



# BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

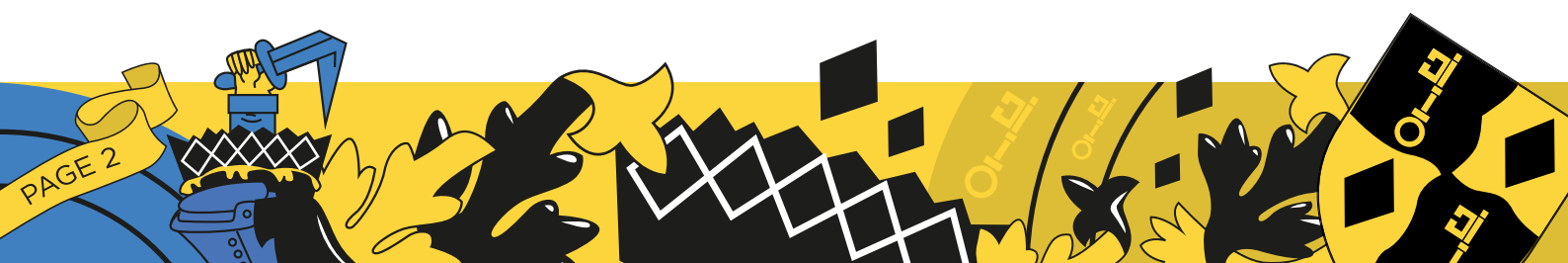
2023-2024

**MAY 2024**



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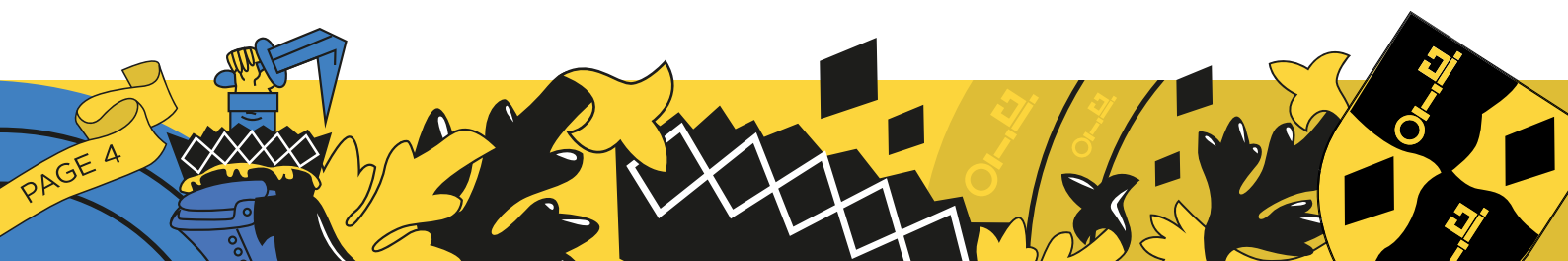
# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Under the Local Government (Wales) Act 2021, town and community councils have a legal duty to prepare and publish an annual report. This report serves as an additional means for the council to interact with its community, complementing existing channels such as newsletters, the council website, consultations, and social media.

The annual report is aimed at enhancing the council's accountability and transparency. It serves as a proactive method to share information regarding the council's priorities, activities, and achievements. While there's no prescribed format, the level of detail is expected to align with the council's size and activities.

The report primarily focuses on showcasing the council's work, activities, and achievements of the reviewed year, alongside outlining plans for the future. Through this report, we aim to inform residents and stakeholders about the efforts of Blaenavon Town Council during the 2023/24 financial year, including how public funds were spent and the services provided to the local community.



## 2 FOREWORD BY THE MAYOR OF BLAENAVON 2023/24

Serving as Mayor of Blaenavon for 2023/24 was an enormous privilege. Over the past year, Blaenavon Town Council has enjoyed one of the most successful periods in its 50-year history, culminating in the council being recognised with no fewer than 11 national awards at the One Voice Wales Conference in March 2024. This included two category wins, five highly commended awards, and four commendations.

However, the true significance of these accolades lies in the projects behind them, each of which has delivered real benefits to the people of Blaenavon. Positive impact is what matters to our community, and we must never lose sight of that.



Blaenavon is a wonderful town, with a rich heritage and so much to offer. Nonetheless, like many communities across the country, Blaenavon has faced challenging times. The effects of the coronavirus pandemic, inflation, and the rising cost of living have impacted the health and wellbeing of our residents, posing challenges for families, small businesses, public services, and community and voluntary groups.

The numerous initiatives and interventions delivered by Blaenavon Town Council aim to alleviate some of these hardships, making Blaenavon a better place to live, visit, and do business. Despite being a small authority, we have taken an ambitious approach, with projects covering the cost of living, healthy lifestyles, the environment, heritage, tourism, children and young people, older people, and support for community groups. As the first and most local tier of government, Blaenavon Town Council has also endeavoured to provide a voice for Blaenavon residents to higher levels of government. This report outlines the extent of our work and its impact.

Blaenavon Town Council has been pleased to work with a range of partners over the past year, including Bron Afon Community Housing, Gwent Police, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Torfaen County Borough Council, Hwb Torfaen, Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School, Abersychan Comprehensive School, local businesses, and many voluntary and community groups throughout Blaenavon. As Town Mayor, it has been incredibly inspiring to see the fantastic work carried out by enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers of all ages who make this town a better place.

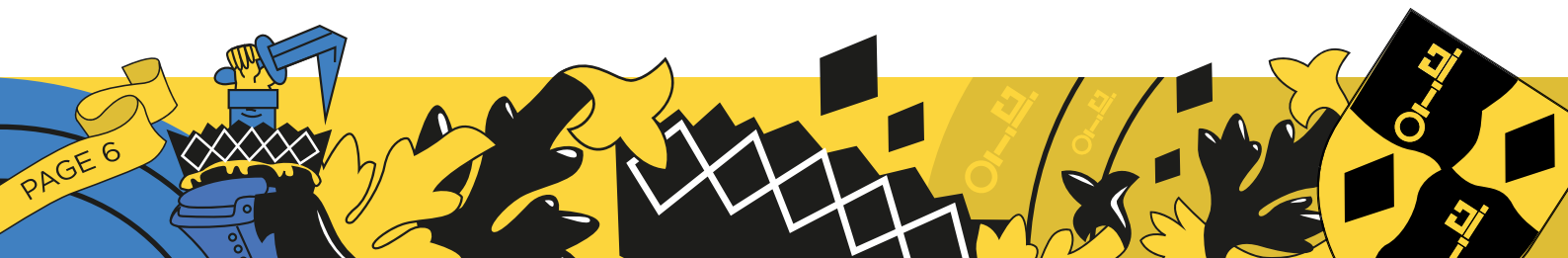




I would like to thank my fellow councillors, as well as the three council officers, Kevin, Kerry, and Sophie, for their hard work and support during my term of office. The combined efforts of members, officers, delivery partners, and the community, have allowed for a successful year for the town council and Blaenavon.

Be assured, Blaenavon Town Council will 'not rest on its laurels' and will continue to work hard to make life better for Blaenavon residents.

**Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews**  
**Mayor of Blaenavon 2023/24**  
**April 2024**



### 3 MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OFFICER TO THE COUNCIL

I was appointed Chief Officer to Blaenavon Town Council in November 2017. Since my appointment I have implemented a series of administrative and operational measures involving key areas aligned to financial governance, project management together with a range of policy and procedure arrangements.

The changes so far have positively enhanced the operating capacity and capability of the Council and in doing so robustly delivers on the Town Council's mission statement.

**“To improve the quality of life for residents by ensuring that Blaenavon is a desirable, thriving, and sustainable place in which to live, visit and do business”**

As Chief Officer, I am a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks which is a National Professional body for Local Council Clerks.

My role is to advise and support the Council within the law, independently and objectively relating to the effective management of all its resources ensuring the Council provides well managed services, projects and events for the community whilst recognising that the Council as a whole is responsible for its decisions.

I am also the Council's Responsible Finance Officer and accountable for all financial records and proper administration of its finances.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on Blaenavon Town Council to produce and publish an Annual Report for transparency.

Throughout this report, we aim to provide you with insights into how your council works, how it spends public money and how you can get involved.

The annual report is part of our effort to improve the democratic life of our town, and to encourage community participation in Council meetings and maybe even consider becoming a Councillor in the future. We genuinely hope you find it informative and beneficial.

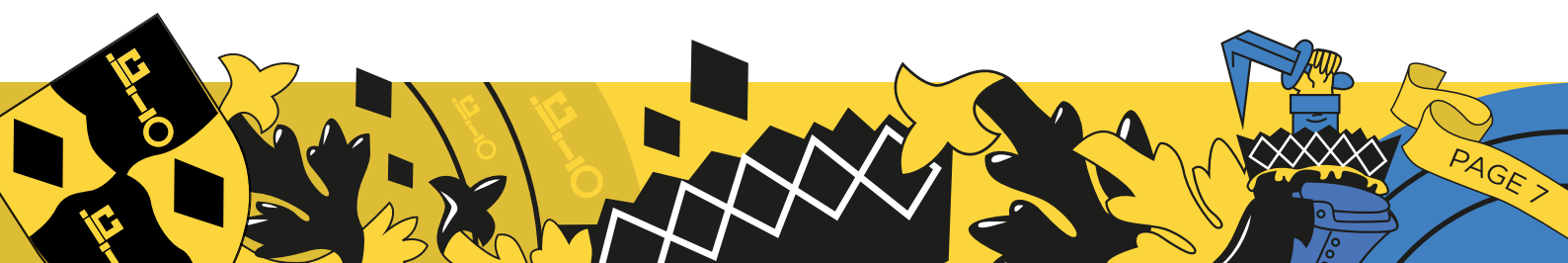
During 2023/24, Blaenavon Town Council have continued to deliver a series of events and projects which has resulted in one of the most successful periods in the history of the Council.

Having listened to the views of our community, we have been able to implement a wide cross section of services to support both our young people and older residents, whilst also focusing heavily on cost of living initiatives to promote wellbeing for all our residents.

A by product of this has been the continued efforts to support our residents and community groups with grant funding opportunities. During 2023/24, the Council provided grant funding totalling £18,064. A great example of this was in partnership with Torfaen Play Service who received £11,600 to provide play service provision during the school holidays.

Together with my fellow officers with support from members and our community partners we have taken great pride in delivering a range of initiatives during the year which have been alluded to within the report.

As Chief Officer, a key part of my role is to ensure that both members and officers are provided with the necessary training in order for them to conduct their roles effectively and efficiently.



## CONTINUATION MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OFFICER TO THE COUNCIL

As a result, with the support of members and fellow officers a Town Council Training Plan 2022/27 has been implemented. An example of the training completed for 2023/24 is contained within this report.

During 2023/24 together with an appointed working group of members, I was proactive in delivering the Town Council's response to Torfaen County Borough Council's Community Review of Town and Community Councils.

The Council's response is an excellent example of what role it plays in delivering services to its residents as a sovereign local authority at the first tier of local government.

The review is currently on going and as a local authority we will ensure that our capacity and capability is protected in order for the residents of Blaenavon to be able to enjoy the services that are currently being delivered.

In March 2024, Blaenavon Town Council were invited to deliver two presentations at the One Voice Wales Innovative Practice National Awards Conference at Builth Wells.

The Council received eleven national awards for innovative practice which included Best Community Engagement Initiative and Best Heritage Initiative together with several highly Commended awards for community initiatives.

This recognition encapsulates the work that the Council is delivering for its residents. This is an exciting time for Blaenavon Town Council. We are committed to deliver more innovative projects and events during the forthcoming year.

We will share more of our achievements with you via our website and social media platforms. and are extremely proud to serve our community of Blaenavon.

**Kevin Warren MIO. FCMI.  
Chief Officer & RFO  
Blaenavon Town Council  
2023/24**

**April 2024**





## 4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Aims and Vision

Blaenavon Town Council aims to create a vibrant and attractive town where people desire to live, work, and visit. Their mission is to improve residents' quality of life, making Blaenavon a thriving, sustainable community. Throughout 2023/24, the Council has pursued these goals by collaborating with partners, engaging with the community, and maintaining strong governance and financial controls.

### Serving as a Voice for the Community

The Council represents residents by holding and attending meetings, participating in external committees, and liaising with partner organisations. Representatives from outside bodies also attend council meetings, providing opportunities for questions and challenges. The Council has participated in key consultations, such as the RWE Abertillery Wind Farm and Torfaen County Borough Council's Community Review, which directly affect Blaenavon.

### Community Engagement Strategy

A significant initiative was the Wellbeing Day at Blaenavon World Heritage Centre, attracting over 500 visitors and collecting valuable community feedback. This feedback influenced the Council's strategic planning for 2023/24.

### Children, Young People, and Families

In response to feedback about a lack of activities for youth, the Council initiated several projects:

- Teen Gym and Skateboarding Sessions: Collaborations provided free gym and skateboarding sessions.
- Family Club and Exercise Classes: Family gym sessions and Mothers and Daughters exercise classes.
- World Heritage Youth Ambassador Photography: Photography workshops engaged young people in preserving local heritage.
- Play Camps and Holiday Activities: Partnerships with various organisations offered a variety of activities for young people.
- Mental Health Workshops: Wellbeing workshops in local secondary schools were attended by over 600 students.
- School Engagements: Poetry and Christmas card competitions with local schools.

### Older People

The Council supported older residents through:

- Exercise Classes: Weekly sessions to enhance physical fitness and wellbeing.
- Cinema Befriending Club: Monthly film screenings to promote social interaction, with over 1,100 participants to date.



## CONTINUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Local Environment

Efforts included:

- Community Safety: Collaborations with Gwent Police and maintaining CCTV in Broad Street.
- Planning Applications: Statutory consultation on local planning applications.
- Town Decorations: Providing bunting, hanging baskets, and Christmas lights.
- Litter Picking: Organising regular clean-up events with community involvement.

### Civic Leadership

The Council fostered civic pride through:

- Coronation of King Charles III: Organised community events and a poetry competition.
- Civic Awards: Recognised local contributions by Blaenavon volunteers.
- Remembrance Day: Coordinated the annual service in collaboration with the Royal British Legion.

### Cost of Living

Initiatives to support residents included:

- Cooking on a Budget: Cookery courses and recipe book distribution.
- Community Swimming: Free swimming sessions and transport to nearby facilities.

### Economic Development

The Council supported local businesses and tourism through:

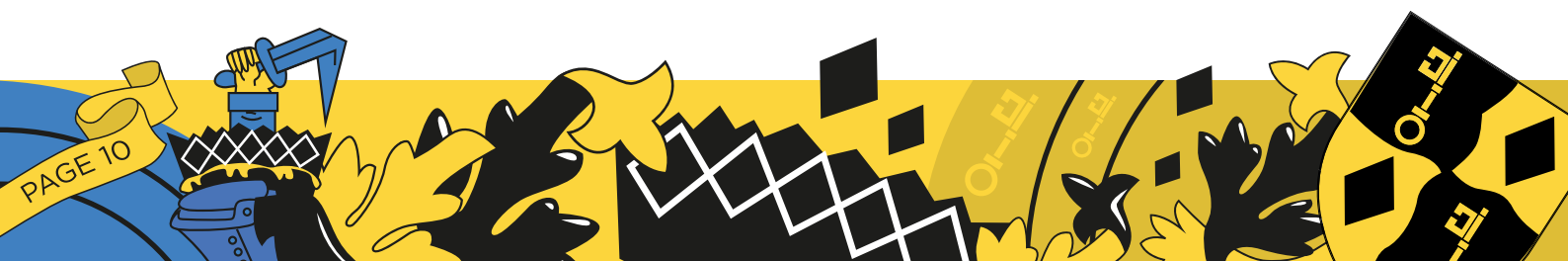
- Townscape Heritage Programme: Supporting heritage-led regeneration.
- Events and Markets: Organised community events to boost the local economy and supported the establishment of a new regular market.

### Heritage and Culture

Key initiatives included:

- Blaenavon World Heritage Site Partnership: Active involvement in the management of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape.
- Big Pit Apprenticeships: Supported training schemes at the National Coal Museum.
- Family of Blaenafon Project: Collaboration on an award-winning photography exhibition and book celebrating local heritage.

Blaenavon Town Council has demonstrated its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for its residents through diverse initiatives. The Council's strategic planning, community engagement, and collaborative efforts have laid a strong foundation for continued success and development in 2024 and beyond.



# ABOUT THE COUNCIL



## 5 ABOUT BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL

Blaenavon Town Council was formed in 1974 under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972. It replaced Blaenavon Urban District Council as Blaenavon's most local tier of government. Today, it carries on a long tradition of community governance in Blaenavon, which dates back to the formation of the Blaenavon Local Board in 1860.

The Local Government Act 1972 created 'communities' with the same name as the urban districts which they replaced and provided for the formation of community councils. Under the 1972 Act, the council of community, which is not grouped with any other community, has the power to resolve that the community shall have the **status of a town**. Since 1974, Blaenavon has held the status of a town with its own **Town Council** and **Town Mayor**.

The council has twelve seats, equally split between **two wards**, namely **Blaenavon East** and **Blaenavon West**. The most recent local elections were held in May 2022, with the next set of elections scheduled for May 2027.

### 5.1 WHAT DO TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS DO?

Town and community councils provide the **first and most local tier of local government**. Their members are the **closest to the community** they represent. They act as a bridge between the community and higher levels of government, advocating for the specific, **place-based needs** and priorities of the town or community they represent.

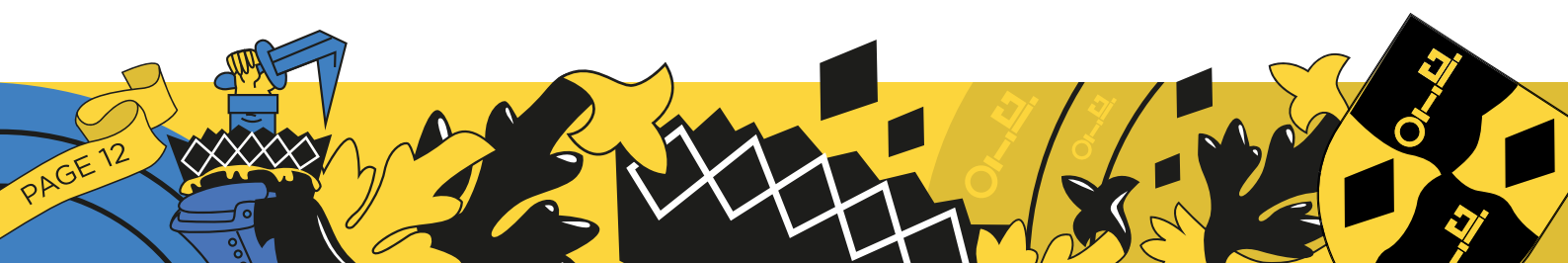
Blaenavon Town Council is not to be confused with Torfaen County Borough Council. The two are separate legal entities. Torfaen County Borough Council is a 'principal authority' and covers Blaenavon, Pontypool and Cwmbran, as well as the surrounding villages.

Torfaen Council delivers most local services and has a much broader range of responsibilities, including education, social services, highways, planning and development, waste management, economic development, and major infrastructure projects. It deals with matters that affect the entire borough and is responsible for coordinating and providing major public services.

As a principal authority, Torfaen County Borough Council had a budget of £319.5 million in 2023/24. By contrast, Blaenavon Town Council, as a town or community council, is **much smaller**, with more limited powers, responsibilities, and financial resources. By contrast, Blaenavon Town Council's 2023/24 precept was **£185,000**.

Nevertheless, town and community councils provide an important voice for the local community and can deliver a wide range of projects, events and initiatives that contribute to local wellbeing, as well as providing funding and support to organisations and community groups.

Increasingly, the Welsh Government is keen for town councils to grow and become more ambitious and take on **place-based services** by taking on community assets and services from the principal authority.



## 6 BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCILLORS

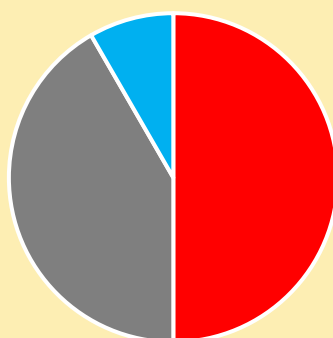
Blaenavon Town Council has **twelve** seats. Thirteen councillors held office during the 2023/24 mayoral year. There are eight elected and four co-opted members.

Cllr Georgina James (Independent) resigned as a councillor for Blaenavon East in January 2024 and was succeeded by Cllr Stephen Templeton (Welsh Conservative), who was elected in March 2024.

### 6.1 POLITICAL COMPOSITION

Politically, as of March 2024, Blaenavon Town Council is under **No Overall Control (NOC)**, and consists of six Welsh Labour councillors, five independent councillors and one Welsh Conservative councillor. However, in practice, Blaenavon Town Council tends not to be party political, with members of all political persuasions co-operating. There is no 'Leader of the Council' as the role does not exist in statute and the position is not recognised in Blaenavon Town Council's Standing Orders.

Political Composition of Blaenavon Town Council (March 2024)



■ Welsh Labour ■ Independent ■ Welsh Conservative

Name	Party Affiliation	Ward
Cllr Liam Cowles	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon East
Cllr Marc Harris	Independent	Blaenavon East
Cllr Georgina James (resigned January 2024)	Independent	Blaenavon East
Cllr Alan Jones	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon East
Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews	Independent	Blaenavon East
Cllr Stephen Templeton (elected March 2024)	Welsh Conservative	Blaenavon East
Cllr Michael Wheeler	Independent	Blaenavon East
Cllr Annalisa Beav an	Independent	Blaenavon West
Cllr Lewis Evans	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon West
Cllr Prof John Hunt	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon West
Cllr Sandra Keen	Independent	Blaenavon West
Cllr Ian Parfitt	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon West
Cllr Tom Porter	Welsh Labour	Blaenavon West

# BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCILLORS (MARCH 2024)



*Cllr L Cowles (Welsh Labour)*



*Cllr M Harris (Independent)*



*Cllr A Jones (Welsh Labour)*



*Cllr N Matthews (Independent)*



*Cllr S Templeton  
(Welsh Conservative)*



*Cllr M Wheeler (Independent)*



*Cllr A Beavan (Independent)*



*Cllr L Evans (Welsh Labour)*



*Cllr J Hunt (Welsh Labour)*



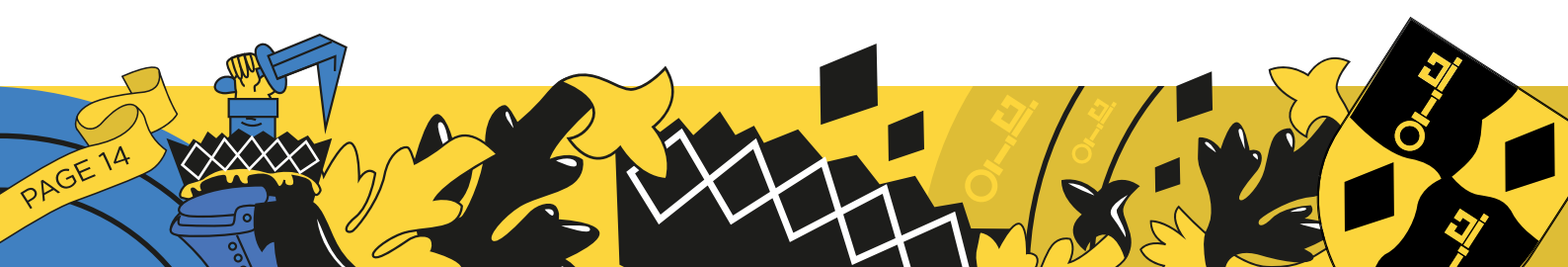
*Cllr S Keen (Independent)*



*Cllr I Parfitt (Welsh Labour)*



*Cllr T Porter (Welsh Labour)*



## 6.2 THE TOWN MAYOR

It is a legal requirement under the Local Government Act 1972 for a Town Council to appoint a Town Mayor at its Annual General Meeting. The Town Mayor is the ceremonial head of the Town Council and acts as the official representative of Blaenavon at civic events, ceremonies, and functions within and outside the town

The office engenders civic dignity and aspires to create a sense of unity and cohesiveness within the community. The mayor will typically attend public, cultural and community events throughout the year will welcome dignitaries, support community initiatives, and generally promote the town.

The Town Mayor also serves as Chairman of the Council and must preside over council meetings, ensuring debates are conducted in an orderly manner and in line with the council's Standing Orders. The mayor has a casting vote in the event of an equality of votes. The mayor must also work closely with the Chief Officer to ensure good governance and management of the council.



The Town Mayor must be a serving councillor and is elected by councillors each year at the council's Annual General Meeting. The council may also choose to elect a Deputy Mayor, but this is not a statutory requirement.

At its Annual General Meeting held on 3 May 2023, the council appointed Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews (Independent) as Town Mayor of Blaenavon and Cllr Annalisa Beavan (Independent) as Deputy Town Mayor of Blaenavon for the 2023/24 Mayoral Year.



During the 2023/24 Mayoral Year, the Town Mayor participated in a wide range of community engagements.







## 6.4 WHAT DOES A TOWN COUNCILLOR DO?

Councillors ensure that residents have a voice in how the town is run and that residents' needs and concerns are heard. Councillors make decisions on setting and spending the council's budget and input into the planning process and on other matters that affect the community.

Councillors also work hard to improve the town's well-being and promote community involvement. They put together community events, lend support to local organisations, and talk to other local authorities and government bodies on behalf of Blaenavon residents.

**Town councillors are unsalaried**, only receiving a **small annual allowance** of £156 to cover the costs of their duties, plus a £52 stationery allowance. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor receive an additional Civic Dignitary allowance of £1,500 and £500 respectively for their extra work. Many of our town councillors have full-time jobs and work or volunteer in the community in addition to their role as councillors. They are public servants who are dedicated to making Blaenavon a better place.

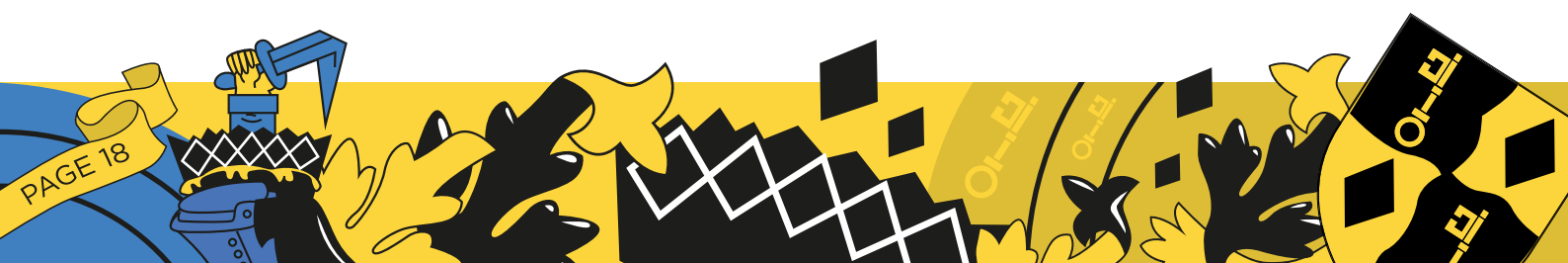
## 6.5 COUNCIL MEETINGS

Blaenavon Town Council holds a **Finance Committee Meeting** on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30pm (chaired by the Deputy Town Mayor) and a **Full Council Meeting** on the fourth Wednesday of each month (chaired by the Town Mayor). The **Annual General Meeting** is held in May and **Extraordinary Meetings** are held when required in accordance with the Council's standing orders. Councillors receive a **summons** to attend council meetings. The Council is in recess in August and December.

Under the Local Government (Wales) Act 2021, council meetings must now be held on a **hybrid** basis, with members (and the public) able to attend via video link or in person in the council chamber at 101 High Street. To ensure compliance with the new law, and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of hybrid meetings, the council invested in new video-conferencing equipment in 2023. Members of the public wishing to attend virtually must request a link from the Chief Officer to the Council ahead of the meeting.

The following table shows councillor attendance to summonsed council meetings during the 2023/24 financial year (i.e. Full Council, Finance, the Annual General Meeting and Extraordinary Meetings, **1 April 2023 -31 March 2024**)

Councillor	Total Expected Attendances	Present Expected	as	Absent Apologies) (inc.	Percentage
N MATTHEWS	22	22		0	100
M WHEELER	22	21		1	95.5
L COWLES	22	20		2	90.9
I PARFITT	22	19		3	86.4
A BEAVAN	22	18		4	81.8
J HUNT	22	16		6	72.7
S KEEN	22	16		6	72.7
A JONES	22	15		7	68.2
L EVANS	22	14		8	63.6
M HARRIS	22	10		12	45.5
T PORTER	22	10		12	45.5
S TEMPLETON (elected Mar 2024)	2	2		0	100
G JAMES (resigned Jan 2024)	18	1		17	5.6



## 6.6 COUNCILLOR TRAINING RECORD 2022-2027

Serving as a councillor is a responsible position and, as such, it is important that councillors and officers are competent to perform their duties in an effective and lawful manner.

Councillor training is not yet compulsory, but town and community councils are obliged to publish a training plan. This is included on the council's website. Training is available to councillors through One Voice Wales. The following table details the number of training modules each councillor has completed since the 2022 elections (as of 31 March 2024):

Councillor	Modules Attended 6 May 2022 - 31 Mar 2024	Total Modules
N MATTHEWS	Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction The Council as an Employer The Councillor Effective Staff Management The Council Meeting Local Government Finance Advanced Local Government Finance Chairing Skills Understanding the Law Devolution of Services Introduction to Community Engagement Making Effective Grant Applications	13
S KEEN	Code of Conduct Introduction to Community Engagement New Councillor Induction The Councillor Local Government Finance Understanding the Law Chairing Skills Creating a Community Place Plan Health & Safety	9
M WHEELER	Understanding the Law The Council Meeting Local Government Finance Advanced Local Government Finance Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction Use of IT, Websites, and social media	7
J HUNT	Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction The Council Meeting Understanding the Law Local Government Finance Chairing Skills	6
A BEAVAN	Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction The Council Meeting Understanding the Law Local Government Finance - Module 6 Advanced Local Government Finance - Module 21	6
I PARFITT	Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction	2
T PORTER	Code of Conduct New Councillor Induction	2
L COWLES	None	0
L EVANS	None	0
M HARRIS	None	0
A JONES	None	0
S TEMPLETON (Elected Mar 2024)	None	0

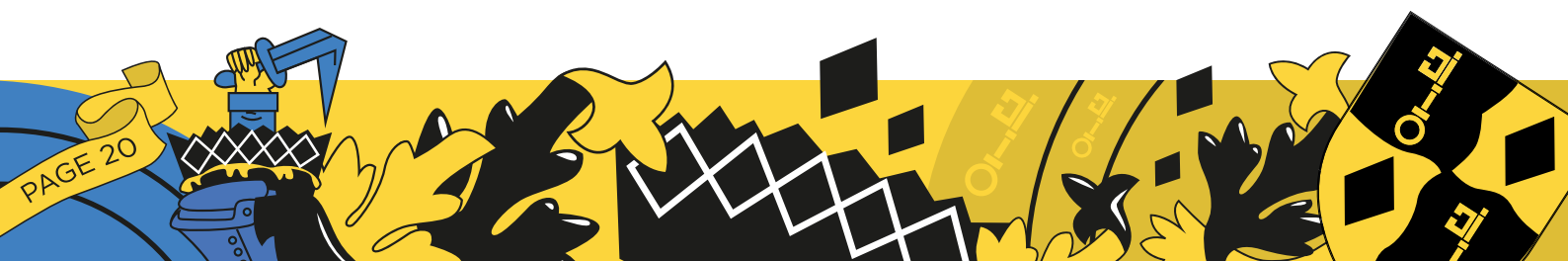


## 6.7 COUNCILLOR PARTICIPATION ON WORKING GROUPS 2023/24

Blaenavon Town Council, from time to time, appoints working groups, consisting of small groups of councillors and officers. These are temporary groups that meet between council meetings to address a particular challenge or problem. They may look at an issue in detail to provide recommendations to the Full Council. The working groups report back at Full Council or the Finance Meeting where all members have the opportunity to debate and contribute.

In 2023/24 the following seven working groups met:

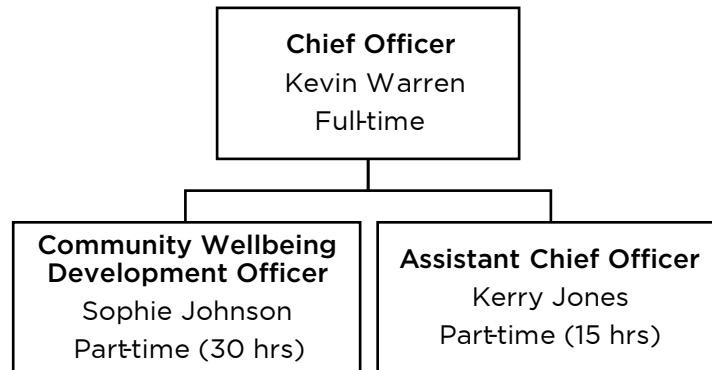
Working Group	Members
King's Coronation Event Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Annalisa Beavan Cllr Prof John Hunt
Community Review Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Prof John Hunt Cllr Mike Wheeler
Communications Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Annalisa Beavan Cllr Lewis Evans Cllr John Hunt
Summer Event Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Annalisa Beavan Cllr Marc Harris Cllr Sandra Keen
Abertillery Wind Farm Consultation Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Prof John Hunt Cllr Lewis Evans Cllr Liam Cowles
2024/25 Budget Setting Working Group	Cllr Dr Nathan Matthews Cllr Liam Cowles Cllr Alan Jones
Assistant Chief Officer Remuneration Working Group	Cllr Annalisa Beavan Cllr Mike Wheeler Cllr Alan Jones



## 7 THE COUNCIL OFFICERS

In 2023/24, Blaenavon Town Council employed three officers (2.2 Full-time Equivalent) to implement the decisions of councillors, deliver projects for the benefit of the community, and ensure that the council meets its legal and auditory obligations.

Officers are employees of the council. They are not elected and are not councillors. Therefore, they must be remunerated by the council at a scale commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. The council, as an employer, has a duty of care towards its staff and a legal responsibility to adhere to contractual and statutory employment law.



The Chief Officer performs the combined statutory roles of **Proper Officer** (Clerk to the Council) and **Responsible Financial Officer**. The Chief Officer manages two part-time members of staff, namely the Assistant Chief Officer (15 hours per week), and the Community Wellbeing Development Officer (30 hours per week).

The Chief Officer is responsible for all **operational matters** relating to the council but is ultimately accountable to the Full Council and works closely with the mayor, who is also responsible for carrying out the Chief Officer's annual appraisal, which is reported back to Full Council.



## 8 ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION

It is important that residents know how to access the council and its services. There are several ways in which residents can access information and notices relating to the council.

### 8.1 THE COUNCIL OFFICE

The Blaenavon Town Council office is located at 101 High Street, Blaenavon, Torfaen, NP4 9PT (in the former librarian's house attached to the Workmen's Hall). The building is leased from Torfaen County Borough Council.

The building contains the Council Chamber where council meetings are held. The room is steeped with tradition and reminders of Blaenavon's civic history. This includes the civic regalia, boards depicting the names of past Chairmen and Mayors from 1860 to present day, and furniture, including the presiding desk and chair, which date back to King Edward VIII's visit to Blaenavon in 1936.

Members of the public have a right to attend council meetings. Meetings are now held on a hybrid basis, meaning that members of the public can also watch council meetings remotely if they request a link from the Chief Officer ahead of the meeting.

### 8.2 COMMUNITY NOTICE BOARDS

There are three community notice boards in Blaenavon where residents can read legal notices relating to the council, including Agendas for meetings, as well as information about upcoming events. These are located:

1. Outside the Council Offices at 101 High Street, Blaenavon
2. Ivor Gardens, Blaenavon
3. Clapham Terrace, Forge Side

Copies of minutes can also be read at Blaenavon World Heritage Centre and Library, Church Road, Blaenavon, NP4 9AS.

### 8.3 WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Residents can find relevant documentation on the Blaenavon Town Council website ([www.blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk](http://www.blaenavontowncouncil.co.uk)) and can keep up-to-date with the latest developments by following the council's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/BlaenavonTC>).

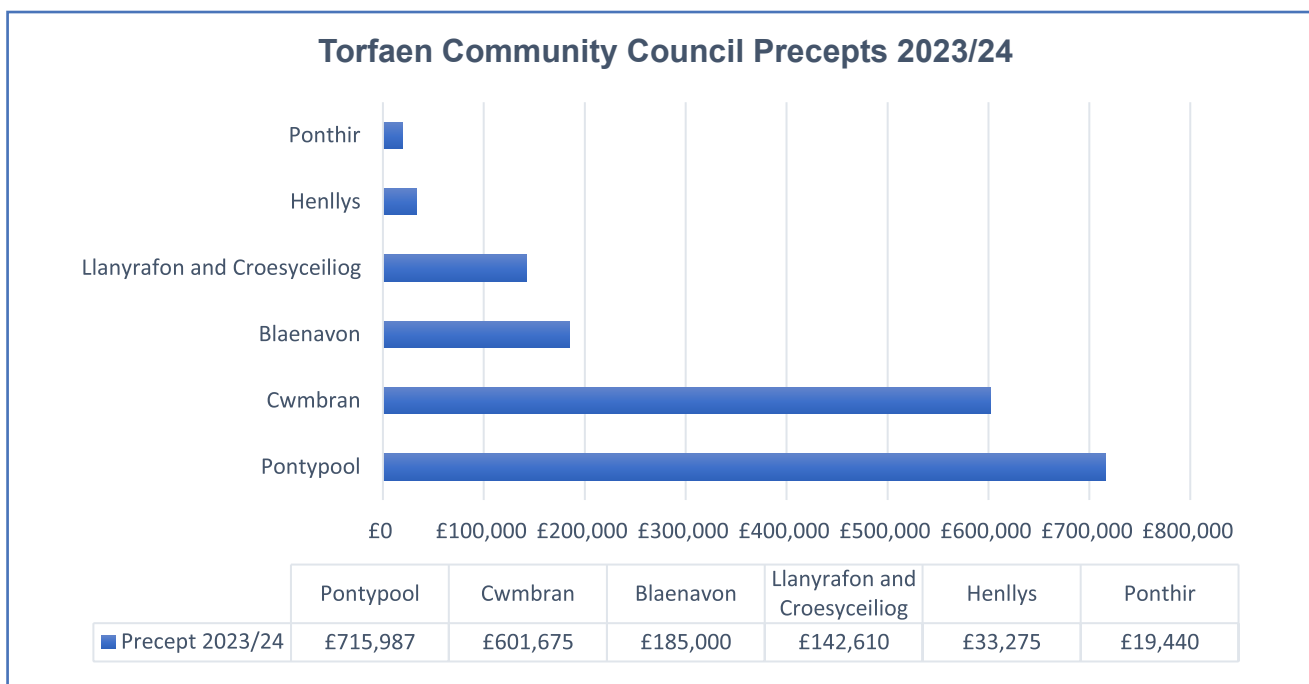
### 8.4 NEWSLETTER

The Blaenavon Town Council newsletter was reintroduced during 2023/24 to ensure the council reaches those who are not online or active on social media. The 12-page document was distributed to houses and public buildings throughout the town, as well as online. It is anticipated that the newsletter will continue to be published in 2024/25.



# 9 FINANCES

## 9.1 THE PRECEPT



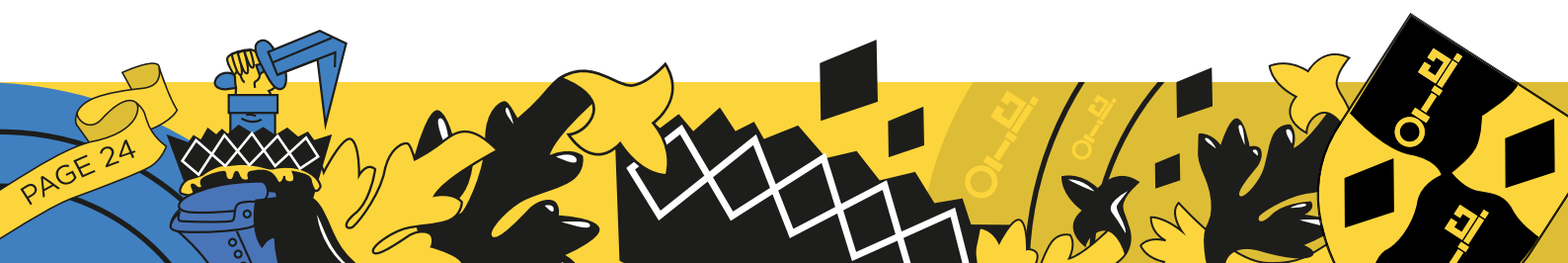
Blaenavon Town Council has a duty to set a **precept** as part of its budget process. This is an annual sum that the council levies to fund its services and operational costs. It is collected by Torfaen County Borough Council as part of the Council Tax.

Blaenavon has the **third highest** precept of the six town and community councils in Torfaen. The precept for 2023/24 was set at **£185,000**.

## 9.2 BLAENAVON TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNITY TAX LEVY 2023/24

There are approximately 2,908 chargeable dwellings in Blaenavon. Over **82%** of Blaenavon houses are Band A and Band B. Very few houses are in the higher bands.

Council Tax Band	Number of Properties in Blaenavon	Percentage of All Properties	Annual Cost of Blaenavon Town Council	Weekly Cost of Blaenavon Town Council
Band A	1424	48.97%	£64.13	£1.23
Band B	973	33.46%	£74.82	£1.44
Band C	225	7.74%	£85.51	£1.64
Band D	151	5.19%	£94.74	£1.82
Band E	101	3.47%	£117.58	£2.26
Band F	28	0.96%	£128.27	£2.47
Band G	4	0.14%	£160.33	£3.08
Band H	1	0.03%	£192.40	£3.70
Band I	1	0.03%	£224.47	£4.32





There are approximately 1,229 dwellings in Blaenavon or 42.3% who are registered as 'Discounted Dwellings'. This is broken down as follows:

% Discount	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Band I
25%	738	367	61	31	20	4	2	0	0
50%	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### 9.3 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 2023/24

INCOME	2023/24
Precept	£185,000.00
Interest	£0.00
Vat Receipt	£ 5797.86
Revenue	£3,030.00
Other Receipts	£5,557.84
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£199,385.70</b>

EXPENDITURE	2023/24
Salary	£102,692.35
Election Costs	£0.00
Establishment Costs	£27,026.49
Cllrs Allowance	£4,591.10
Hospitality	£0.00
Projects	£55,433.91
<b>Grants</b>	<b>£18,063.95</b>
Vat	£7,462.21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£215,270.01</b>

<b>Balance</b> Carried Over into 2024/25	<b>£83,358.99</b>
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### 9.4 2022/23 FINANCIAL YEAR AUDIT OPINION

In autumn 2023, a full audit was undertaken by Audit Wales on the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023. The audit was conducted on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales and in accordance with the requirements of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and guidance issued by the Auditor General for Wales.

Audit opinion: **Unqualified**

This means that, on the basis of the audit, **no matters came to the auditor's attention to give cause for concern** that, in any material respect, the information reported in the Annual Return has not been prepared in accordance with proper practices; that relevant legislative and regulatory requirements have not been met; is not consistent with the Council's governance arrangements; and that the Council does not have proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.



# 10 AIMS AND VISION

The Town Council's vision for Blaenavon is:

*“A successful, vibrant, attractive town, where people want to live, work, and visit.”*

The Town Council's Mission Statement is:

*“To improve the quality of life for residents by ensuring that Blaenavon is a desirable, thriving and sustainable place in which to live, visit and do business.”*

Blaenavon Town Council aims to:

1. Provide a **democratic and representational voice** for the community.
2. Manage services (that are delivered directly) to a **good quality standard, in an efficient, effective, and responsive way, at an affordable cost.**
3. Ensure that public services delivered in Blaenavon by other bodies are dealt with **effectively, and in accordance with the wishes of the community.**
4. Work with residents, principal authorities and other service providers, businesses, and community organisations with the aim of **achieving a safe, healthy, prosperous and sustainable community.**
5. **Serve those who live, study and work in Blaenavon** and those who visit the town.
6. Promote and **represent the community's views and aspirations** at local, county and national level.
7. Provide **high standard, cost-effective services**, and amenities to help meet the needs and wishes of residents.
8. **Work in partnership**, or otherwise, with other statutory and voluntary bodies, businesses and individuals to ensure and improving standard of services and facilities to meet the needs and expectations of Blaenavon's residents.
9. Achieve more influence over service delivery and development in the town to **ensure that the best interests of Blaenavon are considered.**
10. Seek a **fair share of investment** in the town by local and regional authorities.
11. Encourage the **devolution of services** to the Town Council where they can be delivered more effectively and efficiently, and ideally with no additional cost to the taxpayer.
12. Enhance and promote the **historic and cultural heritage** of Blaenavon and safeguard its unique identity and its **natural and built environment** recognised with **World Heritage Status.**
13. Encourage and promote the **economic and commercial vitality** of the town centre and to strive for a pleasant, clean, and safe environment throughout the town.
14. Promote and **support local voluntary groups** and clubs that seek to assist residents and visitors to Blaenavon.
15. Be a **professional, competent, and caring** Town Council.
16. To help to create a **socially inclusive** and caring community which embraces all its residents, irrespective of age, culture, income, race, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or religion, and which seeks to develop their well-being, knowledge, understanding and cooperation.



## CONTINUATION AIMS AND VISION

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To achieve the above the council has:

- Developed the capability and capacity of councillors and staff.
- Liaised with other key partners and organisations.
- Developed appropriate policies and procedures.
- Ensured community engagement, including social media.
- Maintained robust administrative and financial control methods.



# WORK & ACHIEVEMENTS 2023/24



# 11 SERVING AS A VOICE FOR THE COMMUNITY

As the first and most local tier of government, it is essential that Blaenavon Town Councillors represents the interests of the residents of Blaenavon. This includes attendance at Full Council and Finance Meetings, sitting on outside bodies committees, liaising with partner organisations, and engaging with the community.

## 11.1 ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS AND OUTSIDE BODIES COMMITTEES

During 2023/24, Blaenavon Town Council had representation on the following committees and organisations:

- Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee (x2 members)
- One Voice Wales Gwent Valleys Area Committee (x2 members)
- Torfaen Museum Trust
- Churches Working Together
- Blaenavon Townscape Heritage Programme Board
- Torfaen Community Councils Partnership (x2 members)
- Mic Morris Trust
- Torfaen Community Transport
- Blaenavon World Heritage Site (BWHS) Partnership Board
- BWHS Partnership: Steering Group
- BWHS Partnership: Caring for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Working Group
- BWHS Partnership: Exploring and Enjoying the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Working Group
- Torfaen Armed Forces Covenant Forum
- Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School Board of Governors
- Ysgol Bryn Onnen Board of Governors
- Healthy Blaenavon Strategic Partnership Board (x3 representatives)
- Torfaen Canal Partnership

**Councillor representation** on the above bodies **provides a voice** for Blaenavon Town Council and Blaenavon residents on organisations and committees that can make a difference in the Blaenavon community. Councillors who attend outside bodies committee meetings or participate in relevant community work are requested to provide an update at monthly Full Council meetings, where they may face questions from other members.

Regular meetings have also been held with the Chair of the Blaenavon Over 50s Forum. In addition, officers hold meetings with officers of partner organisations from time to time in the course of their operational work.



## 11.2 ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL BY REPRESENTATIVES OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Representatives of outside bodies occasionally offer to attend, or are invited to attend, Blaenavon Town Council Meetings – either at the Finance Meeting or Full Council meeting. This provides members the opportunity to ask questions and provide challenge, where appropriate. The following attended council meetings in the 2023/24 financial year:

Date	Representative	Position	Body	Issue
12/04/2023	Theresa Pearce and Kate Jenkins	Public Services Team	Torfaen County Borough Council	Launch of the TCBC Waste and Recycling Consultation Programme.
12/04/2023	Caroline Genever-Jones	Elections and Business Manager	Torfaen County Borough Council	TCBC review into electoral arrangements for community councils.
24/05/2023	Kevin Weaver	Community Engagement and Participation Officer	Torfaen County Borough Council	Update concerning role and remit.
14/06/2023	Rebecca Hartley	Blaenavon World Heritage Site Co-ordinator	Blaenavon WHS Partnership / Torfaen County Borough Council	Blaenavon World Heritage Site Periodic Review
28/06/2023	Ashleigh Taylor	Treasurer	Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee	To provide an update on the status of the Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee
28/06/2023	Caroline Genever-Jones	Elections and Business Manager	Torfaen County Borough Council	TCBC review into electoral arrangements for community councils.
27/09/2023	Julian Davenne	Play Service Manager	Torfaen County Borough Council	Blaenavon school holiday play provision
11/10/2023	Kevin Weaver	Community Engagement and Participation Officer	Torfaen County Borough Council	Update on summer provision in Blaenavon
25/10/2023	Justin Jones	Principal Planner	Torfaen County Borough Council	Developments of National Significance – windfarm applications.
08/11/2023	Caroline Genever-Jones	Elections and Business Manager	Torfaen County Borough Council	Polling district and poll station review 2023
08/11/2023	David Williams and Phillip Coombe	Volunteers	Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company	Potential partnership working opportunities
24/01/2024	Susie Sorby	Helping Working Families Officer	Bron Afon Community Housing	Implementation of family food bags within Blaenavon.
24/01/2024	Rebecca Hartley	Team Leader Strategic Place Projects	Torfaen County Borough Council	Blaenavon Placemaking Plan
14/02/2024	Cllr Liam Cowles	Torfaen CBC Ward Member	Torfaen County Borough Council	TCBC update from Cllr Cowles in his capacity as a TCBC member.
28/02/2024	Lee Stachow	Neighbourhood Inspector for Torfaen	Gwent Police	Policing Update
28/02/2024	Susie Sorby	Helping Working Families Officer	Bron Afon Community Housing	Chill Skills mental health initiative for children and young people.
13/03/2024	Mike Logan	Wellbeing Director	Bridges Centre, Monmouth	Community Transport



## 11.3 PARTICIPATION IN CONSULTATIONS

From time-to-time important consultations are held by other organisations that have the potential to affect the future wellbeing of the Blaenavon community. There were two major consultations relevant to Blaenavon during 2023/24. These are as follows:

- RWE Abertillery Wind Farm Consultation
- Torfaen County Borough Council – Review of Communities

The first involves a **Development of National Significance** (DNS) whereas the second involves the **electoral arrangements** for the Blaenavon community, including councillor numbers, wards and the Blaenavon community boundary.

Councillors have been strongly engaged in both consultations and the Town Council has submitted detailed representations on both. The following sections summarises Blaenavon Town Council's position in relation to each consultation.

### 11.3.1 RWE ABERTILLERY WIND FARM CONSULTATION

RWE Renewables proposes to site six wind turbines, with a maximum height of 200 metres each, on a wind farm between Abertillery and Abersychan. **All six turbines would potentially be visible on the Coity ridge from various locations within Blaenavon.** The proposed windfarm is classed as a Development of National Significance (DNS) and, as part of the statutory consultation process, RWE Renewables held a pre-application public consultation between 19 October 2023 and 4 December 2023.

Blaenavon Town Council responded to the RWE consultation on the Abertillery Wind Farm Development by establishing a Working Group to compile concerns and participated actively in the consultation event at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall. In its response, Blaenavon Town Council acknowledged the climate emergency and explained its support for renewable energy but emphasised the importance of **appropriate siting** due the potential impact on the setting of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape as a **UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site**.

The council has expressed concern that the proposed wind farm development could compromise the **Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)** of the World Heritage Site due to visual impact, adversely affecting the nuanced interpretation of the relict landscape.

Additionally, the council has raised queries concerning potential impacts on the natural environment, including threats to Waun Afon Bog, slope instability, impacts on wildlife and habitats, and potential disruption to the area's Dark Skies status.

Regarding the supposed community benefit, the council has sought clarity on the financial benefits for the Blaenavon community from the proposed development. Moreover, the council has suggested potential uses for community benefit funds, including supporting heritage projects in the area.

Blaenavon Town Council emphasised the need for a thorough assessment of the proposed development's impact on both the cultural and natural heritage of the area, as well as transparent consideration of community benefits.

#### **Next Steps**

RWE Renewables is now considering the consultation feedback. If it chooses to make a formal planning application, a decision would be expected by the Welsh Government in late 2024.



### 11.3.2 TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL – REVIEW OF COMMUNITIES

In early 2023, Blaenavon Town Council was notified of Torfaen County Borough Council's (statutory) review of boundaries and electoral arrangements for the six town and community councils in the area. Blaenavon Town Council established a working group on 26 April 2023, consisting of council members and the Chief Officer, to coordinate a response to the consultation process.

The working group began by reviewing Torfaen County Borough Council's Terms of Reference and prepared a response, which was approved at a Finance Meeting on 10 May and submitted to the elections department. The public consultation opened on 7 June, prompting stakeholders to assess current community boundaries and propose changes for effective local governance.

The Community Review Working Group compiled a phase one consultation response which was ratified at a Full Council meeting on 26 July and submitted to Torfaen County Borough Council's elections department on 27 July.

Torfaen County Borough Council's Task and Finish Group issued recommendations in November 2023, namely:

- To make **no changes to the existing Blaenavon Community boundary**.
- To **reduce** Blaenavon Town Council members from **12 to 10**.
- To merge Blaenavon East and Blaenavon West into a **single Blaenavon Ward**.

Blaenavon Town Council made a phase two consultation response in February 2024, heavily criticising Torfaen County Borough Council's Task and Finish Group's recommendations in respect of Blaenavon.

A summary of Blaenavon Town Council's phase two consultation response is as follows:

#### TCBC RECOMMENDATION:

To make no changes to the existing Blaenavon Community boundary.

Blaenavon Town Council **SUPPORTED** the decision to retain the existing Blaenavon community boundary.

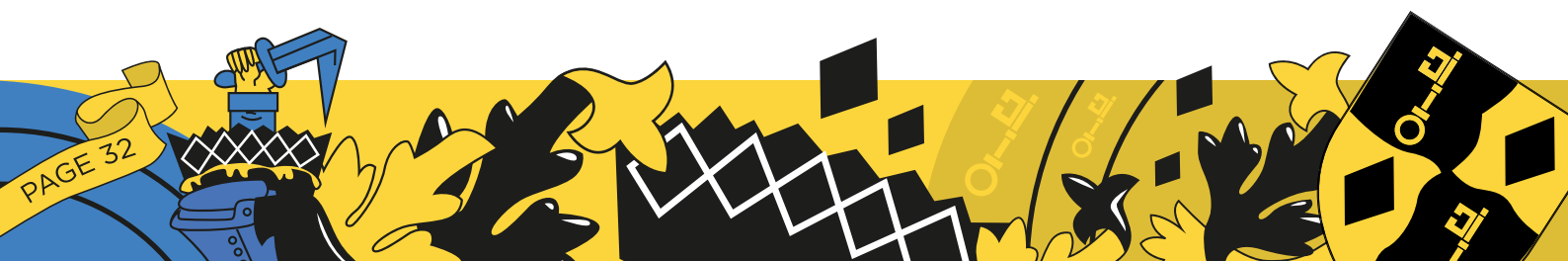
Blaenavon Town Council supported this recommendation because it **maintains civic tradition** and **community identity**. The current boundary, to the greater extent, aligns with the historic footprint of the Blaenavon community area, preserving its heritage and identity.

Maintaining the existing boundary therefore upholds a continuous and longstanding civic and democratic tradition in Blaenavon, which dates to 1860. Retaining the boundary respects Blaenavon's distinctive community identity and acknowledges its relative geographic isolation from neighbouring communities within the borough.

#### TCBC RECOMMENDATION:

To reduce Blaenavon Town Council members from 12 to 10.

Blaenavon Town Council strongly **OPPOSED** the recommendation to reduce the number of Blaenavon Town Councillors from 12 to 10.





Blaenavon Town Council opposed this recommendation because **the proposed reduction in councillor numbers for Blaenavon Town Council lacks any discernible community benefit and fails to improve efficiencies in local government administration or democracy.** This reduction unreasonably constrains the council's capacity to effectively deliver place-based services and align with policy directions set by the Welsh Government and One Voice Wales.

Moreover, it **diminishes opportunities for democratic participation** and grassroots representation, directly impacting community leadership, and contradicts Torfaen County Borough Council's draft Community Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to increase community involvement in local decision-making by 2027.

Additionally, the proposed cut **undermines efforts to promote diversity and inclusion** within the council and the broader community, while also weakening oversight of public resources and finances. Furthermore, it unfairly positions Blaenavon Town Council as one of the smallest in Wales (in terms of councillor numbers), treating it unfavourably compared to similar-sized councils.

**TCBC RECOMMENDATION:**

To merge Blaenavon East and Blaenavon West into a single Blaenavon Ward.

Blaenavon Town Council **OPPOSED** the recommendation to combine the Blaenavon East and Blaenavon West wards into a single Blaenavon Ward.

Blaenavon Town Council opposed this recommendation because merging the wards would impose unreasonable costs and expenses on the Town Council and the residents of Blaenavon in the event of by-elections. The associated by-election costs and expenses, ranging from those related to polling stations, postal votes, poll cards, and staffing, become significantly inflated if the town were to have just a single ward.

Also, maintaining multiple wards ensures that ballot papers remain manageable, accessible, and comprehensible for voters, whereas a single ballot with 10 or 12 candidates may overwhelm and confuse some voters.

**Next Steps**

As of 31 March 2024, Blaenavon Town Council awaits the results of the next stage of the consultation process. However, the council remains steadfast in its position that **the recommendations are bad for Blaenavon.** The Town Council will continue to hold members of the Task and Finish Group to account and, if necessary, will contest the proposals at every level.



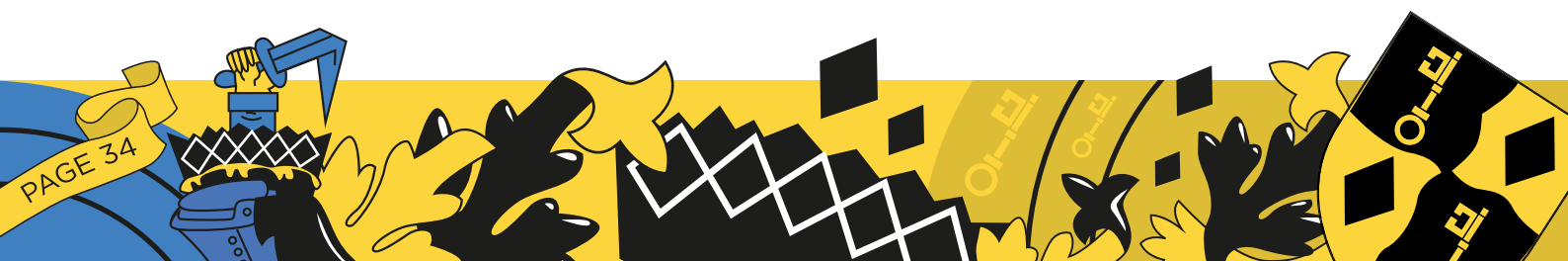
## 12 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

In March 2023, Blaenavon Town Council held a Wellbeing Day at Blaenavon World Heritage Centre. The aim of the day was to provide an opportunity for residents to talk to town councillors and staff and provide feedback about what they would like to see happen in the community.



The event showcased a range of community organisations that can offer help and support to residents, including services aligned to health and wellbeing, financial support, housing, cost-of-living, education, employment, and volunteering.

Unlike a traditional council consultation meeting, the event was designed to be fun and engaging for all generations. Blaenavon World Heritage Centre received over 500 visitors during the day and allowing valuable feedback from residents to be incorporated into the Town Council's strategic planning for 2023/24.



The feedback which was received and analysed provided much of the impetus for the projects and initiatives that were delivered during 2023/24, which are described in further detail later in this report.



## 12.1 COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Communication was a common theme identified in community comments. Therefore, in 2023, Blaenavon Town Council reintroduced its community newsletter after almost two decades. This decision was prompted by feedback indicating that, despite the council's active presence on Facebook and a comprehensive website, digitally excluded residents and non-social media users lacked access to important community information. As such, some residents felt disconnected from their local representatives and uninformed about the council's activities, events, and services.



Recognising the importance of inclusivity and the need to reach all residents, the council compiled a 12-page newsletter. This document served as a comprehensive guide, detailing the council's structure, the roles and responsibilities of town councillors and officers, and encouraging residents to participate in future elections as candidates or voters.

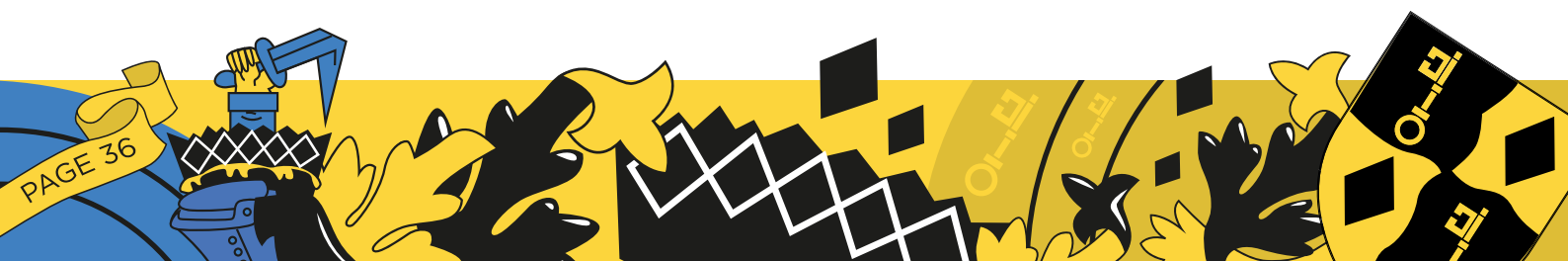
Distributed to every household in Blaenavon in October 2023, the newsletter became a useful resource for residents to stay informed about the council's projects, initiatives, and upcoming community events. By offering insight into the council's work, the newsletter aimed to engage residents in the governance of their town, complementing digital communication channels and ensuring inclusivity in information dissemination.

Transparency and accessibility are key features of the newsletter's content. By outlining the council's work and resource allocation, residents gain a clearer understanding of its role in the community, fostering trust and

accountability. Moreover, the newsletter actively promotes civic participation and community engagement by highlighting local initiatives and events. This encourages residents from diverse backgrounds to contribute actively to the town's life or to benefit from the services that their council provides.

Distributing newsletters in public buildings, such as the local library and resource centre, further ensures that essential information reaches residents of all demographics, promoting inclusivity and democratic participation.

The newsletter forms an important component of the council's broader commitment to promoting democratic health and fostering community engagement. Through its informative and accessible content, the publication serves as an important tool in strengthening the bond between the council and residents.



Positive feedback has been received from residents, who appreciate learning more about the work of the Town Council. Given its success, the council plans to produce further newsletters in 2024/25 to ensure an inclusive communications strategy.

*“I would like to express my thanks to the Town Council for deciding to re-introduce a tangible newsletter. My husband and I do not participate in any social media - What’s App, Facebook etc., so local news often passes us by, except when friends inform us, or posters are displayed in town. We are, therefore, most appreciative of this excellent development and hope you will keep it up in the future.”*

Letter received from Blaenavon Resident, dated 15 Nov 2023



## 13 CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FAMILIES

During its community wellbeing day in March 2023, Blaenavon Town Council received significant community feedback noting a shortage of activities available for young people within the town. In response, Blaenavon Town Council the council sought to establish a range of youth engagement initiatives, with a specific focus on addressing the following priorities:

- Adherence to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
- Alignment with deprivation and access targets outlined by the Welsh Government.
- Opportunities for collaborative partnership working.
- Consideration of cost implications to the Council.
- Promotion of family engagement.
- Inspiration and active involvement of young people.

Through its work, Blaenavon Town Council aims to empower its younger residents by providing innovative opportunities for personal growth, self-discovery, and skills development within a nurturing and supportive environment. It is the Council's aspiration that these initiatives will equip young individuals with the tools to seize control of their lives, make informed decisions, and actively contribute to their communities.

### 13.1 TEEN GYM AND SKATEBOARDING SESSIONS

Blaenavon Town Council initiated collaboration with local organisations to identify opportunities for younger residents and families to access affordable facilities and embrace the physical and mental benefits associated with regular exercise. This was particularly pertinent amidst the prevailing cost of living crisis. Partners included Torfaen Sports Development, Blaenavon Active Living Centre, and Bron Afon Community Housing.

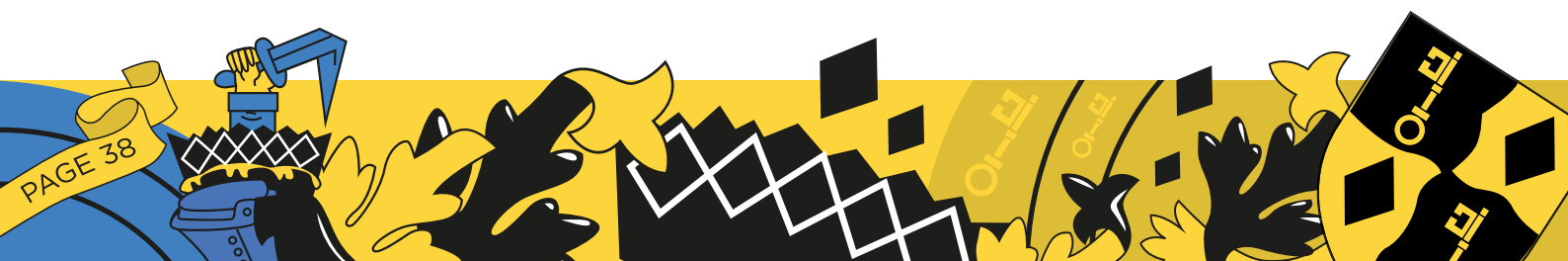
Successful negotiations with partners and the acquisition of a £1,000 grant from Bron Afon Community Housing led to the launch of the Teen Gym and Skateboarding sessions. These initiatives were designed to engage and empower the younger generation, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting their overall well-being.

The offer included:

- Free weekly gym sessions tailored for youths aged 11-16 years, held every Friday from 4pm to 5pm at Blaenavon Active Living Centre. These sessions were conducted under the guidance of two qualified gym instructors from Torfaen Sports Development.
- Five two-hour skateboarding sessions targeting 11-16-year-olds during school holidays. Led by Torfaen Sports Development in collaboration with Skateboard Academy UK.

The response to both initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive, with the skateboarding sessions experiencing full capacity attendance. Between May 2023 and March 2024, a total of **259 participants** have actively engaged in **33 gym sessions**.

Feedback from participants has been resoundingly affirmative, highlighting the myriad benefits experienced, including stress reduction, structured learning environments, enhanced fitness levels, augmented confidence, and self-esteem, improved social skills, and a deeper sense of teamwork.





*"I am writing to express my gratitude for the events that Blaenavon Town Council put on in support of the youth of the town. As an example, last summer, you organised a free skateboarding session for Blaenavon youth in which my children attended. It was professionally organised with coaching from the staff to ensure that safety was key, all the children were briefed, with knee, elbow, and helmet protection in place. All the children in attendance were excited and given the opportunity to try out something new. My daughter in particular struggles with her self-esteem was super excited to be involved in which it made her feel good about herself."*

Feedback from a Blaenavon Father, February 2024







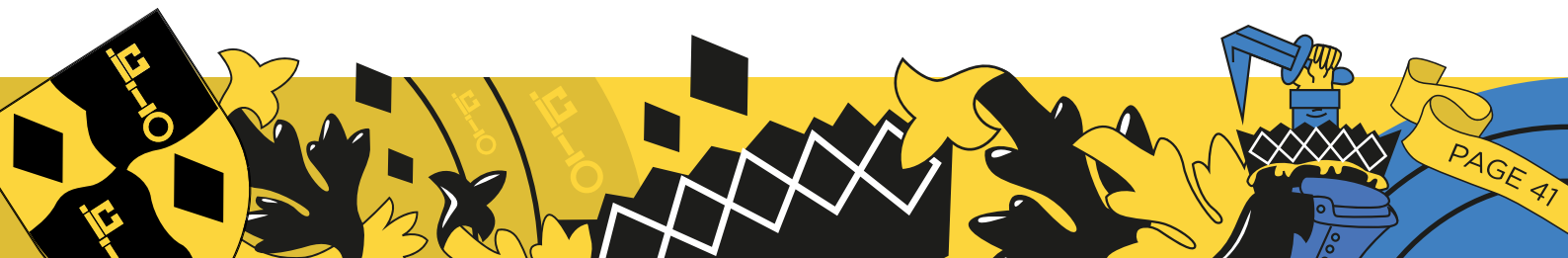
*“I am very pleased with the programme and hope it will continue. It has been a great way to keep fit, while also socialising with other young people my age in Blaenavon. The teen gym in particular has been very successful in improving my overall confidence, and my general fitness. I especially enjoy attending the teen gym because it gives me the chance to focus on my own self-improvement, on a regular basis.*

*Thanks to the Town Council, I can listen to music while exercising at the same time for free, so it's easier to concentrate. After teen gym finishes at five, Family Gym is active until six. Family Gym is an amazing opportunity for not just me, but also my family to come together, while also working as a team to compete in sports like basketball and football.”*

Feedback from a Blaenavon Teenager, February 2024

### 13.2 FAMILY CLUB AND MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS EXERCISE CLASSES

There were also opportunities for young people to exercise with their families as part of the 'Family Gym' sessions, which were held at the Blaenavon Active Living Centre every Friday evening during term time. These were held in conjunction with Torfaen Sports Development, with some 265 participants at sessions in 2023/24.



Blaenavon Town Council, in conjunction with Torfaen Sports Development, has also funded Mothers and Daughters exercise classes at the Blaenavon Active Living Centre. There were 176 participants during 2023/24.



### 13.3 WORLD HERITAGE YOUTH AMBASSADORS: PHOTOGRAPHY CLASSES

In 2023, Blaenavon Town Council organised a series of photographic workshops with a focus on the town's heritage and aimed at exploring and enhancing the aspirations of young people. To initiate the project, the council engaged professional photographer Walter Waygood to work in collaboration with the Blaenavon World Heritage Youth Ambassadors.

The objective was to engage and empower the younger generation in preserving their own cultural legacy and identity, through showcasing their work in an exhibition and book.



Under the guidance of Walter Waygood, and with support from Blaenavon Town Council's Community Wellbeing Development Officer, the project comprised:

- 4 Practical Workshops
- 1 Post Production / Exhibition Layout Design Workshop

These sessions aimed at engaging young people in Blaenavon and instilling pride in their local environment. A further aim of the project was to equip the ambassadors with photography skills aligned to interpretive, artistic, and creative competencies, enabling them to contribute to the design and compilation of the main exhibition.

The five workshops covered various techniques, including:

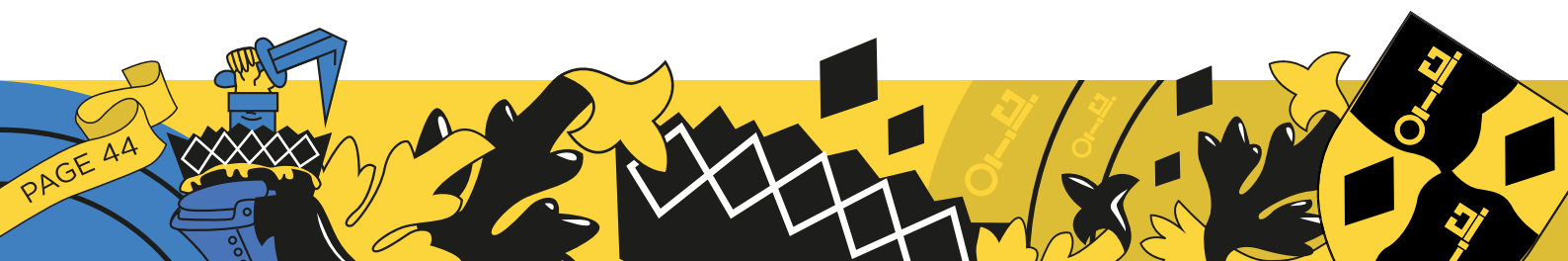
- Utilising visual resources for inspiration and guidance
- Exploring creative camera techniques
- Participating in practical field trips
- Engaging in picture matching exercises
- Conducting photography sessions
- Selecting and editing photographs





The enthusiasm, energy, and teamwork displayed throughout the workshops was evident in the portfolio of work completed by the ambassadors, showcased in the exhibition and book. This achievement helped integrate youth and heritage to deliver a successful community initiative.

Feedback from the ambassadors highlighted the enjoyable and thought-provoking nature of the workshops, providing them with opportunities to enhance their skills in designing and producing individual A3 prints, thus contributing to their own legacies aligned with future generations.





*“In 2023, our young people worked together with Blaenavon Town Council in delivering a photography project with a local photographer called Walter Waygood. The project was designed to look at themselves, and their community, through new lens’s and use the photos to celebrate not only their community, but who they were within it...”*

*The project was a fantastic example of engaging young people in their community, helping them not only think about their community, but who they were within it. They chose to celebrate themselves within the community and highlight areas of the town and people which they felt most connected to, and most proud of. The project helped our young people consider what it meant to be a part of the community in a meaningful way, and challenged a perception within our town that young people are anti-social. Our young people reported that they not only felt proud of the outcome, and that their work was on display, but they had a huge amount of fun undertaking the project. They reported that they felt seen by the community and respected for their input.”*

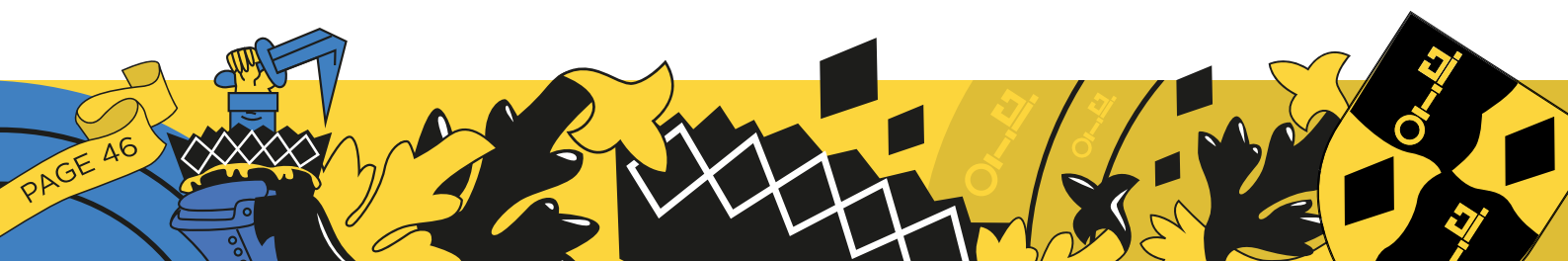
Director of Development, Hwb Torfaen





*“I just wanted to offer my thanks for the work the Town Council have been doing in the community of Blaenavon. My children really enjoyed the recent photography project... I recognise the importance of these projects in bringing varying members of the community together. My children enjoyed their time with Mr Walter Waygood, learning about how to operate a camera and were very excited to be part of the exhibition. Projects of this sort bring the history of small towns to younger generations, giving them a sense of the place they live as well as giving them opportunities to learn new skills.”*

**Feedback from Parent of Photography Workshop Participants**



### 13.4 PLAY CAMPS AND SCHOOL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Blaenavon Town Council has been actively supporting youth activities during 2023/24. In partnership with Torfaen Play, the council has funded Play and Wellbeing Camps in Blaenavon during school holidays, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for children.

These camps, catering to ages 5-11, promote positive wellbeing through activities that encourage social connection, physical activity, mindfulness, learning, and kindness. Children engage in games, arts and crafts, sports, and more, fostering skills, friendships, and self-confidence. Nutritious packed lunches are also provided. The scheme helps working families during the school holidays, helping parents manage childcare and work commitments.



In addition to the camps, the council has offered various activities during school breaks, including an Easter Trail, Halloween pumpkin carving, Animals Interactive sessions, free cooking sessions with Cook Stars, and the Blaenavon Summer Music Project with Rec Rock. The council has also supported free paddleboarding sessions with Black Crow Paddleboarding.









### 13.5 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SESSIONS

Blaenavon Town Council worked in partnership with Pontypool Community Council to fund a series of wellbeing workshops at St Albans High School and Abersychan Comprehensive Schools for over 600 young people. The workshops, facilitated by mental health organisation Tidy Butt, focused on mental health and wellbeing, with a variety of workshops including, managing stress and anxiety, nutrition, martial arts, bushcraft and survival skills, beatboxing, and creative art. The feedback from staff and pupils from both schools was very positive.



### 13.6 ENGAGEMENT WITH BLAENAVON HERITAGE VC PRIMARY SCHOOL

A children's poetry competition was held at Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School to mark the Coronation of King Charles III in May 2023 and Blaenavon Town Councillors were delighted to attend a special assembly to present each winner with an annual magazine subscription for their fantastic poems, a certificate, and a water bottle. The Town Council was also pleased to support a Christmas Card Competition in conjunction with Torfaen Play in December 2023.



### 13.7 SPONSORSHIP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Blaenavon Town Council also considers small grant applications to support young people in Blaenavon.

In 2023/24 the council was pleased to award sponsorship to 15-year-old Kai Powell, who was crowned 63kg British Boxing Champion at the British Championships on 4 June 2023. A council grant was used by Kai to purchase boxing boots to support him in pursuing his boxing career.

A small grant was also issued to 14-year-old Joseph Foster to support his endeavours in joining Operation Wallacea in Cusuco National Park, Honduras, in 2025 to study biodiversity and nature conservation.



# 14 OLDER PEOPLE

## 14.1 OVER 60S EXERCISE CLASSES

Encouraging regular exercise is crucial for maintaining good health and well-being, especially as individuals age. By engaging in consistent physical activity, older people can enhance strength, flexibility, balance, and coordination, thereby reducing the risk of falls and other health issues.



In collaboration with Torfaen Sports Development, Blaenavon Town Council has established weekly exercise sessions tailored for adults aged 60 years and above. Led by qualified instructors, these sessions are thoughtfully crafted with older adults in mind, ensuring exercises are safe and suitable for varying fitness levels.

These exercise groups offer older individuals a supportive and friendly environment to improve their fitness levels and overall well-being.

## 14.2 CINEMA BEFRIENDING CLUB

Expanding on the successful intergenerational project of 2019/20, Blaenavon Town Council sought to create a sustainable community engagement initiative aligning with the objectives of the Wellbeing for Future Generations Act. In early 2022, the Council initiated a community dialogue on health and well-being, collaborating with local organisations to identify engagement opportunities, focusing on locations, and individual/group needs. Partnerships were formed with Torfaen Community Connectors and Blaenavon Workmen's Hall.



The Blaenavon Befriending Film Club was launched in 2022, held monthly at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall Cinema. The club offers residents a free film screening and refreshments, promoting social interaction and tackling loneliness, particularly among older residents.

Bookings are managed by the Council's Community Development Wellbeing Officer, facilitating feedback collection on loneliness, mental health, affordability of services, food poverty, and community event promotion, shaping future events.

With over 20 sessions and 50+ attendees per session, the initiative has provided 1,100 residents with opportunities for increased social activity. The club has been met with positive feedback, ensuring the project's continuation for 2024/25. Residents appreciate the friendly environment, shared interests, positive impact on their lives, diverse film selection, and absence of transport costs.





*"... it is important to me to be independent, make new friends and a social life. The befriending club has really helped me. I am now retired on a pension so being able to watch a free film monthly and socialise with lots of different people I really appreciate. This has enabled me to make friends that I am now able to enjoy other activities with. Therefore, I would just like to express my appreciation for the befriending club and all the other free activities I have been able to participate in since moving to Blaenavon. Thank you, Blaenavon Town Council."*

**Feedback from a Blaenavon Resident**



# 15 THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

## 15.1 COMMUNITY SAFETY

Blaenavon Town Council works closely with Gwent Police and Torfaen County Borough Council on matters relating to Community Safety. Councillors regularly engage with the Neighbourhood Policing Team. The Town Council building is often used for meetings with the Police, partner organisations and residents to discuss matters of concern and solutions to local issues. Blaenavon Town Council also funds the maintenance of the Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras in Blaenavon Town Centre.

## 15.2 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Blaenavon Town Council is a statutory consultee for any planning applications submitted within the community boundary or within the wider area which may influence the town or its residents. Torfaen County Borough Council is the local planning authority and makes the final decision.

Planning applications that are to be considered by the Town Council are forwarded to the Chief Officer by the local planning authority and these are brought to the attention of the full council monthly and are shown in the agendas document.

All applications which the council considers are recorded in the corresponding minutes for that meeting and any observations or concerns are brought to the attention of the local planning authority.

## 15.3 PLANTING, BUNTING. AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Blaenavon Town Council keeps Blaenavon looking vibrant by providing the bunting and hanging baskets in the town centre, as well as planting flowers on the roundabout on Cwmavon Road. The Council also provides the Christmas lights in Blaenavon, Forge Side and Garn yr Erw as well as the Christmas Tree in Market Street.



## 15.4 LITTER PICKING

Blaenavon Town Council acknowledges the pressing issue of litter and fly-tipping and the adverse social, environmental, and economic impacts on the community. In response, the Council has implemented a strategy to deal with the issue.



In 2021, the Council launched the Blaenavon Heritage Pickers Facebook group, now boasting over 140 members. This platform serves as an information hub for community-led clean-up events, highlighting the positive impact of regular clean-ups on both the community and individuals.





Throughout 2023/24, Blaenavon Town Council has led an ongoing litter picking campaign, organising regular clean-up events across various locations, including the Gilchrist-Thomas Industrial Trading Estate, Broad Street, Upper Coed Cae, the Flower Park, Hayman's Field, Riverside, and Forge Side. The Council fully funds the necessary equipment, which is available for use by individuals and local groups.

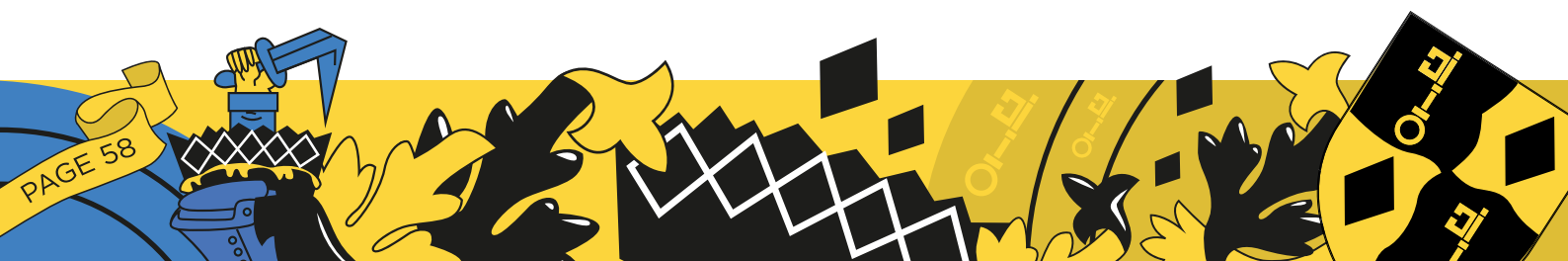


The success of this initiative has led to collaboration with stakeholders such as the litter prevention officer and Street Scene Service of TCBC, Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School Eco Council, and Scout Groups. By promoting community awareness and participation, the Council aims to safeguard the environment while fostering better mental and physical health and social cohesion.



*"I have attended many of the community litter picking sessions and plan to continue to do so well into the future. It's such an important topic for our local community and something many people can get involved in. Litter picking helps improve our community spirit and the environment and anyone can help no matter their age or fitness levels. The local Facebook group that was started allows people who maybe can't get out to the litter picking sessions to stay involved. They can see what's being done to help keep our town tidy and realise people care and have community spirit."*

Feedback from a Blaenavon Litter Picking Volunteer



*“I have lived near Blaenavon for around 3yrs, and been actively involved in litter picking for nature all that time and before that in other areas of South East Wales. Blaenavon, as a heritage town, has benefited greatly from the addition/introduction of an organised team, led by the Town Council, which seeks to encourage residents in a matter of aspects relating to their environment. Since it has been active, there has been a positive and succinct change to attitudes regarding man made, environmentally impacting litter and illegal tipping, and what can be done to make not only the world a better place but a sense of pride and ‘loving where you live’.*

**Feedback from a Blaenavon Litter Picking Volunteer**



*“The litter picking by individuals and members of the Heritage Pickers group has had a positive impact on many areas including Forgeside, Blaenavon Town Centre, Garn Yr Erw but also other residential, recreational, commercial, and industrial areas. I saw this first hand when I joined members of the town council for a litter pick on Upper Coedcae Road last Summer... The example set by the Town Council has been one that has been embraced by residents and one that the Town Council hopes will be replicated elsewhere. They are passionate about the town, environment and wildlife and so hopefully will continue this positive work for years to come.”*

**Feedback from Litter & Fly-tipping Prevention Officer,  
Torfaen County Borough Council**



## 16 CIVIC LEADERSHIP

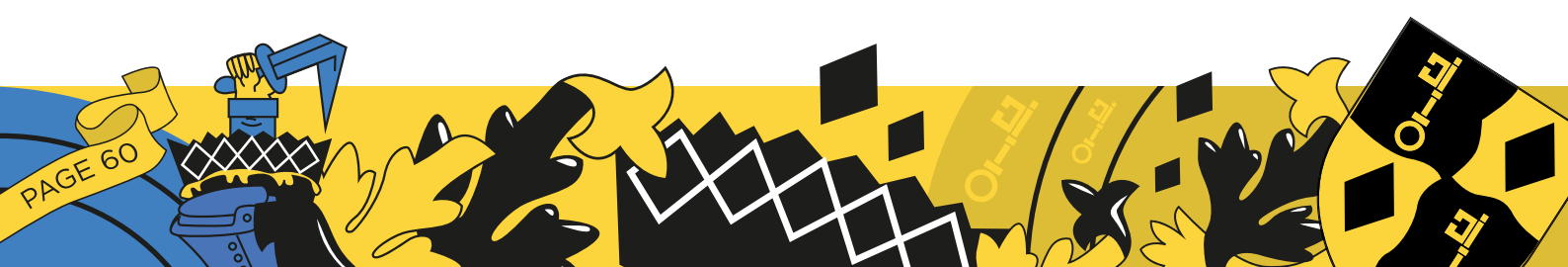
Blaenavon Town Council plays a prominent role in fostering civic pride and community spirit within the town. From commemorating significant national events to honouring local heroes, the Council actively engages in initiatives that celebrate Blaenavon's identity and recognise the contributions of its residents.



### 16.1 CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

In May 2023, Blaenavon Town Council took a leading role in commemorating the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. The Mayor raised the Coronation Flag at the Remembrance Garden outside Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, followed by the delivery of two successful community events over the Bank Holiday weekend.

To encourage local participation, the Council provided free street decoration packs for residents to host street parties and held a poetry competition in collaboration with Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School. Additionally, shops and businesses across Blaenavon were tastefully decorated for the occasion, with Green Gables Grazing receiving recognition from the Town Council for the best-dressed shop window. In early 2024, the Council obtained and displayed a free framed portrait of His Majesty the King in the council chamber, courtesy of the UK Government's scheme.







## 16.2 BLAENAVON CIVIC AWARDS

Blaenavon Town Council hosts the annual Civic Awards ceremony, presided over by the Mayor, to honour individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the town.

The 2023 event, held at the Constitutional Club, was well attended and celebrated the achievements of various residents across different categories:



### Outstanding Achievement

- Angela Lewis - Blaenavon Over 50s Forum
- Sandra Keen - Avon Road Community
- Aislinn Harris - Litter Picking
- Leighton Williams - Services to Forgeside RFC

### Overcoming Adversity

- Colin Roberts - Supporting Neighbours

### Youth Award

- Kai Powell - Boxing
- Alecia McHugh - Hwb Torfaen
- Daniel Morse - World Heritage Youth Ambassadors

The event serves as an opportunity for the Council to express gratitude to the exceptional individuals and organisations that enrich the fabric of Blaenavon.







### 16.3 REMEMBRANCE DAY AND ROYAL BRITISH LEGION EVENTS



Blaenavon Town Council, in collaboration with the Blaenavon branch of the Royal British Legion (RBL), coordinates the annual Remembrance service for the town. This solemn occasion includes a parade through Blaenavon Town, commencing at Broad Street carpark and concluding at the Blaenavon war memorial at Church Road. A wreath laying ceremony is conducted, following a two-minute silence observed at 11am.

The event enjoys widespread support from local organisations, including Blaenavon Town Band, local churches/chapels, clergy, businesses, youth organisations like the Scouts and Brownies, sports clubs, schools, and civic dignitaries from across the borough, as well as the Mayor and Town Councillors. Notably, the Remembrance Day event is deeply valued by the town's residents, reflecting their pride and respect for the occasion.

Throughout the year, Blaenavon Town Council continues to extend support to the RBL at various events, including Armed Forces Day in June.







# 17 COST OF LIVING

## 17.1 COOKING ON A BUDGET

In 2021, as part of the Healthy Blaenavon Initiative, Blaenavon Town Council created a

'Recipes on a Budget' booklet to support individuals and families during the Covid pandemic, considering the rising cost of living. Over 200 copies were distributed free of charge in electronic and printed formats.

In 2023, the Council responded to ongoing cost-of-living challenges by reintroducing the booklet, aiming to minimise costs, promote family engagement, identify partnerships, and address Welsh Government targets. Collaborating with local organisations such as Multiply Team - TCBC and Garnyschan Partnership, the Council launched the Cooking on a Budget project in September 2023.

This initiative comprised two 5-week courses held at 'The Pantry,' a community shop and kitchen. Led by a cookery tutor and Multiply engagement officer, the sessions empowered 12 residents to budget, calculate ingredient costs, and prepare nutritious meals using the recipe book. Participants received weekly cooking lessons and took home copies of the recipe book, generating positive feedback on cost savings, community engagement, and health benefits.

Due to its success, the Council is repeating the project in 2024, affirming its commitment to enhancing community well-being through sustainable, cost-effective initiatives.



*“I took part in the Cooking on a budget sessions and I really enjoyed it and learned a lot, we used recipes from the town council recipe book, and I still have my recipe book now and use a good few of the recipes quite regularly at home now too especially the corned beef stew, cookies and the overnight oats. I learned a lot about measurements and weighing from these sessions and I understand the maths side of cooking and budgeting a lot more now too.*

*It has been really beneficial for me and my family and I'm very grateful for Blaenavon town council and multiply for doing these sessions. The cooking on a budget sessions have helped me and my family with trying to get good meals and ingredients for less money during this cost of living crisis, budgeting as much as possible and still having filling and tasty meals is hard but having the knowledge and recipe book from these sessions has helped us a lot.”*

**Feedback from Blaenavon Resident 2024**



## 17.2 COMMUNITY SWIMMING

In 2007, the closure of Blaenavon Leisure Centre by Torfaen County Borough Council left residents without access to pool facilities, prompting concern from residents. With the nearest swimming pool being located six miles away in Pontypool, residents would incur transport costs in accessing these facilities.

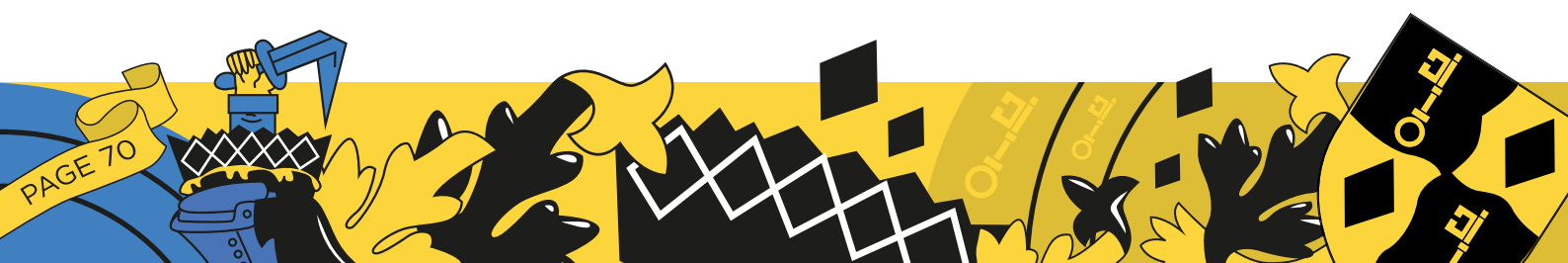
Amidst the cost-of-living crisis, this could disadvantage Blaenavon residents compared with those in the south of the borough.



In 2023/24, Blaenavon Town Council collaborated with local organisations, including Torfaen Leisure Trust and Jenson Travel, to identify cost-effective swimming opportunities for Blaenavon residents.

This led to the launch of the Community Swimming Initiative, providing free swimming sessions at Pontypool Active Living Centre during school holidays, along with complimentary bus transport.

These community swimming events have proven to be a success, with attendees offering fantastic feedback. For many, it was a valuable opportunity to socialise with fellow community members while engaging in healthy exercise.



*“Working together with Blaenavon Town Council has meant that it is easier for customers to access our facilities and enjoy the physical and mental benefits associated with regular exercise, without the restrictions of cost and transport which during the current cost of living crisis can be a major struggle. It is a huge positive to see that we are able to help our local communities access the facilities and also have a great time whilst here!”*

Operations Director - Torfaen Leisure Trust



*“My son and I have attended a number of these sessions run by Blaenavon Town Council and we have thoroughly enjoyed them. The sessions we have attended have hugely benefitted my son in building his confidence further in the pool and have fun with his friends and peers outside of school and outside of swimming lessons. It is also a great time for me, as a busy mum, to catch up with other mums/friends and not just a quick wave at the school gates. I am sure it is beneficial to all parents to see their children have fun, interact with their peers, and build their confidence in the water.*

*One major benefit of being able to attend these sessions, is that they are free of charge and, if needed, a coach to transport us to and from the leisure centre. In this current economic climate and cost of living crisis that some are enduring, this is truly a huge help. It is a fabulous project organised by the Town Council and is something that we will continue to use. Blaenavon Town Council support the community in so many ways with these sessions being just one of the many they offer, free to the local community.”*

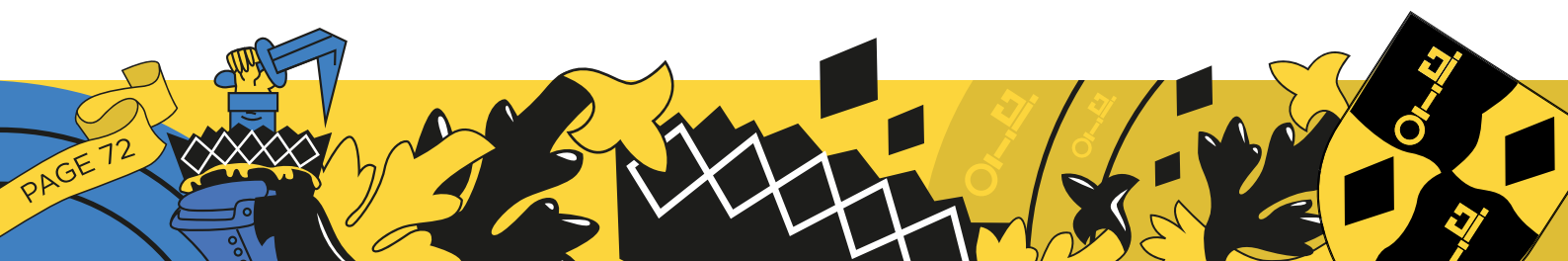
Feedback from a Blaenavon Mother 2024



*“I am a resident in Blaenavon and me and my family have been attending the Family swimming sessions since they started. As a family I am so grateful as for these sessions. We can never normally take our 4 children swimming as its quite costly. So this helps us loads. This is keeping the children entertained through the half terms etc and it’s also giving the children some exercise. As most activities for a family of 6 is quite high, having a free swim session and transport is amazing for us. It helps us save on diesel also.*

*I have lived in Blaenavon for entire life and have brought my children up in Blaenavon. Through my lifetime and my older three Children’s lifetime. We never had as much Free events as now... Thank you to Blaenavon Town Council for giving us amazing free activities throughout the half terms and Summer Holidays.”*

**Feedback from a Blaenavon Mother 2024**





*“As an adoptive parent to three children with additional needs, the activities organised by our town council have been invaluable to us as a family, offering us affordable, engaging, and supportive activities on our doorstep and providing us with the opportunity to develop our support network and feel supported in our local community. We feel very privileged to live in a town with a council who ensure that there are opportunities and activities for everyone.”*

Feedback from a Blaenavon Resident

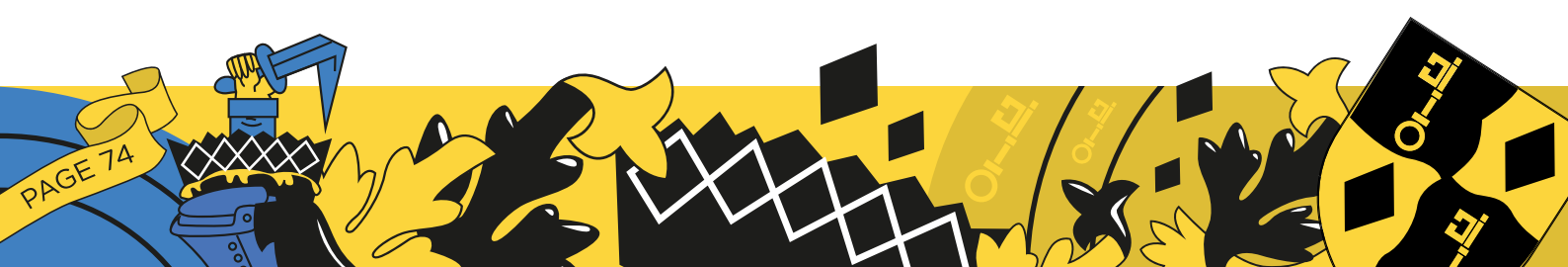


## 18 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Blaenavon Town Council supports initiatives that advance the social, economic, environmental, and commercial vibrancy of the town, aiming to bolster its future prosperity, sustainability, and enrich the cultural well-being of residents and local businesses. While the Council's financial resources are limited, it collaborates with relevant organisations and businesses to cultivate and facilitate opportunities.

The Council's contribution to the Townscape Heritage Programme, aimed at enhancing the environmental condition of the town centre, coupled with its organisation of local events, serves to bolster the local economy.

Moreover, Blaenavon Town Council has obtained a street trading licence, allowing it to support the introduction of new monthly markets within Blaenavon Town Centre. Collaborating with Torfaen Council's Foundational Economy Team and Torfaen & Gwent Small Business Markets, the Council successfully launched the first of these markets in March 2023.



## 18.1 EVENTS AND TOURISM

During 2023, Blaenavon Town Council embarked on a strategic tourism initiative with a clear objective to:

- Actively support the local tourism economy.
- Provide a diverse year-round programme of events for both residents and visitors.

Blaenavon Town Council formed working groups and collaborated with local organisation to stage events that would invigorate the community and promote tourism.

A partnership between Blaenavon Town Council, Forge Side RFC, and Blaenavon World Heritage Centre resulted in a dynamic weekend celebration of the Coronation of King Charles III. Events included an all-day event at the Forge Side RFC Pitch and Community Garden on 7 May, featuring live music, food, drink, and entertainment.







The festivities continued with a Coronation Fayre at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre on 8 May, filling the tourist attraction with visitors, who enjoyed performances by Blaenavon Male Voice Choir, a range of stalls, and children's entertainment.





On 12 August, the Council organised a Country and Western Fayre in Blaenavon Town Centre. This event, despite appalling weather conditions, provided live music, games, street food, and children's entertainment but also benefited local businesses, particularly pubs, through increased footfall.





Adding to the diversity of its events, the council arranged and subsidised a concert by Welsh singer-songwriter Bronwen Lewis at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall on 8 September. Lewis's performance drew a 200-strong audience, not only from Blaenavon but also from across the south Wales area, contributing to Blaenavon's regional visibility.





The Blaenavon Town Council Christmas Market on 18 November, held in collaboration with GW Crafters at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, attracted hundreds of attendees. Visitors enjoyed a variety of stalls, Santa's Grotto, a free film, and a photographic exhibition sponsored by the council.



The council's subsequent Christmas Light Switch on Event on 24 November, attended by approximately 700 people, featured a festive line-up of live music, food stalls, children's rides, a gaming van, and Santa's sleigh. This substantial increase in footfall provided a boost to local businesses, both those trading at the event and those in the town's evening economy, such as pubs and takeaways.







The strength of partnership working, the variety of events delivered, and the economic benefits derived, put Blaenavon Town Council in a strong position to continue and build on these successes in 2024.

*“My role is to recruit small businesses from Blaenavon and throughout Torfaen, to help the Town Council create a diverse shopping opportunity for local people, similar to those you would find in larger towns and cities, but accessible to those who might not have the means or confidence to travel.*

*As well as a shopping experience for the public, this [Christmas Market] event allows small businesses a safe, secure and affordable place to showcase and sell their creations...*

*Blaenavon Town Council have really shown a love and passion for Blaenavon and the people who live there, by using their funds to ensure that the Christmas Event provides fun and free experiences for all, local or otherwise. A face painter, Santa’s grotto and children’s crafts are a few examples of the free experiences available to everyone who attends. All of this has allowed this event to grow into a highly anticipated and well attended event...*

*I work with a lot of organisations throughout Torfaen and Monmouthshire and can honestly say that the support we all receive from Blaenavon Town Council goes above and beyond. They all volunteer on the day of the event to ensure it runs smoothly and safely and to clean up the venue after the event, demonstrating respect and appreciation to the Workmen’s Hall for hosting us.”*

Feedback from the Founder, G W Crafters



*“We would like to express our gratitude and thanks for your support and knowledge that enabled us to host the successful joint King’s Coronation and Community Garden Day event. The working partnership between us at Forgeside RFC and yourselves at Blaenavon Town Council has fostered a positive collaboration that I would like to think will continue for many years to come...”*

*The event was the success we hoped it would be, really put a spotlight on Blaenavon and what it offers, and we were all pleased to see the crowds it pulled in people of all kinds, with lots attending from out of town following advertising the event on social media. We were inundated with positive comments for the event and calls for future events to be organised. This is a massive boost for our volunteer organisation, being able to hold an event locally means the cost and planning of travel is reduced and opens the event up for more families, with events like this raising the sense of pride and spirit in the community...*

*The success of our collaboration has given us the confidence that we can host successful events that would be supported by the local community at the rugby ground, meaning we will build on this and plan for future community events that we will keep you informed of, and as we have said, we hope the partnership between us at Forgeside RFC and yourselves at Blaenavon Town continue for many years to come.”*

Feedback from Forgeside RFC Committee





*“The [Coronation Fair] event was a fantastic success bringing many benefits to the Community and was also a great example of partnership working with the Town Council. It was also of benefit to the World Heritage Centre by dramatically increasing footfall and showcased collaborative working between ourselves and the Town Council. The event also benefited tourism to the area by exposing visitors to all that the Blaenavon Heritage Centre and World Heritage Site has to offer.”*

Feedback from Blaenavon World Heritage Centre Manager



# 19 HERITAGE AND CULTURE

## 19.1 BLAENAVON WORLD HERITAGE SITE PARTNERSHIP

Blaenavon Town Council was a founding member of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site Partnership, which was formed in 1999, ahead of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape being inscribed as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site on 2 December 2000. Blaenavon Town Council works as active member of the Partnership, contributing to Board, Steering Group and Working Group meetings.

During 2023/24, the Council engaged with the Partnership as part of the Periodic Reporting Cycle required under the Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. This has involved working with Partners to consider the State of Conservation of the World Heritage Site and to consider the risks to the World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value. The Mayor of Blaenavon, on behalf of Blaenavon Town Council, endorsed the Partnership's submission to the UK Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) in July 2023.

Blaenavon Town Council remains alert to the risks posed to the World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value. This, in a large part, has guided Blaenavon Town Council's response to the RWE Abertillery Wind Farm consultation process. The state of conservation of Blaenavon House (Ty Mawr) also remains a serious concern and the matter has been raised and discussed at Full Council. Blaenavon Town Council has also been kept informed on Gwent Police's Operation Harley that is dealing with illegal off-road biking on the Blaenavon landscape. Town Councillors attended an operational briefing meeting with Gwent Police at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall on 29 July 2023.



## 19.2 BLAENAVON TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE PROGRAMME

The Blaenavon Townscape Heritage Programme (THP) continued to make progress during 2023/24 and is now reaching its conclusion. The former Market Tavern public house and the former butchers' shop at 24 Broad Street were the latest properties to receive funding from the Programme and are anticipated to be completed during 2024.



The Programme, which has received over £1.2 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, has been supported with match funding from Blaenavon Town Council, Torfaen County Borough Council, Cadw and the private sector. It has provided grant funding for buildings within the Blaenavon Conservation Area that are in urgent need of comprehensive heritage-based restoration and refurbishment. The recent grant awards follow previous Blaenavon THP investment into the nearby Bethlehem Chapel, HM Stores and The Hwb.



Numerous community activities have been completed during 2023/24 as part of the Townscape Heritage Programme, including 'The Hidden Histories of Blaenavon' community film, which premiered at the Workmen's Hall Cinema in October 2023 and the Blaenavon Broad Street Tapestry digital exhibition, which was completed in March 2024.

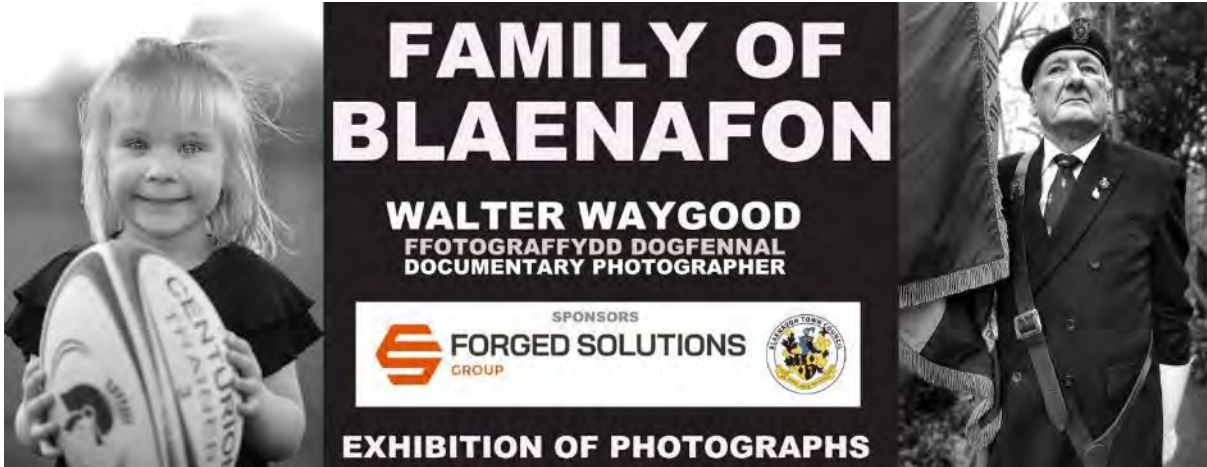


### 19.3 BIG PIT NATIONAL COAL MUSEUM APPRENTICESHIPS

Blaenavon Town Council contributed £2,000 towards the Big Pit National Coal Museum's apprenticeship scheme during 2023/24. Since its introduction, the scheme has seen seventeen apprentices trained in electrical engineering and guiding. The scheme is an important part of Big Pit's succession planning to ensure that traditional mine maintenance skills are passed on to a new generation to ensure that visitors can continue to enjoy and learn about the history of mining into the future.

### 19.4 FAMILY OF BLAENAFON PROJECT

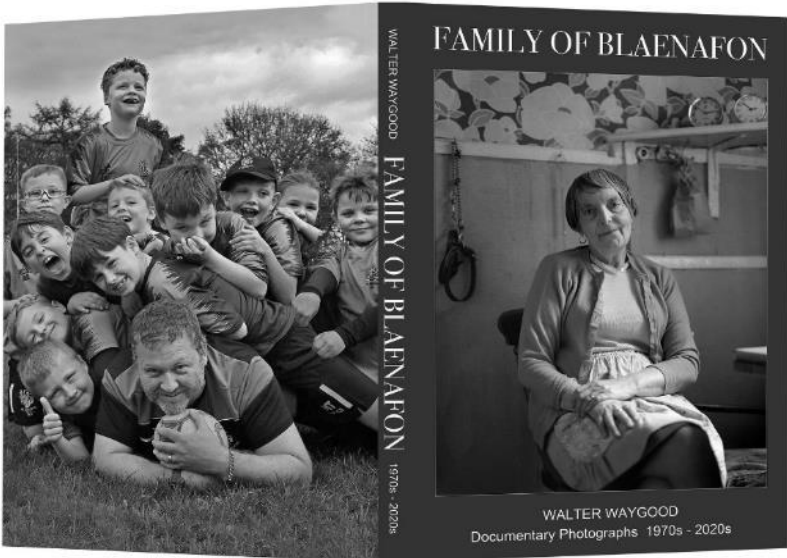
During 2023, Blaenavon Town Council collaborated with renowned south Wales photographer Walter Waygood to honour and celebrate the intangible cultural heritage, spirit, and resilience of the Blaenavon community through a new exhibition and book.



Walter Waygood started his photography career in Blaenavon during the 1970s when he had a studio in the town. During the 1970s and 1980s, his lens documented Blaenavon's society undergoing a significant transition. The town, like many others in south Wales, was grappling with finding a renewed purpose following the decline of its industrial base. However, the townspeople, their institutions and cultural identity, forged in industry, showed resilience and determination amid socio-economic change.



Seeking to express his appreciation for the town that helped launch his career, Walter Waygood approached Blaenavon Town Council for support in completing his 'Family of Blaenafon' exhibition and the accompanying book. The council, alongside local business Forged Solutions Group Ltd, co-funded these initiatives, and helped Walter in setting up the exhibition at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall and contributing historical context for the book.

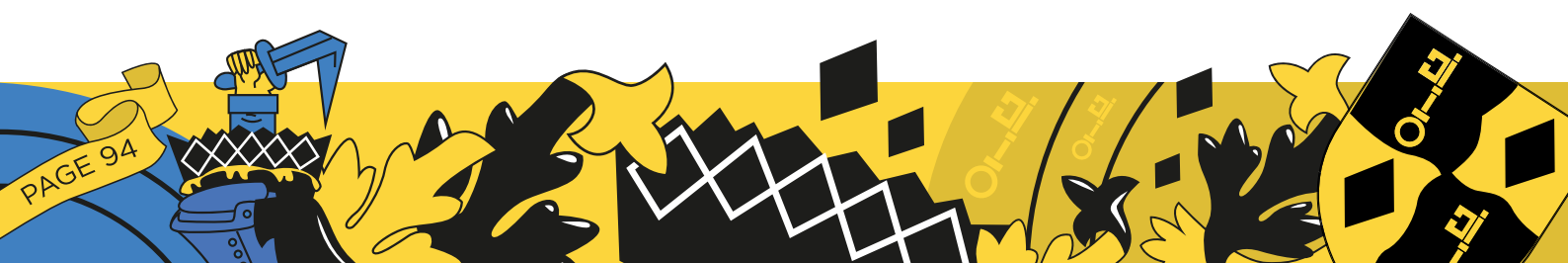


Furthermore, the council funded photography workshops led by Walter for the Blaenavon World Heritage Youth Ambassadors. This not only engaged the younger generation in preserving their own cultural legacy but also resulted in some of their work being featured in the exhibition and book, enriching the project with an intergenerational perspective.

The exhibition and book showcase the evolving landscape and buildings of Blaenavon, but more prominently, they emphasise its intangible cultural heritage. Photographs depict this south Wales coalfield town at work, at play, in worship, at school, and participating in various community groups.

Walter's recent work in the 2020s revisits these themes, juxtaposing the modern 'Family of Blaenafon' with their counterparts from the 1970s, revealing both change and continuity.

The exhibition was launched at a well-attended event at Blaenavon Workmen's Hall in July 2023, attracting a wide audience. Speeches from the Mayor of Blaenavon, Nick Thomas-Symonds MP, and two Blaenavon-born rugby internationals Terry Cobner and John Perkins, highlighted the project's significance. It not only provided an opportunity for the community to reminisce but also encouraged a re-evaluation of their connection to the local historic environment.



This heritage initiative illustrates Blaenavon's dedication to preserving its distinctive identity, fostering community engagement, and understanding the evolution of this quintessential south Wales town. This project has immortalised 'the Family of Blaenafon,' allowing current and future generations to appreciate and celebrate the rich cultural tapestry of this historic community.

*“In early 2023 I worked in partnership with Blaenavon Town Council toward staging the exhibition and the publication of a book that had grown in dimensions after the Covid virus period. The Council supported me immensely and provided a £1000 grant to deliver the project together with assistance in arranging the exhibition. An added contribution that enriched the documentary was the request by the Council to do photography workshops with a young generation of Blaenafon, the World Heritage Youth Ambassadors based at the Blaenafon Hwb, Broad Street. Here was an opportunity to return to the street where my career commenced and to share the beautiful medium of photography with an energetic generation.*

*This was a delightful experience whereby we could use a creative medium to learn creative skills to express personal viewpoints and delve into the heritage of this proud world heritage town. The work produced from the workshops was included in the exhibition at the Workmen's Hall which added to the inclusivity of the display where different bodies within the local community came together to make the documentary a success.*

*The launch of the exhibition at the Workmen's Hall was an outstanding success with over 100 people in attendance. Memorable speeches were made by two international rugby players (one the President of the Welsh Rugby Union), the local MP and the Town Mayor...*

*This was all made possible by the Family of Blaenafon uniting together combined with the added financial and undaunted moral support of Blaenavon Town Council...*

*Thank you to my Family of Blaenafon and may I congratulate Blaenavon Town Council of the way that they display their role in serving the residents of this town with such vigour and hardworking dedication .”*

**Feedback from Walter Waygood 2024**





*“The latest thing we have done is the photography course and I found it really interesting because we learnt about heritage and took photos as well and I would recommend it and it was good for the young people and I think it benefited the community and helped see the heritage in Blaenavon”*

**Feedback from Hwb Torfaen Participant**







*“I benefited because I learnt more about the heritage of Blaenavon town from exploring and taking pictures. I also really enjoyed working with a famous photographer because he really inspired me to progress in the things I love. I just wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you for the opportunity, I really appreciate it.”*

Feedback from Hwb Torfaen Participant



## 19.5 HERITAGE EASTER EGG TRAIL

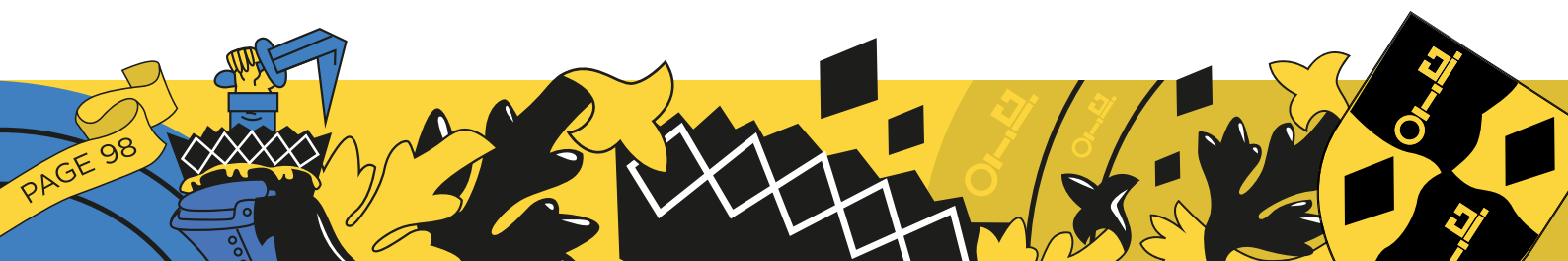
In 2023, the Blaenavon Town Council undertook an innovative initiative to interpret the town's rich cultural heritage. Inspired by the success of the 'Little Voices' project at Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School and the Council's commitment to engaging the younger generation in their cultural heritage, the Heritage Easter Egg Trail was introduced.

In partnership with Head 4 Arts, the Council implemented a digital component costing £800 to enhance community engagement, promote tourism, and connect residents with the local historic environment. The event was promoted through the Council's Facebook page and flyers.

The initiative involved placing individual posters in ten local businesses to showcase the town's heritage and support the local economy. Each poster included a QR code, allowing participants to access historical insights. To ensure inclusivity, paper copies of the trail were provided for those without digital access.



The council's goals of promoting cultural awareness, preserving the town's identity, empowering future generations, and boosting the local economy guided the project. Participants received digital certificates and Easter egg prizes upon completion, resulting in community engagement.



Feedback from participants highlighted the positive aspects of the event, such as its family-friendly nature, opportunities for physical activity, and increased awareness of local businesses and heritage.

Building on the success of the project, the Council launched another Digital Easter Egg Trail in March 2024.

*“Myself and a friend participated in the Easter egg trail around the town. Between us we had 4 children, aged 5, 8, 8 and 14. They all enjoyed looking for the clues especially as they got to use the phone!! We were out and about for a while, no one complained about walking and gave a good opportunity to get out of the house. They were super pleased with the Egg! We look forward to activities set up with the council and thank them for their hard work and commitment.”*

**Feedback from a Blaenavon Parent**



## 20 CONCLUSION

During the past year, Blaenavon Town Council has experienced one of the most successful periods in its 50-year history, culminating in recognition with 11 national awards at the One Voice Wales Conference in March 2024. These accolades, which include two category wins, five highly commended awards, and four commendations, are a testament to the Council's work during 2023/24.

The Council's ambitious approach has encompassed a wide range of projects addressing cost-of-living issues, promoting healthy lifestyles, protecting the environment, and preserving and celebrating heritage.

Efforts to boost tourism, support children and young people, aid older residents, and empower community groups have been central to our strategy. As the first and most local tier of government, Blaenavon Town Council has also been a firm advocate for residents, ensuring their voices are heard at higher levels of government.

The key achievements over the past year have been outlined at length in this report. Blaenavon Town Council's ambitious approach has laid a strong foundation for continued progress. Looking ahead, the Council is committed to building on these successes.

Future plans include ongoing community engagement, enhancing opportunities for young and older residents, and continuing collaboration with local organisations to promote economic development and maximise the benefits of Blaenavon's World Heritage Site status. The Council will continue to strive to make Blaenavon a thriving, desirable, and sustainable community for current and future generations.



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