



Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly

FAQs – Blaenau Gwent CBC

No	Question	Response
1	Council - why don't they make it compulsory for people to recycle?	<p>To make recycling compulsory would require a change in legislation from Welsh Government and this has so far not been their policy. They would prefer councils to put in place kerbside collection services and Recycling Centres which make it as easy as possible for residents to recycle a wide range of materials. We do as a Council, however, have enforcement powers which we can utilise, if we choose to do so, for individual households which we can prove are not recycling and issue those households with a legal notice to ensure that they do.</p>
2	What is within the Council's remit? (Housing, transport and green space).	<p>The Council manages a varied number of different buildings and spaces in the County Borough including green spaces, schools and an industrial units portfolio. BG Council holds no housing portfolio of its own and relies on RSL (Registered Social Landlords) for local provision. Leisure buildings and services are contracted out to a Trust but some partnership work on buildings is undertaken.</p> <p>A number of schemes have already been completed to improve the efficiency of buildings in BG through EU funding and WG funding and this program is continuing. This can be seen via the use of Arbed am Byth and Warms Homes Funding in the past 4 years to upgrade 823 properties within the borough and which amounted to £5,730,147 of inward investment.</p> <p>Local public transport is provided through service agreements with private sector providers run through Torfaen CBC, and some third sector provision.</p> <p>For details on Councils role in relation to green space please refer to Q14.</p> <p>Please see attached 2 pages from a recent CCC report “Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget”</p>



3	Do we have a person in BG council who deals specifically with climate change?	<p>Blaenau Gwent Council does not have a specific climate change officer or team of officers, because tackling the climate crisis is not considered a standalone activity, but impacts on the work of staff across the organisation. The Managing Director Michelle Morris chairs the newly established Decarbonisation Board that will deliver the Decarbonisation Plan, and the board includes staff from across the council who have responsibility for key areas of council operations relating to decarbonisation such as fleet, energy and procurement. The Board monitors progress across the council against the emissions identified in our plan. A range of officers across the council deliver work that reduces our carbon emissions as part of their roles: from the Re:fit programme putting LED lighting in our council building and street lighting; to the 21st century schools programme delivering less energy intensive new schools; to thousands of tonnes of carbon saved through increased recycling rates.</p>
4	What are the unique challenges to climate change in BG?	<p>Blaenau Gwent has faced challenges including the closure of coal mines in the 1980s and the closure of Ebbw Vale Steelworks in 2002, leading to huge job losses. Although these changes have contributed to reducing our carbon emissions and the greening of our valleys as nature recovers from the long-term scarring caused through our historical industries, they were not undertaken for these reasons and we can't underestimate their effect. That is why it is important that our future response to the climate crisis does lead to a just transition, which considers what is fair and improves living standards.</p> <p>The proportion of carbon emissions that come from homes is much higher in Blaenau Gwent (37%) than the Welsh average (21%). This is largely due to emissions from industry in Blaenau Gwent being much lower than that the Welsh average, rather than emissions from housing in Blaenau Gwent being particularly high. Overall carbon emissions from all sources in Blaenau Gwent are relatively low; emissions per head are 4.1 tonnes CO₂, the second lowest number in Wales, well below the Welsh average of 7.5 tonnes CO₂.</p> <p>The relative importance of housing emissions does mean that we have more direct local control over emissions than in areas where emissions from industry, that may well not be owned locally, are more important. However, we also face additional challenges in decarbonising the housing stock. Blaenau Gwent has an above average level of older terraced housing, which is the most difficult housing type to retrofit with energy efficiency measures. We also have a high proportion of housing connected to the mains gas grid; most plans anticipate that low carbon heating solutions will be installed in off-grid housing first, as this is where they will generate the largest cost savings.</p>



		<p>Blaenau Gwent has above average levels of tree cover (17%) compared to the Welsh average (14%), and the level of urban trees in our towns is also above average. However, the level of tree coverage in urban areas has been declining recently, and there is considerable potential for increasing tree coverage as the EU average is 37%.</p> <p>The geography of Blaenau Gwent as a valleys community means that a decarbonised transport system faces different challenges to other high population density areas. Provision of public transport, space for vehicle charging and active transport will all be shaped by our geography. Currently the proportion of journeys made by car are above the Welsh average and proportion made by public and active transport are below Welsh average, reflecting these challenges.</p>
5	<p>Lights on in public buildings during evenings in schools, council buildings etc. Can they be switched off?</p>	<p>All internal lighting should be off from the time each building closes. All new buildings and refurbishments have absence detection and PIR sensors which will automatically turn internal lights off. Other older building's especially older schools will need to be manually turned off by the caretakers but this should be done as part of the lock up procedure.</p> <p>Building times vary if there is after school or community use and most Schools open around 6am for cleaning, Leisure Centres do not close until 10pm.</p>
6	<p>What other services may suffer as a result of funding being made available for these activities?</p>	<p>The size of the changes needed to decarbonise both council operations and the borough as a whole mean that these changes, in most cases, will not be funded by stand-alone low carbon projects outside of existing budgets. For example, over the 10-year period of the Council Decarbonisation Plan most, if not all, of our council vehicles would be replaced regardless of the climate crisis. The question, therefore, in this context is not whether new funding will be made available for low carbon vehicles, but whether the existing fleet vehicle budget will be spent on low carbon vehicles. Likewise, as we heard during the housing session, there is a similar dynamic with decarbonising housing as gas boilers will need replacing as they get older, retrofitting can be combined with other building works and will help reduce fuel bills. Clearly, there will be cases where the cost of the low carbon alternatives is higher; where upfront costs will have to be paid to realise lower running costs later; or additional actions that might not otherwise be taken will be required. However, The Climate Change Committee estimated in 2019 that the annual costs of achieving net zero for the UK could increase over time, to around 1-2% of GDP in 2050. While costs of this scale are not insubstantial, they are not out of proportion with other financial pressures on services. They also have to be measured against the costs of inaction, both in terms of the impacts of climate change such as flooding, and also the likely increased running costs of continuing to use fossil fuel based technologies which are in the process of being</p>



		phased out. Ultimately, decisions about spending on services will continue to be made via the democratic budget setting process.
7	More info on decarbonisation plan by 2030 - what is the starting point? Where are we now? How close are we? How much of a change is being required? This was shared with the CA – reshare.	<p>Our Decarbonisation Plan is aimed at the emissions from the council’s own operations. The starting point for the council is the calculation of our existing carbon emissions, which are detailed in the plan. The changes required are significant, some of the biggest areas of change include: switching to low emission vehicles for our fleet and staff commute; switching the heating of council buildings from gas boilers to low carbon alternatives; reducing our energy use and miles travelled by council staff; and meeting the increased demand for of zero carbon electricity as these changes to fleet and heating will involve electrification. In some areas such as reducing electricity emissions and recycling waste there have been significant emissions reductions already, while in others we are at the start of our journey. The largest source of emissions in our plan are ‘scope 3’ emissions, these are the emissions produced by other organisations producing the products the council buys or delivering services for us. Ultimately, these emissions will be reduced by our suppliers taking the same type of actions as detailed in our plan, but the council can play an important role in encouraging them to take this action by making climate emissions part of our procurement process and by buying local.</p> <p>The council is also currently working through the PSB to develop a plan covering all carbon emissions in Blaenau Gwent. In both cases we recognise that some elements of decarbonisation are not achievable by action in Blaenau Gwent alone, but if we do not plan ahead and take action locally we will not achieve decarbonisation in Blaenau Gwent, even if the wider national and international changes needed do take place.</p>
8	Do we know what the figures re emissions versus income are for local area?	We don’t have specific Blaenau Gwent figures for household emissions and income in Blaenau Gwent of the type shown by Professor Whitmarsh in her talk. However, we do know that the emissions per head for Blaenau Gwent are relatively low compared to the Welsh average and the same is true for household income . This is consistent with the UK figures showing that low income households have lower carbon emissions, so it seems reasonable to assume that the figures for Blaenau Gwent specifically are similar.
9	Who decides where money is spent in the council?	Full Council – 42 Councillors – decides the overall budget for the Council and the relevant allocation to services. Within this agreed budget, Senior Managers have delegated powers to spend within their own budget areas.
10	Why hasn't the PSB got a budget?	The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 established public services boards as a statutory board in each local authority area in Wales. Local authorities are one of the four statutory members on the PSB – the other



		<p>three being the Local Health Board (Aneurin Bevan University Health Board), the Fire and Rescue Authority for the area (South Wales Fire & Rescue Service) and Natural Resources Wales. A range of other partners are also invited to participate in the activities of the Blaenau Gwent PSB. These include Welsh Government, Gwent Police, Tai Calon, the Gwent Police & Crime Commissioner, Coleg Gwent, and the Gwent Association for Voluntary Organisations. The PSB must prepare and publish an assessment of the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area and then, within a year, a Well-being Plan. This Plan sets out local objectives, again aligned to the Act's goals, and the steps that will be taken to achieve them.</p> <p>PSBs are provided with some resources from Welsh Government to carry out the well-being assessment and planning process but do not have a specific budget to deliver against the Plan. Progress against the Plan relies on effective partnership working, collaboration and integration with existing work programmes to utilise resources from PSB partners and aligning them with the long-term objectives of the Well-being Plan.</p>
11	How much money could be generated locally to invest in community initiatives? What are the figures/has modelling been done?	The Council is aware of the Green Bonds approach that has been adopted in other local authority areas. We have begun some initial investigations in this area, but at this early stage no Blaenau Gwent specific modelling has been undertaken, and no options have been put forward for decision making by council.
12	Can we get more varied recycling? Get people involved in these schemes more - encourage people by schemes such as bottle deposit schemes for cans and bottles	We currently offer a wide-ranging kerbside collection recycling service which includes paper, cardboard, plastics, cans, food, textiles, small electrical items, household batteries, green waste and nappies. We also offer a range of recycling services at our Household Waste Recycling Centres such as electrical appliances, rubble, paint, oil, plasterboard, carpets and mattresses. We are constantly working with Welsh Government and reprocessors to investigate options to expand the range of materials we can recycle at the kerbside and at our Recycling Centres such as more recently plastic film. Welsh Government have recently consulted on the introduction of a national Deposit Return Scheme as we know this is a policy they are keen to introduce to encourage more recycling 'on the go' (when people are out and about away from their homes). We would like to encourage the community to get more involved in the repair and reuse schemes we are looking to implement across Blaenau Gwent – mobile Repair Cafes and Reuse Shops at our Recycling Centres. If we can encourage the community to repair and reuse where they can then this will reduce the amount of materials becoming 'waste'.



13	Is the steelworks still the cause of issues now in BG?	<p>In terms of carbon emissions, no, there are no further carbon emissions associated with the historical operations of the steelworks. In a wider sense there are carbon impacts associated with the development of the site. There are carbon emissions associated with the construction of further buildings on the site, and their operation, but these emissions may well represent savings compared to the impact of the older, less efficient, buildings organisations previously operated out of. For example, there is a district network heating system linked to many of the main buildings. They are certainly far less carbon intensive than the steelworks was.</p>
14	How can we trust local government to look after nature and green space?	<p>The council has identified the access to and quality of green spaces as a key priority in its Corporate Plan. To this end and in accordance with The Environment Act (Wales) 2016 all service areas have various duties built into their service plans to ensure that we protect biodiversity and the natural environment.</p> <p>Key policies have been adopted for biodiversity, tree management, rights of way and flood management all of which seek to uphold Section 6 of the Environment Act. We are also currently developing a Green Infrastructure Strategy to help further with our decision making process around sustainable development for the future.</p> <p>Blaenau Gwent has a proud history of creating and enhancing the natural environment across the County Borough, having reclaimed many former post industrial sites that have managed them over time into locally designated Local Nature Reserves, all exhibiting a diverse range of habitats and species and proudly achieving Green Flag Status. Management for these sites is delivered through working with a range of Community Groups across Blaenau Gwent. Successful funding initiatives such as the Resilient Gwent (WG ENRAW funding) continues to help fund this on-going commitment through our Local Nature Partnership</p> <p><u>Local Development Plan</u> is the Council's land use plan that The establishes where and how much development will take place. It also identifies which areas are to be protected from development.</p> <p>The Plan responds to the needs of a growing and regionally important economy making provision for jobs, homes and infrastructure. It also ensures the well-being of communities is maintained, and the impacts of the development and use of land are sustainably managed. It guides funding and investment programmes whilst providing for the enhancement and protection of the environment and environmental qualities.</p>



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Climate Assembly

		<p>The main tool for protecting strategic green space is the settlement boundary. This boundary is drawn tightly around the urban areas and identifies where development will normally be permitted. Outside of the boundary, development is strictly controlled. Local natural green spaces within the settlement boundary are protected by a policy in the development plan which seeks to protect open space. There are also other policies which protect biodiversity, green infrastructure and Trees, Woodlands and Hedgerows.</p> <p>These policies are being reviewed as part of preparation for the Replacement Local Development Plan. An open space assessment and Green Infrastructure Assessment will be prepared and used to inform a review of the existing policies and to protect areas which need protection.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Plan is subject to a statutory process which involves public engagement and consultation. The Plan is also subject to an examination by an Independent Inspector who considers comments made and examines the soundness of the Plan.</p>
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