

Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2024 –25

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

Councillor Paul Griffiths, Cabinet Member

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

For the other areas in the Planning Performance Framework, performance data has been obtained by Monmouthshire officers from the Development Management Quarterly Returns and our own back-office system. Comparisons have been made with the Welsh average performance for each measure over 2018/19 (the latest reporting period for this national data) as well as our own performance against the measures over 2024/25 (N.B. WG intends to reintroduce the all-Wales comparison data and Performance Framework for the 2025/26 reporting period). 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 high at 92% (compared to 93% over 2023/24) and was well above the WG target of 80%;
- The average time to determine all applications rose slightly to 102 days (from 100 days in 2023/24) as the team continued to work through solutions (including the NRW review of environmental permits) that addressed the phosphate pollution issue that had contributed to lengthy delays in determining many applications in the central and northern parts of the County;

- The proportion of major applications determined within agreed timescales was 89% compared to 67% over the previous year, well above the pre-pandemic Welsh average in 2018/19 (68%);
- 78% of listed building applications were determined within agreed timescales, just below the 80% 'Good' target set by WG, and we provided a valued Heritage service for Blaenau Gwent Council;
- The percentage of applications that were approved was 95%, an indicator that our pre-application advice service is working well;
- During this reporting period, we closed 274 applications seeking pre-application advice. 289 submissions for pre-application advice were received in 2024/25. Of these 45 led to planning applications, with 43 being approved and 2 being refused. The two refused applications were a householder application and an associated application for listed building consent, both relating to pre-application advice where the officers had set out that the proposal was unacceptable at the 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.

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

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the Local Planning Authority operates, both corporately and in terms of Monmouthshire as a county, for the 2024/25 period.

Corporate Context

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

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

MCC Purpose	To become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life
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CC Objectives	A Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced; A Green place to live and work, with reduced carbon emissions, and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency; A Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres, where businesses can grow and develop; A Safe place to live where people have a home and community where they feel secure; A Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued; A Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.
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- 2.4 The Planning Service's purpose, 'To plan for, advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development', links directly to all six of these objectives. The Planning Service sits within Communities and Place Directorate (N.B. now the Place & Community Well Being Directorate, October 2025).
- 2.5 The Planning Service is made up of i) the Planning Policy and ii) the Development Management (DM) teams. The primary purpose of the Planning Policy team is to prepare and monitor the statutory Local Development Plan (LDP) and assist in its effective implementation through the Development Management (planning application) process. This ensures that the land use and sustainable development objectives of the Council are met ensuring the provision of an adequate supply of land in sustainable locations for housing, retail, education, recreation, tourism, transport, business, waste and other needs, whilst protecting the county's valued environmental, heritage and cultural assets. This work aligns directly with achieving the Council's objectives.
- 2.6 Key areas of work for the Service include:
- Carrying out a replacement of the Monmouthshire LDP.
 - Preparing and co-ordinating thematic supplementary planning guidance to help to foster the interpretation and implementation of LDP policy.
 - Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with both internal and external partners.
 - Monitoring and evaluating development plan policies, including preparing the statutory LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).
 - Maintaining the LDP evidence base and ensuring fitness for purpose for future LDP revision.
 - Providing pre-application advice to customers;
 - Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
 - Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development;
 - Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB and the Brecon Beacons National Park;

- Providing a heritage service for our neighbouring colleagues in Blaenau County Borough that works in a manner that is consistent and as well-resourced as the one provided for Monmouthshire.
 - Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable in the public interest.
- 2.7 The main customer of the Planning Service is the applicant of any planning application, however there are numerous stakeholders including individuals, communities, businesses, third sector organisations, other Council Services and elected Members.

Local Context

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

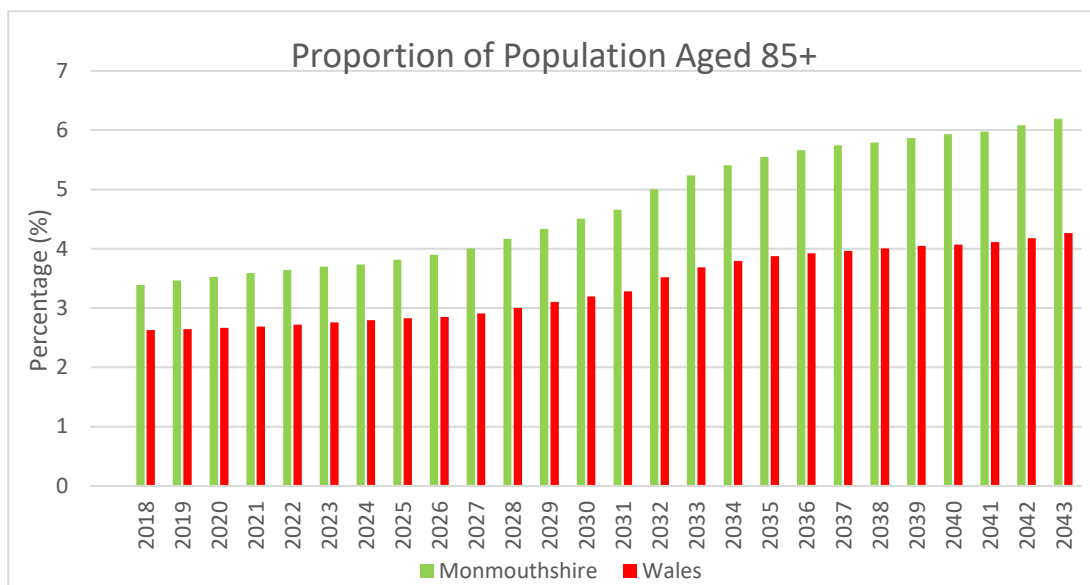
Our people

- 2.8.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 93,000 in 2021¹. Almost 8% of residents reside within the BBNP area of the County. The County has a low population density of 1.1 persons per hectare – significantly lower than the South-East Wales average of 5.3 persons per hectare – reflecting the area’s rural nature. Only 53% of the population lived in wards defined as being urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).
- 2.8.2 Our population increased steadily, up 7.6% between 2001 and 2011 compared with the Wales average of 5.5%. The increase from 2011 to 2021² represents a lower increase at 1.8%, however, this is marginally higher than the growth for Wales over the same period of 1.4%. This increase is wholly attributable to inward migration, with natural change showing negative growth. The County has a relatively high and increasing proportion of older age groups, and a lower and decreasing proportion of younger adults compared with the UK and Wales averages. The graph below illustrates the proportion of those aged 85+ in Monmouthshire in comparison to Wales, based upon the 2018-based local authority population projections for Wales, 2018 to 2043. It shows that the trend in the ageing demographic is likely to continue. The 2021 Census suggests the proportion of those aged 85+ is 3.4% in Monmouthshire compared to 2.7% in Wales.

Source: Office for National Statistics, Stats Wales

¹ Source: Census 2021

² Source: Census 2021



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

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



2.9 Housing and quality of life

2.9.1 The County has three broad categories of settlement:

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

- 2.9.2 Over the last decade, housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged over 300 dwellings per annum, although there have been significant annual variations with 205 completions in 2014/15 and 443 in 2018/19. To deliver the LDP housing requirement, 488 completions per annum were required (2013-2021). During 2024/25 there were 319 housing completions (compared to 291 in 2023/24).
- 2.9.3 Data indicates that house prices in Monmouthshire are very high, averaging around £400k based on sales and valuations between October 2023 and March 2024. HM Land Registry data provides that the average house price in Wales as a whole was £208,112 in March 2025 (compared to £200,795 in March 2024). Between 2006 (the time the Monmouthshire Unitary Development Plan was adopted) and March 2025, there have been 5,493 completions of which 1,094 were affordable, equating to 20% of all dwellings built. Since LDP adoption (2014) to March 2025 there have been 3,495 completions of which 719 were affordable, equating to 20% of all dwellings constructed. This affordable housing provision only relates to those units derived from planning consents but additional affordable housing provision can result if open market houses are purchased by a registered social landlord.
- 2.9.4 Monmouthshire is generally a prosperous County offering a high quality of life for its residents. However, poor access to community facilities and declining local service provision is an issue for rural and ageing communities. The health of Monmouthshire's population is generally better than the Wales average, with greater life expectancies and a higher proportion of residents classing themselves as being in good health (2021 Census). Fewer residents in the County suffer with a limiting long-term illness compared with Wales as a whole. The rate of reported crime in Monmouthshire tends to be lower than for Wales as a whole.

2.10 **Our economy**

- 2.10.1 The ONS Annual Population Survey suggests that the County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (78.7%, 2024/2025) compared to neighbouring Authorities including Newport (73.9%), Cardiff (73.9%), Blaenau Gwent (64.6%) and Torfaen (74.4%). The equivalent figure for Wales is (72.7%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:
- In 2024, the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) records that the public administration, education and health sector accounts for 35.8% of jobs;
 - The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 24.9% of jobs;
 - Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County (see 2.10.3 below).
- 2.10.2 The County had 4,445 active enterprises in 2024, 11% of which were in the property and business services sector. The three sectors with the most businesses were Professional, scientific and technical services (16%); Agriculture, forestry and fishing (16%) and Construction (11%). Accommodation and food services accounted for 7%. The UK Business count dataset accessed via Nomis also suggests that 98.7% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees).

- 2.10.3 Tourism is vital to Monmouthshire's economy and generates income to support a wide range of businesses and services. According to figures supplied by tourism economic indicator 2024 STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor), 2.28 million visitors came to Monmouthshire in 2024, spending 3.53m visitor days in the county, generating more than £352 million benefit for the local economy, and supporting 3,422 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs. (Approximately 15% of Monmouthshire jobs are supported by tourism spend). Each visitor contributing to the county's economy by shopping on our high streets, purchasing food and drink, fuel, services and accommodation spent an average of £99.83 per day.
- 2.10.4 Management of the destination for visitors and residents is guided by [Monmouthshire's strategic Destination Management Plan](#). The previous Plan, which ran to 2020, has been reviewed and a new Plan developed based on in-depth research and collaboration with a wide range of local, regional and national partners. Monmouthshire's new Destination Management Plan sets out a clear direction for the future, as well as an ambition and roadmap for developing the visitor economy within the county to 2030. While the Plan has been commissioned by Monmouthshire County Council, it is designed to provide a common direction for all public, private and third-sector organisations with an interest in nurturing tourism to bring positive benefits to our communities. The Plan has been developed to support the Council's vision of ensuring that our 'communities are socially and economically sustainable by attracting and retaining younger people to rebalance our ageing demographic.' This has driven the Destination Management Plan's focus on revitalising our towns and landscapes; on developing more dynamic experiences for new generations; and on gradually evolving the destination or place brand so that it firmly positions Monmouthshire as an inspiring and relevant place to stay, invest and live.
- 2.10.5 The 2021 Welsh Government Commuting Statistics indicate that 61.2% of the County's working residents work in the area. This is an increase on previous years and suggests that there has been some progress in meeting the aspiration to increase the proportion of resident workforce working within Monmouthshire over the Plan period. However, the same data source suggests that Monmouthshire has a net outflow of 2,800 commuters – with 14,300 commuting into the Authority to work and 17,100 commuting out. There was significant in-commuting from Newport (3,000), Torfaen (1,900) and Blaenau Gwent (1,400), and from England (2,900). The main areas for out-commuting were Newport (2,600), Torfaen (2,400), Cardiff (1,600) with a further 4,600 going to Bristol. A relatively high proportion of Monmouthshire's residents travel long distances to work, with a high usage of the private car. Heavy reliance on the private car and limited opportunities for public transport is a particular issue in rural areas.
- 2.10.6 Other key challenges facing the Planning Service include areas at risk of flooding (including most of the Gwent Levels and the flood plains of the Rivers Usk and Wye and their tributaries). There are, however, flood defences within the towns of Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk.

2.11 Our built heritage

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

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

3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

Organisational setting

3.1 During the previous reporting three periods the Planning Service underwent significant changes, primarily in the Applications, Heritage and Enforcement Teams. As a response, several posts were replaced. Over 2025/26 there were very few changes to staffing arrangements, although in January 2025 a new Head of Planning was appointed following the promotion of the incumbent to a senior management post within the Council. The Head of Planning was appointed internally being the former Applications & Heritage Manager. This left a vacancy in the Heritage Team that was addressed early in the 2025/26 reporting period by the appointment of a new Principal Heritage Officer.

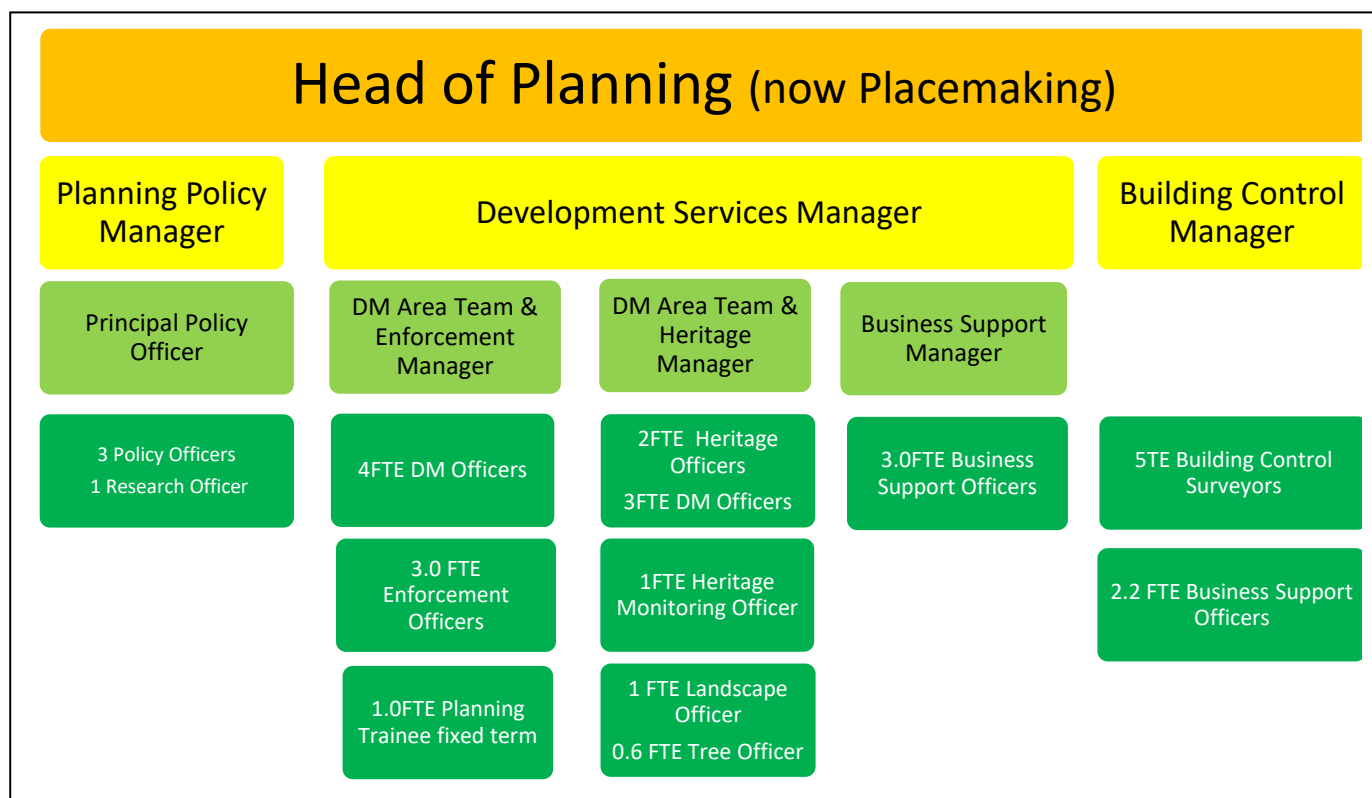
In the Policy Team, a Senior Officer was promoted to the role of Principal Policy Officer to assist the complex and challenging work regarding the adoption of the Replacement LDP.

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

3.2 Department structure and reporting lines for the 2024-25 reporting period



Planning Service staffing structure for the vast majority of the 2024-25 reporting period



Budgets

- 3.3 The two main costs for the service are staff costs and the LDP budget (money is transferred from the above budget to sit in an LDP reserve, built up to fund the next LDP). Income is generated by planning application fees and charges for our discretionary services including our pre-application advice service (the latter amounted to approximately £68,000 over 2024/25, slightly higher than the previous year) as well as the Planning Service's more recently introduced discretionary services that are discussed below.
- 3.4 Planning application fee income (£367k) was the lowest received since 2011/12. The prime cause was the reduction in the number of major planning applications which provide much higher fees compared to minor applications. This has partly been the result of the impact of the riverine phosphate constraint in settlements like Abergavenny and Monmouth (this is discussed in later sections of this Report) but more significantly, the late stage of the lifecycle of the LDP. Fee projection work means there is likely to be slightly more activity on housing sites towards the later part of the 2025/26 reporting in respect of the strategic sites that may come forward in the emerging RLDP. We are likely to see outline applications submitted for some of the strategic candidate sites prior to the Examination stage, probably in the last quarter of 2025/ 2026. Application fees are set periodically by Welsh Government but they do not rise by inflation each year (the last increase was in 2020) and fee income is dependent on economic activity which is also out of the Council's hands. WG has confirmed that fees will increase to move towards 'Full cost recovery' in December 2025, beyond this reporting period.
- 3.5 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 50% of the cost of dealing with planning applications. Additional costs are incurred through the work involved in the statutory Development Plan, and via other services such as enforcement and heritage management. Increased planning application fee income is used to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council. In-year windfall extra income is used to balance the Council's budgets and offset overspend in other services. Conversely as has been the case during recent years, underspend in other services was used to offset DM's under-recovery of income, when economic and other circumstances resulted in a drop in fee income. Application fee income has fluctuated significantly over recent years, and this poses a challenge for budget management going forward. Fee income is heavily influenced by the wider economy, for example house-building (which itself is affected by interest rates, mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Budgeted fee income	£668k	£684k	£681k	£693k	£589k	£480k	£480k	£567k	£620k	£717
Actual income	£560k	£430k	£653k	£666k	£494k*	£651k	£554k	£475k	£508k	

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

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

Staff resources

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

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

4.0 OUR LOCAL STORY

Workload

4.1 Key projects during the reporting period included:

- In October 2024 Council endorsed the Deposit RLDP for public consultation and agreed the revised Delivery Agreement. Consultation and engagement on the Deposit RLDP and supporting documents took place between 4th November – 16th December 2024. Notification of the consultation, inviting comments, was sent to approx. 1,000 consultees, agents, and individuals on the RLDP consultation data base. Nine in-person engagement events were held across the County, together with three virtual events (one for town and community councils and two open to all). Officers also engaged with the Business Forum and representatives of school councils and attended a Business Resilience Forum and Climate Change Champions meeting. Approx. 750 people responded to the consultation, resulting in approx. 4,500 individual representations which were subsequently processed by the Planning Policy Team.

- We have started shifting back to a more hybrid working arrangement with officers returning to work in the office more frequently, using collaboration spaces in County Hall to meet as a group on regular days and Support Team colleagues normally using the original space in the office to meet, scan and train colleagues. The return of staff to the office has helped junior officers to benefit from face to face learning in the collaboration spaces and this office presence also helps induct new colleagues. Planning Committee has reverted to a hybrid arrangement with some Members preferring to attend in County Hall (others opting to attend virtually).
- We have continued providing a joint heritage service for Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent Councils. This commenced in January 2019 and has provided our neighbouring authority with expert heritage advice without the need to employ its own officer or commission a consultant. MCC manages the service for BGCBC via a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and provides the staff to deliver a resilient heritage service assisted by BGBC funding. Owing to the effective merger of BGCBC and Torfaen CBC Planning Services this arrangement ended during March 2025.
- Towards the end of the 2021, as a planning authority we were faced with a new constraint of riverine phosphate pollution. Within Monmouthshire it was identified that within the River Usk 88% of the river's water bodies failed to meet the required water quality target and within the River Wye 67% failed to meet the target. As a result of this failure NRW issued detailed planning guidance (updated July 2023) to ensure that the environmental capacity of the rivers (which are designated special areas of conservation) do not deteriorate any further. Any proposed development within the catchment areas of the rivers that might increase phosphate levels need to clearly evidence within a planning application that the development can demonstrate phosphate neutrality or betterment in its design and/or its contribution to the water body. In most cases there will be limited capacity to connect to the public sewerage system and an alternative solution will have to be found. This requirement on drainage considerations has impacted on all development that increases the volume or concentration of wastewater. We apply the guidance to all new applications in those Wye and Usk catchment areas. This has sometimes delayed applications and many were on hold until the Council had developed a clear strategy for dealing with such issues. We continue to work with a wide range of agencies including WG, NRW, Welsh Water and other authorities (including new nutrient management boards) to find sustainable solutions to this significant environmental problem. Recent work has seen DC-WW commit to providing phosphate stripping technology at Monmouth and Llanfoist waste water treatments works by April 2025. This, allied to NRW's recent review of environmental permits for the main settlements' waste water treatment works, has led to the identification of solutions that will help bring forward much needed development (including affordable housing) in the main towns of Monmouth and Abergavenny as well as smaller settlements in the County.
- Delivering our bespoke pre-application advice service for potential applicants, as well as offering pre-purchase certificates and completion certificates.
- Successfully recruiting new staff and training them to adapt to their new roles in DM and Policy Teams.
- Implementing prioritised elements of the Team's Digital Plan to improve our processes and customer experience – including upgrades to the Idox Document Management System (DMS) and Public Access (PA).

- Securing detailed planning permissions for a 46-home affordable housing scheme at Mabey Bridge, Chepstow, a 50-home affordable housing scheme at Tudor Road, Monmouth, a significant employment development (motorway-related services, plus B2 and B8 uses) at New House Farm, Chepstow and a bio-fuel vehicle fuelling station at the Wales One business park, Magor.



Image of the approved housing scheme at Tudor Road, Wyesham; this is an allocated site in the current Local Development Plan and will deliver 100% affordable housing comprising a mix of houses, apartments and bungalows

4.2 Last year there was a decline in the number of applications received (8%), influenced by the UK’s current economic challenges, the impact of phosphate pollution in the riverine SAC catchment areas and the lifecycle of the LDP which is in the process of being replaced. The percentage of applications determined within agreed timescales fell by one percentage point but remained high at 92% and is rated ‘green’ (good). The proportion of approvals remained high at 95%. During 2024/25, 97% of applications were determined under delegated powers while 20 planning applications were decided by Planning Committee (Wales’s average in 2018/19 was 93%).

	2015 -16	2016 -17	2017 -18	2018 -19	2019 -20	2020 -21	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24	2024- 25
Applications received	1284	1117	1188	1126	1134	1126	1154	1014	956	879
Applications determined	1085	1087	1071	1101	1106	947	1152	1026	956	908

% within 8 weeks or agreed timescale	79%	90%	91%	88%	91%	91%	81%	89%	93%	92%
% applications approved	95%	96%	95%	95%	97%	97%	97%	94%	97%	95%

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

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

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

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

4.5 These discretionary services were commenced seven years ago (they were rolled out slowly and then gathered pace until the pandemic when lockdowns, restrictions and home-working meant the pressure on staff time needed a response; priorities were put on applications and pre-application advice so the fast track service was suspended). Following them being recommenced, we have reviewed the effectiveness of these services and they appear to be working well. The average time for a householder fast track service over 2025/26 was a 29 day turnaround.

4.6 In more recent years, we have introduced planning performance agreements (PPAs) with applicants to provide a systematic framework of project management for more complex planning applications with milestones agreed such as submission of the application, set meeting dates and a projected committee date. The first was pioneered at Fairfield Mabey strategic, mixed use site in Chepstow and was well-received by those involved including the applicant. At the outset (2022/23), two PPAs were used for major proposals at Wales One, Magor (a large employment proposal) and the Wye Bridge active travel scheme. The fees for these two PPAs totalled approximately £40,000 which helped the Planning Team and internal consultees manage their resources to meet the target dates in the PPA. Two PPAs were negotiated during 2024/25, at Mill Lane, Abergavenny for a mixed use retail and food and drink proposal, and for BAE Glascoed for redevelopment proposals – as yet not submitted.

4.7 In relation to enforcement workload, the team were better resourced than in previous reporting periods due to successful recruitment to fill vacant posts over 2022/23. There are two measures for enforcement and for 2024/25 the first measure was rated 'good' where 214 out of 260 cases were investigated within 84 days (82%) which compared to an average Welsh figure of 72% for 2018/19. There was, however, a decline in the performance of the second enforcement measure which rose to 134 days to take positive enforcement action (up from 91 days in 2023/24). This was attributed to the closing of three long-standing cases which skewed the overall figure. If these were omitted the figure was 115 days. The 134 day measure is nevertheless a 'fair' performance rating and is significantly lower than the Welsh average from 2018/19 of 199 days.

4.8 Value of Planning

4.8.1 RTPI Cymru has published a toolkit which measures the value generated by a local authority planning service. The tool has been developed to capture the economic, social and environmental value at a local planning authority level across Wales. The tool and its 'Value Dashboard' have been designed to provide RTPI Cymru and the Welsh Government with a platform to demonstrate to local authorities, national policy makers, the private sector, researchers and other broader policy and media audiences, the value planning contributes and how planning is positively contributing to Wales' seven well-being goals. The data has been updated to reflect planning permissions and completions in the current reporting period, 2024/25. 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 almost £104M to the local economy by the allocation of sites in the LDP, the safeguarding of land, the granting and implementation of planning permissions, the operation of its enforcement function and the securing of planning obligations. In the previous reporting period this equated to approximately £70M. We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods, although it is fair to say that the parameters behind the model are now several years out of date and may undervalue the socio-economic contribution of the local planning authority. We will enquire with the RTPI and Welsh

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

Planning service key data



28 FTE jobs in
planning service



908 applications handled



£0.5m 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

7 major
901 minor
0 other



0 DCOs dealt with
1 DNS dealt with
58 LBC applications granted
11 refusals appealed
0 judicial reviews

Decisions

✓ 718 approvals (79%)
x 41 refusals (5%)
292 subject to pre app



Permissions



Permissions

■ Consistent with local plan
■ Departures from local plan



Contributions

Section 106 income

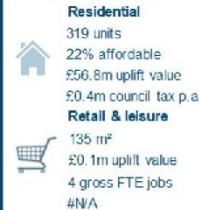
£0.2m
Breakdown



CIL income



Completions



Enforcement

352 enforcement complaints
4 planning contraventions
7 enforcement notices
1 breach of condition notices
1 stop notices
2 section 125 notices



Wider indicators



In 2024/25 the total value of planning was £103.9m

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 (Stats Wales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal database), 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 'triangle 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



Development recently completed or near completion – top: aerial image of the ongoing Brunel Quarter strategic housing site on brownfield land at Chepstow; bottom: town houses on the Brunel Quarter development with associated urban placemaking / public space.

Local pressures

4.9 Key local pressures include:

- Enabling delivery of the County's housing needs: bringing forward allocated LDP sites; site viability; achieving good planning decisions, creating sustainable and balanced communities and seeking to achieve a good level of housing growth having regard to strong demand;

- Managing the development plan and development management process having regard to the impact of riverine phosphate pollution that has affected development proposals in the central and northern parts of the County significantly;
- Ensuring full capacity of our staffing levels, promoting retention of staff via training and other opportunities, and to recruit promptly where vacancies arise;
- Securing timely consultation responses from consultees, both internal and external;
- The work associated with the replacement of the adopted LDP having regard to the challenging timetable for delivery;
- The need to help resource and deliver the Strategic Development Plan for SE Wales;
- The lack of income from major planning applications due to the gap between the implementation of the current LDP and the adoption of its successor with associated impacts on budgets to resource the service;
- Career development and training support for staff in the light of limitations on budgets.

4.10 One of our key challenges is balancing our aim of creating quality places in a timely manner while ensuring schemes are viable and help deliver housing numbers. We are, however, clear that quality is more important than quantity. The introduction of a place-making emphasis in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) is welcomed, as is the form of the revised PPW that embraces the Well-Being of Future Generations Act.

5.0 Customer Feedback

5.1 The number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded. There were 18 complaints received over 2024/25, compared to 4 during 2023/24. The theme of these complaints stemmed from concerns about lack of communication from case officers during the processing of planning applications and were resolved following intervention by line managers and subsequently improved dialogue with the applicant. There was also a willingness for applicants to become more tolerant once they understood the team's situation in respect of delays caused in waiting for consultation responses from key consultees. Another complaint related to a concern about lack of enforcement relating to construction management at a large housing site where enforcement action was not taken as quickly as the community had wanted or because it would not have been expedient to do so. The case where a Stage 2 Investigation led to a complaint being partially upheld, stemmed from a case involving pre-application advice where the advice was given verbally but never followed up in writing. This was fully acknowledged as being unacceptable. 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.

Of the 18 complaints investigated under the Council's formal Complaints Procedure, four were escalated to Stage 2 (investigated by a senior council officer unconnected with the Planning Department). The one case identified above involving pre-application advice, was

the only one where a complaint was partially upheld (out of 18 cases). In addition, none were considered appropriate to be investigated by the Public Service Ombudsman. As far as enforcement of planning control is concerned, there is often a misunderstanding within the community about the scope for enforcement action by a planning authority or an appreciation of the length of time it takes to remedy a breach of planning control. The team will continue to engage with our communities to ensure there is improved dialogue and clearer understanding of both the justification for action and the speed it takes. Linked to this, and as an action from last years' APR, a useful training session took place with Community and Town councillors focussing on planning enforcement in April 2025. A session with County councillors followed that in May 2025 with a focus on how to comment effectively on planning applications, engaging in the application process and also the planning enforcement process. These events were well-attended and also well-received by all attendees with positive feedback given.

We received twenty-one recorded compliments over 2024-25.

	2017 /18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/ 21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024/25
Number of Stage 1 formal complaints received	4	14	13	21	18	14	4	14
Number of Stage 2 formal complaints investigations received	1	4	2	2	6	5	1	4
No of Stage 2 complaints upheld or partially upheld	0	3 partially upheld	2 elements of the complaint partially upheld	2 partially upheld	0	0	0	1 partially upheld
No of Ombudsman complaints upheld or partially upheld	1 upheld	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No of compliments received	2	6	6	4	4	17	24	21

5.2 Quality customer service continues to be a service and organisation priority so the momentum and desire to improve remain. We are introducing a new feedback form (online) for customers to engage with us in respect of the quality of our planning application service which is due to go live in Q3 of 2025/26.



Photograph (May 2025) of the new King Henry VIII School, Abergavenny, taken from Pen-y-Pound, shortly after its official opening

6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2024/25

- 6.1 This section details our performance in 2024-25. 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 lengthy absence of data for 2019/20 – 2024/25 from WG means we have to compare performance to the Welsh average over 2018/19. The all-Wales comparison data will be re-introduced by WG ready for the 2025/26 reporting period which will be helpful.
- 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 given the very mature stage of the current LDP);
 - Efficiency;
 - Quality;
 - Engagement; and
 - Enforcement.

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

- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales improved from 67% to 89%, and was well above the 'Good' target of 60% (8 out of 9 applications);
- The end-to-end period for determining major planning applications fell from 436 days in 2023/24 to 267 days; this related to just a small number of applications (nine) – these featured three applications involving complex drainage issues (including phosphates/ SAB compliance issues), plus legal and ecological inputs - Tudor Road, Wyesham; Maby Bridge Affordable Housing and the Magor Bio-fuel station application;
- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales remained high at 92%, demonstrating the effective recruitment and training up of new officers in the Applications team ('Good' target 80%);
- The proportion of applications we approved remained high at 95% (service target is 94%);
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service, and followed our advice 100% were approved;
- In eight out of eleven appeals (73%) against our decisions to refuse planning permission, MCC's decision was confirmed, well above the 'Good' standard of 66% or more;
- We dealt with a large number of applications for listed building consent (58 applications) and 78% of these were determined within agreed timescales (target 80%);
- Enforcement performance remained strong for the measure relating to the percentage of enforcement cases investigated in 84 days (82% compared to the 2023/24 figure of 83%) which is rated 'Good', although the performance did decline in respect of the average time to take positive action which increased from 91 days to 134 days, rated 'Fair'. This was primarily because we closed a small number of long-standing cases which inflated the average figure. We investigated around 300 enforcement cases and served 15 notices.
- Significant s106 monies (approx. £1M) were received towards important community infrastructure schemes including the Abergavenny velo park, proposal as a result of granting permission for major developments allocated in the LDP such as those at Rockfield Farm/ Vinegar Hill - Undy, and Crick Road, Portskewett.

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

The Previous APR's actions involving securing political agreement for the Heritage Buildings at Risk Strategy, upgrading our back office software systems to process applications more efficiently and undertaking planning training (with a focus on enforcement) with our community / town councils as well as County councillors, were all completed. In addition, our Senior Heritage Officer received Cadw accreditation to determine listed building applications relating to Grade II* buildings and one of our DM Officers graduated with

Cardiff University, after completing the part time Planning course. The digitising of historic (and sometimes inaccurate) tree preservation order records is a longer term project and is carried forward (see below).

- 6.4 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 none are in 'need of improvement'.

	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

- 6.5 Four actions are identified going forwards:

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

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

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

Action 3 – To continue to invest in our staff to ensure professional qualifications are achieved and professional development takes place – this includes the accreditation of two of our heritage officers so that they can determine applications for listed building consent without reference to Cadw. The more we develop our own staff, the less reliant we are on a very competitive labour market.

Action 4 – To carry out a re-structure of DM management to ensure there is sufficient capacity to manage the team effectively, having regard to recent staff changes.

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

6.6 We still hold substantial information on older planning applications in microfiche form (pre-2000). Retrieving such information is time-consuming and inefficient and the lack of accessible information for the public leads to a high volume of calls and enquiries to the Council's Support Team and daily Duty Officer. Digitising this information will reduce phone calls and emails to all those officers and will free up time to carry out work of greater value

to the service and customers, such as processing submissions for pre-application advice and the applications themselves. This necessary but relatively costly action is to be funded externally as part of the migration of local authority data resulting from the HM Land Registry assuming management of local searches but will benefit the Planning Service and its customers so is very much welcomed. N.B. This work has commenced in the 2025/26 reporting period.

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

- 6.7 This is a time-consuming project and will no doubt be an action for successive APRs to come. There is a need to re-survey older and often out of date tree preservation records held by the Council from the 1950s to the 1990s and then digitise this accurate information on the Council's GIS layers so that it can be made available to the public to self-serve. The re-survey work will require additional resource. We may need to explore external funding sources promoting digitisation of services to achieve this action.

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

- 6.8 There are competing demands on the Heritage Team and many requests from the community are received to intervene to stop the decay of several prominent listed buildings throughout the County. Officer time and financial resources are limited in this regard, but an action plan agreed by Members has now helped to prioritise the cases that warrant priority working and action. To this end a Buildings at Risk Strategy and action plan was proposed to be developed in the previous APR to manage this process more effectively and to help the communities understand the choices we make when opting to take appropriate action to save and protect such assets. The strategy provides a methodology for drawing out the worst buildings and then set out appropriate actions as to how these will be tackled; actions are identified to address the worst 5-10 buildings at risk so it is a more manageable and transparent process. This Strategy was approved by Members in early 2025 and work is now proposed in 2025/26 to address key buildings referred to in the document.

Action 3 – To continue to invest in our staff to ensure professional qualifications are achieved and professional development takes place – this includes the accreditation of two of our heritage officers so that they can determine applications for listed building consent without reference to Cadw. The more we develop our own staff, the less reliant we are on a very competitive labour market.

- 6.9 In previous reporting periods, particularly after the Covid pandemic, there had been a relatively high turnover of staff within the team. To ensure that our colleagues feel valued and supported, we have committed to helping more junior staff to study to achieve professionally-accredited qualifications. Two of our staff are now enrolled on undergraduate courses. More established members of staff will be supported by training opportunities,

many of which are organised internally to reduce costs and have included county councillors and community councillors. These have covered issues like planning enforcement, one planet developments / rural enterprise dwellings, S106 agreements, affordable housing, biodiversity and active travel. Over 2024/25, two of our heritage officers achieved accreditation from Cadw so that they can determine applications for listed building consent under Cadw's delegation scheme (the Senior Heritage Officer at Grade II* level). Following the departure of two members of the Heritage team in 2025/26, their replacements will need to undergo this training with Cadw.

Action 4 - To carry out a re-structure of DM management to ensure there is sufficient capacity to manage the team effectively, having regard to recent staff changes.

- 6.10 The current temporary structure in DM has been in place since January 2025. This change was a result of an internal promotion and sought to trial an alternative structure to provide resilience and additional leadership capacity for the service. A review of the temporary restructure was to occur after 18 months to consider whether it was fit for purpose and met service needs. Recent changes in the Planning Service have seen the appointment of a new Head of Planning and it is considered necessary to review the structure and set out a clear and fit for purpose structure of the DM function within the wider Planning Service.
- 6.11 The proposed structure will be designed around service need rather than the unique skills of people who have historically been within the service. This will provide clear lines of reporting across the disciplines within the DM service – including Heritage, Enforcement and planning applications. Previous structures have been less resilient and required reorganisation following retirements or staff leaving (internal or external). This restructure is anticipated to take place towards the end of 2025, subject to political approval.



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

Opportunities and Risks going forward:

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

- Continue to roll out the project management of major planning applications, where appropriate, via planning performance agreements to seek, by best endeavours, timely and well-managed processing of such applications, providing a good customer experience for the customer;
- To digitise the information held by the Council in microfiche or paper form to improve the web site experience for customers and improve customers' pathways to information (Action 1 a and b);
- To implement the Buildings At Risk Strategy to safeguard some of our most precious but vulnerable heritage assets (Action 2);
- Continue with the replacement Monmouthshire LDP because of the need to facilitate the identification/ allocation of additional housing land as well as addressing the demographic and employment challenges of the County;
- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups, including the Welsh Government, the WLGA and the RTPI
- To support our colleagues via training opportunities, regular reviews and one-to-ones to invest in their careers, ensure their well-being and mental health are resilient and their productivity remains high, helping to meet the challenge of retaining our officers in a currently highly dynamic job market in the built environment professions (Action 3).

- To restructure the DM management team to ensure it is fit for purpose and provides firstly, capacity to manage our staff effectively and secondly, resilience in meeting the environmental and socio-economic challenges facing the Council and our communities (Action 4).
- To respond to the challenges raised by the economic squeeze on households and enterprises to ensure our County's communities and local economy can be resilient and can thrive.
- To manage the threat of phosphate pollution in our two main rivers to reduce environmental damage, while finding new ways of managing this issue that will still allow sustainable development to take place in those catchment areas.

6.11 Progress will be measured via our 2025/26 Annual Performance Report and our 2025 - 2028 Service Business Plan.



See text on next page



Images of Veddws Farm in the Wye Valley, a remodelled cottage integrating new, well-mannered extensions to the older Victorian cottage with a more contemporary detached garage and home office (the latter on the first floor) in the substantial, landscaped garden (images courtesy of Hall & Bednarczyk Architects)