

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol Blaenau Gwent

# Environment Background Paper Cefndirol Amgylchedd

Local Development Plan  
Adeneuo Datblygu Lleol

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**Appendix 1: Green Infrastructure**



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Aim of this Paper

- 1.1 To set out the background and evidence for how objectives, allocations and policies have been identified and developed.

### Overview of how this Paper fits into Plan preparation

- 1.2 This paper will provide information for Officers and Members of the Authority, stakeholders, members of the public and the Inspector to help explain the approach taken on the Environment.

### Context

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## 2.0 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

### People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (Update 2008)

- 2.1 The Wales Spatial Plan (WSP) provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Blaenau Gwent along with the neighbouring authorities of Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cardiff, Bridgend, Newport and the Vale of Glamor



Regulations 2010 (the “Habitats Regulations”). This legislation gives protection to European sites (SACs and SPAs) and also protects certain wild plants and animals (European Protected Species)

## **National Legislation and Designated Sites**

- 2.11 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 or Section 35 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) places a duty on all local authorities and other public authorities in England and Wales to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions (biodiversity duty). Section 42 of this Act places a duty on the National Assembly for Wales to publish a list of the species and habitats of principal importance in Wales. All local authorities must have particular regard to this list when carrying out it's functions, including determining planning applications.

## **Local Sites**

- 2.12 Policies in Local Development Plans should also provide for the protection of Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGs). Locally designated sites should be subject to the application of rigorous criteria to ensure their designation is justified on biological or geological grounds. The process of designating and maintaining the sites should be transparent. Where development proposals may affect national or local BAP habitats or species the same principles apply as to locally designated sites above.

## **Technical Advice Note 6 'Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities' 2010**

- 2.13 The revised PPW includes amendments made as a result of consultation on Technical Advice Note 6 (TAN 6) and both documents should be read together

TAN 6 deals with the following issues:

- ~ sustainable rural communities;
- ~ sustainable rural economies;
- ~ rural affordable housing;
- ~ rural enterprise dwellings;
- ~ One Planet Developments;
- ~ sustainable rural services; and
- ~ sustainable agriculture.

- 2.14 One of the key issues that LDPs need to address is how the land use planning system can be used to create sustainable rural communities. PPW and TAN 6 both emphasise the importance of affordable housing in sustainable rural





## 3.0 REGIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

### Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valley 2020 (June 2006).

- 3.1 In June 2006, the Heads of the Valley Strategy was launched to help tackle the issues faced by the Heads of the Valleys communities. The Heads of the Valleys Programme area covers the whole of Blaenau Gwent.
- 3.2 The objectives of the programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:
- ✓ An attractive and well used natural, historic and built environment;
  - ✓ A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities;
  - ✓ A well educated, skilled and healthier population;
  - ✓ An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience, and
  - ✓ Public confidence in a shared bright future.
- 3.3 **Strategic Programme 2:** A perception Changing Landscape, sets out the aim to develop and implement a number of key strategic landscape-scale environmental enhancements, concentrating on key corridors and gateways such as the Heads of the Valleys Road and Hirwaun. The programme will also seek to protect, enhance and manage the natural and semi-natural environment, its resources and biodiversity.
- 3.4 **Strategic Programme 9:** Linked Local and Regional Attractions and Facilities  
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4.0 LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

4.1



## 5.0 CURRENT AND FUTURE ALLOCATIONS/DESIGNATIONS

### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

#### BIODIVERSITY

##### Special Areas of Conservation

- 5.1 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are strictly protected sites designated under the EC Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992). The UK is bound to the terms of the Habitats Regulations, which are translated into the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act, 2000. The legislation focuses not only on protection, but also on management.
- 5.2 Planning Policy Wales defines SACs as Statutory Nature Conservation Designations. The Assembly will seek to ensure that the “  
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” (para. 5.3.9)
- 5.3 TAN 5 highlights the UK’s obligations and international responsibilities to protect statutory protected sites from damage and deterioration, with their important features to be conserved by appropriate management.
- 5.4 In planning law, SACs are afforded the highest possible biodiversity protection. Wales contains 90 SACs or candidate SACs and although none of them fall within the boundary of Blaenau Gwent, several are in close proximity.
- 5.5 Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and Regulation 48(1) of the Habitats Regulations 1994, a ‘Habitat Regulation Assessment’ needs to be undertaken by law on all European protected sites. ‘Habitat Regulation Assessments’ in essence, assesses the likelihood of significant effect on a site as a result of development, including the cumulative impact of other plans, strategies, allocations or individual development proposals. Where significant effects are identified, alternative options should be examined. It is important to note that the effect of the plan on protected sites outside of the County Borough boundaries also have to be taken into consideration when preparing the LDP.
- 5.6 Capita Symonds was commissioned to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment/ Appropriate Assessment (AA) in respect of the Deposit Local Development Plan. Their Screening Report identified the potential for the Deposit Local Development Plan to have a negative impact on 5 European sites identified within a 15km search area around the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council’s (BGCBC) Planning Authority boundary. The 5 sites identified were Cwm Clydach Woodlands, Usk Bat Site, Aberbargoed Grasslands, Sugar Loaf Woodlands and the River Usk.
- 5.7 The Appropriate Assessment identified that, before the consideration of mitigation measures, **4 European sites could potentially be affected** by the delivery of the

LDP when considered on its own. However, after the introduction of mitigation measures the AA **did not identify any** of the European sites, which could potentially be affected by the delivery of the LDP.

5.8 Capita Symonds recommended the inclusion, as an LDP strategic policy, or a clear statement that the proposed LDP and its components will meet the specific requirements of Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and will not adversely affect the integrity of the sites concerned.

5.9 Policy SP10 was included in the Deposit Plan which protects national, European and international nature conservation sites in line with national planning policy;

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest**

5.10 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are areas of land that have been notified and designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as Amended) because it contains wildlife, geological or landform features that are considered to be of special importance at the national level. SSSIs are protected to safeguard these important assets for the benefit of current and future generations.

5.11 PPW identifies SSSI's as a statutory designated site, which makes a vital contribution to protecting biodiversity. Local Planning Authorities should have regard to the relative significance of national important nature conservation sites. The assembly government will “

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interest. This gives local authorities more powers to ensure better protection and management of SSSI's and safeguard their existence into the future.

- 5.15 There are two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the Planning authority boundary:
  - ~ Cwm Merddog Woodlands / Coed Ty'n y Gelli
  - ~ Brynmawr Sections (geological site)
- 5.16 The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) is responsible for selecting and designating SSSIs, which are identified under scientific criteria published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).
- 5.17 The inclusion of a policy within the LDP that refers specifically to the SSSI is not considered necessary due to the protection it has within national legislation. The inclusion of a policy within the local development plan would be repeating national legislation and guidance.

### **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs)**

- 5.18 SINCs comprise one category of nature conservation designation that are recognised throughout the UK under a wide range of differing titles, and which are collectively known as
- 5.19 SINCs are a non-statutory wildlife site designation covering a wide range of semi natural habitats of substantive value within a regional, county or district context and protecting and enhancing these sites is an essential part of sustaining the biodiversity resource of Blaenau Gwent.
- 5.20 They are found on both public and private land and vary in size and shape, from small ponds to much larger areas of habitat such as ancient woodland, upland, and species rich grassland.
- 5.21 Selection of these sites is a matter for local authorities and local wildlife organisations. Selection takes into consideration the most important, distinctive and threatened species and habitats within a national, regional and local context, making them some of our most valuable urban and rural wildlife areas. Guidelines on the identification of SINCs in South Wales are set out in published scientific criteria / 0 0 0 ' and '+ 0 1+' (Gwent Wildlife Trust, 2004 and 2008). They are approved by a Panel of Experts, which includes the Countryside Council for Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust, SEWBReC, the Blaenau Gwent Biodiversity Partnership, the Council's Ecologist and other bodies.
- 5.22 Over the past three years, the Council in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC) have worked on a major partnership project to identify SINCs across the borough. In November 2009 the Council approved the designation of a first tranche of sites, which had been identified as worthy of protection through ecological surveys as SINCs. In September 2010 a second tranche of SINCs was approved bringing the total of

## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

SINCs to be included in the LDP to 137. Both tranches are shown on the Proposals Map.

- 5.23 The identification and review of SINCs is an ongoing process with sites being identified as and when ecological survey data becomes available. Further tranches of sites will therefore be submitted to Committee as and when the ecological data becomes available and sites are approved for designation by the SINC Expert Panel. As soon as a site has been assessed and qualifies as a SINC under the guidelines, then its status as a SINC will be honoured. It does not necessarily feature in the LDP as a SINC as they can be identified and designated at any time although they will have the same status as those included in the LDP. SINC records will be updated at the first review of the Plan.
- 5.24 SINCs constitute an important ecological resource providing both an important haven for local wildlife and recreational green spaces for the local community to enjoy. River corridors which are designated as SINCS form part of the Strategic Green Infrastructure and other SINCS are part of the Local Green Infrastructure.
- 5.25 In a Borough with a lack of statutory wildlife site protection, (for instance, there are only 2 designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)) there is a need for greater recognition and increased action for SINCS in order to conserve the County's biodiversity resource.
- 5.26 The designation of these SINCS and their protection ensures that a green network is maintained across the borough. This provides many services, some of which are listed above, benefiting our local community as well as the species and habitats that are found within them. Today the protection of these resources is vitally important, as it will ensure a resilient countryside that can stand up many of the issues facing our society such as a growing population and changing climate.
- 5.27 Since the implementation of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill in 2006, Local Authorities now have a key role to play in the conservation of





economic and environmental objectives in the context of more efficient use of natural resources'. The Wales Spatial Plan is built upon five themes, all of which are supported by Green Infrastructure. The "Valuing our Environment" theme is particularly relevant when considering how the region's green infrastructure can contribute to implementing the Spatial Plan vision for South East Wales. The Valuing our Environment theme focuses on:

- ✓ High quality urban living and close proximity to stunning countryside
- ✓ Managing development pressures to safeguard and enhance the high quality landscape and countryside
- ✓ Sustaining and developing places that are safe for people to walk and cycle, and reducing crime
- ✓ Protecting environmentally sensitive areas, such as the Gwent Levels
- ✓ Identifying opportunities to manage, restore and create other sites which will safeguard and enhance the area's biodiversity
- ✓ South East Wales as a networked environment region.

5.37 Integrating environmental planning into spatial planning is a key aim for South East Wales and the concept of a networked environment region focuses on planning for Green Infrastructure in a similar way to more traditional planning of 'grey' infrastructure such as developing a road network. Recognising that the Green Infrastructure provides essential ecosystem services such as clean water,



## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

south, thereby providing an attractive green corridor running through the site. The Green Bridge cycle and walkway will connect The Works to T Llwyn village.

- 5.42 The benefits of the Green Infrastructure can clearly be seen at the Works as the pedestrian and cycle routes provide the opportunity for recreation with corresponding health benefits and also connect to a local community. They make the historic environment more accessible by establishing a link to the iconic General Offices which plays an important role in the heart of the community, and is now being transformed into a major visitor attraction that will showcase the heritage of the valleys, thereby providing an economic boost. Linear GI (the central wetland area which acts as a green corridor) running through the site is integral in securing connectivity for wildlife as well as accessibility for people.
- 5.43 The Ebbw Vale Sustainable Development Framework has been produced to guide and facilitate the regeneration of Ebbw Vale town centre and the Northern Corridor, in conjunction with the ongoing development of the Works. s6i)::6n)LC6t)L5  
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through the Ebbw Fach valley from Brynmawr to Llanhilleth. It links 13 community green spaces and numerous local heritage sites and environmental sites and is an example of the Green Infrastructure. VRP is an essential component of Blaenau Gwent's Green Infrastructure and acts as a principal delivery vehicle in achieving a networked environment region in SE Wales.

- 5.47 Blaenau Gwent's Green Infrastructure is shown in Appendix 1 and it will be protected and enhanced through Policy DM16.

**LANDSCAPE 10TUVMG1A1DROmVUKRP1RD.0UV(-8YVmD1 0D1 rhh**

## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

Development of Criteria report allowed for other more specific or local needs to be identified at stage 1, and therefore included at all later stages.

These local criteria are:

- ✓ Prominence,
- ✓ Spectacle – dramatic topography and views,
- ✓ Unspoilt areas - Pre-industrial patterns of land use
- ✓ Unspoilt areas – Remoteness and Tranquility
- ✓ Vulnerability & sensitivity to change
- ✓ Locally rare landscape
- ✓



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" (Section 197).

5.61 Currently, only trees and woodlands that are protected under Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) or are within a conservation area are legally protected. 5  
1 678 5 % - # 699: highlights the fact that protected trees are a material planning consideration (Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 Section 197).

5.62 Hedgerows are often seen as key defining features of the British and Welsh landscape character. However, the loss of hedgerows through removal, dereliction and general lack of management has been a key feature in recent decades to the detriment of our natural environment.

5.63 With this in mind, the Hedgerow Regulations, 1997, which were made under the Environment Act 1995 were introduced in England and Wales to protect hedgerows for the contribution they make to the natural heritage. The legislation protects hedgerows that qualify as 'important' under the hedgerow regulations criteria. When a hedgerow qualifies as important there is a strong presumption that it will be protected.

5.64 Policy DM17 will ensure that development proposals do not cause unacceptable harm to trees, woodlands and hedgerows.

5.65 Draft Supplementary planning guidance has been prepared, entitled "5  
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4 % ". This SPG provides a reference for developers, including a step-by-step guide in how to incorporate trees in proposals for development.

## GEOLOGY

### Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)

5.66 Regionally Important Geological Sites are a non-statutory geodiversity designation. The RIGS in Wales are supported by the Countryside Council for Wales and are designated by regional RIGS groups. A Wales-wide network of audited RIGS is nearing completion with the South-East Wales region (including Blaenau Gwent) being carried out by the South Wales RIGS group. The roll-out of an all-Wales RIGS database is anticipated to commence in 2011, as soon as the All-Wales RIGS audit is completed.

5.67 Brynmawr Sections SSSI is currently the only designated Geological site in Blaenau Gwent. It will remain protected under SSSI Status, which is of a higher level b35DRVvyT:56o)LC6f)L:56 )L::56a)y5CD::7:6n);6:)L5;io RrL76 )L::533 3;ot CD:GVyL





5.74 The Council does not have a list of such buildings and structures however, but a local list will be compiled from visual surveys and consultation with local interest groups. SPG will set out methodology for such a list.

### **Conservation Areas**

5.75 Under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act and Regulations 1990, local authorities have a statutory duty to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and designate them as conservation areas. These are afforded statutory protection by the Act, which provides that within these areas, local authorities are duty bound to prepare proposals for their preservation and enhancement, and to have special regard for proposals that may affect its character. The Act further provides control over the total or substantial demolition of a building within a conservation area and enables local authorities to affect repairs and make available grants and loans for repairs or restoration of buildings.

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## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

covers historic parks and gardens whilst the second part is a register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales. The register is divided into two parts: the first part covers historic parks and gardens whilst the second part is a register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales. The register is divided into two parts: the first part covers historic parks and gardens whilst the second part is a register of Landscapes of Historic Interest in Wales.

## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

part of the lake and create a wetland. Llanhilleth Pithead Baths is another newly allocated site and the removal of the derelict industrial building, which is considered to be an eyesore will enable the land to be developed. In total 4 sites have been allocated for land reclamation and they are shown on the Proposals Map. The results of the review are shown in the following table.

**TA**



could be released to help achieve the aims of the LDP. Another felt that policies should be adopted to ensure adequate protection against potentially undesirable schemes, possibly wind development and waste disposal.

### **How addressed**

These views have been taken into consideration when determining the detailed policies of the Deposit Plan.

### **Question 6.3**

**Is the countryside within the Plan afforded too much/too little or sufficient protection from development?**

50% of respondents said there is sufficient protection, 33% said too little and 17% believed there to be too much. One respondent thought there is a need to identify more sites for protection, (SINCs), whilst another commented that limited development in the countryside could have positive results. One stated that there are other considerations, such as the social and economic aims of the LDP.

6.12 Deposit plan policies have, where appropriate, take these views into account.

and protected species generally, and where appropriate through the design of new development/ regeneration schemes.

### **Response**

7.8 The Deposit plan will refer to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity including designated sites and protected species.

7.9 Two comments were made on Objective13

### **Issue – Design**

7.10 One comment recommended the rewording of objective 13 to read, “Ensure the standard of design is good quality, sustainable, appropriate to its context, and will improve the quality of the physical and natural environment; and protect and enhance Blaenau Gwent’s historic and cultural environment”.

### **Response**

7.11 Policy DM1 in the Deposit Plan will encourage good quality sustainable design in new developments. Policy DM2 will ensure that development proposals are appropriate to the local context in terms of type, form, scale, mix, and density.

### **Issue – Biodiversity Features**

7.12 1 comment recommended the clarification of objective 13 and suggested referring to incorporating existing biodiversity features into new development, and providing ecological enhancements, as well as respecting the physical and historic setting.

### **Response**

7.13 Policy DM2 refers to incorporating biodiversity features in new developments. It recognises that the landscape and the natural environment are amongst the most important local resources and needs to be protected and enhanced. Policy DM2 explains that the key is to incorporate areas of established importance and ensure these are protected and enhanced, for example through their management and the incorporation of new features such as native trees and plants.









landscapes (which fall partially within its boundary) and 1 registered historic park and garden. Also, there are a number of buildings, which are of local importance, but are not protected by National Policies, and a list of such buildings will be compiled during the Plan period and they will be afforded protection under this Policy.

A second conservation area has been designated in Tredegar, which provides the opportunity to encourage and promote the conservation of the architectural heritage of the designated area. The LDP considers the historic built environment as a valuable resource that should primarily be protected for its own sake in line with national planning policy but can be harnessed in a sustainable manner, for example, through promoting heritage tourism, for the purposes of regeneration. The Tourism Strategy intends to develop heritage sites as tourism attractions by developing tourism trails to heritage locations, providing on site interpretation and improving the marketing of the sites. Nantyglo Roundhouse Towers, the General Office building at Ebbw Vale and Bedwellty House and Park are three major projects, which could increase the visitor numbers to the area. The built heritage provides an important cultural and historical identity that if protected and enhanced could provide tourism opportunities. The LDP will ensure that sites are preserved and enhanced and that a framework is put in place to promote tourism opportunities.

### Natural Environment

#### **DM15 Biodiversity Protection and Enhancement**

- 1. Development proposals within 10 km of the Usk Bat Sites SAC that would have an impact on connectivity corridors or cause direct or indirect disturbance to the features must be subject to a project level HRA.**
- 2. Development proposals will only be permitted within, or in close proximity to sites designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), or that affect**

Development proposals on land which although a considerable distance away (10km), could impact upon the Usk Bat Sites SAC. A key aspect of the lesser horseshoe bat is its mobility, which means that it could potentially travel many kilometres from Usk Bat Sites SAC. Therefore mitigation measures are necessary

in respect of potential development in all areas with the exception of the very southern parts of the Borough. Consequently any potential development proposals that would have an impact on connectivity corridors or cause direct or indirect disturbance to the features (such as light, noise etc.) must be subject to a project level HRA.

Blaenau Gwent is an area with a rich and diverse natural environment, including specific biodiversity protection for areas and habitats and species including international, national and local designations. International and nationally designated sites will be assessed in accordance with national planning policy. This element of the Policy applies to locally designated sites, for example, the 137 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCS) and 6 Local Nature R





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Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are shown on the LDP Proposals Map and have been designated to protect areas that are considered to be important to the overall landscape, history, culture, biodiversity and geology of the County Borough. The designation of these landscape areas has been undertaken at a local level, using a regionally agreed methodology. The methodology used to identify the SLA's in Blaenau Gwent builds on the Countryside Council for Wales LANDMAP methodology and considers factors such as:

- ~ Prominence;
- ~ Spectacle – dramatic topography and views;LC6 L36 )R6t)R)R6t)Ry th56a)LC6n);6d)LC6 )





# ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

51.	Nine Arches Grassland	71.	Trefil Ddu Pond 4 (4 of 4)
52.	North Pen-y-Lan Grassland	72.	Trefil Village Grassland
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## ENVIRONMENT BACKGROUND PAPER

The current provision of SAC's and SSSI's alone is not sufficient to maintain the biodiversity of Blaenau Gwent. It is therefore important to identify locally designated wildlife sites such as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). Blaenau Gwent currently has 137 SINC's which are shown on the Proposals Map. Work is in progress to designate a number of other SINCS. As soon as a site has been assessed and qualifies as a SINC under the /  
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0 1+ ' (Gwent Wildlife Trust, 2004 and 2008), then its status as a SINC will be honoured anTr t rye 0

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