

**BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN EXAMINATION
CYNGOR BWRDEISDREF SIROL BLAENAU GWENT
YMCHWILIAD CYNLLUN DATBLYGU LLEOL**

**NOTES OF THE PRE-HEARING MEETING: 24 APRIL 2012
GENERAL OFFICES, STEELWORKS ROAD, EBBW VALE, NP23 6DN**

1. SUMMARY OF MEETING

The principal aim of the meeting was to clarify the process for running the public hearings. All sessions will be held in The General Offices, Steelworks Road. A smaller room will be used with better acoustics and microphones for all speakers attending. It was agreed by those present that the examination could continue in English. The hearings will be run as round table discussions. The Inspector is happy to consider requests for formal cross-examination but anyone wishing to cross-examine another group or person is invited to explain to the Inspector why this is necessary.

The hearings will run over 10 days rather than nine in response to the increased number of people to be invited to appear in connection with minerals matters. The schedule of the hearings has also been adjusted in response to requests to amend the dates. Some questions have been revised to give greater clarification as to the relevant matter to be examined. Other questions have been deleted in response to new information provided by the Council that is now on its website (for example, car parking standards). Most sessions will start at 1000 hours but Day 2 will start at 0945 hours.

Having regard to the individual **renumbered** hearing sessions, the Inspector confirmed the following matters:

Session 1 - Development Strategy/ Vision

Question 7 – the Council will be given a list of policies and be invited to confirm how they comply with national policy and whether they merely repeat it.

Session 3 – Gypsy and traveller housing

Question 8 – this question will be revised. The Council will be invited more explicitly to consider why it would be unsound to plan for six, rather than four, additional pitches.

Session 5 - Six Bells Site

Question 5 - the Inspector directs the Environment Agency and Council to meet to explore if outstanding differences in connection with the Six Bells flood consequence assessment can be resolved. If the Council and Environment Agency reach agreement on this matter, it will be assumed that the issue of flood risk will have been resolved and will not need to be discussed unless any other contradictory flood consequence assessment of the site is received.

Session 6 – Employment

Question 1 – the Council will be invited to clarify what it means by the term “delivered”. Does this term imply development (as defined in the Town and County Planning Act 1990) resulting in new employment activity? It may be the case that another verb more accurately conveys what is meant.

Session 8 – Waste

Question 1 – the Council is directed to explain what the land allocation of up to 4 hectares will be used for.

Session 10 – Blaina Local Town Centre

Question 1 – this question has been added to ensure that parties attending this session have a chance to review the logic for the Council’s hierarchy of centres.

Session 13 - Securing sustainable development

Question 5 - the Council will be invited to clarify how the Plan implements the Welsh Government Practice Guidance “Planning for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy – A Toolkit for Planners” (library reference SD118) and what its implications are for individual sites such as MU1.

Session 14 – Turning Heads

Question 4 – the Council is requested to confirm if it has adopted any Supplementary Planning Guidance or other policies regarding its conservation areas and, if so, to put this on the examination library website.

Session 15 – Transport

Question 1 - the Council is directed to present an answer in the form of a table explaining which transport projects are intended to be delivered at which stage of the lifetime of the plan and what funding has been secured to deliver them.

Length of statements to be provided

Statements providing answers to the various questions to be discussed in each statement must not exceed **3,000 words** (excluding attachments) per session. Jeanette John will return statements that are late and/or plainly exceed this word limit. It is not necessary to repeat what you have already written. The Inspector has read every written submission already.

Site visits

The Inspector has visited the county and will conduct further site visits before the hearings start. It will be necessary to do some accompanied site visits during the examination. The operator of the Trefil quarry is invited to make suitable and safe arrangements (minibus?) to allow parties attending Session 18 to visit the area allocated for proposed extension (likely date 11 July).

2. DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSION OF STATEMENTS

18 May 2012 - deadline for submitting any technical reports that are likely to form part of an individual or organisation's statement of case.

18 May 2012 - deadline for submitting additional short papers (see note below) and for CCW to clarify its statement of common ground.

1 June 2012 (12 noon) – deadline for all groups and individuals to respond to the hearings agenda.

15 June 2012 (12 noon) - Council's deadline for preparing its own submissions in relation to each hearing session including any concessions made and/ or rebuttal of submissions made by other groups and individuals.

3. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO SUPPORT THE EXAMINATION

The Inspector has asked for the following additional **short** papers and statements to help with the examination. These papers should not exceed two pages plus attachments. It would greatly help the examination if these papers could be prepared by 18 May 2012.

3.1 Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) and focussed changes

CCW is invited to review its SoCG and comments on the Council's focussed changes to the Plan and confirm which outstanding matters are soundness concerns and which are suggestions as to how the plan might be improved.

3.2 Agriculture

The Council is directed to prepare a short paper which:

- quantifies the role of agriculture in county's economy (number of farms, estimate of jobs (SIC), type of agriculture);
- categorises the quality of agricultural land (using relevant government land quality classifications);
- subsequently considers whether there is a need to develop a policy around the rural economy and agriculture consistent with national planning policy including TAN 6 covering matters such as re-use of agricultural buildings, farm diversification) and, if not, why not.

3.3 Usk Bat Site SAC

CCW is invited to write a short paper which:

- explains the logic and merit of a designating a 10km radius around the Usk Bat Site SAC rather than, say, a 5km radius;
- identifies the protected species the Inspector should have regard to in the Usk Bat Site SAC in considering development in Blaenau Gwent such as the lesser horseshoe bat including a short statement on its commuting and foraging habits;

- confirms if CCW agrees with the findings of the Habitats Regulation Assessment which the Council has commissioned.

3.4 Vacant housing

The Council is directed to prepare a short paper:

- estimating the current proportion of housing that is vacant, and confirming the basis for reaching this figure;
- identifying any geographic concentrations of housing in the county and where they are (identified on a map);
- offering a plausible explanation for concentrations of vacant properties (for example, its location, house size, structural issues, proximity to local services);
- confirming whether there are concentrations of vacant housing by tenure (private or socially rented); and
- ultimately, offering a view on whether there is a realistic prospect of this housing being re-occupied in current economic conditions or over the lifetime of the plan. If not, what other options are open to the Council?

3.5 Brecon Beacons National Park

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNP) is invited to prepare a short paper that will be of use when considering minerals issues in Blaenau Gwent. The paper should clarify:

- the statutory basis for the designation of the national park, explaining the implications for development proposals adjoining or visible from the park;
- the relevance to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council of its obligations under Section 62 (2) of the Environment Act 1995;
- the current position of the BBNP in its UDP with regard to minerals and its draft LDP position (including extracts of any current or draft policies); and
- any action being undertaken by BBNP to bring about the closure of existing dormant mines in the park and funding available to do this.

3.6 Significant landscape areas

Torfaen County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are invited to clarify the difference in the methodologies used to assess significant landscape areas and whether this has any implications for land designation across Blaenau Gwent, most notably with regard to Tir Pentwys Tip which straddles the two local authority areas. They are invited to prepare a short joint statement on this matter.

4. Question and answer session

Will the procedures for the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council LDP examination be the same as that used in other examinations in Wales?

Yes, but different Inspectors may take different approaches to handling matters such as submissions where large numbers of people object to a specific site allocation.

May I circulate technical reports ahead of the examination?

Yes. It would greatly help the examination if people learn ahead of time what your view is likely to be. A deadline for the circulation of technical reports has been set for 18 May 2012. Jeanette will circulate all technical reports received electronically to all people attending the relevant session.

What is the deadline for submitting my statement for the hearing?

Noon, 1 June. There are no exceptions to this deadline. Jeanette John will return statements that arrive late. She will also circulate statements received on time to all people attending the relevant session.

Can anyone attend these sessions?

Yes. They are open to the public. However, you only need to speak if you asked to appear in opposition to the Council's position within the statutory consultation period and consider the Plan unsound. The Inspector has asked some organisations to appear on an optional basis where it may help him clarify matters (for example, Torfaen County Borough Council on minerals) and has invited others whose evidence might help the examination.

What happens if more than one person from our organisation wants to speak?

Discussion is usually easier if only one person from each organisation speaks at the table. The spokesperson for the organisation may wish to confer with a colleague or swap seats at the examination. The Council will have two officers sitting at the table at each session as one officer is normally responsible for looking up policy references and examination documentation that support the Plan while the other one presents evidence.

Will the Council tell me why they will not include my site for housing?

The Council will be asked to explain why it has excluded Sites H1.4 and H1.5 from its earlier list of allocated sites at Session 4 (27 June 2012).

I've made submissions about one site only. Can I attend other sessions?

People will be invited to attend sessions about which they have previously made submissions within the statutory timescale. You may attend other sessions as an observer.

Clarify Question 1 as it relates to Parc Arrael Griffin AS(N)23.

Promoters of this site are invited to consider whether it is necessary for the site to be explicitly allocated as a tourism and leisure site in the Plan if, as the Council state, it is being used for that purpose already.

Vincent Maher

INSPECTOR