

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S PLANNING SERVICE'S ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR)</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION – CLLR. P. GRIFFITHS</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>17 DECEMBER 2025</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>

## **1.0 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide the Cabinet Member for Planning & Economic Development with a report on the performance of the Council's Planning Service for the financial year period 2024-25.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

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

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Welsh Government(WG) normally requires all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales to submit an Annual Performance Report for their planning service by the end of November each year (albeit that this requirement was relaxed during the reporting periods affected by the Covid pandemic). This requirement links with the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, and the Welsh Government's objective of creating a positive and enabling planning service.
- 3.2 This is the ninth Annual Performance Report (APR). The report to a scrutiny committee provides the opportunity to review and discuss performance and was welcomed by previous Committees, with a request that it become an annual item.
- 3.3 The APR looks at the performance of the Planning Service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government (WG) targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance over the previous year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available. The objective of the APR is to reflect on and celebrate good performance, identify areas for improvement, and look across Wales to identify potential areas of best practice that Monmouthshire could learn from or share with others. Recently there was no requirement from WG to submit an APR and no all Wales comparative data has been provided as is normally done. Again, this year WG have not provided national benchmarking figures to enable the council to review its current status against the Wales average. This is unfortunate as the comparison being made is no longer accurate or reflective of the status of planning services across Wales during 2024/25. Issues such as resources limitations and environmental considerations such as water quality in rivers would have an impact on local planning authorities across Wales and therefore the comparison is flawed. Despite that, Monmouthshire's Planning Service decided to continue to

commit to submitting an APR but had to base the assessment of our performance over those two years against the Welsh average in 2018/19 (the last year the national data was published).

3.4 The APR is divided into sections, with the format and appearance being consistent throughout Wales, and all LPAs reporting on the same performance indicators. The report looks at where the Planning Service sits corporately, local pressures, customer feedback and performance. Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making (omitted from the APR in recent years as no performance data was provided by WG and given the work now being focussed on replacing the current LDP);
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

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

3.5 The Annual Performance Report is provided at Appendix 1.

#### **4.0 KEY ISSUES**

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

4.2 Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

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

- Providing a heritage service for our neighbouring colleagues in Blaenau Gwent County Borough that works in a manner that is consistent and as well-resourced as the one provided for Monmouthshire.
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable in the public interest.

## **5.0 MAJOR PROJECTS FROM 2024/25**

### **5.1 During the reporting period these 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 BGBCB 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 the BGBCB 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.

## **6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF OUR 2024/25 APR**

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

- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales 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 Grove Farm - Llanfoist.

- 6.2 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. Of the 12 ranked indicators, 8 are ranked 'Good', while 4 are 'Fair' and none 'need improvement'.

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

The Previous APR's actions involving 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).

	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

- 6.3 Four actions are identified going forwards.

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.

#### 6.4 **Value of Planning**

RTPI Cymru has published a toolkit which measures the value generated by a local authority planning service. The tool has been developed to capture the economic, social and environmental value at a local planning authority level across Wales. The tool and its 'Value Dashboard' 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, 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. We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods. 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



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



Residential  
111 ha



Retail & leisure  
0 ha



Commercial  
244 ha



Waste  
0 ha

### LDP Value

£2.1m uplift value

(based on land allocated for whole plan period)

Value adding policies ✓ 89%

### Applications

7 major  
901 minor  
0 other

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

■ Statutory ■ Discretionary

### Decisions

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

■ Delegated ■ Committee

■ Delegated ■ Committee

### Permissions

**Residential**  
958 units  
£40.4m uplift value  
18% affordable

**Retail & leisure**  
240 m²  
£0.0m uplift value

**Tourism**  
250 bedspaces  
220 self catering

### Permissions

■ Consistent with local plan  
■ Departures from local plan

**Commercial**  
10,350 m²  
£0.2m uplift value

**Renewables & other**  
#REF!

0 tonnes waste  
0 tonnes minerals  
4 ha remediation  
4ha

### Contributions

#### Section 106 income

£0.2m

#### Breakdown

■ Training and employment  
■ Sports and leisure  
■ Environmental  
■ Community/cultural  
■ Formal open space  
■ Primary health  
■ Education  
■ Infrastructure  
■ Active travel  
■ Highways  
■ Affordable housing

#### CIL income

£0 total value

### Completions

**Residential**  
319 units  
22% affordable  
£56.8m uplift value  
£0.4m council tax p.a

**Retail & leisure**  
135 m²  
£0.1m uplift value  
4 gross FTE jobs  
#N/A

#### Commercial

9,950 m²  
£5.5m uplift value  
144 gross FTE jobs  
#N/A

#### Renewables

1 MW  
£5,000 community benefit

#### Tourism

150 50 FTE jobs  
200 self catering

### Enforcement

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



### Wider indicators

£186,100 spend on consultancy fees  
9 internal consultees  
0 Energy statements  
0 EdAs  
3 Environmental statements

£20,000 health benefits of affordable housing provision p.a  
£100,000 recreational benefits from open space created p.a  
3 Travel plans  
0 HIAs  
8 Transport assessments

**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 (StatsWales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraised databooks), 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 'intangible 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



## **7.0 OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD**

7.1 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.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

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

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

9.1 Sustainability, equality and well-being considerations are central to the planning service's activities. This report is a review of the previous year's performance against targets and benchmarking information, however the proposed five actions for future improvements seek to improve service delivery to the benefit of our customers and communities.

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

## **10.0 OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

10.1 There is normally a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to undertake an Annual Performance Report and to submit it to the Welsh Government by 31 October



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

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

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

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

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

- 11.2 In addition, the Council's Performance & Overview Select Committee will scrutinise the APR via a report to be considered on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025.

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

#### **12.0 CONSULTEES**

- Planning Committee and the Performance & Overview Select Committee via a report to the latter considered on 3 December 2025.
- Place and Community Well-being Directorate SLT

#### **13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

None.

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

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## Appendices

1. Annual Performance Report including appendix (Performance Framework)
2. Equality and Future Generations Evaluation