

Local Development Plan

Preferred Options Report

March 2008

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In November 2006, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council made the decision to cease work on the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and to start work on the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Local Development Plan (LDP). The timetable for the various statutory stages of the Local Development Plan is set out in the Delivery Agreement (May 2007).

1.2 In order to help develop a preferred strategy, a consultation exercise was undertaken on the Issues Paper and two different sets of workshops were held. The first of which was the Issues and Vision Workshop held on 27th July 2007, at the VITCC in Tredegar. The second was the Vision and Strategy Workshop held on the 19th October 2007 at the VITCC Tredegar and 22nd and 30th November at the Learning Action Centre, Ebbw Vale.

Purpose of the Report

1.3 The purpose of the report is: firstly, to record and analyse the information and opinions gathered through the development of the options and choice of preferred option; and secondly, to provide the views of those that attended the workshops to provide a clear indication of the way in which the options were developed and the preferred option chosen.

2.0 IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES AND VISION

Issues and Vision Workshop (July 2007)

- x The need to find a role / function for town centres;
- x The need to create a more balanced population stemming out-migration; and
- x The need to provide a range of housing opportunities, to meet aspirations including the need for affordable housing.

2.4 The options to be developed, were required to overcome these issues to ensure that the Vision for the Borough could be met by the end of the Plan period. The Vision developed after this workshop was:

By 2021, Blaenau Gwent will become a network of sustainable vibrant valley communities; through: providing a range of good quality, affordable homes; diversifying and creating a dynamic and competitive economy; establishing safe and thriving town centres; generating a vibrant visitor destination. Its unique environment, cultural and historic identity will be protected, thereby creating a place where people want to live, work and visit.

Consultation on Issues Paper

2.5 The Issues paper was prepared as a discussion document intended to promote debate on the issues of strategic significance for the Authority. The document was placed on the Council's website and sent to; members, key officers, statutory consultees and interested parties. In total, 176 individuals/organisations were consulted. Although the formal consultation took place over a 4-week period between 6th July and 8th August 2007, late responses were accepted. In all 14 responses were received.

2.6 For a detailed report of the consultation exercise, refer to the Issues Paper – Report of Consultation (September 2007) which is available from the Planning Policy Team or from the planning policy pages of the Council's website at www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

3.0 DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIONS

3.1 As a result of feedback from the workshop and consultation on the Issues Paper, three options were prepared for consideration through a further round of workshops. These options were developed to address the identified issues and meet the proposed vision for the Borough.

3.2 The options were developed in accordance with WAG advice (LDP Manual), which recommends restricting the options to 2-4 in order that they can be considered seriously. The options have been chosen in accordance with the LDP Manual which indicates that demand and supply issues can be brought together to produce options that range from a strong market led level of growth to a more capacity constrained level of growth. In choosing the options, regard has been had to national planning policy, the Wales Spatial Plan, Regional Plans and the Community Plan.

3.3 The options developed were:

Option 1: Regeneration

This option maintains the current strategy contained within the Blaenau Gwent Adopted Unitary Development Plan (1996-2011), which includes the following features:

- x population decline from the 2006 figure
- x no new housing allocations (urban containment) and a house build rate of 117 per annum
- x continuation of the existing employment allocations and strategy
- x the main towns of Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Brynmawr, Blaina and Abertillery would be the focus of shopping, commercial, cultural, social and leisure activity
- x the main expansion of services in Ebbw Vale

Option 2: Growth and Regeneration

This is a growth strategy, which has the following aspects:

- x stems out-migration leading to an increase in population to 71,000
- x a house build rate of 200 per annum
- x emphasis of growth would be in the Heads of Valleys and there would be regeneration focus in the south of the borough
- x a new hierarchy of towns with Ebbw Vale becoming the regional centre, with Tredegar, Brynmawr and Abertillery becoming district shopping centres. Blaina would become a local shopping centre.
- x specific roles would be provided for town centres, which are currently in decline, in an attempt to encourage their growth.
- x new employment opportunities to broaden the job offer

Option 3 : Balanced and Interconnected Communities

This option is trend based characterised by the following:

- x stems out-migration and stabilises population at 2006 levels.
- x the house build rate would be 157 per annum.
- x the emphasis is to spread growth according to the share of population which means it would be allocated in the Ebbw Fach Valley
- x equalise employment through de-allocating some employment sites in the north and relocating them borough wide, close to towns
- x no retail hierarchy but the number of town centres in the borough would be reduced from five to four (Abertillery, Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale and Tredegar) by excluding Blaina.
- x new complementary roles for the town centres.

4.0 CHOICE OF PREFERRED OPTION

Vision and Strategy Options Workshops (October and November 2007)

- 4.1 The second workshop was repeated three times in order to engage a wide range of relevant stakeholders, including various local interest groups, organisations from Blaenau Gwent and neighbouring authorities (see appendix 2 for a list of attendees on the individual dates and appendix 3 for the presentation on the development and detail of the three options).

Meeting:	Date:	Venue
Members of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	19 th October 2007	ViTCC, Tredegar.

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to be made. In fact, some sites may need to be de-allocated. As a result this would lead to an urban containment strategy.

Advantages

- x Three groups identified that it may encourage the development of previously developed land, thereby protecting the rest of Blaenau Gwent (including important areas of Greenfield land) against major development.

- x Three groups indicated that, as a result of this population loss, there would be less pressure on services.

Disadvantages

- x Six of the seven groups expressed concerns that, under this option, there would be a continuing loss of population.

- x Four groups considered that there would be a population imbalance, as this approach would result in an ageing population,

Employment

Under this option the emphasis is to spread growth according to the share of population, which would mean de-allocating some employment sites in the north and relocating them borough wide, whilst concentrating on business close to towns.

Advantages

x Three groups recognised that, if new employment sites were

Summary

There was considerable concern expressed about the implications of development in the Ebbw Fach valley in that it would place pressure on the infrastructure and potentially have a detrimental impact on the environment. It would not promote sustainable transport or be in line with market forces, possibly resulting in the loss of businesses to the area. The suitability and availability of land was also questioned. It was pointed out that, under this option, there would be limited growth and less opportunity for planning gain.

However, there were advantages associated with this option. For example, all communities would benefit. It had more realistic house build rates than Option 2. It would stop the decline in population and promote a better use of employment land. Also, it would be more sustainable if new employment sites were located in close proximity to the town centres, be beneficial for town centres, and result in less pressure on services than Option 2.

* For a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of each option see Appendix 4.

4.9 Alternative Option var/MCI5lu

- x a house build rate of 150-250 per annum (back-loaded)
- x new employment opportunities to broaden offer
- x a new hierarchy of town centres, with Ebbw Vale becoming the regional centre, and Tredegar, Brynmawr and Abertillery becoming district shopping centres. Blaina would become a local shopping centre.
- x specific complementary roles would be identified for town centres, which are currently in decline, in an attempt to encourage their growth.

Appendix 1

Stakeholders who attended the Issues and Vision Workshop – Friday
27th July 2007

Name	Organisation
Angela Chard	BGCBC Chief Accountant - Corporate Service
Alan Reed	BGCBC Head of Environment Management & Highways Services
Alun Evans	BGCBC Transportation Strategy Manager
Alwyn Hughes	BGCBC Business Development Officer
Alyson Tippings	BGCBC Tourism Officer
Andrew Long	BGCBC Team Leader, General Services
Andrew Parker	BGCBC Research Officer
Bernadette Elias	BGCBC Head of Policy Performance & Development
Bethan Cartwright	BGCBC Ebbw Vale and Tredegar Town Centre Manager
Dave Thompson	BGCBC Team Leader, Grants Policy & Operations
Eirlys Hallett	BGCBC Principal Planning Officer Planning Control
Ged McHugh	BGCBC Head of European and Economic Policy
Gemma White	NHS Local Public Health
Jane Layzell	Local Health Board
Jane McNeil	BGCBC Community Development Manager
Jenny Turner	BGCBC Strategy & Policies Officer
Jeremy Gass	University of the Valleys
Jim Perry	Glamorgan & Gwent Archaeological Trust
Joanna Rhead	BGCBC Group Auditor
John Howells	BGCBC Divisional Head - Development Division (Education)
Kate Rodgers	CCW
Leanne Connor	BGCBC Business Development Support Officer
Louise Horner	BGCBC Senior Estates Officer
Lyn Evans	BGCBC Grounds Maintenance & Countryside Manager
Mark Hopkins	BGCBC Engineer
Wayne Thomas	RISE
Will Beer	NHS Local Public Team
Brian Swain	BGCBC Facilitator
Hayley Spender	BGCBC Facilitator
Lynda Healy	BGCBC Facilitator

Appendix 2

Members who attended Vision and Strategy Options Workshop – Friday
19th October 2007

Name
Councillor K E Barnes
Councillor D L Elias
Councillor K Hayden

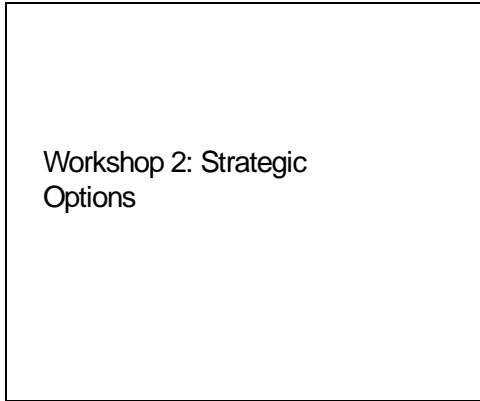
Kayna Tregay	Environment Agency
Huw Lewis	GAVO (Facilitator)
Frank Callus	Heads of Valley Strategic Programme Co-ordinator (Education)
John Howells	Local Education Authority
Janice Tse	Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Gemma White	NPHS
Anita Thomas	Princes Trust
Colin Stevens	Rassau Tenants & Residents Association & Blaenau Gwent Federation of T&R Associations
Andrew Jenkins	Rhyd Developments Ltd
Mike O'Dowd	Vice Chair, Nantyglo Communities First

Stakeholders who attended Vision and Strategy Option Workshop –
Friday 30th November 2007

Name	Organisation
Jessica Osbourne	Co-ordinator for Tredegar Central & West & Sirhowy Partnership
Tracy Nettleton	Brecon Beacons National Park
Alan Reed	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Alison Hoskins	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Bethan Cartwright	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Eirlys Hallet	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Julian Bosley	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Karin Lamb	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Kelsey Watkins	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Lynn Phillips	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Tony Chivers	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Richard Jones	Countryside Council for Wales
Dr Jayne Layzell	Blaenau Gwent Local Health Board
Brian Kember	Tredegar Development Trust
Mike Johnson	The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (Newport & Valleys)
Rob Murray	Torfaen County Borough Council
John Millard	Melin Housing Association
Vic Parkin	Chair of Nantyglo Partnership
Sharon Hill	Co-ordinator for Nantyglo Partnership
Darren Lewis	Co-ordinator for Rassau & Garnlydan Partnership
Rob James	Co-ordinator for Ebbw Vale N & S Partnership
Helen Madden	Co-ordinator for Blaina Partnership
Deborah Beeson	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Edward Robinson	Blaina Senior Citizens
Councillor David Britton	Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council
Trevor Neatherway	Blaenau Gwent Local Health Board
Andrew Parker	Blaenau Gwent CBC

Appendix3

Presentation on the development of the options and an outline of each option



How do we get there?

Spatial Options

UDP = Urban Containment
Growth = Heads of Valleys
Trend = Equalise Growth
(Ebbw Fach)

Committed Sites - UDP

Candidate Sites Map

Strategy Options

Option 1:UDP Regeneration
UDP - Urban Containment

Option 2:Growth and Regeneration
Growth - Heads of Valleys focus

Option 3:Networked Communities
Trend - Equalise Growth

Employment Land

Landbank of 64 ha

Annual land take-up 2 ha

Sufficient land – but is it suitable for
new business opportunitiesan o

Main Issues

The implications of the decline in the manufacturing sector and the shift in favour of the services sector and technological industries

Find a role function for town centres

Create a balanced population stemming out-migration

Provide a range of housing opportunities to meet aspirations including the need for affordable housing

Other Issues

Environment

Education and Skills

Transport

Leisure and Tourism

Renewable Energy

Waste

Workshop 2: Options

The aim of this workshop is to establish the preferred strategy

Task

Identify the advantages and disadvantages of each option

Option 1: UDP Regeneration

Population decline from 2006 level

No new housing allocations – urban containment

Continue with existing employment allocations and strategy

Main towns of Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, Brynmawr, Blaina and Abertillery focus of shopping, commercial, cultural, social and leisure activity

Main expansion of services will be in Ebbw Vale

Option 1: UDP Regeneration

Settlement	Share of population	Share of housing	Approx No of committed houses
Upper Sirhowy Valley (Tredegar)	22%	27%	500
Ebbw Fawr (Ebbw Vale)	33%	54%	1000

Upper Ebbw Fach (Brynmawr, Nantyglo)

Option 2: Growth and Regeneration

New employment opportunities to
broaden offer

The identification of a few large sites will
provide the opportunity for new/improved
service provision

New hierarchy of towns with Ebbw Vale
becoming the regional centre.
Tredegar, Brynmawr and Abertillery
district shopping centres 180.1-12 418.32 0.48 re f EMC EM1with Ebbw Vale

Alternative Option

Task

To identify an alternative Option

Variables

Growth

Location

Issues (Employment, Retail)

What Happens Next?

Further workshop with stakeholders and interested parties in November

Consider the findings of both workshops to help us identify the preferred strategy - SA will also assist in this process

Report back to Steering Group and LDP Forum

Prepare Preferred Strategy Document

Seek Council Support

Consult in Autumn 2008

Appendix 4

Advantages and Disadvantages identified in Vision and Strategy
Options workshops

OPTION 1: REGENERATION (CONTINUATION OF THE UDP
STRATEGY) All Groups Combined (no. of votes received)

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x Sustain existing communities as all town centres are served (4) x Less pressure on services as population loss (3) x Encourage development of previously developed land (3) x Less urban sprawl (1) x More places to play (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x Further decline of town centres (7) x Further decline of communities (1) x Lack of job opportunities (1) x Less affordable housing (1) x Ageing housing stock so unable to attract people to area (3) x Population loss and less money from WAG (6) x Not market-led as funding split between 5 town centres (2) x Ageing population/ population imbalance so more pressure on services (4) x Lack of inward investment (4) x Lack of flexibility in employment/no diversification of economy (2)

