

# **Monmouthshire LPA**

## **PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2020 – 21**

### **PREFACE**

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

This report shows that Monmouthshire's Planning Service continues to perform well, with none of the twelve relevant 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 been held via a virtual meeting over the reporting period, is working effectively showing an excellent relationship between members and officers in this authority. The whole team showed commendable resilience during the pandemic (that affected all of this reporting period) in continuing to turnaround planning applications and heritage work and to investigate and resolve enforcement cases in a timely manner.

Where we think there are areas that need improving, we have clear actions to improve those elements of the service.

Good planning is central to the Council's purpose of building sustainable, resilient communities while also generating growth in the economy and protecting the heritage and landscapes that make our County the beautiful place it is. It is central 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 key role in assisting the local economy to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and we are committed as an authority to ensure this happens.

Councillor Sara Jones, Cabinet Member

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is Monmouthshire's seventh Annual Performance Report, which looks at the performance of the Planning Service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government 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 five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:
- Plan making;
  - Efficiency;
  - Quality;
  - Engagement; and
  - Enforcement.

Owing to the absence of national performance data from Welsh Government (WG) in relation to performance over 2019/20 and 2020/21, similarly to last year's APR, the Plan making element has been omitted. The performance of the Local Development Plan is more than adequately covered in the Annual Monitoring Report, also being submitted to WG in October 2021. 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. In the absence of all Wales data for 2020/21, comparisons have been made with the Welsh average performance for each measure over 2018/19 (the latest time period for this national data) as well as our own performance against the measures over 2020/21. 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 remained at 91%, was well above the national target of 80% and was above the Welsh average;

- The average time to determine all applications did increase to 92 days (from 72 days in 2019/20) but that is wholly explained by the impact of the pandemic on our ability to visit sites and the impact of caring/ home-schooling on our capacity to work;
- The proportion of major applications determined within agreed timescales was 78% and was 10% above the Welsh average in 2018/19, despite the fact the pandemic had an impact on application turnaround times;
- 88% of listed building applications were determined within approved timescales and we provided a valued Heritage service for Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent councils that is discussed later in this Report;
- The percentage of applications that were approved remained at 97%, well above WG average;
- Over 2020/21, we closed 377 submissions for pre-application advice
- 106 planning applications stemmed from the pre-application advice we gave. Of those that have been determined 6 were refused (5.5%), 6 were withdrawn (5.5%) due to a change in the applicants' circumstances and 94 were approved (89%). All six that were refused had not followed the advice we gave at pre-application stage. 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. This year there are 13 relevant indicators and of these 12 are ranked:

- Monmouthshire's performance is ranked 'good' against 8, 'fair' against 4 and there are none 'in need of improvement'. One of the 'fair' results relates to the average time taken to determine all applications in days; this stood at 92 days, missing the target of 67 days but can be explained by the challenges imposed by the pandemic and related lockdowns on our colleagues' ability to visit sites and their reduced capacity to work owing to redeployment, home-schooling and caring arrangements. The other fair measures related to decisions taken by Members that were contrary to the officer recommendation (there were only two decisions out of thirty-five so numbers are low and are not of immediate concern) as well as the two enforcement measures that have to be considered in the context of the pandemic and having regard to a key member of that small team being away from work for a considerable part of this reporting period. Indeed, the enforcement team's performance held up remarkably well in the circumstances.
- Our appeal performance has improved significantly since the 2018/19 period, and now stands at 100% of appeals being dismissed which is well above the expected standard of 66% and the previous years' performance of 86%.

Further commentary on the performance against these measures is set out in Section 6 and Appendix A.

1.6 In the light of the above and having regard to our key work areas, four actions are proposed going forward:

*Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service's Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.*

*Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.*

*Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service's enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers.*

*Action 4 – Continue to review the collaboration arrangements in relation to heritage services with neighbouring authorities (Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils) and to develop 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 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to improve customer service.

## 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 2019-20 period.

### Corporate Context

- 2.2 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and will be submitting its seventh Annual Monitoring Report in October 2021.
- 2.3 The purpose of the Planning Service is to help build sustainable and resilient communities that support the well-being of current and future generations in Monmouthshire, which is a shared purpose with the Council's public service board partners. This is at the heart of everything we do.  
We contribute to delivering the Council's well-being objectives, which align to the Public Service Boards objectives, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2017-2022, the specific objectives we contribute to are:

MCC Purpose	Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities
MCC Well-being	The best possible start in life
Objectives	Lifelong well-being
	Maximise the potential of the natural and built environment
	Thriving and well-connected county
	Future-focussed Council

- 2.4 The Planning Service's purpose links directly to Monmouthshire County Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities.
- 2.5 The Planning Service sits within the Council's Enterprise Directorate. The Enterprise Vision provides a strategic context for the development and promotion of an enterprising culture, which builds business resilience and creates high value outcomes for Monmouthshire's communities.
- 2.6 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 four of the Council's Well-being objectives while being prepared to work innovatively aligns with the fifth objective regarding a Future-focussed Council.

- 2.7 The Monmouthshire Public Service Board Well-being Plan identifies a key issue as being the need to respond to demographic change, with the County having an increasingly ageing population. The Planning Service has an important part to play (alongside Housing colleagues) in readdressing the supply and mix of housing stock to ensure suitable and affordable housing is available to all demographic groups.
- 2.8 The Planning Service in its policy-making role and when making decisions on planning applications has a significant part in the Well-being goal that seeks to “Protect and enhance the resilience of our natural environment whilst mitigating and adapting to the impact of climate change”. The PSB Well-being Plan acknowledges this by i) identifying Planning’s (and its partners’) capacity to improve the resilience of ecosystems by working at a larger scale (landscape) to manage biodiversity and maximise benefits such as natural flood risk management; ii) ensuring design and planning policy supports strong, vibrant and healthy communities that are good for people and the environment, and iii) enabling renewable energy schemes, especially community owned schemes, and developing new solutions including storage, smart energy, heat and local supply.
- 2.9 The Planning Service’s Vision is “To enable through the land use planning policy framework the building of sustainable and resilient communities that support the well-being of current and future generations.”
- 2.10 In addition, the Development Management Service undertook a System Review between 2010-12 where its purpose was established as being: “To advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development” which complements the overall service vision.
- 2.11 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.
  - Depending on the outcome of legislative changes at the UK Government level, adopting and implementing the Community Infrastructure Levy. Infrastructure needs will be reviewed and consideration will be given to the best options for funding them alongside LDP progress.
  - Working within our unified Planning Service (Policy and DM) focussed on enabling positive outcomes.
  - 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.
  - Developing linkages with the Council’s emerging framework for community governance and development
  - 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 Torfaen 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.
- Preparing and submitting the Planning Services' Annual Performance Report (APR) to WG which assesses the effectiveness of the Monmouthshire's planning service and benchmarks it against other Councils' performance.
- Supporting Monmouthshire's businesses and communities to recover and thrive following the Covid-19 pandemic and facilitating new and innovative ways of sustaining our high streets.

2.12 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.

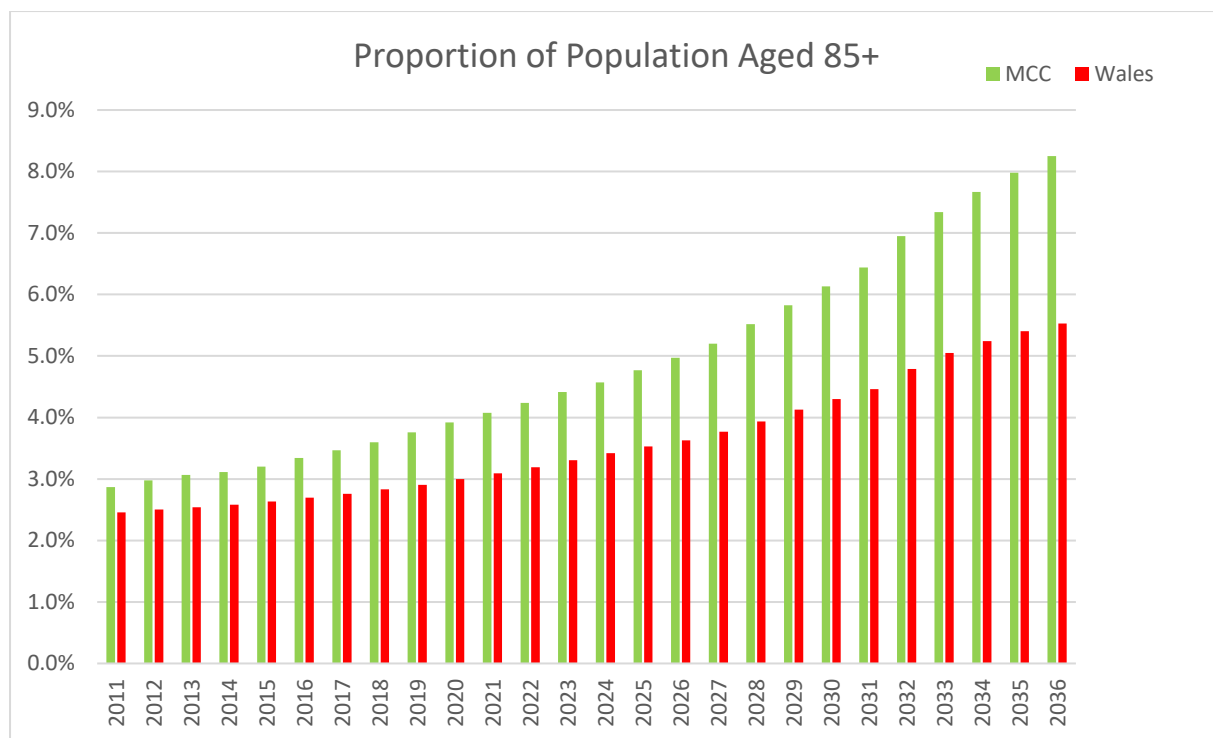
### **Local Context**

2.13 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.

### **2.14 Our people**

2.14.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 91,323 in 2011 (92,843 according to the 2016 mid-year estimate), 7.9% of which resides 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 live in wards defined as being urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).

2.14.2 Our population has been increasing steadily, up 7.6% between 2001 and 2011 compared with the Wales average of 5.5%. 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. This trend is predicted to continue.



Source: Office for National Statistics

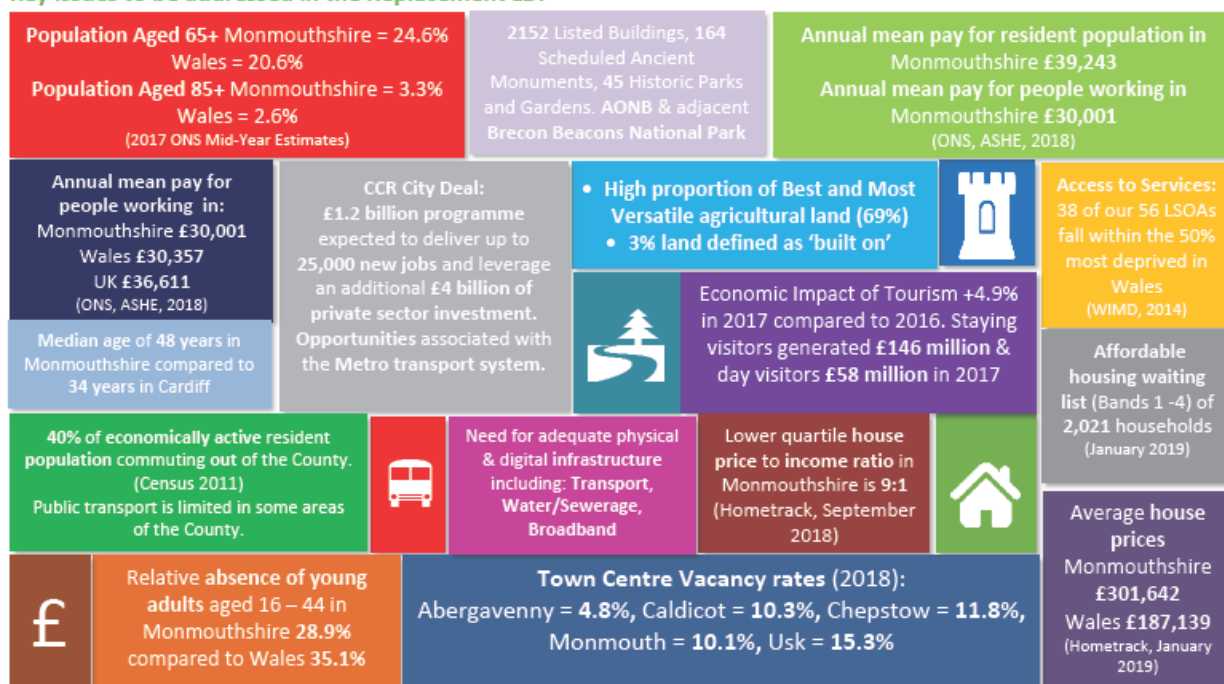
2.14.3 This demographic change has significant implications for economic activity and demand for services to enable our citizens to continue to live independent lives.

2.14.4 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



## 2.15 Housing and quality of life

### 2.15.1 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.

### 2.15.2 Over the last decade, housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged approximately 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 are required (2013-2021). To date, completions since LDP adoption have averaged approximately 300 per annum. This is discussed in more detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report although 419 dwelling completions (including 71 affordable homes) were recorded in 2020/2021.

2.15.3 Land Registry data indicates that average house prices in Monmouthshire have increased over the current monitoring period with average prices in quarter 1 (January to March) 2021 standing at £298,932, significantly higher than the 2012 quarter 4 baseline price (£188,720). Between 2006 (the time the Monmouthshire Unitary Development Plan was adopted) and March 2021, there have been 4,179 completions of which 868 were affordable, equating to 21% of all dwellings built. Since LDP adoption (2014) to March 2021 there have been 2,174 completions of which 495 were affordable, equating to 23% of all dwellings constructed.

2.15.4 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 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.

## 2.16 **Our economy**

2.16.1 The County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (62.8% in 2011) compared to neighbouring Authorities or the Wales average (58.2%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:

- The public administration, education and health sector accounts for 33.3% of jobs;
- The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 27.4% of jobs;
- Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County (see 2.16.3 below).

2.16.2 The County had 3,720 active enterprises in 2011, 27% of which were in the property and business services sector. Nearly 99% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees). Monmouthshire has experienced growth in eight of fourteen sectors in the decade to 2011, with the greatest increases in the property business services, hotels and catering and education and health sectors, while there has been a decline in the number of manufacturing businesses. Recent changes in Business Rates by the Welsh Government have disproportionately affected Monmouthshire.

2.16.3 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 STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor), the sector brought in £204.43m to Monmouthshire in 2017 and supported the equivalent of 2,968 full-time jobs, accounting for approximately 10% of the workforce. Each visitor contributing to the county's economy by purchasing food and drink, fuel, services and accommodation spends on average over £66 per day.

2.16.4 Monmouthshire's tourism performance over the life of the previous plan displayed an encouraging 10% real growth in terms of economic impact, an increase of 8.7% in visitor numbers and a 1.5% growth in full-time jobs. The approved Destination Management Plan has been developed following a review of the previous plan and is based on Monmouthshire's best prospects for tourism growth as well as extensive consultation with

stakeholders. The Plan capitalises on key opportunities for Monmouthshire, including its location at the gateway to Wales offering an initial chance to make a great impression, especially now that the Severn Bridge tolls have been phased out.

2.16.5 The 2015 Welsh Government Commuting Statistics indicate that 58.3% of the County's residents work in the area. Although less than the Welsh average of 69.4%, this is an improvement of last year's figure of 54.5%. This 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 900 commuters – with 17,800 commuting into the Authority to work and 18,700 commuting out. There was significant in-commuting from Torfaen (3,000), Newport (2,900), Blaenau Gwent (2,800) and from outside Wales (8,000). The main areas for out-commuting were Newport (3,900), Bristol (3,400), Cardiff (2,500) and Torfaen (2,100), with a further 6,400 commuting to other areas outside Wales. 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. These figures should be treated with caution, however, as the data is based on a small sample survey.

## 2.17 **Communications**

2.17.1 The County is easily accessible from the rest of Wales by the M4, A40, A449 and A4042 and from England by the M4 and M48 Severn Bridges and the A48, A40 and A465. The good road transport links connect the County to major population centres such as Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. Monmouthshire is served by a number of local and national bus routes, with main bus stations in the towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. In terms of rail provision, Monmouthshire has four railway stations, at Caldicot, Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction in the south of the County and Abergavenny in the north. As part of the Cardiff Capital Region, Monmouthshire is set to benefit from the proposed South Wales Metro proposals. The local community in Magor Undy is at an advanced stage of campaigning for a new Magor Undy Walkway Station, close to the Community Hub building that has now received planning permission. The announcement to remove the toll charge on the Severn Bridge has already had a demonstrable impact on house prices and, anecdotally, on speed of sales.

2.17.2 Public rights of way include 1,499km of footpaths, 71km of bridleways, 84.5km of restricted byways and 1.5km of unrestricted byways. These public rights of way are complemented by permissive paths. The County has three long distance regional trails (Usk Valley, Wye Valley and Three Castles) as well as the national trail (Offa's Dyke Path). The County also provides the start of the all-Wales coastal path. There are two national cycle routes within Monmouthshire, both of which run from Chepstow. The countryside access opportunities available in the County are one of its key assets, sustaining tourism and providing opportunities for economic regeneration.

2.17.3 The rural nature of the County and high proportion of SMEs means broadband and mobile communication are both vital and challenging. The Council is part of the Superfast Cymru

project rolling out BT broadband. Other local projects to roll out Broadband into less accessible rural areas are being explored.

## **2.18 Our natural heritage**

2.18.1 The County is noted for its rural beauty and has a rich and diverse landscape stretching from the coastline of the Gwent Levels in the south of the County, to the uplands of the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north. In addition, there is the picturesque river corridor of the Wye Valley AONB in the east and the Blaenavon Industrial World Heritage Site to the north-west. The landscape and countryside of Monmouthshire contributes not only to the health and well-being of Monmouthshire's residents but also supports the important tourist economy.

2.18.2 Monmouthshire has significant biodiversity and nature conservation resources, a number of which are internationally or nationally recognised, including:

- The Severn Estuary Special Area for Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar Site (Wetland of international importance);
- The River Wye, River Usk, Wye Valley woodlands and Wye Valley Special Areas of Conservation (bat sites);
- 49 nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – covering some 2,087 hectares. Most are woodland or grassland sites with others designated for their wetland or geological interest;
- Two National Nature Reserves (Fiddler's Elbow (woodland) and Lady Park Wood) and one Local Nature Reserve at Cleddon Bog;
- Approximately 650 non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) predominantly in relation to grassland and ancient and semi-natural woodland areas. The statutory sites cover 6,432 hectares, or 7.6% of the LPA area; 3,664 hectares of which comprises the Severn Estuary SPA.

2.18.3 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.

## **2.19 Our built heritage**

2.19.1 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.

2.20.1 The current LDP has been heavily reliant on greenfield sites to deliver its development needs due to a lack of brownfield sites. Air quality in Monmouthshire generally meets current standards, although there are two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the County, where objective levels of nitrogen dioxide may be exceeded. These are at Bridge Street in Usk and Hardwick Hill/Mount Pleasant in Chepstow. The Monmouthshire Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy has not identified any sites as being contaminated.

### **3.0 PLANNING SERVICE**

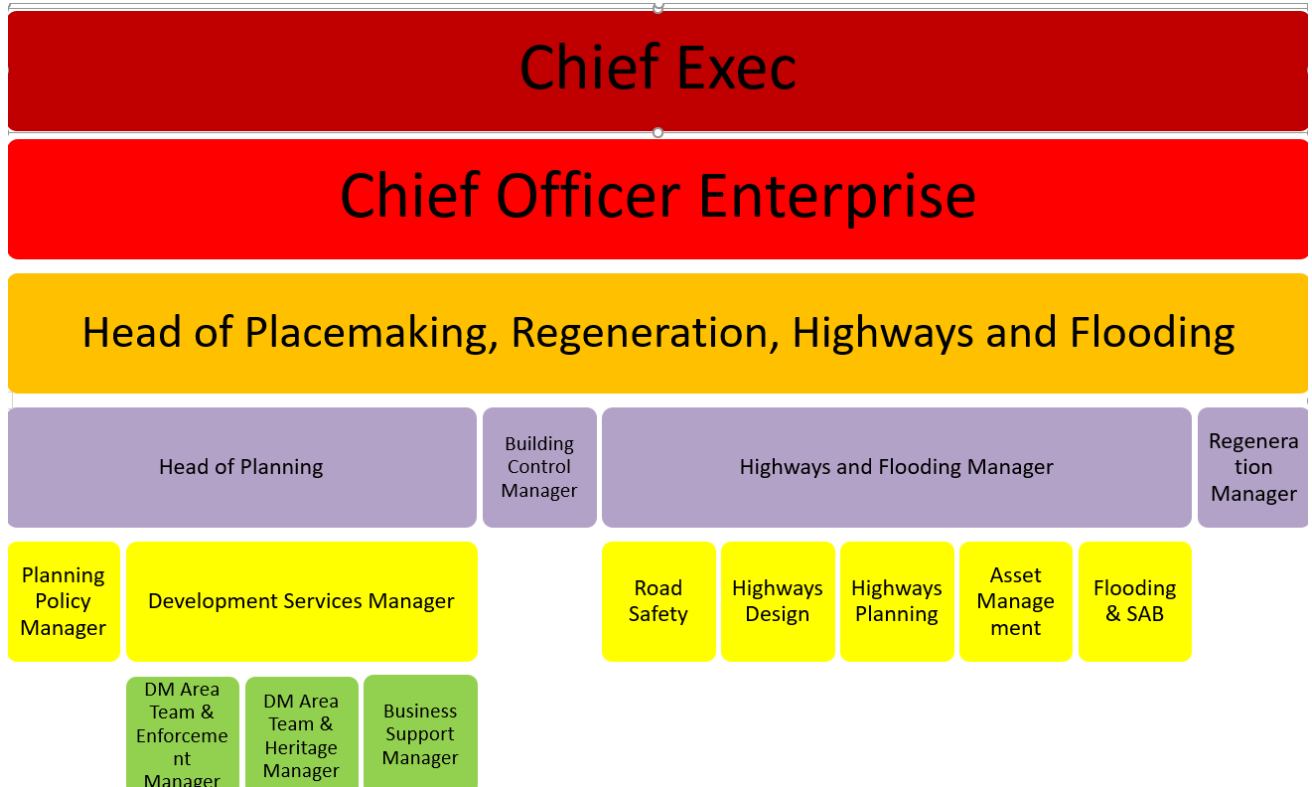
#### **Organisational setting**

- 3.1 During the previous reporting period, the Planning Service had undergone a number of significant changes, including a restructuring of management responsibilities. This resulted in a new head of service post, namely the Head of Planning, with the former head of service taking a more senior role in the Council as Head of Placemaking, Housing, Highways and Flooding. The new head of service was promoted internally from a management role in DM and that management post was not backfilled following agreement within the wider DM Management Team to absorb management of the successful candidate's responsibilities between the DM Service's Heritage Manager and the other existing Development Management Area Manager. Following initial concerns about the two managers' capacity to manage their enlarged teams, this has worked well and staff have commented that they feel that the management structure works effectively. It also enabled a departmental budget saving when application fees had fallen behind the targets in the DM budget.

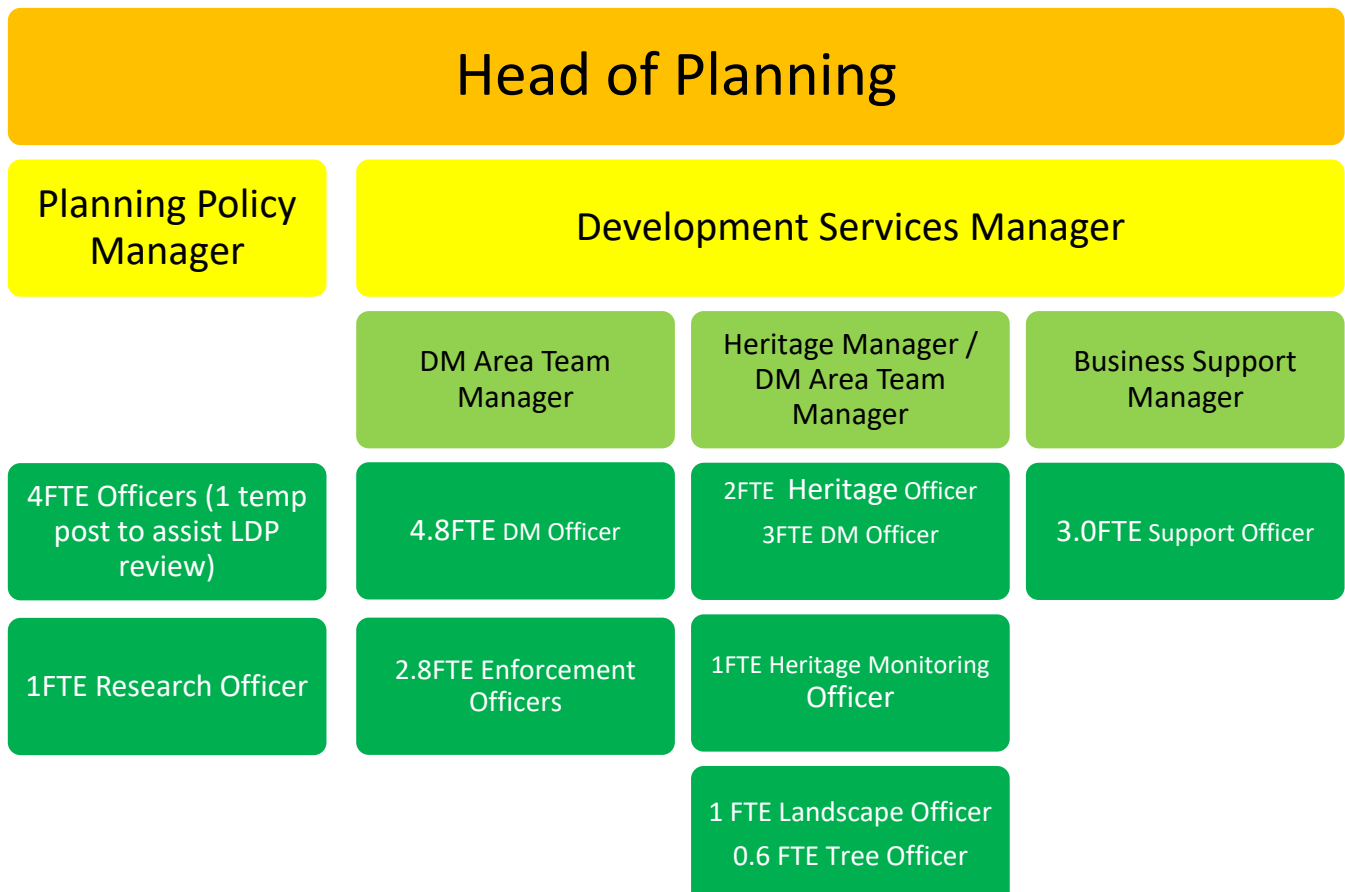
This reporting period saw some change as three members of staff left the team: a Senior DM Officer left to pursue a promotion with another planning authority in South-East Wales; the Heritage Monitoring Officer left as a result of a promotion to a more senior role with a planning authority in the West Midlands, and a Planning Support Officer left in March 2021 to pursue a career with a private company that provides back office and public access software for local government services. The latter two posts were successfully replaced while the Senior DMO post has been left unfilled as we have taken stock of the downturn in major and more complex applications as a result of the life cycle of the LDP and the impact of the pandemic.

In Planning Policy, a temporary post of a Senior Planning Policy Officer was made permanent given the scale of work involved in the Replacement LDP as well as other policy work related commitments.

### Department structure and reporting lines for the 2020-21 reporting period



### 3.2 Planning Service staffing structure for the 2020-21 reporting period



## **Links with other Council projects**

- 3.3 There are a number of wider corporate activities that impact upon the planning service, or that the planning service supports and/or shapes:

3.3.1 Budget management

Local Government budgets have been significantly reduced over recent years, and the Planning Service has had to make savings in the same way as all other unprotected services. This has comprised a combination of reduced expenditure, increased income budget lines, and reduced staffing costs.

Over 2020/21 the pandemic (as well as the lifecycle of the LDP whereby the larger housing sites have almost all been approved permission) had a substantial impact on the amount of application fee income received by the DM Team, leading to a gap in income of just over £201,000 compared to the budget target (£589,000). This was offset by a sum of £234,000 termed 'Covid19 Income Loss Recoupment' that helped DM to underspend by approximately £100k (owing to savings in the salaries and the professional fees elements of the budget). The Policy team underspent by £136k, but the majority of this is the rolled over reserve to fund the replacement LDP which will be used over ensuing years during the replacement plan process.

3.3.2 Service improvement/Systems Thinking

The Council has reviewed a number of its services via a Systems Thinking approach. Planning underwent this review between 2010 and 2012, and it is now fully embedded. The review seeks to strip the service back to basic principles: who is the customer, and what is important to them? As far as is possible (for example taking into account legislative requirements), activities that do not add value to the customer are removed.

In terms of the Planning Service, this has resulted in a high performing, outcome-focussed service. Officers are empowered to make decisions and take responsibility for their caseload from start to end. The outcome focus means that our emphasis is on securing a positive outcome where possible, rather than a focus on arbitrary performance targets. Performance against end-to-end times is monitored via monthly team meetings, however this monitoring is in the context that decision speed is only a small part of the wider picture, and is not always important to our customers.

The team applied this approach when implementing the roll out of a new planning application processing data base system that went live in March/ April 2018. This ensured disruption when changing over to the new system was minimised. It has also been used as method to seek ways of improving the service's web pages to improve the customer experience when accessing planning-related information online.

As outlined in the actions it is considered prudent to conduct a review of the average time to determine application in a system thinking approach in the coming year to seek to improve this performance indicator.



### 3.3.3 Development Team approach

A fee-paying pre-application advice service was introduced in late 2013 which has been well received by customers and is now embedded. This service includes offering a Development Team approach, which seeks to provide an integrated, round-table multi-disciplinary approach to pre-application enquiries. This has helped build positive relationships with other service areas, and help all parties to understand each other's objectives and priorities, leading to better outcomes. We also ask applicants if they wish the local ward member to be involved in pre-application discussions on major planning applications to improve communication and to promote transparency. Another improvement we have introduced is to ensure the council's Design Panel, made up of the council's planning committee chair, vice chair and opposition spokesperson and senior planning managers, is involved at an early stage for major planning proposals that have a design implication. Experience shows the subsequent planning application follows a smoother path during the committee process because of the inclusive nature of the journey. All applications that have undergone this process – including major housing proposals at Abergavenny, Monmouth and Caldicot that have been approved within agreed timescales.

During this reporting period, we closed 377 applications seeking pre-application advice. 106 planning applications stemmed from the pre-application advice we gave. Of those that have been determined 6 were refused (5.5%), 6 were withdrawn (5.5%) due to a change in the applicants' circumstances and 94 were approved (89%). All six that were refused had not followed the advice we gave at pre-application stage. Consequently, we have a 100% success rate of applications that went to decision stage and followed our pre-application advice.

### 3.3.4 Best practice benchmarking

We are involved in various regional and all-Wales working groups, which provide an important forum for identifying, learning from and sharing best practice, while recognising Monmouthshire's uniqueness. These groups include:

- Planning Officers' Society for Wales (POSW) (meeting of all Chief Planning Officers from Welsh LPAs; POSW is involved in benchmarking work among all Welsh local planning authorities undertaken for WG by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to understand the costs of running a planning service more accurately and comparably than CIPFA data;
- South East Wales branch of POSW (POS-SEW);
- South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) (meeting of planning policy lead officers from the ten SE Wales LPAs and the Brecon Beacons National Park together with WG representatives, HBF, NRW and Welsh Water). Monmouthshire and Newport Councils jointly chaired this group during this reporting period, with Monmouthshire becoming the Chair Authority in January 2017;
- South East Wales Heritage Forum. Monmouthshire's Heritage Manager chaired this group during the previous reporting period.
- South Wales Enforcement Forum
- South Wales Development Management Group (meeting of the South Wales Development Management lead officers)

An informal group of DM officers and managers from the former Gwent Local Planning Authorities also meets occasionally to share best practice and procedures in the light of new regulations coming into force. The objective is to discuss consistency on a more manageable basis, and feed learning back to all LPAs in Wales.

In addition, we hold bi-monthly liaison meetings between the Planning Policy and Development Management teams to disseminate policy changes at national and strategic levels, to understand corporate strategies, to aid interpretation and implementation of the adopted Local Development Plan, and to review implementation of the LDP to help inform and shape the replacement LDP. This has provided a valuable forum to ensure a cohesive and consistent planning service is provided.

### 3.3.5 Asset Management

In response to budget pressures, in addition to a wider desire to use our assets responsibly, the Council is undergoing a process of reviewing its estates portfolio and where appropriate, disposing of those assets. The planning service plays a key role in enabling best use of/return from those assets. As an example, planning permission has been granted for a solar farm on one of our own County farms near Crick. The revenue from energy generation can be reinvested into providing valuable services to our citizens. The Corporate Business Plan includes a commitment to deliver a second solar farm.

The Local Development Plan includes four Council-owned sites as strategic (primarily housing) allocations. During this reporting period, detailed planning approval was granted at Llanfoist for a 24 unit 'close-care' village as well as 26 affordable homes on the strategic LDP site at Mabey Bridge, Chepstow.

### 3.3.6 Well-Being Plan

There are four well-being objectives forming part of the Monmouthshire Well-Being Plan, two relating to people and two relating to place:

People/Citizens:

- Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life
- Respond to the challenges associated with demographic change

Place/Communities:

- Protect and enhance the resilience of our natural environment whilst mitigating and adapting to the impact of climate change.
- Develop opportunities for communities and businesses to be part of an economically thriving and well-connected county.

In tandem with the Well-Being Act and the Well-being Plan the Council's Planning Service is committed to securing sustainable development in the public interest for the good of the County's citizens and its environment.

### 3.3.7 Local Transport Plan and Active Travel

We contributed towards the Council's Local Transport Plan in a previous reporting period, and will continue to work with colleagues to help enable delivery of the identified priorities

and compliance with the Active Travel Act, whether this be via LDP allocations, planning application decisions or securing planning contributions. During this reporting period we have been involved in negotiating pedestrian and cycle links for a new cycle route in the Usk area.

### 3.3.8 IT improvements and 'channel shift'

The Council has a shared IT resource with Newport, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils, and through this has implemented a new planning back-office system. Collaboration on reporting functions and training has been undertaken with Torfaen Council. Setting up the new system has been very resource intensive but the system went live in April 2018.

The Planning Service is a key frontline service in terms of visibility and customer access. We have already introduced agile working and electronic document management, which have served us well having regard to the impact of the Covid pandemic and the necessity it has created to work from home for the vast majority of time. Work has been undertaken to improve our website to improve the ability of customers and stakeholders to self-serve where possible, as well as to comply with the Welsh Language Measures, although more work is needed to improve the customer offer in this area.

In recent years we have improved the layout and content of the DM service's web pages to allow customers to self-serve more easily. We have also moved towards a paperless office, resulting in printing and postage savings. Going forward we would like to scan old microfiche records so that these are also available via our website, however this is prohibitively expensive at present. We also introduced a Report It function on the web site so that the public could report possible breaches of planning control for the planning enforcement team to investigate.

### **Operating budget**

- 3.4 The operating budget for the service is shown below together with the changes from last year:

	<b>Costs</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Net Cost</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>2013-14</b>	£1,648,800	£601,200	£1,047,600	
<b>2014-15</b>	£1,397,400	£614,900	£782,500	£-265,100 (-25%)
<b>2015-16</b>	£1,360,500	£669,900	£690,600	£-91,900 (-12%)
<b>2016-17</b>	£1,363,600	£572,000	£791,600	£+101,000 (+15%)
<b>2017-18</b>	£1,292,600	£430,100	£862,500	£+70,900 (+9%)
<b>2018-19</b>	£1,426,500	£653,600	£772,900	£-89,600 (-10%)
<b>2019-20</b>	£1,535,022	£669,300	£865,722	£+92,822 (+12%)
<b>2020-21</b>	£1,610,000	£778,300 <sup>#</sup>	£831,700	£-34,022 (-4%)

The figures exclude Planning Policy's budget for Professional fees which is rolled forward each year for LDP review work.

<sup>#</sup> This amount included a grant from WG for £234,800 to offset loss of fee income due to the pandemic

- 3.5 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 pre-application advice (the latter amounted to approximately £46,000 over 2020/21) as well as the Planning Service's newer discretionary services that are discussed below.

- 3.6 Planning application income (£388k) was lower in 2020/21 than in previous years. Although the number of planning applications received remained broadly comparable to recent years (see the table at par. 4.2 below) the income from major planning applications fell compared to previous reporting periods. This has inevitably been the result of the pandemic which reduced economic activity (particularly during the earlier months of the reporting period), 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 lifecycle of the LDP. Fee projection work means there will be little application activity on larger allocated and unallocated housing sites over 2021/22. This is chiefly due to the lifecycle of the current LDP which is at the end of the plan period and is now under review. Delays to the review stages of the new plan will mean there will be no new larger housing sites coming forward until post Deposit/ Examination stage, probably later in 2022 at the earliest. Aside from the income target not being achieved the service has made savings in terms of staff costs (a senior DM officer who left to pursue a promotion elsewhere was not replaced given the downturn in major applications a senior management post was not filled because of a re-structure of the DM Management roles). There was also an under-spend in the professional fees budget. Agreement to stop increasing the application fees each year by inflation was agreed by the Council given that the authority does not set the fees, they do not rise by inflation each year and fee income is dependent on economic activity which is also out of the Council's hands.
- 3.7 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 60% of the cost of dealing with planning applications, although work is currently being undertaken by work commissioned by WG and endorsed by POSW to provide a more accurate picture of cost recovery across all Welsh planning authorities. 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 mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams (for example the feed-in tariff for renewable energy schemes).

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
<b>Budgeted fee income</b>	£525k	£633k	£668k	£684k	£681k	£693k	£589k	£480k

<b>Actual income</b>	£584k	£664k	£560k	£430k	£653k	£666k	£443k*	
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N.B. Fee income includes planning application fees, pre-application income and the discretionary fees for fast track applications. The 2019/20 and 20/21 figure also includes payment from Torfaen Council towards funding the joint Heritage Service.

\*This reduced level of income was then offset by a grant from WG for £234,800 due to the pandemic

### **Staff resources**

- 3.8 Staffing levels for the reporting period are shown in the chart at paragraph 3.2 above. Key changes over 2020/21 saw some movement of staff with three officers in the DM team leaving to pursue career opportunities with other organisations: a Senior DM Officer left in late 2020 and was not replaced to address budget restrictions, while recognising the reduction in the numbers of major applications being received; the Heritage Monitoring Officer left in early 2021 and was replaced promptly, while a member of the Planning Support Team also left in Spring 2021 and was also replaced.

In Planning Policy, an experienced officer from neighbouring Newport City Council who had been seconded to a role as a senior officer was appointed to a permanent role given the scale of work involved in the replacement of the LDP.

- 3.9 For the reporting period, sickness levels were relatively low, although one member of the enforcement team was absent for a lengthy period following a family bereavement. The pandemic did have an impact on the capacity of officers and there were pressures caused during national lockdowns and when the children of staff needed to be home-schooled or care had to be provided which significantly affected our colleagues' ability to work to pre-pandemic levels. Morale of team members has been impacted by the length of the pandemic and the sense of isolation home-working can have. To address this, managers put in place regular virtual meetings, welfare chats and counselling.
- 3.10 Training and development opportunities for colleagues were seriously hampered by the pandemic during the reporting period and were almost exclusively virtual events organised by the Council itself or occasionally by the RTPI. Virtual events included a law update by FTB Chambers and a workshop about the new CPO regulations proposed for Wales. 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 and to gain advice from Countryside colleagues in relation to the phosphate constraint issue at casework management meetings held twice a week.

Five staff within DM have undertaken Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM) qualifications over the last three years, four having qualified and one is underway.

- 3.11 All colleagues have had an annual appraisal during the reporting period.

## 4.0 YOUR LOCAL STORY

### Workload

#### 4.1 Key projects during the reporting period included:

- Delays incurred to the RLDP process as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and publication of the updated/corrected WG population and household projections, necessitated a revisit of the growth and spatial options and Preferred Strategy stages of the Plan process, as well as a further revision to the RLDP Delivery Agreement timetable and community involvement scheme (CIS). Work on the RLDP continued in accordance with the revised Delivery Agreement (second revision October 2020), and included:  
Revisit of the RLDP Growth and Spatial Options included updating the growth scenarios, evidence base and preparing the Growth and Spatial Options consultation Paper. The Paper was presented at an all Member workshop and subject to political reporting in December 2020, including Cabinet (16th December) for endorsement to issue the Growth and Spatial Options Paper for non-statutory consultation, including identifying growth option 5 and spatial option 2 as the preferred options at this stage of the process.  
Non-statutory consultation on the Growth and Spatial Options Paper took place in January – February 2021. The Candidate Site Advice Service also recommenced in January 2021. Preparation of the revised Preferred Strategy and associated evidence base/background papers. (N.B. The Preferred Strategy will be subject to political reporting in June 2021, including Full Council for endorsement to consult, with statutory public consultation and engagement in July – August 2021. The Second Call for Candidate Sites will commence alongside the Preferred Strategy consultation).  
Continued regional working and joint working with neighbouring local planning authorities, as well as continued Member engagement on RLDP progress, including via Cabinet Member Briefings and RLDP all Member Workshops.
- Over a large part of the reporting period there was a full national lockdown stemming from the Covid-19 outbreak that meant that new ways of working had to be introduced for our service, leading to 100% of our staff working from home, use of Teams technology for meetings and a suspension of site visits until the risk had been assessed and the lockdown eased. We also 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. Planning Committee and the operation of the Council's Delegation Panel took place virtually via Teams with extra emphasis placed on high quality PowerPoint presentations and site videos to help provide Members with the evidence and material needed to make sound planning decisions.
- Continuing a joint heritage service for Monmouthshire and Torfaen Councils. This commenced in January 2019 and reviews of its effectiveness took place periodically over the reporting period. MCC manages the service for TCBC via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and provides the staff to deliver a resilient heritage service assisted by TCBC funding. The contract was renewed for a further 12 month period until the end of December 2021.
- Towards the end of the reporting period as a planning authority we were then 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 have issued detailed planning guidance 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 will impact 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 some are on hold until this constraint is overcome. There are no easy solutions and we continue to work with a wide range of agencies including WG, NRW, Welsh Water and other authorities to find sustainable solutions to this significant environmental problem.

- Delivering our bespoke pre-application advice service for potential applicants, as well as offering pre-purchase certificates and completion certificates.
- Successfully recruiting new staff in the roles of the Heritage Monitoring Officer and a Planning Support Officer and appointing a permanent Senior Policy Officer to help deliver the replacement LDP.
- 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 major development at Llanfoist for a close care community and the affordable housing element of the LDP-allocated, strategic mixed-use development at Mabey Bridge, Chepstow. A major proposal to expand brewing capacity at Magor Brewery was also approved.
- Working with a Building Preservation Trust to seek to secure the restoration of a Listed Building at Risk including a CPO.

4.2 Despite the lower activity at the beginning of the pandemic, application caseload has remained largely consistent with pre-pandemic levels while the number of applications determined decreased by 14% as a result of more limited working capacity. The proportion of approvals remained high at 97%. During 2020-21, 96% of applications were determined under delegated powers (Wales's average in 2018/19 was 93%).

	<b>2013 -14</b>	<b>2014 -15</b>	<b>2015 -16</b>	<b>2016 -17</b>	<b>2017 -18</b>	<b>2018 -19</b>	<b>2019 -20</b>	<b>2020 -21</b>
<b>Applications received</b>	983	1173	1284	1117	1188	1126	1134	1126
<b>Applications determined</b>	852	1053	1085	1087	1071	1101	1106	947
<b>% within 8 weeks or agreed timescale</b>	70%	76%	79%	90%	91%	88%	91%	91%
<b>% applications approved</b>	93%	95%	95%	96%	95%	95%	97%	97%

4.3 A key area of work over the last three to four 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 we had to suspend the Fast Track services as there was firstly a need to work at home and not visit sites during the first national lockdown and secondly, a lack of officer capacity to deliver the shorter timescales associated with the Fast Track services due to the impact of the pandemic. We intend to reintroduce the Fast Track services over the next reporting period and 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 small additional charge. 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). There is an £85.00 additional fee (so £275 in total) although certificates of lawfulness are £190. A valid application is defined as outlined within Welsh Government Circular 002/12. In the unlikely event of not being able to achieve this target or agree a short extension of time (no more than 5 working days) we will refund the fast track service fee.

4.4.2 The *pre-purchase certificate* is a discretionary 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; ii) listed building consents and iv) enforcement history relating to identified breaches of planning control (this would not relate to unsubstantiated complaints). 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. The fee for this service is currently £256 and 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 we provide 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. The fee for this service is £205 for each application number requiring a certificate and we will aim to provide a written response within 28 days. Where an application for listed building consent and a planning application were required for the same development, they will be treated as one application.

4.5 These discretionary services have been in place since 1st July 2017 (they were rolled out slowly but have gradually gathered pace). The below table outlines the take up of these services



and the amount of income that the additional services have generated. **As stated above, owing to the impact of the pandemic on officer capacity, these discretionary services were suspended enabling officers to focus on the core service work of processing planning and related applications.** Once the backlog of applications eases (caused by reduced capacity during the pandemic) we will seek to increase the uptake of these services with wider marketing.

Type of service	Number of applications/enquiries complete 01/04/18 to 31/03/19	Income generated*	Number of applications/enquiries complete 01/04/2019 to 31/03/20	Income generated*
Fast Track householder applications	47 (9 refunds due to a range of issues, but mainly because the number of objections led to the need for the application to be presented to the Council's Delegation Panel rather than be officer delegated)	£3230  (This figures excludes the refunded amount)	46	£3485
Fast Track certificate of lawful development	Existing - 0 Proposed – 4	£760	1	£285
Pre purchase certificates	6	£1080	5	£1050
Completion certificates	2	£240	1	£250
Fast Track listed building applications	13	£1925 (Included 6 refunds as applications were too complex to be determined in 35 days)	5	£1375
<b>Total</b>		<b>£7, 235</b>		<b>£6,778</b>

\*Beyond the standard fee for a householder or other planning application

4.6 In relation to enforcement workload, significant changes to the performance indicator definition were made over recent years, changing what is measured as an enforcement case and the definition of when a case is 'resolved'. While 2018/19 saw a decline in performance against the revised WG measures, the appointment of a new manager in the Enforcement Team midway through 2018/19 has seen an encouraging improvement in the team's performance following a fundamental review of its work practices. This intervention has enabled the measures to move from Poor to Fair, as discussed in Section 6 and Annex A below. The team were hampered over

the latter part of 2020/21 by the loss of a member of staff due to a family bereavement and for a smaller part of the reporting period a colleague in the team reported sick. Despite this, performance remained fair although there is considerable scope for improvement. Action 3 for this priority area is therefore retained to seek sustained improvement.

### **Annual Monitoring Report**

4.7 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and our sixth LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was submitted in October 2020 to cover the 2019-20 period. Previous AMRs identified that although good progress had been made in implementing many of the Plan's policies and that overall the strategy remained sound, a number of key housing provision policy targets were not being met which indicated that these policies were not functioning as intended. The continued lack of a 5 year housing land supply remained a matter of concern that needed to be addressed if the Plan's housing requirements are to be met. The third AMR recommended an early review of the LDP was necessary because of the housing land supply shortfall. A full review of the LDP commenced during 2017 which culminated with the publication of the Final Review Report in March 2018. The report concluded that the LDP should be revised and that this should take the form of a full revision procedure, i.e. a replacement LDP. It also concluded that the Monmouthshire LDP should be revised on an individual basis, rather than jointly with adjacent Local Planning Authorities. Work on this project is ongoing and is described in full in the latest AMR (2019/20).

4.8 As at March 2021, the status of the strategic sites is as follows (more detailed information is available in the Council's 2020-2021 AMR):

#### **4.9.1 Deri Farm, Abergavenny (SAH1):**

Persimmon Homes submitted a full application (DC/2014/01360) for 250 residential units (201 market and 49 affordable units) in November 2014. The progress of the application was slower than anticipated due to significant issues relating to site viability, particularly affordable housing provision and the undergrounding of overhead power lines. However, these issues were subsequently resolved, the application was approved in the 2017 - 2018 monitoring period and 183 units have been completed to date.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group expects the site to deliver 234 dwellings within the Plan period with all dwellings completed by the end of the next monitoring period.

#### **4.9.2 Crick Road, Portskewett (SAH2):**

In the 2018/19 monitoring period Monmouthshire County Council and Melin Homes submitted a joint outline application (DM/2018/00696) for 291 residential units (218 market and 73 affordable units), this was granted permission in March 2019. During the previous monitoring period a reserved matters application (DM/2019/01041) for 269 residential units has been approved (201 market and 68 affordable units). The drop in density of the site has been driven by changes to the proposed house types and by positive improvements to the design of the site. These improvements include Green Infrastructure that forms the north-south axis of the site, the ecological implications of a badger sett on the site which has led to greater protected open space, whilst the highway requirements have resulted in safer, more accessible links. The employment allocation on the site has been replaced with a care home which will provide up to 32 beds on the

area outlined for employment use. This was subject to a separate planning application, DM/2019/01629, which was granted permission on 26 February 2020.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group does not expect the site to deliver any dwellings within the Plan period. The first completions on site are expected in 2022/23.

#### **4.9.3 Fairfield Mabey, Chepstow (SAH3):**

The landowner submitted an outline application (DC/2014/01290) in October 2014 for up to 600 residential units (350 to be delivered within the Plan period), commercial space including offices and workshops (Use Class B1), small scale retail/food and drink floorspace (Use Classes A1 and A3) and multi-functional green and blue open space. Progress with the application has been slower than anticipated due to various matters, including highways issues (Welsh Government Highways Division had a holding objection on the application for 18 months). However, the outstanding issues have since been resolved and the site gained outline planning permission for 450 units (432 market and approximately 18 affordable units on 1.5 acres of the site) in November 2017. A Reserved Matters Application (DM/2019/00001) was approved during the last monitoring period for 347 units. The application was for the market housing element of the site and does not include the land identified for affordable housing or employment land; the affordable housing (26 dwellings) element of the site was the subject of a separate application for which Reserved Matters was permitted during the current monitoring period (DM/2019/01960(RM)). Work on the site has begun with 18 completions during the current monitoring period.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group expects the site to deliver 77 dwellings within the Plan period. The remaining dwellings are expected to be completed by 2025/26.

#### **4.9.4 Wonastow Road, Monmouth (SAH4):**

Outline permission was granted for up to 370 dwellings and 6.5ha of employment land in December 2014. The site developers (Barratt/David Wilson and Taylor Wimpey) submitted a Reserved Matters application (DC/2015/00392) for 340 units (238 market and 102 affordable units) which was granted permission in November 2015. The site was completed during the current monitoring period.

The overall LDP site allocation is for a total of 450 units. The additional units relating to this allocation are to be delivered as an extension to the site at Drewen Farm. An application for this element of this site has not yet been submitted.

#### **4.9.5 Rockfield Farm, Undy (SAH5):**

This site is allocated for 270 residential units and 2ha of serviced land for business and industrial use in the adopted LDP. An outline planning application was submitted in July 2016 (DC/2016/00883) for 266 units and 5,575 sq. m of employment land (B1 use). For the purposes of the AMR, 265 units (198 market and 67 affordable units) are recorded as a net gain, the existing farmhouse has a residential use and is being demolished so has been taken off the overall figure. Progress with the site has been slower than anticipated due to various issues, including archaeology. These issues have, however, been resolved and the outline application was approved in March 2018. A Reserved Matters application (DM/2018/01606) was granted planning permission for phase 1 of the site in February 2019 for 144 residential units. The site is currently under construction with 57 dwellings completed to date.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group expects the site to deliver 90 dwellings within the Plan period. The remaining dwellings for phase 1 of the site are expected to be completed by 2022/23. Phase 2 is expected to be completed by 2025/26.

#### **4.9.6 Land at Vinegar Hill, Undy (SAH6):**

This site for 225 residential units is linked to the adjacent Rockfield Farm site and was expected to progress in tandem. Whilst initial progress on the site has been slow, a hybrid application has been submitted on this site (DM/2019/01937 – November 2019) for two parcels of land for up to 155 dwellings with associated open space and infrastructure. A full planning consent is being sought for 72 dwellings on parcel A with an outline planning consent being sought for parcel B with all matters reserved except for access. Whilst allocated for 225 dwellings in the Adopted LDP the site is only proposed to come forward for up to 155 dwellings as the landowner does not wish for a parcel of land to be brought forward. It is expected that the development will be approved during the next monitoring period.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group does not expect the site to deliver any dwellings within the Plan period. The first completions on site are expected in 2022/23.

#### **4.9.7 Former Paper Mill, Sudbrook (SAH7):**

A full planning application (DC/2015/01184) was submitted by Harrow Estates (Redrow confirmed as the developer) in October 2015 for 212 residential units (192 market and 20 affordable units). There had been a number of site viability issues associated with this application meaning that progress with the application has been slower than anticipated. However, these issues were subsequently resolved and the application was approved in the 2016 - 2017 monitoring period (November 2016). Following a re-plan of part of the site the number of residential units on the site has decreased to 210. The site is currently under construction, with 124 dwellings completed to date.

The housing trajectory prepared in consultation with the Housing Stakeholder Group expects the site to deliver 154 dwellings within the Plan period. The remaining dwellings are expected to be completed by 2023/24

4.10 The AMR highlights issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing, and developers continue to raise viability issues on some of the strategic housing sites above. This is a Wales-wide issue. The Council's approach to viability debates has now been established, and the links between a project management approach to these applications with LDP delivery are understood.

4.11 In response to the Council's lack of five-year housing land supply and the Welsh Ministers' decision to 'disapply' par. 6.2 of TAN1 the Council adopted an innovative and evidence-based approach to dealing with non-allocated housing sites. This was described in a report to Council considered on 21 February 2019 where Members resolved that the Council continued to give 'appropriate weight' to its lack of a five year housing land supply, insofar as those development proposals are otherwise acceptable in planning terms and that the 11 'ground rules' set out in the report were all satisfied.

An outline planning application (and subsequent reserved matters) for a major housing proposal was approved in the light of this policy at Church Road, Chepstow (this commenced development during 2021) while another at Raglan was called in by Welsh Ministers and subsequently refused.

In the light of the Raglan appeal and subsequent Ministerial clarification that major housing proposals should only come forward as part of the Development Plan system, then this innovative policy approach has been abandoned.

4.12 In October 2015 the Council's Economy and Development Select Committee scrutinised the LDP's impact on enabling tourism-related development. As stated above, the tourism industry forms a key part of the County's economy and links directly to what makes Monmouthshire distinctive. This scrutiny identified a need to produce Supplementary Planning Guidance to clarify for customers and officers how the LDP supports different types of tourism development, and also identified a need for future revisions to the policy to allow greater flexibility for agricultural diversification for tourism purposes. The SPG was adopted during this reporting period and is now widely used by DM officers to consider proposals for sustainable rural tourism. The AMR shows that the clarity provided by the SPG has had a positive impact on tourism-related proposals coming forward and being approved.

### **Value of Planning**

4.13 RTPi Cymru has published a new 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' has 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, 2020/21. 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 £87.3 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. We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods. The 'Dashboard' data summarises the Planning Service's contribution below:

# Value of Planning in Monmouthshire 2020/21

## Planning service key data



29 FTE jobs in planning service

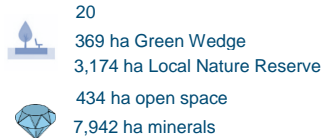


947 applications handled



£0.4m collected in fees

### LDP Land Safeguarded



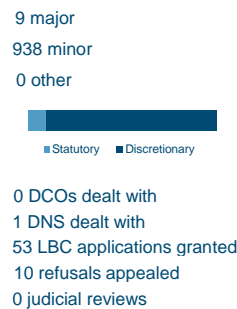
### LDP Land Allocated



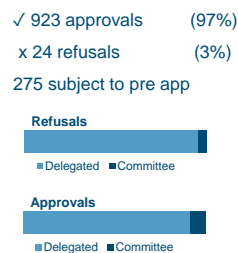
### LDP Value

**£2.1m uplift value**  
(based on land allocated for whole plan period)  
**Value adding policies ✓ 89%**

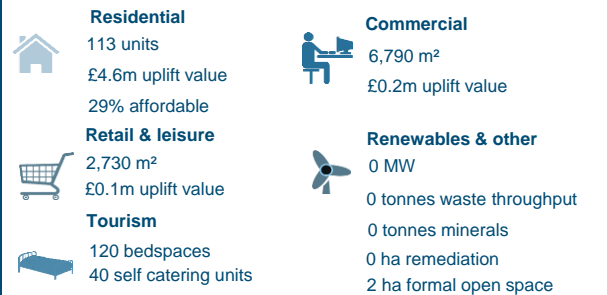
### Applications



### Decisions



### Permissions



### Contributions

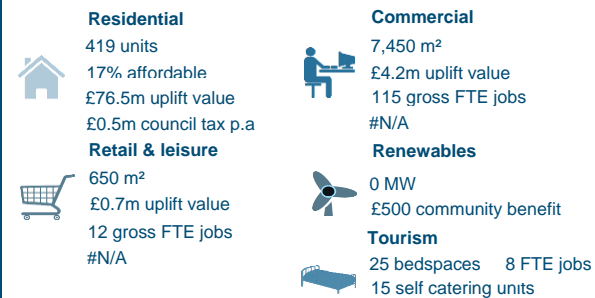
#### Section 106 income



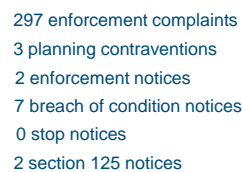
#### CIL income



### Completions



### Enforcement



### Wider indicators



In 2020/21 the total value of planning was

**£87.3m**

SOURCES: Planning function outputs (LPA survey), Land and property value data (JLL estimates), business rates valuations (Valuation Office Agency), employment densities (English Homes & Communities Agency), Council tax rates (StatsWales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal databook), Community benefit from renewables (Renewables UK Cymru). Some of the calculations require high level assumptions to convert between units/m2/ha. Where possible, benchmarks have been employed otherwise reasonable assumptions have been used. Business rate, council tax and gross FTE job 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 any given application. 'Value adding policies' refers to the proportion of policies the team has identified as adding 'intangile 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

JLL

## Service Plan priorities for 2020-21

### 4.14 The Service Plan for the Planning Service identified the following priority actions:

- Work on the Replacement LDP continued in accordance with the Delivery Agreement (second revision October 2020), and included:  
Preparation of the Preferred Strategy which is the next key stage in the RLDP process.  
Continued preparation of the evidence base /background documents to inform the Preferred Strategy. These will be published alongside the Preferred Strategy (see below).  
Preparation of an options appraisal in relation to the phosphate issue that arose at the end of 2020 and its implications for the RLDP. This was reported to Council as part of the Preferred Strategy Report.  
As a result of the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, the decision was taken on 17th March 2020 to postpone the RLDP Preferred Strategy engagement events until further notice and to keep open, with an extended deadline, both the Preferred Strategy consultation period and the second call for candidate sites.  
Continued Member engagement on RLDP progress, including via Cabinet Member Briefings and RLDP all Member Workshops on a range of RLDP topics (Future Wales: the National Plan 2040; Health Infrastructure; Preferred Strategy in Q1)  
Attendance at various webinars / training events, including Carbon Literacy Training and Viability.
- Continued regional working and joint working with neighbouring local planning authorities, as well as continued Member engagement on RLDP progress, including via Cabinet Member Briefings and RLDP all Member Workshops.
- Joint working continued with Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent, Newport and Caerphilly Councils through progress meetings, as well as progress on jointly commissioning further evidence base work for the respective RLDPs.
- Provision of evidence of the County's housing land supply, retail data and employment land take up. This provides data to inform the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and RLDP.
- Regular attendance to ensure that MCC's policies and interests are effectively represented at regional fora, including SEWSPG and Pathfinders. This includes participation in the SDP Task & Finish Group meetings.
- Upgrade the Idox Uniform planning application data base software system and public access module to ensure system resilience and better functionality for system users
- Implement elements of the Team's digital plan for the future of the whole team. A key element of this work involves the digitising of woodland and tree preservation order information to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service's Tree Officer, the daily Duty Officer and Support staff; this is on-going with the Council's GIS Team and while some background work has taken place this has been hampered by the pandemic; this is a substantial element of work and will run into the next reporting period.
- Review the pre-application advice service to verify it is adding value, reducing waste and that it is valued by customers. This has been carried out although it is proving difficult to obtain customer feedback due to a lack of responses. Of the small proportion returned we understand that the general consensus is that the bespoke service is regarded as 'good' although it can be a little slow; it is regarded favourably compared to many other LPA's services. In terms of officer feedback, they consider that the Uniform Enterprise task works

well to prompt them to carry out a task but that it can be challenging to get other internal departments to a meeting. The review has involved the introduction of an online form to enable customers to request pre-application advice. We also reviewed the charges for 2019/20 to more accurately and fairly reflect the time taken to do the work. This has led to an increase in the fee for pre-application advice we charge at Level 2 which now better reflects the statutory service (even though the latter does not involve a meeting with the applicant). The charges were going to be increased from 3 August 2020 but this was delayed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic and were introduced when bespoke services were restarted in Spring 2021. We also introduced a small charge for non-starters which always involve some work but were previously returned without a charge.

- Prepare the 6th LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and Annual Performance Report (APR). These were sent to WG in October 2020 and published online.
- Continue the systematic improvement of the processes of the Planning Enforcement team. While significant improvement has been made it remains an action in the current APR, with progress on this ongoing but inevitably having been affected by the pandemic and a member of this small team being away for a protracted period due to a family bereavement.
- Cross-departmental working to ensure corporate plans and activities align with the LDP. This priority is on-going, although significant steps have been taken to improve cross-departmental working relationships, including work on s106 agreements, green infrastructure and the Cardiff Capital Region.
- Develop 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. This element has been delayed due to covid and staffing issues, but should be commenced during the next reporting period
- Consolidate collaborative working arrangements with other agencies including neighbouring local authorities. This has led to joint working arrangements regarding the council's heritage service (with Torfaen Council) as well as joint working on the LDP review with Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen and for the employment evidence base there is a larger than local joint study on the Gwent footprint (including Newport and Caerphilly Councils). Managers also attend SEWSPEG and the DM regional managers' meeting to share good practice and discuss pending or recent changes in planning legislation.

### **Local pressures**

#### **4.15 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 communities and seeking to achieve a good housing land supply;
- 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;
- 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;
- Constant change caused by successive new legislation, national planning policy and procedures;



- 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 and training support for staff in the light of limitations on budgets.

4.16 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 PPW is welcomed, as is its form that embraces the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

#### **Actions from our previous APR**

4.17 Our 2019/20 Annual Performance Report identified four actions:

Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service’s Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.

Action 2 – upgrade the Planning Service’s Uniform (planning application processing) software and the public access module that will provide business continuity and provide enhancements to our customers and ensure better GDPR compliance.

Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service’s enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers.

Action 4 – Continue to review the collaboration arrangements in relation to heritage services with neighbouring authorities (Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils) and to develop 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.

4.18 Action 1 has been commenced but involves significant survey work in reassessing older tree preservation orders to verify if they are still fit for purpose or need amending/ deleting. The survey information would then be digitised and made publicly available to help customers to self-serve, reducing demand on the Tree Officer, daily duty officer and support colleagues. This will involve additional resource and the pandemic has also reduced current staff capacity to manage and conclude this project. This will thus be retained as a priority action for the next reporting period.

4.19 Action was 2, the upgrading of the team’s planning application back-office system and public access module (to improve the compliance with GDPR issues and users’ experience) was completed at the end of March and went live in April 2021. The system is now more resilient and is working in a stable and consistent manner. The previous system would have been de-supported by our software suppliers.

- 4.20 In respect of action 3, this was instigated following a downturn in the performance of the planning enforcement function in 2018/19 and has been an action for the last two APRs. Over 2019/20 there were substantial reductions in the time taken to investigate enforcement complaints due to measures instigated by the new manager of this team including providing more of a framework for meeting milestones in the enforcement process. During 2020/21 a team structure has been agreed that essentially reflects the current structure, although there is now more emphasis on the (more junior) Enforcement Officer role prioritising enforcement cases rather than assisting with (enforcement related) planning application work. There remains, however, scope for continued improvement, although performance was reasonable despite the pandemic and the effects of having a member of the team absent for a lengthy period due to a bereavement.
- 4.21 As regards Action 4, despite challenges during this reporting period it has been possible to extend and manage a shared heritage service between Monmouthshire CC and Torfaen CBC, and also to provide a service to Blaenau Gwent CBC (on a lesser scale). The Heritage Manager drew up a Memorandum of Understanding and secured approval for the collaboration. This resulted in the appointment of a new Senior Heritage Officer to resource the collaboration, managed by Monmouthshire's Heritage Manager but funded by Torfaen. The service has been in place since January 2019 and has had the second review early in 2020/21. The feedback was positive and both authorities were pleased with the progress made. It is anticipated that this will be reviewed formally in the next reporting period. The collaboration has key benefits, including improved resilience and skill sharing, together with more opportunities to learn and build on the team's skill set. Nevertheless, owing to changed management responsibilities of the MCC Heritage Manager which now entails significant additional DM management, it will be important to review the efficacy of this arrangement. The impact of the pandemic and the limited resources also mean that there has been no meaningful start on the related buildings at risk strategy which will remain a service priority going forward.

## 5.0 Customer Feedback

5.1 The number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded. There were 21 complaints received over 2020/21, compared to 13 in 2019/20. Five of the twenty-one complaints are still being investigated (four of these relate to one development site).

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. Indeed, of the twenty-one complaints received eight were complaints logged individually from different households regarding common issues, including four made about the Well Lane, Devauden housing scheme allocated in the LDP with two regarding an approved dwelling at High Trees, Chepstow and two relating to an approved extension to a house at The Kymin. Two of the twenty-one complaints were deemed to be justified and involved the raising of land in a garden in a suburban location and an associated unsightly fence's impact on a neighbouring property which the team resolved by putting in place a landscaped screen to mitigate any harm; the second involved a proposal to extend a property in a rural location where the plans were poor and information less clear than it could have been in the application, although the proposal itself was acceptable in visual terms. Lessons learned from these issues were to i) look carefully at the impact of proposals to raise the height of garden land and ensure fencing has a specification in the submitted information to avoid poor implementation and ii) to check submitted drawings are accurate, to scale or are dimensioned and to display previously approved drawings for neighbours to compare with the current proposal on the current application file.

We received six recorded compliments over 2019/20, the same as the previous period.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020-21
Number of Stage 1 formal complaints received	17	9	5	5	4	14	13	21
Number of Stage 2 formal complaints investigations received	11	5	2	2	1	4	2	2
Number of Stage 2 complaints upheld or	4 partially upheld	3 partially upheld	0 upheld	0 upheld	0 upheld	3 partially upheld	2 elements of the complaints	2 partially upheld

partially upheld							partially upheld*	
Number of Ombudsman complaints upheld or partially upheld	1 partially upheld	0	0	0	1 upheld	0	0	0
Number of compliments received	3	4	2	9	2	6	6	4

\*One of these did not relate to the Planning Service but other Council service areas in terms of communication with the complainants; the other related to the conduct of a case officer which has been discussed with that officer via one-to-ones.

- 5.2 Quality customer service continues to be a service and organisation priority so the momentum and desire to improve remain.

## **6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2020-21**

6.1 This section details our performance in 2020-21. 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 up to date data for 2019/20 or 2020/21 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.

### **Plan making**

6.3 As at 31 March 2021, we were one of 23 LPAs that had a current development plan in place. We are proposing to submit an Annual Monitoring Report in October 2021. This document has been prepared and is being submitted to Welsh Government by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020. Issues on the performance of the Plan are discussed in detail in that document and are not repeated here. The replacement of the Plan was commenced in 2018.

### **Efficiency**

6.4 In 2020-21 we determined 947 planning applications, each taking, on average, 92 days to determine. This compares to an average of 77 days (11 weeks) across Wales (2018/19) although this was before the Covid-19 pandemic and so is an unfair comparison. Following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission. Our focus is therefore on the outcome, and we seek improvements in application turnaround times via actions to

improve our pre-application advice service and the information on our web pages, as well as more focussed performance management of individual case officers in the DM team.

- 6.5 91% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic this was the same as in 2019/20 and slightly above the Welsh average of 88% for 2018/19. We also determined 88% of Listed Building Consent applications within the required timescales compared to 84% during 2019/20 and compared to the Welsh average of 75% in 2018/19.

Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received was almost the same as the previous year in that we received 1126 applications compared to 1134 in 2019/20;
- The number of applications we determined decreased by 14% (947 applications compared to 1106);
- The number and percentage of applications we approved was the same as the previous year and remained high at 97%.

### **Major applications**

- 6.6 We determined 9 major planning applications in 2020-21, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 248 days (35 weeks) to determine which was lower than the 296 day average in 2019/20. The nine applications did feature a number of older applications that had involved substantial negotiation and had remained undermined pending the submission of supporting information at the request of the applicants to ensure either a positive outcome was reached or to enable unresolved issues to be narrowed in the event of an appeal.

This figure is expected to improve although the expectation that there will be fewer major applications because of the lifecycle of the LDP and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will need to be monitored. The use of planning performance agreements, where appropriate, should help to reduce end-to end times for these larger projects.

- 6.7 78% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales (7/ 9), compared to 68% across Wales in 2018/19. This measure is ranked as 'good'.

- 6.8 We have consistently performed above the Welsh average on this measure since 2014/15. Our particularly strong performance for major applications is due to a combination of an effective pre-application service, and a good working relationship with customers ensuring agreement to an extension of time. We are now rolling out planning performance agreements for major applications, where applicants can opt for milestones to be agreed in the processing of their application, based on best endeavours and prioritisation of these important applications.
- 6.9 Over the same period:
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales decreased from 89% to 87%;
  - The level of approvals remained stable at 97%.
- 6.10 This slight decline in the percentage of householder applications determined within agreed timescales will be monitored over the next reporting period to ensure staff are seeking to agree extensions of time wherever they can. However, overall this shows a very good level of performance given the challenges to our staff as a result of the pandemic.

## Quality

- 6.11 In 2020-21, our Planning Committee made 35 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to almost 4% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales just over 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee. Unlike most Authorities, Monmouthshire has a Delegation Panel system in operation whereby most applications (but not householder applications) with between 1 and 4 objections are reviewed by a group comprising the three lead Planning Committee Members. In 2020-21 51 applications were considered by the delegation panel. This system works effectively in reducing the number of applications referred to Committee while ensuring interested parties are reassured that their concerns have been heard and reviewed before a decision is made. It was possible to keep this process running during the pandemic by using remote meeting technology.
- 6.12 Of these Committee-made decisions, 6% (2 out of 35 decisions) went against officer advice. This compared to 8% of member-made decisions across Wales in 2018/19. This equated to 0.21% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice in

Monmouthshire (0.4% across Wales). The relatively low proportion of Committee overturns is testament to an effective Member-Officer working relationship, the added value of Planning Committee visiting most sites before making a decision, and an experienced Planning Committee provided with appropriate development training.

- 6.13 The two overturned applications in question related to firstly, a block of apartments in Llanfoist that Members regarded as an over-development of the site (this has been appealed but no decision has yet been received), and the other was a group of residential units for close care accommodation also in Llanfoist that was approved contrary to recommendation, given it was on an employment site identified in the LDP. Members considered that this would be a better fit for the site given the non-industrial developments already approved nearby and would make a valuable contribution to accommodation for the older population.
- 6.14 In 2020-21 we received 10 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.05 appeals for every 100 applications received. This was the third lowest ratio of appeals to applications in Wales indicating our willingness to negotiate proposals to a positive outcome and the strength of our policy framework.
- 6.15 Of the ten appeals that were decided during the year, all ten were dismissed. These decisions show a continued improvement compared to the period before 2017 when performance on appeals dipped to below a 50% success rate. This may reflect the greater emphasis on place-making in appeal decision-making. The proportion of appeals we receive is very low. An appeal is essentially waste in our system as well as waste to the applicant. Our pre-application advice system has been useful in deterring the submission of applications that have little chance of success.
- 6.16 During 2020-21 we had no applications for costs at any section 78 appeal.

## **Engagement**

6.17 We are:

- one of 24 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee;
- one of 22 LPAs that have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public, and
- one of 21 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications.



## **Enforcement**

- 6.18 In 2020-21 we investigated 179 enforcement cases, which equated to 1.95 per 1,000 population. This was a relatively high figure in Wales but was a reduction of almost 30% compared to the previous reporting period. We investigated 72% of these enforcement cases within 84 days compared to 75% in 2019/20 but this was a very reasonable outcome given the difficulties in visiting sites during the pandemic as well as staffing issues during the period. Across Wales 77% were investigated within 84 days in 2018/19 (pre-pandemic).
- 6.19 The average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action was 199 days, which was a decline in performance compared to the previous reporting period (142 days) although it was better than the performance in 2018/19 of 232 days. This decline was to be expected given the challenges presented to this small but dedicated team because of the pandemic and the loss of a team member for a considerable period due to a family bereavement. As this measure is ranked as Fair instead of Good we have retained this action for the next reporting period to seek to continue the improved performance.

## 7.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Based on the performance information in Section 6 and Appendix A, 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 remained healthy at 78%, and was well above the Good target of 60%;
- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales remained high at 91% despite the impact of the pandemic on working practices and was better than the Welsh average performance in 2018/19 prior to the pandemic;
- 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;
- 'Won' all ten appeals against our decisions to refuse planning permission;
- We again dealt with a large number of applications for listed building consent (52 applications) and 88% of these were determined within agreed timescales;
- Enforcement performance remained resilient despite the constraints of the pandemic and a temporary reduction in staff resource.

This shows that, despite a challenging workload and the significant impact of Covid-19, our performance has been very good and our pre-application advice service is effective.

7.2 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. Of the 12 ranked indicators, 8 are ranked 'Good', while 4 are 'Fair' and 0 are in 'need of improvement'.

- The 'fair' results relate to i) the average time taken to determine applications (92 days) which missed the Good target of 67 days but must be seen in the context of the major pressures put on the service during the pandemic and cannot be fairly compared to pre-pandemic performance, ii) decisions taken by Members that were contrary to the officer recommendation (there were only two decisions so this has to be judged in that context)) as well as iii) and iv), the two enforcement measures that have to be considered in the context of the pandemic and having regard to a key member of that small team being away from work for a considerable part of this reporting period.

	Number of indicators
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'good'	8

Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'fair'	4
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance 'needs improvement'	0

- We performed above or at the Wales average (2018/19) in 9 of the 12 comparable indicators. The indicators for which performance was below the Welsh average related to the average time taken to determine all applications in days and the two enforcement indicators – although it is arguably unfair to compare the performance in relation to these measures against pre-pandemic data for clear and obvious reasons. Further commentary on the performance against these measures is set out in Section 6.

### 7.3 Five actions are identified going forwards.

Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service's Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.

Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.

Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service's enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers.

Action 4 – To develop 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 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to improve customer service.

### **Digitising paper information, improving the experience of customers and reducing demand on officer time**

- 7.4 We still hold substantial information on tree preservation orders in the County as paper records in the Council's 'amber storage area'. 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 Tree Officer (who is part time, 0.6 FTE), the daily duty officer and also the Support team.

Digitising this information will reduce phone calls and emails to all those officer sand 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. The quality of the data also needs review (for example, some of the older TPOs need reviewing as the information will be out of date), although this may be carried out once the data is in a digitised format that is easier to manage and change (Action 1).

***Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service’s Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.***

We also manage and secure a substantial amount of social infrastructure when approving major developments – this includes areas of public open space, education facilities, affordable housing, sustainable transport infrastructure, ecological improvements and green infrastructure. Much of this goes unnoticed and unheralded, with many of our local communities tending to focus on more negative aspects of new development such as increased traffic or the additional pressure on local services. To improve awareness of the good things new developments deliver to a community we intend to improve how we promote the community infrastructure each major proposal delivers. This could be via social media as well as more conventional methods such as the Council’s web pages or indeed this APR.

***Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.***

#### **Speed of resolving enforcement cases**

- 7.5 The performance of the Council’s Planning Enforcement team had declined in relation to the two enforcement measures in the Performance Framework over 2018/ 19, resulting in complaints about delays from the public and the perception the service was poorly performing. These issues are certainly not unique to Monmouthshire, and the problem is at least in part due to a misunderstanding of the powers available to us and/or unrealistic expectations, a matter that had been addressed in some way by the training on enforcement that took place in May 2018 for community and town councillors. Over 2019/20 there were substantial reductions in the time taken to investigate enforcement complaints due to measures instigated by the new manager of this team. As a result of the pandemic and staffing pressures, unsurprisingly performance declined over 2020/21. Thus, there remains scope for continued improvement. The review of the Planning Enforcement function is ongoing and has already helped to improve this team’s practices and drive out waste. The action below therefore is a spin-off from previous years (Action 3).

***Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service’s enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers***

## **Heritage Collaboration and Buildings at Risk Strategy**

- 7.6 Monmouthshire has a wealth of heritage assets and has long invested in its heritage team to manage these assets in the public interest. It has become apparent in recent years that opportunities existed to work collaboratively with neighbouring Councils to provide a shared heritage resource. The previous reporting period saw the establishment of a shared heritage service with Torfaen Council that has been working well. This has given the opportunity to address issues of capacity and consistency of advice between Authorities. In addition, it provides an opportunity to increase resilience, knowledge and the skills base of aspects of Historic Environment Management through building and sharing of expertise and experience. It also acknowledges the agenda for collaboration in the delivery of local government services being promoted by Welsh Government. An action from last year saw the team seek to extend the offer to other neighbouring local authorities which resulted in a memorandum of understanding being agreed to provide heritage services for Blaenau Gwent CBC. This has so far worked reasonably well and has allowed the service to provide resilience to BGCBC whose range of work does not need a full time heritage officer while not impacting on the team's ability to cover the demanding heritage workload in Monmouthshire. This arrangement, however, does need reviewing because of the more limited time the MCC Heritage Manager now has to manage this service due to their increased managerial role in the DM team. This will be the subject of review during the next reporting period to verify whether the service can viably continue.

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 is proposed to be developed 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.

***Action 4 – Continue to review the collaboration arrangements in relation to heritage services with neighbouring authorities (Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils) and to develop 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.***

### ***Average time to determine planning applications***

The average time to determine planning applications has increased to 92 days within the 2020-2021 period however this is understandable given the significant impact that the pandemic had on the capacity of the team given external factors. These issues will not be unique to Monmouthshire's planning service. Whilst it is recognised that there is rationale behind this increase it is considered that there should be a review of the planning application process to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the team and that the system thinking principles that were adopted following the 20212-system thinking review are still being fully implemented. Notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic it is considered that there remains scope for continued improvement. The review of planning applications is ongoing however this more detailed review will be conducted when the impact of the pandemic subsides and there is capacity to critical appraise the process and ensure best practice is being implemented.

Action 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to improve customer service.

### **Opportunities going forward:**

- 7.7 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:
- In tandem with our systems thinking approach, to use Team meetings and performance reports to drill down into specific areas of workflow and identify where problems exist and why, with a targeted approach to identifying solutions;
  - Continue to roll out the project management of major planning applications, where appropriate, via planning performance agreements to seek by best endeavours to ensure timely and well-managed processing of such applications, providing a good customer experience for the customer;
  - To digitise the Tree information held by the Council in paper form to improve the web site experience for customers and improve customers' pathways to information (Action 1);
  - To promote the positive work of the Planning Service and colleagues in other Council teams in securing much needed community infrastructure when we approve major development. This could be promoted via this document, our web site and social

media (potentially through use of infographics) allowing our local communities to understand the tangible benefits of allowing new development (Action 2);

- To improve the speed with which we deal with enforcement cases via the continued systems review of the Enforcement function (Action 3);
- To continue to review the collaboration arrangements in relation to a Built Heritage Management Service with neighbouring local authorities, ensuring it is fit for purpose in providing resilience, shared learning and consistency across all the collaborating authorities (Action 4);
- To develop a Buildings At Risk Strategy to safeguard some of our most precious but vulnerable heritage assets (Action 4);
- 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
- Promote the value of the work carried out by the Council's Planning Service by updating the Value of Planning toolkit on an annual basis and publicising the findings in each APR.
- To support our colleagues who have had to work remotely for the vast majority of the reporting period because of the pandemic to ensure their well-being and mental health are resilient and their productivity remains high.
- To respond to the threat provided by the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure our County's businesses can bounce back quickly from the pressures caused by lockdowns and other covid measures that restricted business activity.
- 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.

7.8 Progress will be measured via our 2021/22 Annual Performance Report, 2021/22 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2021-2024 Service Business Plan.

## ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

### OVERVIEW

MEASURE	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

WALES AVERAGE 2018/19	Monmouths hire LPA 2019/20	Monmouths hire LPA 2020/21
68	85	78
232	296	248
88	91	91
77	70	92
75	84	88
9	4	6
68	86	100
0	0	0
Yes	Yes	Yes



MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No
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 2019/20	Monmouths hire LPA 2020/21
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
77	75	72
167	142	199

## SECTION 1 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator	05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 50% and 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 50% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	78
<p>The team's performance declined slightly from 85% over 2019/20. This element of the team's performance, however, remained strong and was well above the pre-pandemic Welsh average of 67.8%. We determined 7 out of 9 major applications within agreed time periods. To prioritise resources for major planning applications, planning performance agreements will be increasingly adopted with applicants for suitable planning applications, leading to better project management of these generally more complex applications.</p>	

Indicator	06. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	248 (no target set for this indicator)
<p>The Council's performance improved under this measure compared to 296 days over 2019/20. There were only a small number of major applications (nine) determined over this period reflecting the impact of the pandemic and the lifecycle of the LDP wherein most major housing sites have now been granted consent.</p> <p>This figure is just above the pre-pandemic Welsh average of 232 days. If one outlying application was omitted (a housing scheme at Mardy that was eventually refused, where the applicant wished to negotiate all the material issues that could be resolved before lodging an appeal - which led to a protracted process of determination (780 days) the measure fell to 172 days, which would have well been below the Welsh average. It is worth noting that the continued use of PPAs should help the team to keep this measure at a good level of performance in future years.</p>	

Indicator	07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 70% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 70% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	91
<p>91% of all planning applications we dealt with were determined within the required timescales, which is well above the 80% threshold for the 'Good' performance ranking. This compared to 88% across Wales during 2018/19.</p> <p>This is a very good level of performance having regard to the significant impact of the pandemic and the constraints the national lockdowns presented to normal working practices.</p>	

Indicator	08. Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Less than 67 days	Between 67 and 111 days	112 days or more

Authority's performance	92 days
<p>In 2020-21 we determined 947 planning applications, each taking, on average, 92 days (11.5 weeks) to determine. This is higher than the previous year (70 days) which was largely unaffected by the pandemic. Given our officers' challenges over the 12 months involved and our focus on outcome rather than speed, this is a very reasonable achievement.</p> <p>This will continue to be a priority for the service as we emerge from the pandemic.</p>	

Indicator	08a. Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	88
<p>This is the fourth year of its inclusion as an indicator and the performance has improved significantly since its first where 67% of applications for listed building consent were determined within agreed timescales. The Welsh average for this indicator was 75% (pre-pandemic). The Council's Heritage team has worked hard at improving its turnaround of listed building applications. The team of four officers (including a monitoring officer) also contributes to the pre-</p>	

application advice process, the handling of appeals and provides consultation responses on planning applications in conservation areas. A similar service is also provided for Torfaen Council and to a lesser extent Blaenau Gwent CBC. The Authority has Cadw accredited delegation arrangements for grade II\* and II buildings.

## SECTION 2 - QUALITY

Indicator	09. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Less than 5% of decisions	Between 5% and 9% of decisions	9% or more of decisions

Authority's performance	6
<p>Monmouthshire's performance shows that 6% of Committee decisions go against officer recommendation, which equated to just two planning applications out of 35 determined at committee during 2020/21. This was slightly higher than the 4% over the two previous reporting periods but must be seen in the context that these are low numbers.</p> <p>This compares favourably to the 9% average in Wales over 2018/19.</p> <p>Provided that Committee decisions are based on good planning judgement and material planning considerations, overturned recommendations are a perfectly acceptable part of the planning process. The difficulty only arises where decisions are made that cannot be substantiated at appeal.</p> <p>The two overturned applications in question related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) A block of apartments in Llanfoist that Members regarded as an over-development of the site (this has been appealed but no decision has yet been received), and:</li> <li>ii) A group of residential units for close care accommodation also in Llanfoist that was approved contrary to recommendation, given it was on an employment site identified in the LDP. Members considered that this would be a better fit for the site given the non-industrial developments already approved nearby and would make a valuable contribution to accommodation for the older population.</li> </ul> <p>All appeal decisions are reported to committee so that Members can review and learn from such decisions.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal

Authority's performance	100
<p>This year saw an excellent level of performance that improved from 86% to 100% with all ten appeals being 'won'. The placemaking agenda set out in Planning Policy Wales appears to be providing a higher benchmark for appeal Inspectors' decisions which is helpful to our decision making process. The decisions are reviewed in the Planning Service's monthly Policy / DM Liaison meetings as well as at Planning Committee and detailed issues are shared and discussed.</p> <p>The proportion of appeals we deal with is low at 1.1 appeals for every 100 applications received (Welsh average was 2 appeals per 100 applications determined in 2018/19). This indicates our willingness to negotiate proposals to a positive outcome and the strength of our policy framework.</p>	

Indicator	11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases

Authority's performance	0
<p>No awards of costs for unreasonable behaviour have been made against us this year.</p> <p>An action identified in the first APR was to report appeal decisions to Planning Committee every month for learning and discussion. This action has been implemented and has been welcomed by the Committee as useful. Committee members are also encouraged to sit in on appeal hearings or inquiries as further development training and to assist the case officer. The Council's protocol is that nominated members help to present the case where a decision is contrary to the officer recommendation.</p>	

## SECTION 3 – ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	12. Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>Monmouthshire has an established and effective Public Speaking Protocol and also allows applicants, objectors, supports and community and town councils to speak at the Delegation Panel site visits prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has proven to be a valuable exercise in terms of making informed decisions and improved customer and community satisfaction, even if the final decision is not the one they hoped for. During 2020/21 the meetings continued successfully in a virtual manner due to the pandemic, and the public speaking element has been assimilated into this process through use of videos, audios or transcripts, the latter being read out by an officer, which allow continuity of participation.</p> <p>The Size and Composition of Local Planning Authority Committees (Wales) Regulations 2017 did not seek to control the public speaking element of a planning committee. If any future national protocol seeking consistency throughout Wales is published it is hoped it is provided as best practice guidance and does not curtail the successful delegation and public speaking systems we already employ.</p>	

Indicator	13. Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Members of the public can seek advice from a duty planning officer		There is no duty planning officer available

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>We have a duty officer available every day from 9am to 5pm and although this is resource intensive, we recognise from feedback to previous customer satisfaction surveys that this is a service that the customer values.</p>	

Indicator	14. 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)?	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>

All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online
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Authority's performance	Yes
<p>Our public access element allows customers to view all public documents and plans relating to applications including officer reports and decision notices, and also allows customers to comment online.</p> <p>We implemented upgrades to the back office and public access systems at the end of the reporting period which has improved the customer experience and has enabled better GDPR compliance. The automated system has allowed officers to carry out work of greater value such as determining applications for pre-application advice and planning applications.</p> <p>Navigational and functional improvements to the Idox public access module (e.g. to enable a customer to track changes to an application) were actioned during the previous reporting period.</p>	



## SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

Indicator	15. 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	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Between 70% and 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Less than 70% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days

Authority's performance	72
<p>This had been an area of disappointing performance and compared poorly to the Welsh average of 76.3% in 2018/19 when it was 65%. The appointment of a new Area Team Manager who manages the enforcement section saw the commencement of a systems review of the enforcement function in 2018/19. This measure rose to 75% over 2019/20 and remained reasonable at 72% during 20/21 despite the substantial challenges presented by having fewer staff resources during the reporting period (through redeployment as a result of the pandemic, family bereavement and illness). While key changes to working processes were put on place by December 2019 we would like to move much closer to 100% for this measure and thus the action to closely monitor the performance of the Enforcement Team is retained for a further 12 month period.</p>	

Indicator	16. Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	199
<p>This indicator improved significantly during 2019/20 (it fell to 142 days) and was below the Welsh average of 165 days (2018/19). It is not surprising that given the considerable challenges the small enforcement team faced over 2020/21 that this end to end performance measures has declined to 199 days. This remains, however, fair as a level of performance. The systematic review of the enforcement service will continue into the next 12 months to seek to omit waste, poor working practices and find smarter ways of working to reduce this time to a more acceptable level for our customers.</p>	