

Draft for consultation

THRIVING TOGETHER – Tech Valleys Growth Corridor

A Blueprint for Inclusive and
Sustainable Growth for Blaenau
Gwent and Torfaen (BGT)



Summary

Our 2035 Ambition

Thriving Together – Tech Valleys Growth corridor sets out a clear and compelling future ambition:

Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen is a modern, connected area where innovation, industry and community come together to create opportunity for all.

- Rooted in world changing heritage — from the Blaenavon World Heritage Site to the founder of the NHS — Tech Valleys growth corridor, strategically located between the A465 and M4, is building a new future powered by advanced manufacturing, med tech, cyber engineering and thriving SMEs.
- Our towns, homes and communities will be connected by a modern Tech Valleys Metro system of integrated transport, creating a greener, fairer and more prosperous region for everyone
- Innovation, Enterprise and Community spirit will transform life experience for all through the widespread use of applied technologies in addressing our shared challenges

This ambition is backed by focused, coordinated action across three strategic themes:

1. Infrastructure & Investment

Delivering the places, connectivity, spaces and investments that allow communities and businesses to flourish and thrive.

2 Business & Employment Growth

Creating the conditions for businesses to start, grow and innovate — to generate quality jobs across our local area and region.

3. People & Skills

Equipping local people with the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to thrive and access job opportunities..

How We Will Deliver It

To make this ambition a reality, we will deliver a suite of **14 joint workstreams**, each detailing the “what, how, where and when” of delivery. These workstreams will be shaped with partners, communities and stakeholders over the next two years, ensuring that every action is connected, co designed and rooted in local need, demands and aspirations

These will be supported by a series of **Placemaking Plans**, setting out what success will look like in each of our communities — for our people, our businesses and our shared places.

Our delivery programme includes a series of “**Early wins**” that aim to gain traction and build momentum, to secure further public and private funds and our Development Partner will bring much needed commercial expertise to ensure our projects are “investment ready” - allowing us to use our own funding to further pump-prime private sector investment.

Aligned With Our Values: The Marmot Principles

Our shared Blueprint is firmly aligned with the Marmot agenda adopted by both councils.

This means:

- Tackling health inequalities

- Improving public health and wellbeing
- Ensuring that economic growth benefits everyone
- Ensuring the best possible start in life for our children

By embedding these principles throughout our work, we will build not just a stronger economy, but a fairer and healthier one.

How We Will Measure Our Impact

We will track our progress through a set of strategic outcomes, which have been developed and agreed with our communities, partners and stakeholders.

- Build a high value, future focused economy.
- Create thriving, resilient town centres shaped with our communities and partners.
- Deliver high quality homes and neighbourhoods with strong green and leisure offers.
- Strengthen skills and pathways into good work.
- Deliver the Tech Valleys Metro to better connect communities internally and externally.
- Create a world class SME ecosystem.
- Strengthen the area’s destination management offer — heritage, landscape, culture and tourism

These outcomes will be measured by key indicators of:

- Economic growth and business performance

- Job creation and skills development
- Improvements to physical and digital infrastructure
- The wellbeing and health of our communities
- Reductions in inequality and improvements to quality of life

An **Annual Economic Impact Plan** will provide a regular report upon the progress and impact made using key performance indicators to capture how our economic prosperity dials are moving. We know this will not happen overnight but our impact will be transparent, evidence based and regularly reported — so together we can learn, adapt and accelerate progress.

A Unique Moment — A Shared Mission

This is more than a strategy.

It’s a shared mission — a chance to build a thriving, resilient, forward looking region that works for everyone.

Together, we have a unique opportunity to shape a prosperous and thriving future for Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. And working together, we will deliver it.



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Executive Member
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Torfaen County
Borough Council



**Councillor
John C Morgan**
Cabinet Member -
Economy & Place
Blaenau Gwent
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Council

Our Joint Blueprint

Our shared “Thriving Together” blueprint for inclusive and sustainable growth outlines our aspirations for our people, places and businesses. It is shaped around a headline **ambition** and is underpinned by **3 Strategic Themes, Placemaking Plans** and **14 Workstreams**, which will bring the vision to life at the local level.

Our ambition

Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen is a modern, connected area where innovation, industry and community come together to create opportunity for all.

- Rooted in world changing heritage — from the Blaenavon World Heritage Site to the founder of the NHS — Tech Valleys growth corridor, strategically located between the A465 and M4 is building a new future powered by advanced manufacturing, med tech, cyber engineering and thriving SMEs.
- Our towns, homes and communities will be connected by a modern Tech Valleys Metro system of integrated transport, creating a greener, fairer and more prosperous region for everyone.
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Strategic Theme 1 Infrastructure and Investment

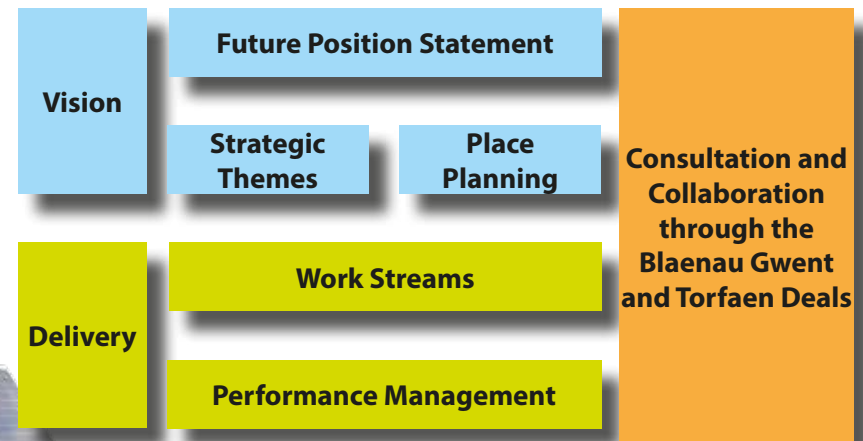
Securing the necessary local physical, transport and digital infrastructure and investment to support business start-ups, growth, skills development and inward investment that will drive our local and regional economies. In particular, this will include a focus on securing an integrated bus and rail system linking our communities with each other and with the rest of the region. We will channel investment to secure green infrastructure and enhanced energy capacity, efficiency and security, creating resilient, sustainable places, businesses and communities.

Strategic Theme 2 Business and Employment Growth

Encouraging and enabling more productive and competitive businesses to drive local enterprise and innovation, entrepreneurship and prosperity to safeguard and create good quality employment opportunities. This will include a blend of nurturing new business start up, supporting current businesses to grow and attracting new inward investment

Strategic Theme 3 People and Skills

Supporting people into work and increasing lifelong skills including nurturing entrepreneurship, connecting current and future generations to employment opportunities whilst providing the required skilled workforce to support business growth.



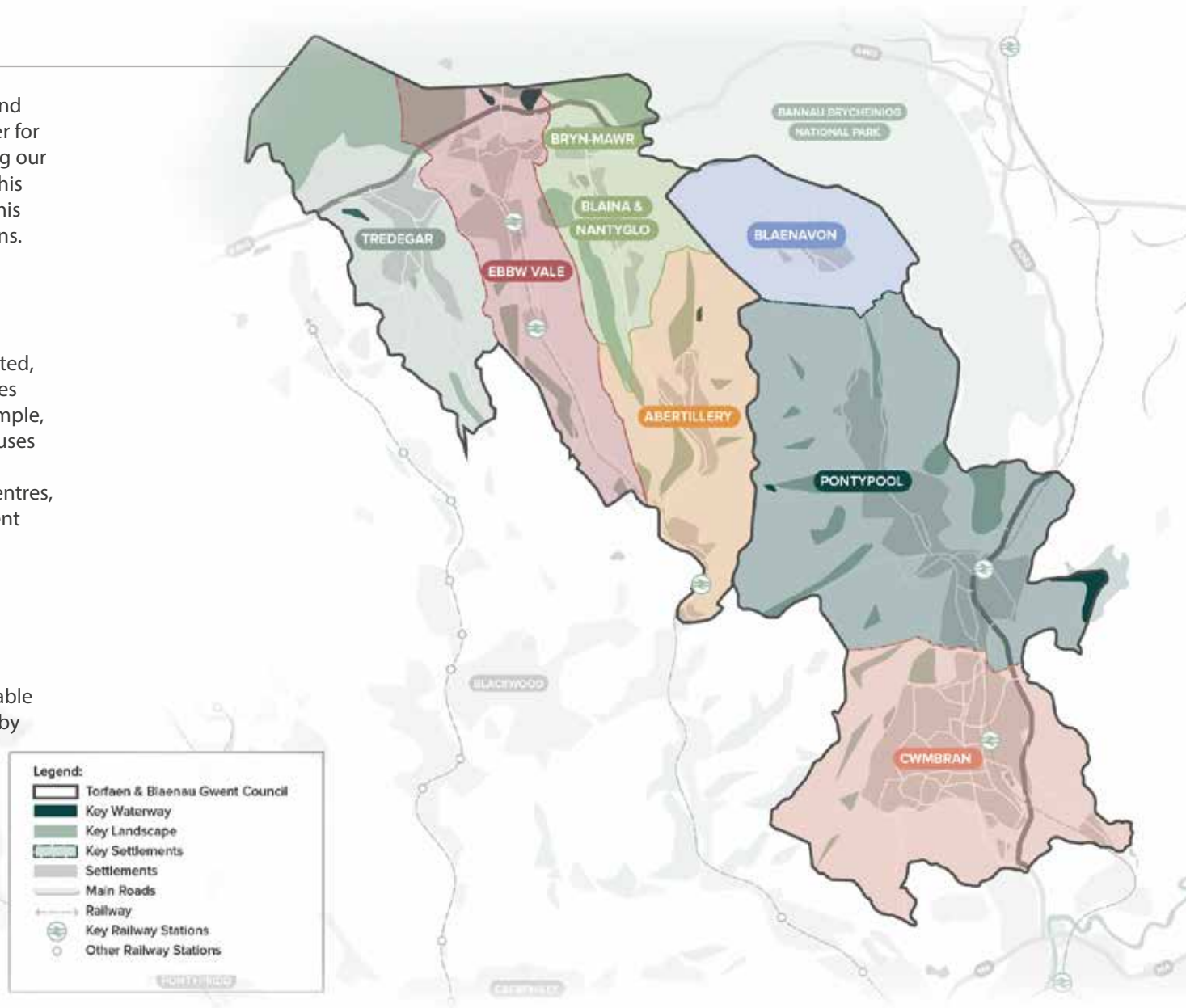
Place Planning

Place planning is about creating vibrant, attractive, and functional spaces that enhance the quality of life offer for residents, businesses, investors and visitors – ‘building our communities with and for our communities’. Within this context the Placemaking Plans produced as part of this Blueprint provide a spatial expression of our ambitions.

The Placemaking Plans for each key settlement will provide an overarching framework for local action as presented in this Blueprint – Figure 1.0 Detailed Placemaking Plans will be further developed or initiated, working with our partners, addressing the key themes and workstreams of this Blueprint, including, for example, a joint Local Development Plan to guide future land uses (and associated infrastructure), Placemaking Plans to deliver projects that revitalise and reimagine town centres, and Masterplans for bringing forward key employment sites.

The Blueprint sets out some strategic outcomes to measure our progress developed and agreed with partners and stakeholders.

Driving delivery through the 14 Workstreams will enable each area of activity to move at the pace demanded by the specific challenges and opportunities faced and, as a result, contribute to achieving the ambition and associated outcomes.





Strategic Context

This Blueprint sets out a new strategic economic framework for the federated area and drives forward several current and emerging strategic policies:

Well Being of Future Generations Act

– the Blueprint will support all the key goals of the act ensuring the prosperity and sustainability of future generations.

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

Torfaen County Plan Wellbeing objectives:

1. We will raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives
2. We will encourage and champion children,

young people and families so they can thrive

3. We will tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives
4. We will make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically
5. We will respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment
6. We will make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities
7. We will support and promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical well-being
8. We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit
9. We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services

Blaenau Gwent Council – Corporate Plan Priorities:

1. Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent
2. Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities
3. An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place
4. Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

The Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Deal is a new social contract between the councils, residents, and partners. Unique in Wales and grounded in embedding the Marmot principles It will set out a shared vision for fairer, healthier, and more resilient boroughs - one where health inequalities are tackled and every resident is empowered to thrive.

- **Mission One: Early Year Building Bright Futures** - Support every child to thrive by building strong foundations for lifelong learning and development - focusing on cognitive, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.
- **Mission Two: Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Ambition and Resilience** - Inspire ambition and resilience by empowering people of all ages to lead informed, independent, and healthy lives.

- **Mission Three: Wellbeing Through Community Leadership** - Partner with communities to harness local strengths and improve wellbeing, reducing the need for early access to statutory services.
- **Mission Four: Thriving Economy, Vibrant Places** - Drive sustainable economic growth and create vibrant, well-connected communities where people and businesses can thrive.
- **Mission Five: Empowered Communities, Shared Power and Success** - Work alongside communities to capture their ambition and energy as we plan and deliver our services, creating the conditions for community resilience, self-reliance, and shared success.





Key Assets

Although facing persistent economic, social and environmental challenges, Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent have significant assets:

- Strong individual and collective local identities
- Strategic location within the Cardiff Capital Region and between the A465 & M4 Corridors
- Enormous potential across several business sectors
- Outstanding natural environments and landscapes
- World class heritage and visitor offers
- Excellent business support infrastructure and being “business centred” across all our council functions
- Comprehensive network of existing and emerging regeneration initiatives
- Innovative approaches to local government and collaboration through implementing our federated council model

These assets provide a strong foundation for building an ambitious proposition across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. By leveraging this unique combination of strengths, the area can create vibrant, inclusive, connected and sustainable places where current and future generations can prosper and thrive.

Strategic Outcomes

Our key themes and supporting workstreams link with each other in each place to achieve the following strategic outcomes

- Build a high-value, future-focused economy.
- Create thriving, resilient town centres shaped with our communities and partners.
- Deliver high-quality homes and neighbourhoods with strong green and leisure offers.
- Strengthen skills and pathways into good work.
- Deliver the Tech Valleys Metro to connect communities internally and externally.
- Create a world-class SME ecosystem.
- Strengthen the area’s destination management offer - heritage, landscape, culture and tourism

Priority Workstreams

Our Blueprint will be delivered through the following 14 priority workstreams:

Strategic Theme 1 - Infrastructure and Investment

Workstream 1 Connectivity Plans

This will focus on improving physical and digital connections including road, key rail improvements and superfast broadband and promoting active travel through enhanced place-based walking and cycling through accessible local route networks.

This will include investment into establishing a Tech Valleys metro that utilises the latest innovations in travel to provide more frequent and better integrated bus/train travel centred around transport hubs to ensure existing and new communities are well connected and, as a result, enjoy better mobility.

Workstream 2 Infrastructure Investment Plan

Investment in infrastructure is the cornerstone of the Blueprint and will be critical to creating good quality jobs and supporting innovation, enterprise and sustainable, inclusive growth within existing established industries, whilst nurturing emerging industries of the future. Through targeting investment into delivering integrated public transport to improve connections between settlements, green

infrastructure, such as renewable energy, parks, cycle routes and nature corridors, we will support improvements in 'liveability' that will be important for attracting new residents, workers, businesses and investors as well as underpinning the development of the visitor economy.

Workstream 3 Workspace Prospectus

This will focus on workspace provision to meet the needs, demands and aspirations of local businesses and inward investors alike and to support growth within current and emerging sectors within the area that align with the 'golden thread' that runs through the UK Government and the City Region Industrial Strategies. This will include exploring increasing opportunities for live/workspaces and further quality local workspaces in our settlements backed by superfast connectivity. This will all be brought together via a network of local

/regional innovation centres linked to universities and employers and build upon the Springboard and Goldworks models.





Strategic Theme 2 - Business and Employment Growth

Workstream 4 Business Deal

This will focus on developing a one council approach in each area to ensure alignment of all services behind the Blueprint. One example will be to explore how best to utilise property assets to drive the placemaking plans and shape the workspace offer. Using the collective purchasing power of both councils to procure services from the local area, is a key opportunity as well as working with business to develop closer relationships with local schools and colleges.

Workstream 5 Business Support and Engagement Programme

This will focus on expanding targeted and bespoke business support schemes for SME's, especially in high growth sectors, to help local businesses thrive and contribute to the overall economic resilience of the locality and region. This will include developing an on-line offer and exploring the potential of artificial intelligence. In addition, consideration will be given to establishing an investment fund to support business start-ups and growth.

Workstream 6 Green Business Framework

This will involve supporting growth in the green technology sector whilst developing a comprehensive programme for greening businesses across all sectors.

Workstream 7 Inward Investment support and Joint Prospectus

This will include spotlighting the key employment sites such as The Works and the British in the Tech Valleys and workspace opportunities such as Springboard and Goldworks, delivering a comprehensive marketing plan to attract and grow investment and businesses. It will be important that this is developed in partnership with the Cardiff Capital Region to develop a credible proposition as part of a strategic approach within a global marketplace.

Workstream 8 Shared Destination Management Plan

This will include reviewing the current visitor offer and working with partners to develop and spotlight a range of offers to increase visitor numbers and spend. The strengthening of the visitor economy will also play a key part in promoting the area to attract and retain investors, businesses and people.

Strategic Theme 3 - People and Skills

Workstream 9 Skills and Employability Prospectus

This will focus on developing a network of learning opportunities from early years through to further and higher educational institutions that will provide the skills needed to support our ambitious growth plans whilst connecting local people to the opportunities on offer and enhancing the range and number of apprenticeship opportunities available for young people. Supporting further development of the HIVE approach developed by Coleg Gwent, there will also be a need to understand new patterns in travel to work areas to help connect local people and businesses to as many opportunities as possible.

Workstream 10 Key sector development support

To develop sector specific actions and collaborations around business support, skills development, inward investment and workspace requirements with a focus on:

- **Fundamental** – Construction, visitor economy, retail, leisure, farming and food
- **Specialised** - Manufacturing, Advanced manufacturing, Life sciences, Artificial

intelligence and Defence industries

- **Emerging** – Green technologies, creative industries

Building on the success of the Aspire programme, BGT will also be seen as providing a regional focus for collaboration with Higher Education and applied research in life sciences, green technology and advanced manufacturing, with research capability being based in the local area.

A key objective for the Blueprint will be to see overall resilience in the local economy be improved by increasing the number of firms originating from and being embedded in the area.

Place Plans

Workstream 11 Joint Local Development Plan

Effective planning is essential for guiding land use and development in a way that aligns with our strategic goals. Through the design and adoption of a joint long-term spatial plan, we will aim to maximise the opportunities a coherent “at place” strategy across our joint Council areas. There will also be a need to ensure regional alignment with the emerging regional strategic development plan, Cardiff Capital Region’s Industrial Strategy and Metro transport plans.





Workstream 12 Placemaking Plans

Each of our areas has their own distinct geography, history, identity, ambition and proposition for supporting start ups and business growth. Establishing local needs and shaping and driving forward priorities for further change in each of our communities will be a key focus for the Blueprint. Placemaking Plans will be driven forward in the following communities with other areas adopting the approach, as appropriate, over time:

- Tredegar
- Ebbw Vale
- Brynmawr
- Nantyglo
- Abertillery
- Cwmbran
- Pontypool
- Blaenavon

Workstream 13 Masterplans for our key strategic sites

We need to build, support and sustain large international and national companies, SMEs and entrepreneurs which will include encouraging and attracting new investment and businesses. Our Blueprint therefore prioritises the

development of larger strategic employment areas which will include producing masterplans for the following sites:

- The British, Talywaun
- Ebbw Vale (The Works and Northern Corridor)
- Sites in and around Cwmbran,
- Former Nantyglo school site, Nantyglo.
- Former Civic centre site, Ebbw Vale.
- Mamhilad, Pontypool

These masterplans will align with the work on settlement “place plans” to ensure the future sustainability of growth and complementary relationships between new and existing development.

Workstream 14 Housing Strategy

This will include ensuring the delivery of a range of housing types with a particular focus on more affordable homes to support local people that are well connected to new transport hubs.

Collaboration

Working with local and strategic partners will be essential to ensuring the necessary support and resources are in place to achieve successful delivery. This will include working at all levels of Government, across the public sector and with the different elements of the private and voluntary and community sectors.

Joint delivery of place and site development, where needed, with a third party, will enable all the right skills are deployed to ensure pace of change and value for money for communities is secured.

Critical to achieving effective collaboration, as outlined in the BGT's Deal, will be the involvement of residents in the design, development and delivery of the various initiatives thereby ensuring that local communities are at the heart of the process.

To ensure effective collaboration it will be important for joint working across all Council services through a One Council Approach which in this context will be pulled together and driven forward via the Business Deal priority action.

There are also exciting opportunities to enhance BGT's external profile and expand our wider partnership working to help attract businesses and jobs in sustainable higher value sectors. This relates to the Cardiff Capital Region Growth Deal and continues working with UK and Welsh Governments.

The support of local partners and other key stakeholders will be essential for bringing to life the Marmot Principles. This will include equipping our communities to shape and own the work that needs to be done and will be focused around collaboration with a range of groupings including town and community councils, the voluntary sector and business forums and other groups that operate within BGT.

We will actively encourage joint working to compete more effectively for funding and economic growth opportunities by establishing a **BGT Inclusive Growth Partnership** to provide oversight and drive forward the delivery of the new Blueprint.





Driving Improved Performance

Our strategic outcomes

- Build a high value, future focused economy.
- Create thriving, resilient town centres shaped with our communities and partners.
- Deliver high quality homes and neighbourhoods with strong green and leisure offers.
- Strengthen skills and pathways into good work.
- Deliver the Tech Valleys Metro to connect communities internally and externally.
- Create a world class SME ecosystem.
- Strengthen the area's destination management offer — heritage, landscape, culture and tourism

Performance will be measured at two levels:

- Macro-economic trends and drivers of change that set the context for local delivery.
- Project/ service level that will involve measuring how projects and services are performing against a range of relevant key performance indicators

The headline indicator that the Blueprint will focus on is the Competitive Index. This is a composite measure that covers economic activity, business start-ups, number of businesses, qualifications, knowledge-based businesses, gross value added, productivity, employment rates, gross weekly pay and unemployment rates.

Both Councils already operated a performance management framework to capture, present and monitor performance of services and projects; these will be utilised and developed to help measure the performance of the Blueprint via the Competitive Index.

An annual BGT Economic Report will be produced to review service and project performance and assess the impact of this activity at the macro level and in particular connecting to the Competitive Index. The Economic Report will be used to inform research and further stakeholder engagement which will help shape future project/service development and delivery and, in time, the direction and focus of this Blueprint.

The most recent scores and rankings for each area was as follows:

- **Torfaen:**
22019 Index of 79.9 which was a rank of 336 out of 362 UK Council areas
2023 Index of 79.6 which was a rank of 346 out of 362 UK Council areas
- **Blaenau Gwent:**
2019 Index of 71.0 which was a rank of 362 out of 362 UK Council areas
2023 Index of 72.3 which was a rank of 361 out of 362 UK Council areas

These scores highlight the scale of the challenges faced and the importance of the critical focus that the Blueprint will provide to unlock the areas full potential to drive improvements.

Resourcing change

Each Blueprint workstream will identify the delivery mechanisms to drive its delivery.

Significant activity is already underway with funding being secured and delivery taking place across various workstreams – Place centred improvements in Ebbw Vale, Abertillery, Pontypool and Cwmbran, strategic site development at the Works, Ebbw Vale and the British in Abersychan and a series of key business growth and investment projects across both areas

“Thriving Together” will set future regeneration and investment priorities for the federated councils, with the associated resource implications being reflected in a new joint structure and within both Authorities’ future budgets and Medium-Term Financial Plans. This will include providing the focus for directing external funds from the Welsh and UK Governments.

The intention is however to move, over time, away from a reliance upon UK Government and Welsh Government funding/grants and to increasingly use our assets and access to public investment as a pump primer to leverage private sector investment. To achieve this, we will be working, where appropriate, with commercial specialists to ensure that our propositions are investor and business ready. In particular the Councils will seek to engage a development partner to help identify and drive the development and delivery of key sites

Having the leading, enabling role but also in many cases a direct stake in delivery of “Thriving Together”

will require effective resourcing including adopting a cross councils approach that will ensure all council services are aligned to the Blueprint including use both of our property portfolios to help realise our aims.

Early Wins

The Blueprint will secure the delivery of current and emerging projects which will catalyse the development and delivery of new projects through the 14 Workstreams.

Existing activity includes:

- ✓ Identify and appoint a delivery partner with the necessary skills to bring forward our strategic sites
- ✓ The British - £9 million Phase 1 work around flood alleviation is underway and will be completed by the end of 2026 which will provide traction for producing a new Masterplan to shape and drive the development of the 1,300-acre site over the coming years. This will include exploring the potential for green energy generation and associated employment uses.
- ✓ £40 million Pride in Places programmes will commence from 1 April 2026 to transform local communities across the area over the next 10 years

- ✓ Work is well advanced to secure a development partner through 2026 to help identify and drive forward a number of key sites
- ✓ Plans for a new Engineering Hub will be agreed ready for delivery through 2026 and will help extend the range of the current business support offer at Springboard and the Goldworks
- ✓ The Pontypool Southern Gateway initiative is underway with construction starting through 2026 that will see the provision of new cultural facilities to help draw people into the town
- ✓ Production of an Inward Investment Prospectus is underway to promote key sites across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen to promote on global stage
- ✓ Production of a Destination Management Plan to develop and promote the visitor economy across Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen is underway
- ✓ Green Meadow Farm was recently completed and helps support the local visitor economy
- ✓ Tech Valleys is a major Blaenau Gwent initiative in partnership with the Welsh Government to support and grow hi-tec businesses
- ✓ Hive at Coleg Gwent is now well established and delivering a state of the art facility focused on robotics, advanced manufacturing and aerospace skills development

Why Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen (BGT)?

Great Place to Live...

BGT enjoy a fantastic location which along with outstanding landscapes and historic places makes the district a great place to live. Offering a wide range of local and commutable job opportunities, great all age learning opportunities and affordable housing the network of settlements each retain a strong sense of identity and community

Great Place to Visit...

BGT offer an excellent range of quality environments and places all across the area, including direct access to the Brecon Beacons National Park which all provide a range of heritage, sporting, leisure and cultural activities in a natural setting of international significance.

Great Place to Invest and do Business...

Situated north of Cardiff and Newport and adjacent to the newly dualled A465, M4, M5 and M50 corridors, **BGT** enjoy an accessible location with connectivity to national and global markets. With ambitious plans to unlock the full potential of our areas, this Blueprint will also play a key role in driving prosperity across the wider Cardiff Capital Region and beyond which, as a result, will also contribute to the success of UK Plc on a global stage.

