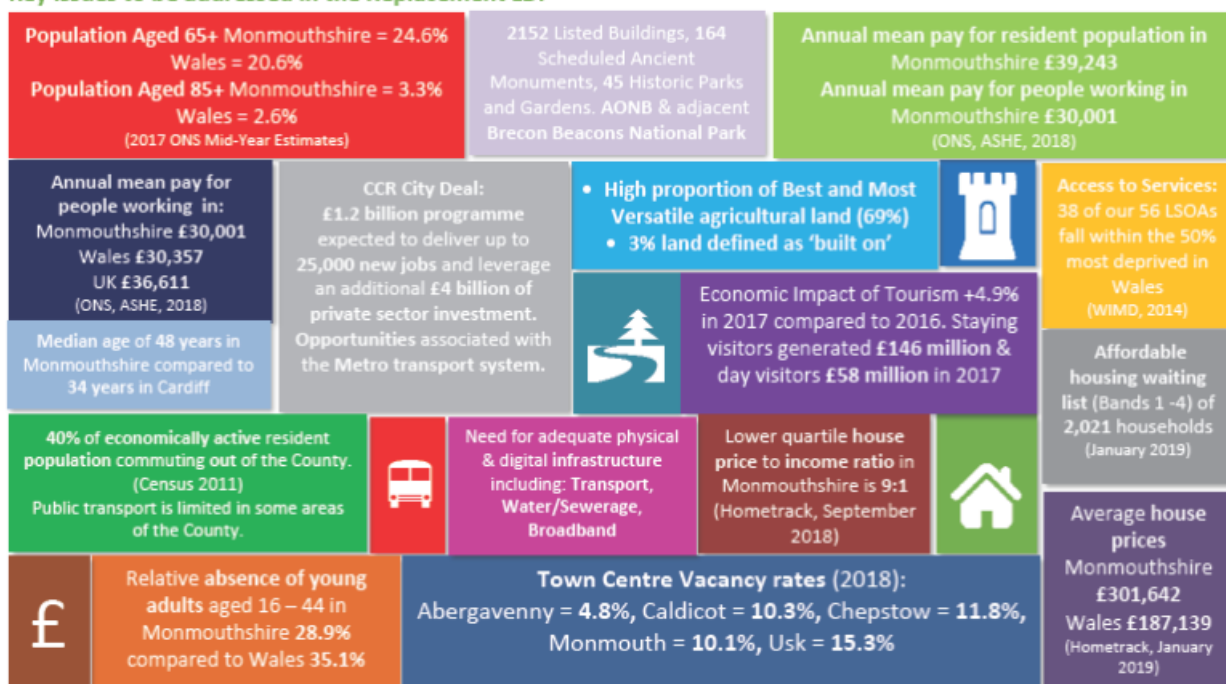


Demographic change has significant implications for economic activity and demand for services to enable our citizens to continue to live independent lives.

2.8.3 The following diagram encapsulates the issues that the Council are seeking to address during the development of the Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) over the next few years (Please see revised delivery agreement):

## Monmouthshire Replacement Local Development Plan – Issues, Vision and Objectives

### Key Issues to be addressed in the Replacement LDP



## 2.9 Housing and quality of life

### 2.9.1 The County has three broad categories of settlement:

- The historic market towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth have developed over many years to have a wide range of opportunities for employment, shopping, community facilities and public transport;
  - The newer settlements in Severnside of Caldicot/Portskewett, Magor/Undy, Rogiet and Sudbrook where recent high levels of residential growth have taken place without the local jobs and community facilities to match. The area benefits, however, from a strategic location at the 'Gateway' to Wales with good access to the employment markets of Newport, Cardiff and Bristol;
- The rural area, containing the small town of Usk, the larger villages of Raglan and Penperlleni, and a large number of smaller villages, widely dispersed around the County.

2.9.2 Over the last decade, housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged over 300 dwellings per annum, although there have been significant annual variations with 205 completions in 2014/15 and 443 in 2018/19. To deliver the LDP housing requirement, 488 completions per annum were required (2013-2021). During 2023/24 there were 291 housing completions. This is discussed in more detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report.

2.9.3 Land Registry data indicates that average house prices in Monmouthshire have increased with average prices in April 2024 standing at £338,352 compared to quarter 1 (January to March) 2022 of £334,148, and significantly higher than the 2012 quarter 4 baseline price (£188,720). Between 2006 (the time the Monmouthshire Unitary Development Plan was

adopted) and March 2024, there have been 5,174 completions of which 1,012 were affordable, equating to 20% of all dwellings built. Since LDP adoption (2014) to March 2022 there have been 3,169 completions of which 648 were affordable, equating to 20% of all dwellings constructed. This affordable housing provision only relates to those units derived from planning consents but additional affordable housing provision can result if open market houses are purchased by a registered social landlord.

2.9.4 Monmouthshire is generally a prosperous County offering a high quality of life for its residents. However, poor access to community facilities and declining local service provision is an issue for rural and ageing communities. The health of Monmouthshire's population is generally better than the Wales average, with greater life expectancies and a higher proportion of residents classing themselves as being in good health (2011 Census). Fewer residents in the County suffer with a limiting long-term illness compared with Wales as a whole. The rate of reported crime in Monmouthshire tends to be lower than for Wales as a whole.

## 2.10 **Our economy**

210.1 The ONS Annual Population Survey suggests that the County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (77.7% January 2021 - December 2021) compared to neighbouring Authorities including Newport (72.7%), Cardiff (74.9%), Blaenau Gwent (71.1%) and Torfaen (70.3%). The equivalent figure for Wales is (73.1%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:

- In 2020, the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) records that the public administration, education and health sector accounts for 30.9% of jobs;
- The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 27.9% of jobs;
- Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County (see 2.10.3 below).

2.10.2 The County had 4,490 active enterprises in 2021, 10% of which were in the property and business services sector. The three sectors with the most businesses were Professional, scientific and technical services (17%); Agriculture, forestry and fishing (16%) and Construction (11%). Accommodation and food services accounted for 7%. The UK Business count dataset accessed via Nomis also suggests that 98.5% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees).

2.10.3 Tourism is vital to Monmouthshire's economy and generates income to support a wide range of businesses that benefit from spending by visitors. According to figures supplied by tourism economic indicator 2023 STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor), the sector generated £329.8M for Monmouthshire's economy in 2023 and supported 3,462 full-time jobs. Each visitor contributing to the county's economy by shopping on our high streets, purchasing food and drink, fuel, services and accommodation spent an average of £93.43 per day.

2.10.4 Monmouthshire's approved Destination Management Plan ran to 2020 when Covid hit and while Monmouthshire's visitor economy has recovered well post pandemic (15% real growth since 2017), there is a need to renew the Plan to align it better with Monmouthshire's Corporate & Community Plan, and to broaden the metrics to demonstrate the cultural, social and environmental benefits of tourism alongside the economic benefits.

Our citizens will be engaged from the outset to ensure that while the Plan is still informed by the market, it will be shaped by local people.

2.10.5 The 2021 Welsh Government Commuting Statistics indicate that 61.2% of the County's working residents work in the area. This is an increase on previous years and suggests that there has been some progress in meeting the aspiration to increase the proportion of resident workforce working within Monmouthshire over the Plan period. However, the same data source suggests that Monmouthshire has a net outflow of 2,800 commuters – with 14,300 commuting into the Authority to work and 17,100 commuting out. There was significant in-commuting from Newport (3,000), Torfaen (1,900) and Blaenau Gwent (1,400), and from England (2,900). The main areas for out-commuting were Newport (2,600), Torfaen (2,400), Cardiff (1,600) with a further 4,600 going to Bristol. A relatively high proportion of Monmouthshire's residents travel long distances to work, with a high usage of the private car. Heavy reliance on the private car and limited opportunities for public transport is a particular issue in rural areas.

2.10.6 Other key challenges facing the Planning Service include areas at risk of flooding (including most of the Gwent Levels and the flood plains of the Rivers Usk and Wye and their tributaries). There are, however, flood defences within the towns of Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk.

## 2.11 **Our built heritage**

2.11.1 The Monmouthshire LPA area has a rich built heritage and historic environment which includes:

- Approximately 2,400 Listed Buildings, of which 2% are Grade I, 10% are Grade II\* and 88% are Grade II. Of note, around 176 Listed Buildings have been identified as being at risk.
- 31 Conservation Areas – designated for their special historic or architectural interest, covering some 1,648 hectares in total;
- 45 Historic Parks and Gardens – identified as having a Special Historic Interest, covering 1,910 hectares;
- 3 Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest identified by Cadw (parts of Blaenavon, the Gwent Levels and the Lower Wye Valley);
- 164 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

### 3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

#### Organisational setting

3.1 Towards the end of 2021/22, the Planning Service underwent significant changes, primarily in the Applications, Heritage and Enforcement Teams. In the Applications Team, three Development Management Officers left the team. Unsurprisingly, this left significant gaps in staffing, diverted more work onto remaining staff and managers and led to a downturn in end-to-end performance across all types of applications, not just householder and minor applications. As a response, several posts were replaced.

During December 2023 a Senior DM Officer left for a promotion in another SE Wales local authority. Owing to the reduced workload for senior officers as a result of the lifecycle of the LDP (virtually all major sites have been built out) this post has been frozen and is subject to annual review. We retain four working Senior DM officers in the structure.

In Heritage there was a minor re-structure following the decision to suspend collaboration work with Torfaen Council (this was partly owing to resource pressures and partly due to the lack of ability to retain the Senior Heritage Officer post funded by Torfaen). A post for a Heritage Officer was filled in July 2022. The Planning Service's Tree Officer left in October 2022 to take up a similar role in S-W England and was replaced in January 2023 by a new officer also working 0.6 FTE like their predecessor.

In Enforcement, two vacant posts were filled in early 2022. Owing to these gaps in appointments, significant pressure had been experienced by the remaining team members and performance unsurprisingly dropped off.

In the Planning Support Team, a Planning Support Officer opted to take up a part-time role and the vacant element of their role was filled in 2022.

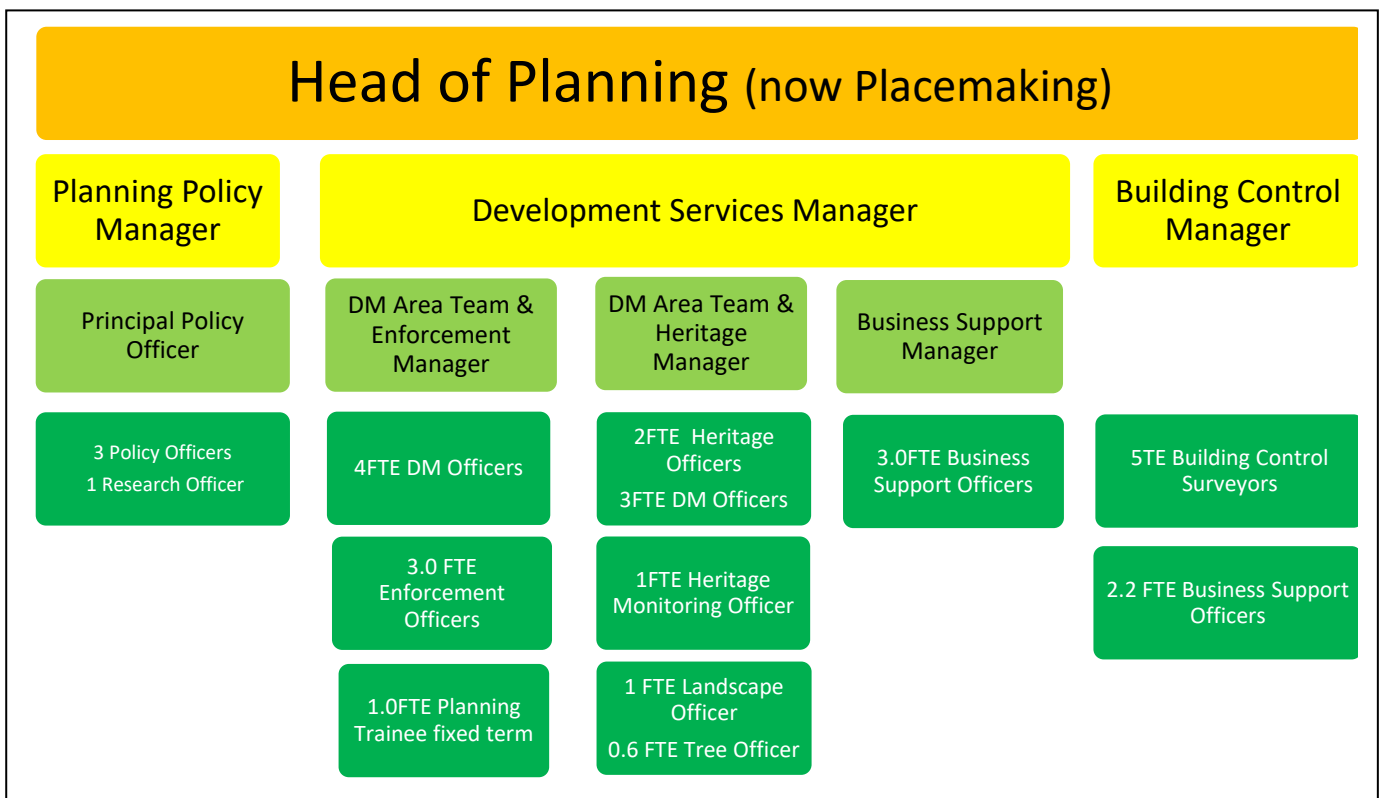
In the Policy Team, a Senior Officer retired in December 2022 and the Research Officer left for a new job in the private sector in September 2022. Recruitment proved challenging and they were replaced during summer 2023.

Performance has been strong across all elements of the service since the vacant posts were filled. There has been a much reduced turnover in the last two reporting periods leading to more stability and higher morale. The risk from losing existing staff to the highly competitive job market for planning and specialist professional staff in both the public and private sectors is noted as a threat that we will need to consider and address.

### 3.2 Department structure and reporting lines for the 2023-24 reporting period



### Planning Service staffing structure for the 2023-24 reporting period



## Budgets

- 3.3 The two main costs for the service are staff costs and the LDP budget (money is transferred from the above budget to sit in an LDP reserve, built up to fund the next LDP). Income is generated by planning application fees and charges for our discretionary services including our pre-application advice service (the latter amounted to approximately £51,000 over 2023/24, slightly higher than the previous year) as well as the Planning Service’s newer discretionary services that are discussed below.
- 3.4 Planning application fee income (£400k) was the lowest received since 2011/12. The prime cause was the reduction in the number of major planning applications which provide much higher fees compared to minor applications. This has partly been the result of the impact of the riverine phosphate constraint in settlements like Abergavenny and Monmouth (this is discussed in later sections of this Report) as well as the late stage of the lifecycle of the LDP. Fee projection work means there is likely to be slightly more activity on housing sites over 2024/25 in respect of sites allocated in the current LDP that have not yet come forward (Tudor Road and Drewen Farm, Monmouth) now that the phosphate issue in respect of the main towns has been resolved. Delays to the adoption of the RLDP means there will be no new allocated housing sites coming forward until Deposit/ Examination stage, probably in the later part of 2024/ early 2025. Application fees are set periodically by Welsh Government but they do not rise by inflation each year (the last increase was in 2020) and fee income is dependent on economic activity which is also out of the Council’s hands.
- 3.5 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 50% of the cost of dealing with planning applications. Additional costs are incurred through the work involved in the statutory Development Plan, and via other services such as enforcement and heritage management. Increased planning application fee income is used to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council. In-year windfall extra income is used to balance the Council’s budgets and offset overspend in other services. Conversely as has been the case during recent years, underspend in other services was used to offset DM’s under-recovery of income, when economic and other circumstances resulted in a sudden drop in fee income. Application fee income has fluctuated significantly over recent years, and this poses a challenge for budget management going forward. Fee income is heavily influenced by the wider economy, for example house-building (which itself is affected by interest rates, mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Budgeted fee income</b>	£668k	£684k	£681k	£693k	£589k	£480k	£480k	£567k	£617k
<b>Actual income</b>	£560k	£430k	£653k	£666k	£494k*	£651k	£554k	£475k	

N.B. Fee income includes planning application fees, pre-application advice income and the discretionary fees for fast track applications. The 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22 figure also includes payment from Torfaen Council towards funding the joint Heritage Service, that has now ended.

\*This reduced level of income was then offset by a grant from WG due to the pandemic



### **Staff resources**

- 3.6 Staffing levels for the reporting period are shown in the chart at paragraph 3.2 above. Key changes over 2021-2023 saw significant turnover of staff within Planning as discussed in section 3.1 above.
- 3.7 For the reporting period, sickness levels were relatively low. It is fair to say that the recruitment of a new cohort of planners has revitalised the team following the end of the pandemic and has enabled the existing staff to get back on top of workloads. To tackle issues of performance and morale, managers put in place regular meetings, welfare chats, counselling and a more structured approach to performance management. In addition, we have invested in young planners who are seeking to enter the profession by providing a trainee post (a one year placement) in both the Policy and DM teams – the latter assisting the workload of the planning application case officers by having their own caseload of householder and minor applications.
- 3.8 Training and development opportunities for colleagues were primarily events organised by the Council itself or occasionally by the RTPI, including the Wales Planning Conference. There was also a law update by FTB Chambers and the annual Welsh Enforcement Conference. In-house opportunities were provided via quarterly Development Management and Planning Policy Liaison Meetings. There is also an opportunity for DM officers to discuss individual cases with colleagues at casework management meetings held twice a week. Two junior officers in the team are enrolled on the RTPI-accredited master's course studying Planning, part time in Cardiff University. A Heritage officer is studying the M.Sc. in Sustainable Building Conservation, part-time also in Cardiff University .

Three staff within DM have undertaken Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) qualifications over recent years.

## **4.0 OUR LOCAL STORY**

### **Workload**

- 4.1 Key projects during the reporting period included:
- In October 2023 Council endorsed updates to the Preferred Strategy following the statutory consultation/engagement in December 2022- January 2023. Work is currently progressing on the preparation of the Deposit Plan which is due to be completed in September 2024. It is anticipated that political reporting to seek endorsement of the Deposit Plan for public consultation and subsequent statutory engagement/consultation will take place in Autumn 2024. The revised RLDP timetable will be set out in an updated Delivery Agreement which will be reported to Council at the same time as the Deposit Plan.
  - Over the last two reporting periods the work pattern has adapted from 100% of our staff working from home to a more hybrid arrangement with officers using collaboration spaces in County Hall to meet as a group on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Support Team colleagues normally using the original space in the office to meet, scan and train colleagues. Site visits for planning applications have continued although we suspended visits for pre-application advice submissions until our resources were back to full capacity. During the pandemic we had let agents know that all applications to be submitted should be done so electronically as

the office was temporarily closed and paper forms of submission could not therefore be scanned for the case officer and consultation purposes. This appears to have produced a shift to almost 100% electronic submissions. Planning Committee has reverted to a hybrid arrangement with some Members preferring to attend in County Hall (others opting to attend virtually).

- We have continued providing a joint heritage service for Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Councils. This commenced in January 2019 and has provided our neighbouring authority with expert heritage advice without the need to employ its own officer or commission a consultant. MCC manages the service for BGBC via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and provides the staff to deliver a resilient heritage service assisted by BGBC funding.
- Towards the end of the 2021, as a planning authority we were faced with a new constraint of riverine phosphate pollution. Within Monmouthshire it was identified that within the River Usk 88% of the river's water bodies failed to meet the required water quality target and within the River Wye 67% failed to meet the target. As a result of this failure NRW issued detailed planning guidance (updated July 2023) to ensure that the environmental capacity of the rivers (which are designated special areas of conservation) do not deteriorate any further. Any proposed development within the catchment areas of the rivers that might increase phosphate levels need to clearly evidence within a planning application that the development can demonstrate phosphate neutrality or betterment in its design and/or its contribution to the water body. In most cases there will be limited capacity to connect to the public sewerage system and an alternative solution will have to be found. This requirement on drainage considerations has impacted on all development that increases the volume or concentration of wastewater. We have been working through the guidance and applying it to all new applications in those Wye and Usk catchment areas. This has sometimes delayed applications and many were on hold until the Council had developed a clear strategy for dealing with such issues. We continue to work with a wide range of agencies including WG, NRW, Welsh Water and other authorities (including new nutrient management boards) to find sustainable solutions to this significant environmental problem. Recent work has seen DC-WW commit to providing phosphate stripping technology at Monmouth and Llanfoist waste water treatments works by April 2025. This, allied to NRW's recent review of environmental permits for the main settlements' waste water treatment works, has led to the identification of solutions that will help bring forward much needed development (including affordable housing) in the main towns of Monmouth and Abergavenny as well as smaller settlements in the County.
- Delivering our bespoke pre-application advice service for potential applicants, as well as offering pre-purchase certificates and completion certificates.
- Successfully recruiting new staff and training them to adapt to their new roles in DM and Policy Teams.
- Implementing prioritised elements of the Team's Digital Plan to improve our processes and customer experience – including upgrades to the Idox Document Management System (DMS) and Public Access (PA).
- Securing detailed planning permissions for a 46-home affordable housing scheme north of Caldicot School, a significant employment development (B1, B2 and B8) at Severnbridge Industrial Estate and a 1km closed velo track at Llanfoist.

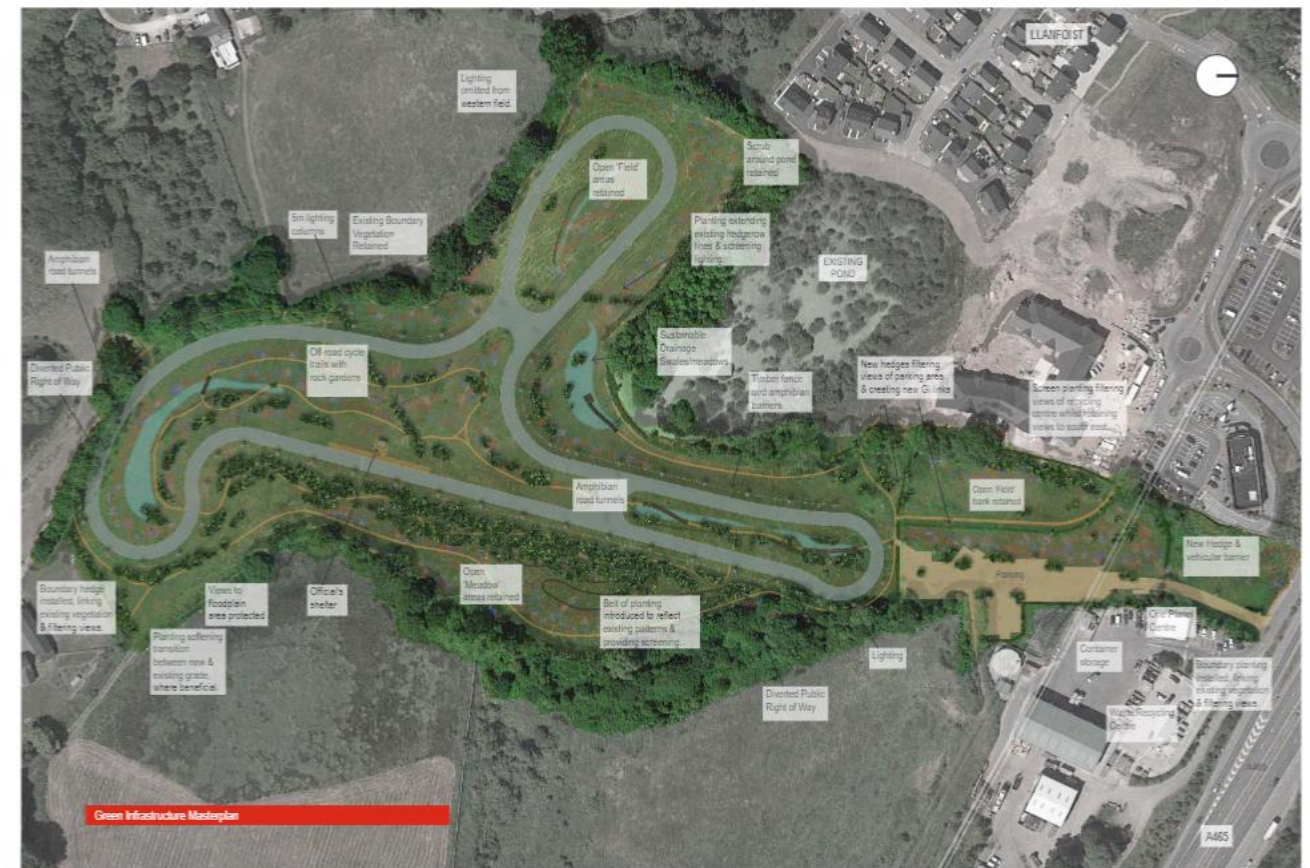


Image of the approved velo park at Llanfoist near the A465 (T), to be partly funded via S106 monies contributed by housing developments in Llanfoist and Abergavenny

4.2 Last year there was a decline in the number of applications received (5.7%), influenced by the UK’s current economic challenges, the impact of phosphate pollution in the riverine SAC catchment areas and the lifecycle of the LDP which is in the process of being replaced. The percentage of applications determined within agreed timescales improved by 4% on the previous year and is rated ‘green’ (93%). The proportion of approvals remained high at 97%. During 2023-24, 96% of applications were determined under delegated powers while 32 planning applications were decided by Planning Committee (Wales’s average in 2018/19 was 93%).

	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24
<b>Applications received</b>	1284	1117	1188	1126	1134	1126	1154	1014	956
<b>Applications determined</b>	1085	1087	1071	1101	1106	947	1152	1026	956
<b>% within 8 weeks or agreed timescale</b>	79%	90%	91%	88%	91%	91%	81%	89%	93%

<b>% applications approved</b>	95%	96%	95%	95%	97%	97%	97%	94%	97%
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4.3 A key area of work over the last four to five years has been the development of new, bespoke services. The most popular of these has been the Fast Track services for householder applications, lawful development certificates (LDCs) (existing and proposed) and listed building consent. Unfortunately due to the Covid pandemic followed by subsequent staffing challenges we had to suspend the Fast Track services. We reintroduced the Fast Track services over this reporting period following our successful recruitment drive. A summary of the current system as well as other bespoke services we offer is set out below.

4.4.1 The Fast Track service accelerates the administration and processing of the application for a relatively small additional charge (currently set at £230 – the standard householder application fee, plus the premium of £130 = £360, and £460 plus £255 = £715 for other applications). The offer is that Fast track applications are determined within 28 days following the submission of a valid application. This decision period varies for fast track applications for a certificate of lawfulness (10 days) and applications for listed building consent (35 days). In the unlikely event of not being able to achieve this target or agreement of a short extension of time (no more than 5 working days) we will refund the fast track element of the fee.

4.4.2 We also provide a *pre-purchase certificate* service aimed at people looking to buy a property in Monmouthshire. The application would provide the applicant with i) a planning history search; ii) details of planning permissions and listed building consents and iii) enforcement history relating to identified breaches of planning control. This service would include a site visit and identify whether there are any breaches of planning control and whether or not any breaches would be enforceable. The certificate confirms that any approved development at the site, up to the point of the request, has been carried out in accordance with approved plans and that there is no breach of planning control at the site. We aim to provide a written response within 28 days. This service looks at compliance with all types of planning permissions including listed building consent: it does not provide a substitute to lawful development certificates.

4.4.3 The other discretionary service we offer is a *certificate of completion*. The certificate will indicate whether or not the planning permission and/or Listed Building Consent applied for has been carried out in accordance with the approved plans, and also it would confirm the status of all planning conditions and any approved amendments if applicable. The purpose of this service is to offer support to applicants, agents or any other interested party that the works are appropriate and acceptable once they have been built. If there is an issue of noncompliance this will be brought to the applicant’s attention and an opportunity provided for the breach of planning control to be rectified. The service includes a site inspection and desk based research and investigation. We will aim to provide a written response within 28 days.

4.5 These discretionary services were commenced on 1st July 2017 (they were rolled out slowly and then gathered pace until the pandemic when lockdowns, restrictions and home-working meant the pressure on staff time needed a response; priorities were put on applications and pre-application advice so the fast track service was suspended). As they have now been recommenced, we will review the effectiveness of these services during the next reporting period.

4.6 In more recent years, we have introduced planning performance agreements (PPAs) with applicants to provide a systematic framework of project management for more complex planning applications with milestones agreed such as submission of the application, set meeting dates and a projected committee date. The first was pioneered at Fairfield Mabey strategic, mixed use site in Chepstow and was well-received by those involved including the applicant. During 2022/23, two PPAs were used for major proposals at Wales One, Magor (a large employment proposal) and the Wye Bridge active travel scheme. The fees for these two PPAs totalled approximately £40,000 which helped the Planning Team and internal consultees manage their resources to meet the target dates in the PPA. Owing to the limited numbers of major applications received, none were negotiated during 2023/24.

N.B. PPAs have been agreed for applications in the next reporting period (2024/25).

4.7 In relation to enforcement workload, the team were significantly hampered throughout the previous reporting period by vacancies in two posts due to those officers leaving for new roles either within the wider DM team or in a neighbouring authority. Positively, the more recent additional resource in the small team has seen performance improve substantially. We also recently noted that we were undervaluing the performance of the team by measuring the 'positive action' indicator wrongly, adding in the initial investigation period which should be measured separately. For 2022/23 this figure improved from the old method of measurement of 290 days to a more accurate 123 days which is now a fair level of performance. Additionally, a good standard has been achieved during the 2023/24 period (91 days). The need to improve this element of the service was previously an action in multiple APRs and we are now confident that the team is functioning well and has evidenced sustained improvement. Thus, this action has been achieved and is no longer required.

#### **4.8 Value of Planning**

4.8.1 RTPI Cymru has published a toolkit which measures the value generated by a local authority planning service. The tool has been developed to capture the economic, social and environmental value at a local planning authority level across Wales. The tool and its 'Value Dashboard' have been designed to provide RTPI Cymru and the Welsh Government with a platform to demonstrate to local authorities, national policy makers, the private sector, researchers and other broader policy and media audiences, the value planning contributes and how planning is positively contributing to Wales' seven well-being goals. The data has been updated to reflect planning permissions and completions in the current reporting period, 2023/24. The toolkit has been a very useful means of promoting the good work undertaken by the department that is often taken for granted. Over this period, the toolkit concludes that the service has contributed £68.6M to the local economy by the allocation of sites in the LDP, the safeguarding of land, the granting and implementation of planning permissions, the operation of its enforcement function and the securing of planning obligations. In the two previous reporting periods this equated to approximately £85M – that higher figure reflecting more construction activity compared to 2023/24 because of the lifecycle of the LDP and the impact of the phosphate pollution issue. We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods, although it is fair to say that the parameters behind the model are now several years out of date and may undervalue the socio-economic contribution of the local planning authority. We will enquire with the RTPI and Welsh

Government as to whether the data assumptions behind the toolkit are proposed to be updated.  
The 'Dashboard' data summarises the Planning Service's contribution below:

# Value of Planning in Monmouthshire 2023/24

## Planning service key data



30 FTE jobs in planning service



956 applications handled



£0.8m collected in fees

### LDP Land Safeguarded



20  
369 ha Green Wedge  
3,174 ha Local Nature Reserve  
434 ha open space  
7,942 ha minerals

### LDP Land Allocated



**Residential**  
111 ha



**Commercial**  
244 ha



**Retail & leisure**  
0 ha



**Waste**  
0 ha

### LDP Value

**£2.1m uplift value**  
*(based on land allocated for whole plan period)*

**Value adding policies/ 89%**

### Applications

7 major  
949 minor  
0 other

■ Statutory ■ Discretionary

0 DCOs dealt with  
2 DNS dealt with  
51 LBC applications granted  
10 refusals appealed  
0 judicial reviews

### Decisions

7 934 approvals (98%)  
x 22 refusals (2%)  
150 xxx

**Refusals**  
■ Delegated ■ Committee

**Approvals**  
■ Delegated ■ Committee

### Permissions



**Residential**  
219 units  
£8.8m uplift value  
35% affordable



**Retail & leisure**  
2,560 m<sup>2</sup>  
£0.1m uplift value



**Tourism**  
500 bedspaces  
1000 self catering

### Permissions

■ Core/strategic local plan  
■ Delegates from local plan



**Commercial**  
5,737 m<sup>2</sup>  
£0.1m uplift value



**Renewables & other**  
2 MW  
0 tonnes waste  
0 tonnes minerals  
0 ha remediation  
5 ha formal open space

### Contributions

#### Section 106 income

£1.2m  
Breakdown

- Training and employment
- Sports and leisure
- Environment
- Community facilities
- Formal open space
- Primary health
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Active travel
- Highways
- Affordable housing

#### CIL income



£0 total value

### Completions



**Residential**  
291 units  
26% affordable  
£50.9m uplift value  
£0.4m council tax p.a



**Retail & leisure**  
1,150 m<sup>2</sup>  
£1.3m uplift value  
18 gross FTE jobs



**Tourism**  
#NA



**Commercial**  
8,200 m<sup>2</sup>  
£5.2m uplift value  
132 gross FTE jobs



**Renewables**  
1 MW  
£5,000 community benefit



**Tourism**  
500 167 FTE jobs  
800 self catering

### Enforcement

286 enforcement complaints  
4 planning contraventions  
6 enforcement notices  
5 breach of condition notices  
0 stop notices  
2 section 125 notices



### Wider indicators



£84,000 spend on consultancy fees



£10,000 health benefits of affordable housing provision p.a



11 internal consultees



£90,000 recreational benefits from open space created p.a

1 Energy statements

0 EqIAs

3 Environmental statements

2 Travel plans

0 HIAs

4 Transport assessments

In 2021/22 the total value of planning was

**£68.6m**

SOURCES: Planning function outputs (LPA or dev), Land and property value data (LL estimates), business rates valuations (Valuation Office Agency), employment data (ONS), (English Homes & Communities Agency), Council tax rates (Stats Wales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal database), Community benefits from renewables (Renewables UK/Cymru). Some of the calculations require likely base assumptions of 1 course between 1 and 2ha. Where possible, benchmarks have been employed otherwise reasonable assumptions have been used. Figures for council tax and gross FTE jobs estimates based on assumption of 100% occupancy and do not factor in any displacement. Numbers of applications and decisions are unlikely to match up as these can take place in different financial years for a single application. 'Value adding policies' refers to the proportion of policies the team has identified as adding tangible value that are included in local plans. Approvals and refusals do not sum to 100% due to applications carry across years. The total value of planning only incorporates some of the metrics presented in the dashboard.



ARUP







Housing developments recently completed or near completion – top left site at Devauden that involved 60% of homes as affordable housing units; top right - a 100% affordable housing scheme on the site of a former garage block off Hereford Road, Abergavenny; bottom left – image of the ongoing Brunel Quarter strategic housing site on brownfield land at Chepstow; town houses on the Brunel Quarter development with associated green infrastructure.

### Local pressures

#### 4.9 Key local pressures include:

- Enabling delivery of the County’s housing needs: bringing forward allocated LDP sites; site viability; achieving good planning decisions, creating sustainable and balanced communities and seeking to achieve a good level of housing growth having regard to strong demand;
- Managing the development plan and development management process having regard to the impact of riverine phosphate pollution that has affected development proposals in the central and northern parts of the County significantly;
- Ensuring full capacity of our staffing levels, promoting retention of staff via training and other opportunities, and to recruit promptly where vacancies arise;
- Securing timely consultation responses from consultees, both internal and external;
- The work associated with the replacement of the adopted LDP having regard to the challenging timetable for delivery;
- The need to help resource and deliver the Strategic Development Plan for SE Wales;
- The lack of income from major planning applications due to the gap between the implementation of the current LDP and the adoption of its successor with associated impacts on budgets to resource the service;
- Career development and training support for staff in the light of limitations on budgets.

4.10 One of our key challenges is balancing our aim of creating quality places in a timely manner while ensuring schemes are viable and help deliver housing numbers. We are, however,



clear that quality is more important than quantity. The introduction of a place-making emphasis in Planning Policy Wales is welcomed, as is its form that embraces the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

## 5.0 Customer Feedback

5.1 The number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded. There were 4 complaints received over 2023/24, compared to 14 during 2022/23. The theme of these complaints stemmed from concerns about lack of communication from case officers during the processing of planning applications and were resolved following intervention by line managers and subsequently improved dialogue with the applicant. There was also a willingness for applicants to become more tolerant once they understood the team’s situation in respect of delays caused in waiting for consultation responses from key consultees. Another complaint related to a concern about lack of enforcement relating to construction management at a large housing site where enforcement action was not taken as quickly as the community had wanted or because it would not have been expedient to do so.

Planning is a contentious area dealing with access to land and changes to property values. It will always be the subject of complaint from third parties who are dissatisfied with a decision. This measure needs to be taken in context and the number of justified complaints is arguably a more pertinent measure. We do however aim to treat all customers with care and respect and to communicate clearly with the public so that they understand what the relevant planning issues are when we make decisions. There is always a degree of subjectivity so there will inevitably be disagreement about the weight given to the respective issues in the planning decision.

Notwithstanding the number of complaints, none of the four complaints investigated under the Council’s formal Complaints Procedure were deemed to be justified as was the single one escalated to Stage 2 (investigated by a senior council officer unconnected with the Planning Department). In addition, none were considered appropriate to be investigated by the Public Service Ombudsman.

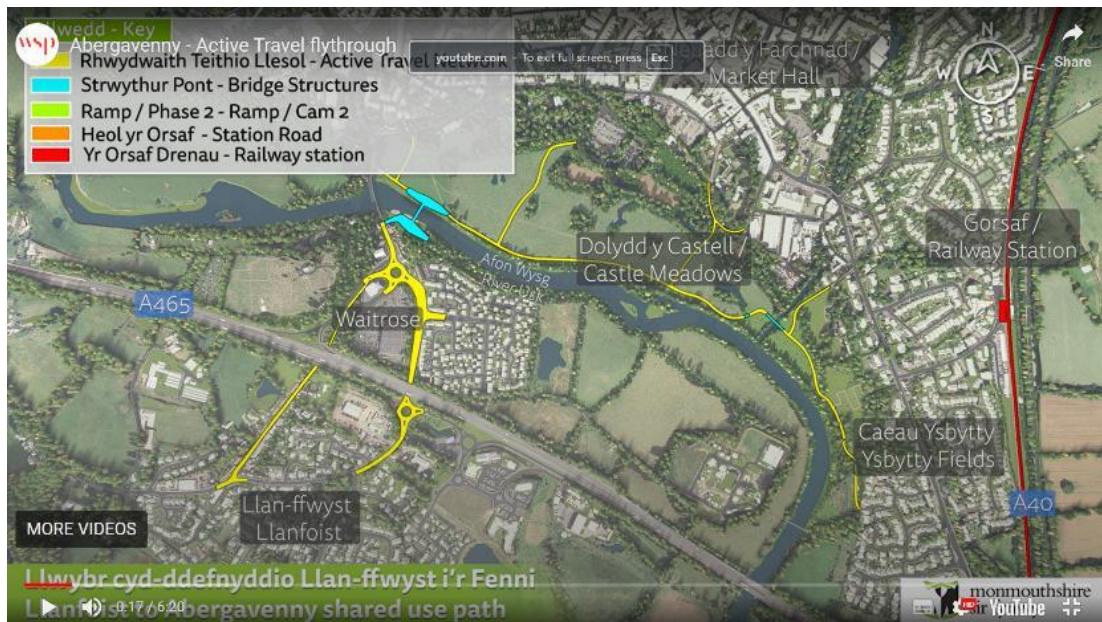
As far as enforcement of planning control is concerned, there is often a misunderstanding within the community about the scope for enforcement action by a planning authority or an appreciation of the length of time it takes to remedy a breach of planning control. The team will continue to engage with our communities to ensure there is improved dialogue and clearer understanding of both the justification for action and the speed it takes. This ties in with Action 4) of the Action Plan (see Section 6.5 below).

We received twenty-four recorded compliments over 2023/24.

	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24
Number of Stage 1 formal complaints received	5	4	14	13	21	18	14	4
Number of Stage 2 formal complaints	2	1	4	2	2	6	5	1

investigations received								
No of Stage 2 complaints upheld or partially upheld	0	0	3 partially upheld	2 elements of the complaint partially upheld	2 partially upheld	0	0	0
No of Ombudsman complaints upheld or partially upheld	0	1 upheld	0	0	0	0	0	0
No of compliments received	9	2	6	6	4	4	17	24

5.2 Quality customer service continues to be a service and organisation priority so the momentum and desire to improve remain. We are introducing a new feedback form (online) for customers to engage with us in respect of our pre-application advice service.



Illustrations showing the approved Active Travel links to be provided at Llanfoist and Castle Meadows to link the areas more effectively with Abergavenny town centre (and eventually the Railway Station) avoiding the narrow and hazardous road bridge over the River Usk which is a deterrent to cyclists and pedestrians.

## 6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2023-24

- 6.1 This section details our performance in 2023-24. It considers both the Planning Performance Framework indicators and other available data to help paint a comprehensive picture of performance. Where appropriate we make comparisons between our performance and the all-Wales picture, although the absence of data for 2019/20 – 2023/24 from WG means we have to compare performance to the Welsh average over 2018/19.
- 6.2 Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making (this aspect is not covered in this APR as the information is more than adequately analysed in the latest LDP Annual Monitoring Report);
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

6.3 Based on the performance information we can be very pleased with the service we deliver. During this period:

- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales was good at 67%, and was above the Good target of 60% (2 out of 3 applications);
- The end-to-end period for determining major planning applications increased from 120 days in 2022/23 to 436 days in 2023/24; this related to just three applications – one being the approved velo park at Llanfoist that was significantly delayed by phosphate pollution issues (including a Welsh Government holding request for a potential call-in, subsequently withdrawn) and another related to an industrial development at Caldicot on an allocated site that was held up by flood assessment issues for a protracted period;
- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales remained high at 93%, an improvement on the previous year (89%) demonstrating the effective recruitment and training up of new officers in the Applications team;
- The proportion of applications we approved remained high at 97%;
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service, and followed our advice 100% were approved;
- We ‘won’ eight out of ten appeals against our decisions to refuse planning permission, well above the ‘Good’ standard of 66% or more;
- We dealt with a large number of applications for listed building consent (51 applications) and 84% of these were determined within agreed timescales;
- Enforcement performance improved for the measure relating to the percentage of enforcement cases investigated in 84 days (rising from 65% to 83%) which is now rated ‘Good’, and the performance significantly improved in respect of the average time to take positive action which fell from 123 days to 91 days, also rated ‘Good’. We investigated 286 enforcement cases and served 13 notices.
- Significant s106 monies (approx. £1.2M) were received towards important community infrastructure schemes including the Magor Hub and the velo park proposal as a result of granting permission for major developments such as those at Rockfield Farm/ Vinegar Hill - Undy, Deri Farm - Abergavenny and Grove Farm - Llanfoist.

This shows that the team is working effectively and has overcome the longer-term effects of vacancies and issues such as phosphate pollution. Our performance has been very good and our pre-application advice service is effective.

The Previous APR’s actions involving reviewing the Enforcement Team’s performance and implementing measures to improve output, initiating the Buildings at Risk Strategy,

digitising our enforcement register and upgrading our back office software systems to process applications more efficiently were all completed.

- 6.4 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. Of the 12 ranked indicators, 10 are ranked 'Good', while 2 are 'Fair' and none are in 'need of improvement'.

	Number of indicators
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'good'	10
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'fair'	2
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance 'needs improvement'	0

- 6.5 Four actions are identified going forwards:

Action 1 – a) Digitise information in relation to older planning applications that are held on microfiche to enable the public to self-serve, reducing the demand on staff time and to reduce the need for travel.

b) Digitise re-surveyed data relating to trees covered by Tree preservation Orders so that the information is accurate and available online and the public can research their enquiries themselves rather than seek this from our Tree Officer, Support Team or Duty Officer.

Action 2 – To finalise and seek political approval for a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.

Action 3 – To continue to invest in our staff to ensure professional qualifications are achieved and professional development takes place – this includes the accreditation of two of our heritage officers so that the Senior Officer can determine applications for listed building consent involving grade II\* buildings without reference to Cadw and the Heritage Officer can determine grade II-related applications.

Action 4 – improve communication and relationships with our community and town councils by providing training on the Planning process with an emphasis on enforcement matters.

**Action 1 – a) Digitise information in relation to older planning applications that are held on microfiche to enable the public to self-serve, reducing the demand on staff time and to reduce the need for travel.**

- 6.6 We still hold substantial information on older planning applications in microfiche form. Retrieving such information is time-consuming and inefficient and the lack of accessible information for the public leads to a high volume of calls and enquiries to the Council's Support Team and daily Duty Officer. Digitising this information will reduce phone calls and emails to all those officers and will free up time to carry out work of greater value to the service and customers, such as processing submissions for pre-application advice and the

applications themselves. This necessary but relatively costly action is likely to be funded externally as part of the migration of local authority data resulting from the HM Land Registry assuming management of local searches.

***b) Digitise re-surveyed data relating to trees covered by Tree preservation Orders so that the information is accurate and available online and the public can research their enquiries themselves rather than seek this from our Tree Officer, Support Team or Duty Officer.***

- 6.7 This is a time-consuming project and will no doubt be an action for successive APRs to come. There is a need to re-survey the existing and often out of date tree preservation records held by the Council from the 1950s to the present and then digitise this accurate information on the Council's GIS layers so that it can be made available to the public to self-serve. The re-survey work will require additional resource via our own Tree Officer and colleagues in the Council's Grounds Maintenance Team in MonLife. We are developing a template to start this structured approach to the re-survey.

***Action 2 – To finalise and seek political approval for a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.***

- 6.8 There are competing demands on the Heritage Team and many requests from the community are received to intervene to stop the decay of several prominent listed buildings throughout the County. Officer time and financial resources are limited in this regard, but an action plan agreed by Members would help to prioritise the cases that warrant priority working and action. To this end a Buildings at Risk Strategy and action plan was proposed to be developed in the previous APR to manage this process more effectively and to help the communities understand the choices we make when opting to take appropriate action to save and protect such assets. The strategy would put a methodology in place for drawing out the worst buildings and then set out appropriate actions as to how these are tackled; in all likelihood there would be actions identified to address the worst 5-10 buildings at risk so it is a more manageable and transparent process. This process started in this reporting period and was largely completed but is extended into the next period to allow it to be finalised and then consulted upon to gain political agreement.

***Action 3 – To continue to invest in our staff to ensure professional qualifications are achieved and professional development takes place – this includes the accreditation of two of our heritage officers so that the Senior Officer can determine applications for listed building consent involving grade II\* buildings without reference to Cadw and the Heritage Officer can determine grade II-related applications.***

- 6.9 Over recent years there has been a relatively high turnover of staff within the team. To ensure that our colleagues feel valued and supported, we have committed to helping more junior staff to study to achieve professionally-accredited qualifications. Three of our staff are now enrolled on undergraduate courses. More established members of staff will be supported by training opportunities, many of which are organised internally to reduce costs. Some events have also been combined with training events for Council Members (see also



Action 4 below). These have covered issues like planning enforcement, one planet developments / rural enterprise dwellings, S106 agreements, affordable housing and active travel. Two of our heritage officers are seeking accreditation from Cadw so that they can determine applications for listed building consent under Cadw's delegation scheme. One of those officers already has accreditation to deal with grade II buildings but is seeking advanced delegation to be able to determine proposals involving grade II\* buildings. Our Heritage Manager is already accredited for applications concerning grades II and II\* buildings, and is understood to be the only local authority officer in Wales who holds this endorsement.

***Action 4 – improve communication and relationships with our community and town councils by providing training on the Planning process with an emphasis on enforcement matters.***

- 6.10 It is several years since the last training involving an introduction to the Planning process was carried out with community and town councillors and inevitably there will be a new cohort of members who lack knowledge and confidence when interacting with the planning system as they carry out their work for the local community. This is often borne out in the range of queries we get from local community councils especially regarding enforcement issues. To this end, we propose to carry out refresher training on the planning process with some focus on planning enforcement. County councillors who are also community or town councillors will be encouraged to attend to provide an element of leadership and to stimulate engagement.



The new Severn View Park Care home, an innovative design approach to dementia care using more intimate and personal spaces; part of the strategic mixed-use development at Crick Road, Portskewett, allocated in the LDP.

### **Opportunities and Risks going forward:**

6.10 The following opportunities for the coming year have been identified as a result of this Annual Performance Report, our LDP AMR and our Service Business Plans:

- Continue to roll out the project management of major planning applications, where appropriate, via planning performance agreements to seek, by best endeavours, timely and well-managed processing of such applications, providing a good customer experience for the customer;
- To digitise the information held by the Council in microfiche or paper form to improve the web site experience for customers and improve customers' pathways to information (Action 1 a and b);
- To finalise and implement a Buildings At Risk Strategy to safeguard some of our most precious but vulnerable heritage assets (Action 2);
- Continue with the replacement Monmouthshire LDP because of the need to facilitate the identification/ allocation of additional housing land as well as addressing the demographic and employment challenges of the County;
- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups, including the Welsh Government, the WLGA and the RTPI
- To support our colleagues via training opportunities, regular reviews and one-to-ones to invest in their careers, ensure their well-being and mental health are resilient and their productivity remains high, helping to meet the challenge of retaining our officers in a currently highly dynamic job market in the built environment professions (Action 3).
- To provide training and support for our colleagues in community and town councils to enable them to engage with the planning process more effectively (Action 4).
- To respond to the challenges raised by the economic squeeze on households and enterprises to ensure our County's communities and local economy can be resilient and can thrive.
- To manage the threat of phosphate pollution in our two main rivers to reduce environmental damage, while finding new ways of managing this issue that will still allow sustainable development to take place in those catchment areas.

6.11 Progress will be measured via our 2024/25 Annual Performance Report, 2024/25 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2024 - 2027 Service Business Plan.





Image of Magor Community Hub partly funded via significant s106 agreement financial contributions from local developments allocated in the Local Development Plan (above); and the building as constructed in September 2023 (below)



ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

MEASURE for 2022/23 APR	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
<b>Efficiency</b>			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	>60	50.1-59.9	<50
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	70.1-79.9	<70
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+
Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	80+	70.1-79.9	<70
<b>Quality</b>			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5-9	9+
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+
<b>Engagement</b>			
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE 2018/19	Monmouths hire LPA 2022/23	Monmouths hire LPA 2023/24
68%	5 out of 7 applications = 71%	2 out of 3 applications = 67%
232	120 days	436 days
88%	916 out of 1026 = 89%	887/956 = 93%
77	110 days	100 days
75	50 out of 67 = 75%	43 out of 51 = 84%
9	2 out of 35 = 6%	2 out of 32 = 6%
68%	7 out of 11 = 64%	8 out of 10 = 80%
0	0	0
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes

MEASURE for 2022/23 APR	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
<b>Enforcement</b>			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	>80	70.1-79.9	<70
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	<100	101-200	200+

WALES AVERAGE 2018/19	Monmouths hire LPA 2022/23	Monmouths hire LPA 2023/24
Yes	Yes	Yes
72%	250 out of 384 cases = 65%	237 out of 286 cases = 83%
199	123 days	91 days