



**Neath Port Talbot**  
**Castell-nedd Port Talbot**  
County Borough Council Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

**Neath Port Talbot Local Planning Authority (LPA)**

**Annual Planning Performance Report (APR)**

**2014 - 2015**

## **PREFACE**

As the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property Services, I have responsibility for delivering the Planning function within Neath Port Talbot. The contribution of the Planning service to secure the broader regeneration aspirations of the Council cannot be underestimated. Through the adopted Development Plan and individual Development Management decisions, we are creating a place where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous. This in turn improves the health and wellbeing of our communities and as such the quality of life for all.

Councillor Anthony Taylor Cabinet Member for Economic and Property Services.

## **CONTEXT**

Neath Port Talbot is located on the coast between the City & County of Swansea to the west and the County Borough of Bridgend to the east. We also share boundaries and characteristics with Carmarthenshire, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Brecon Beacons National Park. The Authority also forms part of the wider Swansea Bay City region and is the link authority between West and South Wales. There is a resident population of 139,800 (Census 2011), covering an area of over 44,217 hectares, the physical characteristics of the County Borough, can be broadly divided into the following two areas; the coastal corridor and the valleys.

The coastal corridor encompasses a relatively narrow coastal strip extending around Swansea Bay where the main centres of population, employment and the M4 corridor are located. The main towns and settlements of Neath and Port Talbot continue to be the major focus for house building both by private market and registered social landlords.

The valleys are characterised by the attractive landscape setting of river valleys separated by upland plateaus and mountains. They are rural in aspect and contain scattered communities throughout. While the individual valleys have strong individual characteristics and identities, they share common features and problems. Historically large scale house building has predominantly been limited to Pontardawe and the Upper Swansea Valley.

## Planning background

The existing Development Plan comprises the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which was adopted in March 2008 and covers the period 2001-2016. The UDP replaced the former West Glamorgan Structure Plan, West Glamorgan Minerals Local Plan and the respective Local Plans of the former authorities.

In accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council is in the process of preparing the Local Development Plan (2011-2026) which once adopted will supersede the existing UDP and be the primary document for use in the determination of planning applications.

The Ministers of the Welsh Government (WG) appointed Lead and Assistant Planning Inspectors to conduct the independent examination to assess the soundness of the LDP. The Pre-Hearing Meeting took place on 28th January 2015 and the examination hearings took place over a 13 week period from 11<sup>th</sup> March to 11<sup>th</sup> June 2015. It is anticipated that the Inspectors' Report will be received on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 with the Council seeking to adopt the LDP at a meeting scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

The Council's Single Integrated Plan (SIP) (2013-2023) sets out the Vision for Neath Port Talbot and seeks to bring about a number of outcomes in respect of health, safety, sustainability, prosperity and education. The LDP has been prepared in order to provide a spatial expression of the land-use implications of the SIP and the LDP Vision in particular complements the Council's overall vision as set out in the SIP.

In addition, there are a range of regional and local strategies and policy statements that provide the framework for the development of policy at the local level – the emerging LDP has had regard to, and is in accordance with, this policy framework. Some of these key strategies include:

- Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales (2015-2020);
- Regional Technical Statement 1st Review (2014);
- Shoreline Management Plan (2010);
- Swansea Bay City Region (2013);
- The Economic Growth Strategy for South West Wales (2013-2030);
- Neath Port Talbot Waterfront Regeneration Strategy (2011);
- Neath Port Talbot Local Housing Strategy (2015-2020);
- Neath Port Talbot Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2014);
- Neath Port Talbot Environment Strategy (2008-2026); and
- Neath Port Talbot Tourism Development Action Plan (2011-2014).

The emerging LDP encompasses a broad range of social, economic and environmental issues and the Plan's objectives provide synergy with the Wales Spatial Plan – i.e. building healthy, sustainable communities; promoting a sustainable economy; valuing our environment; achieving sustainable accessibility; and respecting distinctiveness. The LDP seeks to deliver Neath Port Talbot's role in supporting the wider aims, objectives and aspirations of the City Region.

### **Economy & Employment**

Employment in the County Borough has a relatively high proportion of jobs in the manufacturing and public sectors and a relatively low proportion in the service sector. The employment base is predominantly located along the coastal corridor where Tata Steel and the Council are the largest employers. In the Valleys, the largest employers relate to the mineral extraction industries with the remainder being employed in small and medium sized enterprises.

Significantly more people travel out of the County Borough to access work than those who travel inwards. This work travel pattern reflects the fact that the County Borough is part of the broader Swansea Bay travel to work area. The landbank of industrial land with good access to road, rail and sea performs an important role in the sub-region, as will the University of Swansea Science and Innovation Campus on Fabian Way and the Coed Darcy Urban Village.

### **Transport & Infrastructure**

The coastal corridor is traversed by the key road and rail infrastructure which underpins the County Borough as a key employment area within the sub-region, providing connections eastwards, via the M4 and rail, to Cardiff and beyond, and westwards to Swansea and to the Midlands via the A465 (T) Heads of the Valleys road. The docks at Port Talbot are also considered an asset to the area providing for both general cargo and deep water facilities for bulk cargo.

### **Natural Resources**

The County Borough contains mineral resources, both coal and aggregate, which are significant on a UK scale. They are also important both in terms of their contribution to the Welsh economy and more locally in terms of employment.

Virtually the whole of the County Borough is underlain by coal resources. Coal has been mined extensively within the area for centuries and has contributed significantly to the creation and sustenance of many of the valley communities. The two major hard rock quarries in the area at Gilfach (Neath) and Cwm Nant Lleici (Pontardawe), supply high specification aggregates to various markets.

Due to the extensive upland areas within the County Borough, there is also significant potential for the exploitation of the wind resource. Two of the Strategic Search Areas (SSA E and SSA F) identified by the Welsh Government are predominantly located within the administrative area and following their designation, there has been considerable interest from developers in the area.

## **Historic/landscape setting of the area**

### **Heritage**

The area has a wealth of historical, archaeological and architectural assets, in particular relating to the area's industrial history in coal, iron, steel and copper. It also has many older archaeological remains dating back to pre-Roman times. All of these are important characteristics of the area that provide local distinctiveness. Many, such as Margam Park and the canal network, also provide opportunities for tourism and recreation.

The historic heritage of the area is recognised through a range of designations. Within the County Borough there are 2 designated Landscapes of Historic Interest, 6 Historic Parks and Gardens, 6 Conservation Areas, 92 Ancient Monuments and 391 Listed Buildings.

### **Landscape & Ecology**

Neath Port Talbot has a varied landscape and a number of distinctive habitats ranging from coastal salt marsh and sand dunes through to ancient woodlands and upland areas of purple moor grass. Some of these habitats are of European, National or local importance. Large areas of the County Borough contain conifer plantations and the area also contains important geological features including glaciated valleys and rock formations.

The natural heritage of the area is recognised through a range of designations. Within the County Borough there are 20 designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 2 National Nature Reserves and 3 Local Nature Reserves.

### **Urban/rural mix and major settlements.**

As stated above the County Borough is split into two distinct character areas; The Coastal Corridor which broadly follows the M4 corridor and the Valley Areas which comprise 5 valleys in total.

In regard to the major settlements, the emerging LDP has defined a Settlement Hierarchy that identifies those areas which are the most sustainable locations and can more appropriately accommodate growth in terms of their function. Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe are identified as the 3 main towns, with Briton Ferry, Skewen, Taibach and Glynneath identified as district centres.

The remaining settlements are categorised as either 'large local centres', 'small local centres', 'villages' and 'dormitory settlements'.

### **Population change and influence on LDP/forthcoming revisions.**

The level of growth set out in the emerging LDP is based on an economic-led scenario which is aspirational in its approach and aims to maximise job growth within the local economy. In order to address the key issues of the County Borough, wealth creation through job growth is fundamental to achieving the LDP vision.

This method has enabled the Authority to forecast how economic changes over the Plan period equate to the requirements for employment land and the number of new homes needed to accommodate the projected total population and required labour supply. This ensures alignment between employment and housing resulting in a more sustainable pattern of development which in turn improves the robustness of the LDP.

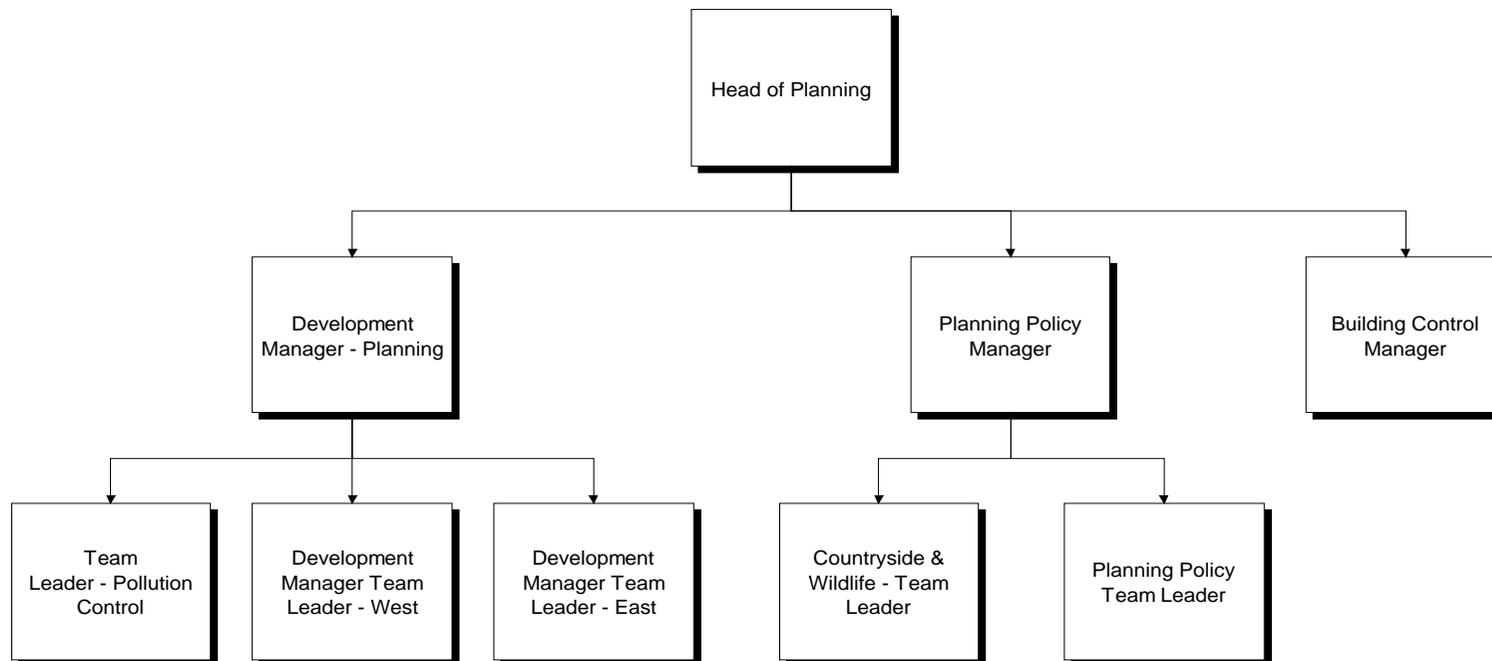
This approach has used the Welsh Government's 2008 population and household projections and detailed analysis of underlying trends in mortality and fertility rates and average household size. Based on the aspirational scenario of job growth (taking into account the Authority's aspiration to reduce unemployment and increase economic activity rates in line with the Welsh average), the population growth for the area has been driven by the ratio of working age population to total population. It is considered that this approach makes the projections more robust than purely trend-based projections which do not accurately reflect the Authority's aspirations for the area.

Based on the projected economic-led growth scenario of 3,850 jobs for the area, the Plan makes provision for an additional 7,800 new residential units, leading to an increase of approximately 7,000 people and a total population of 147,400 by 2026. This approach is aspirational, linked to the local economy and is set to complement the projected growth in economic activity and reduction in average household size in addition to helping meet the need for additional affordable residential units.

### **PLANNING SERVICE**

The Council operates via four distinct Directorates each of which report directly to the Chief Executive. Planning sits within the Environment Directorate where there are four Heads of Service which include, the Head of Planning, Head of Streetcare, Head of Engineering and Transport and the Head of Property and Regeneration.

The Head of Planning is currently responsible for Development Management, Planning Policy, Pollution Control, Wildlife and Countryside including Biodiversity and Rights of Way, together with Building Regulations. As part of the Council's Forward Financial Plan (FFP) a review of the Environmental Health and Trading Standards (EHTS) service is currently taking place which aims to identify synergies and savings between services. As a consequence of this review, there is an expectation that the EHTS service will be moved from the Social Services Health and Housing Directorate to the Environment Directorate. It is anticipated that such a move will result in the integration of many of the functions under the Head of Planning, whose title will be amended to include the responsibility of Public Protection. However the Structure for the Planning Service to team leader level is currently as follows:



The Council has identified its Corporate/key priorities as follows:

**Safer Brighter Futures** – Better outcomes for children and young people

**Better Schools Brighter prospects** – Strategic School improvement programme

**Improving Outcomes, Improving Lives** – Promoting high quality, responsive, citizen certified social care

**Prosperity for All** – Promoting Economic Growth

**Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** – Towards zero waste

**Better, Simpler, Cheaper** – Improving customer experience, making better use of public money

As a consequence of the above, Council funding has been prioritised towards delivering/improving services within the Social Services and Education Departments. The additional financial pressures facing the Council, following the collapse of the economy in 2008 and the consequent austerity measures which followed, have had a significant impact upon the Environment Directorate which has seen its budget cut by £16.375 since 2009/10 and currently stands at £28.542 million which is 10.6% of the Council's net budget. This equates to a 36.5% cut in the Directorate's budget. The Directorate has also been tasked with securing further savings for 2016/17 and 2017/18. To date an additional £1.7 million of proposed savings have been identified and are out to consultation as part of the Council's FFP. Such cuts have resulted in a reduction in staff, the cessation of some non-statutory services, the implementation of alternative service delivery models and an increase in fees.

The biggest impact of budget cuts has been the reduction in staff whereby more than 400 members of staff within the Environment Directorate have left and have not been replaced over the last five years.

Whilst the planning service has been sheltered to a certain extent from the majority of the cuts over this period, it has however lost a total of 31 employees, which have not been replaced within the last 4 years. 54 staff remain in post, two of which are on temporary contracts which amounts to a 36.5% cut in staff over the 4 year period. This was on top of the savings the service managed to secure following the implementation of a Systems Thinking Review of Development Management in 2008. This review resulted in a redesign of the service to improve the customer experience and in turn remove waste from the process. Five posts were designed out of the service at that time as a consequence of this review. The success of the Systems Thinking Principles is however reliant upon the continuous measurement of demand,

performance and capability. Unfortunately the economic downturn which followed the conclusion of the review has prevented the service from being appropriately resourced to meet the demands of all of our customers.

The Service has over the years suffered a loss in specialist skills. Due to the pressure on the council to make savings, we have over the years lost experts within Conservation and design, landscaping and more recently our Minerals Planner. In terms of the latter, given that the Council has one of the largest actively exploited mineral resources in Wales, it is not possible to operate without the specialist skills of a mineral planner. Given the lack of available officers in this field, the Council has signed up to a Service Level Agreement with Carmarthenshire Council who now provide all the mineral planning functions on our behalf, albeit the decision making powers rest with Neath Port Talbot. This is a mutually beneficial arrangement on the grounds that Carmarthenshire is now appropriately funded to maintain a team of officers thus improving the resilience of the team and officers are also able to improve their skills and experience by working on a number of complex and controversial mineral developments within Neath Port Talbot.

The Development Management and Building control functions are fee earning services and as such the budgets associated with these services are based on trend based historical fee income levels, with the shortfall covered by the central revenue budget. There is pressure every year to maximise fee income and thus reduce the need for revenue support to plug the gap. The Planning Policy and Wildlife and Countryside section has very little fee income although grants are sought from various sources to undertake project work relating to active travel, biodiversity and improvements to the rights of way network.

The following chart identifies the overall expenditure levels for each of the services within the planning function both during 2011/12 and during the year 2015/16, thus enabling comparisons to be made over time.

	<b>Development Management</b>	<b>Countryside and Wildlife</b>	<b>Planning Policy</b>	<b>Biodiversity</b>	<b>Building Control</b>	<b>Pollution Control</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2011/12</b>	£248,740	£498,205	£544,656	£211,658	£156,769	£252,945	<b>£1,912,973</b>
<b>2015/16</b>	£132,312	£233,490	£518,602	£182,273	£65,511	£210,622	<b>£1,342,810</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>-£116,428</b>	<b>-£264,715</b>	<b>-£26,054</b>	<b>-£29,385</b>	<b>-£91,258</b>	<b>-£42,323</b>	
<b>Total Difference</b>							<b>-£570,163</b>

<b>% Change</b>	<b>-47%</b>	<b>-53%</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>-14%</b>	<b>-58%</b>	<b>-17%</b>	
<b>Overall % Change</b>							<b>-30%</b>

The above table indicates that there has been an overall reduction in expenditure associated with the Planning Service since 2011/12 of 30%. This is as a consequence of staff reductions and a reduction in budgets associated with the maintenance of public rights of way and money for biodiversity work. As stated above, this budget will reduce further in 206/17 and again in 2017/18.

In terms of income levels, this is mainly secured within the Development Management and Building Control sections of the service where income levels for both services have increased between 2011/12 and 2015/16 by £77,938 and £9,600 respectively. The vast majority of fee income associated with the Development Management Service is associated with Planning Application fees with a small proportion secured through the paid pre-app service and through Planning Performance Agreements, all of which are reliant upon a commensurate level of service. This has however occurred at the same time as the service has experienced a drop in staff numbers. Moreover the services which support the Planning function eg, Highways, Property and Estates, Drainage etc have also experienced significant reductions in staff and resources, and as such have less capacity to respond to consultations and generally support the implementation of the functions carried out within the Planning Service. As a result the teams are currently struggling to address the demands of the service.

Despite the above, the Planning Policy team have operated in accordance with their Delivery Agreement and it is anticipated that we will receive the Planning Inspectorates final report at the beginning of December thus enabling the Authority to adopt the LDP in January 2016. The Development Management service is also operating within the top half of all Local Planning Authorities in terms of the Development Management Quarterly Survey, with an overall percentage rate of applications determined within 8 weeks currently standing at 82% (July to Sept 2015 Returns). Following completion of the systems thinking review in 2008 we consistently featured within the top four LPAs in Wales in terms of overall performance. A recent decline in performance has been as a consequence of receiving more complex and controversial applications together with a reduction in staff numbers and staff sickness levels.

Sickness management is a Mandatory Corporate Measure and there is a requirement for Service managers to reduce sickness levels year on year. Unfortunately sickness levels within the overall Planning Service increased from 287 days (4.22 days per employee) in 2013/14 to 459 days (7.29 days per employee) in 2014/15. This increase is mainly due to two employees being off at the time on long term sickness, which amounted to 188 days sickness. One has since left under ER/VR and the other has returned to work following the successful implementation of the Council's new Return to Work procedures. Without the sickness days attributed to these two members of staff, sickness levels would have been maintained at 4.3 days per employee and whilst this is not a reduction, it is significantly below the average for the Council as a

whole. It must however be acknowledged that sickness is a major influence on the ability of the Council to deliver the service as workloads associated with the staff off sick must be covered by the remaining staff.

## **Our Local Story**

Despite the budget pressures experienced within the service and the associated reduction in staff, the Planning Service has secured a number of achievements over the last financial year, which are summarised as follows:

In 2014/15 a number of changes were introduced to take account of staff reductions and an amalgamation of sections which were required to achieve savings identified within the previously approved Forward Financial Plan (FFP). Further restructuring took place at the tail end of 2014/15 to enable additional staff to leave via the ER/VR scheme and thus secure additional savings towards the FFP. These structural changes have resulted in the amalgamation of services under a reduced number of accountable managers, staff taking on different roles and responsibilities and due to a further loss in staff, those that remain have taken on additional workloads.

Two Nationally Significant infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) for the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon and the Tata power station developments were progressed through two separate Public Inquiries. The Development Consent Order (DCO) for the Tidal Lagoon has subsequently been granted and we are in the process of dealing with a number requirements associated with the DCO. However we are unable to deal with a large number of those requirements as there are jurisdictional problems associated with the development and as such we are awaiting the determination of a Harbour Revision Order, which is currently being considered by the Welsh Government. In terms of the Tata power station, the NSIP process is still ongoing but a decision is due to be released by the Department of Energy and Climate Change by the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015.

Two controversial and politically sensitive wind farms which were refused planning permission by this Authority, were successfully defended at appeal after detailed and complex argument within a Public Inquiry. Unfortunately we were less successful on a third Public Inquiry for an equally controversial application for five turbines located outside a Refined Strategic Search Area, and as such we are currently in the process of discharging the conditions associated with that development.

The complex and controversial application associated with the continuation of coaling, extension of coaling and the implementation of an amended restoration scheme and tourism led regeneration scheme at East Pit was finally assessed despite the lack of a mineral officer in post at the time. A comprehensive report was placed before Members of the Planning Committee who resolved to grant planning permission subject to the intervention of the Welsh Government in the form of a Holding Direction being removed. This was subsequently removed and the service is working closely with the mineral operator to ensure that the work is undertaken in accordance with the approved plans and that progressive restoration takes place in accordance with the phasing plans and bond arrangements.

A Community Fund Policy relating to renewable forms of energy was adopted. Whilst the Planning Service were responsible for preparing the document on behalf of the Council, responsibility for its implementation lies within another service given that community funds are not material planning considerations. This document will ensure that a consistent approach is followed to secure funds for local communities.

The Planning Committee was successfully restructured to reduce it from 45 Members to 12 voting Members and one observer, and a public speaking protocol has been implemented. This has been operating for a year and a review of its effectiveness is currently underway. Early indications suggest that it is proving to be successful in terms of the quality of debate at the meetings and as a consequence the quality of decision making has also improved, but further work is still required to maximise transparency, efficiencies and accountability.

The chargeable pre-application service was introduced a year ago and has secured the targeted contribution towards the FFP but also reduced the number of pre-application inquiries submitted by developers who had no serious intention of developing. This has enabled the service to concentrate time and energy upon those who are committed to building quality development within the County Borough.

The Development Management section has successfully contributed towards the delivery of major regeneration projects throughout the County Borough including the Swansea University second campus, Neath town centre, Afan Lido, Port Talbot parkway together with the ongoing comprehensive development of Wales' largest urban village at Coed Darcy.

The focussed change consultation associated with the emerging LDP was undertaken in accordance with the Delivery Agreement timescales and the responses were compiled and addressed within a comprehensive document which was forwarded to the planning Inspectorate for consideration as part of the Examination In Public (EIP). The Local Development Plan (LDP) was subsequently submitted to the Planning Inspectorate and the Hearing session phase of the Examination in Public (EIP) for the LDP was completed over a seven week period without any significant soundness issues raised. Whilst the Inspectors report is unlikely to be received until December 2015, early indications suggest that the front loading approach adopted by this council has paid dividends.

Five key Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents which were critical to support the LDP as part of the EIP process were completed in draft, albeit it is acknowledged that the Harbourside Masterplan SPG will require additional work to address concerns expressed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

A number of projects to improve access along key circular routes forming part of the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network within the county borough were delivered. These projects involved the installation of 25 kissing gates (1 wooden), 4 bridle gates, 2 field gates and a number of wooden steps. Coupled with this, the removal of existing structures via landowner negotiations/agreements and extensive vegetation clearance has dramatically eased access for the communities using the routes. Objectives within the Rights of Way Improvement Plan have

also been delivered which included the waymarking and rebranding of St. Illtyd's walk which recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary, the establishment and completion of a series of guided walks, the installation of infrastructure to improve access to our network, appropriate maintenance and promotion of the Wales coast path within the county borough, in addition to supporting the development management service in the determination of planning applications which could impact upon the PRoW network.

A new Local Nature Reserve (LNR) was designated at Glanrhyd and Cwm du Glen which is located within the Pontardawe area. The LNR will be financially sustainable in terms of its revenue costs, whilst enhancing biodiversity within the area and providing an additional community facility for local residents and visitors.

As part of ongoing work to ensure compliance with the statutory duty for biodiversity conservation under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, a set of protocols to be applied as part of any 'on the ground works' by the Local Authority has been prepared. These protocols are based on a risk management approach and aim to minimise the likelihood of any unintentional criminal offences being committed.

The new Building Control structure, following the loss of key qualified and skilled staff in March 2014 was implemented successfully without a reduction in service delivery or customer satisfaction. The Building Control section also delivered the chargeable Building Control service on a cost neutral basis and despite losing staff, secured an increase in its market share of the business from 81% in 2013/14 to 87% in 2014/15. Performance in relation to one of the two main KPI's associated with Building Control continued to improve when compared with the performance in the previous year and in relation to the Welsh average. This KPI relates to the number of applications checked within 15 working days (KPI BCT 4) which achieved 100%. This demonstrates an increase in performance of 1.87% when compared with last year.

In addition to delivering the regular services to customers, the largest regeneration project currently under construction in Wales (Swansea University's Second Campus development) has procured its Building Regulations from the Local Authority Building Control section. The project is four times the size of any scheme previously managed by the section and is currently being proactively managed by a team of officers who also continue to manage their more routine caseloads associated with their day to day functions. Whilst the University opened its doors to students in September 2015, additional phases of development are still under construction. In addition to the university campus the section has also been providing the building control function on other land mark developments throughout the county borough, such as the redevelopment of Neath town centre and the rebuild of the Afan Lido leisure facility.

Traffic related air quality has achieved significant improvement over the last year as previous causes of pollution were identified as a consequence of improved monitoring. The traffic management solution introduced at the cross roads adjacent to Pontardawe town centre has successfully achieved a reduction in PM10 levels thus ensuring it is not currently under threat of being declared an Air Quality

Management Area (AQMA). There has also been a slight reduction in the levels at Victoria Gardens however these levels still remain very close to the maximum threshold. A further reduction in levels is still required at this location to ensure that it does not constrain further development in and around Neath town centre.

The Air Aware project was completed. The project introduced an alert system whereby residents who suffer from medical conditions linked to air quality would be advised at the earliest opportunity that air quality was poor. Such an alert would enable them to make informed decisions about their activities for that day, which would in turn reduce the demands and therefore the pressures upon primary health care services. The results of the project demonstrated that despite the alerts being in place the demand for primary care actually increased for those involved in the project. As a consequence the project has been closed down and will not be rolled out beyond the pilot area within NPT nor will it be rolled out nationally.

Both funding and designs were secured for the construction of a dedicated cycleway linking Swansea university to Swansea City centre in addition to linking it to the network of existing routes within the Swansea Bay area, which includes Neath and Port Talbot. This required close collaborative working with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea given that it was a cross border piece of work. The agreed designs have subsequently been implemented on both sides of the boundary.

The Air Quality section has continued to work with industry to improve Nickel emissions thus ensuring that they are within European targets. One site within the County Borough which was previously breaching Air Quality Objective levels is now well within those limits, while a second site is currently operating using Best Available Technology to ensure that their emissions are controlled.

The Contaminated land Strategy was re-written following its initial adoption in 2002 and its review in 2005. This strategy has now been adopted by the Council following extensive consultation and will be used in the future to secure potential funding streams from the Welsh Government to deal with any land identified as being contaminated under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

All of the above are the most significant achievements secured during 2014/15. In addition to the above, the staff have continued to provide what are primarily statutory functions with an ever decreasing budget for customers with increasingly higher expectations. This will become gradually worse over the next few years when budgets become even more constrained. Managers within the section are monitoring and trying to boost morale to ensure that sickness levels are maintained at a minimum and performance at a maximum.

#### **Risks associated with service delivery and how they will be managed**

A number of risks feature within the Planning Service, which are included within the business plan for the service and dependent upon the risk, some are included within the Directorate's Risk Management plan or referred up for inclusion within the Corporate Risk Plan. The most recently identified risks for the planning service and how they will be addressed are as follows:

**The retention of appropriately trained and skilled staff is a key issue going forward** - The loss of professional and technical staff has resulted in a staff structure which is less resilient to change. This may negatively impact upon the ability to retain the remaining staff, who deal with a greater volume of work yet are on lower wages when compared with planners working in the private sector. It is therefore necessary to ensure that Job Evaluation scores remain accurate and succession planning measures are reinforced to retain a skilled and appropriately remunerated staff structure.

**A reduction in fee income associated with the operation of the chargeable Building Control function.** This could arise as a consequence of a slow recovery in the economic climate mainly associated with the construction industry. In order to avoid this it is necessary to continue marketing the service in terms of quality and efficiency, and promoting added value services. It is also necessary to improve linkages with the Development Management section to ensure that we provide a one stop development service.

**Increased sickness levels associated with work related stress could result in an increased workload for the remaining staff.** This risk needs to be minimised by managing workloads and ensuring that whilst our market share is protected it is not at the expense of an over commitment to work.

**Collaborative working at a local as well as regional/national level** is essential to efficient and cost effective service delivery where service providers are working together following the reduction in staff numbers.

**Air quality in the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) may exceed European limits (35 exceedances per year) which could result in infraction proceedings being taken by the European Union with associated fines.** This is particularly important this year due to unusually poor air quality at the start of the year which if extrapolated forward would result in the European exceedance limit being breached. To avoid this, the Short Term Action Plan (STAP) has been initiated with other regulators, industry and Welsh Government to identify causes and explore solutions to address them.

**Potential for the declaration of additional AQMA's at Neath as a consequence of increased traffic pollution.** In response to this risk, increased monitoring has been initiated and the results will be evaluated and potential solutions considered.

**Potential failure to reduce nickel emissions to be within European targets within Pontardawe and Neath.** This could result in infraction proceedings and associated fines from the European Union. It is therefore necessary to work closely with industry and the Health and Safety Executive to improve operational and abatement systems.

**The reduction in staff coupled with an increase in workload could result in a drop in performance which will in turn undermine the need to promote economic growth which is one of the Council's key corporate objectives and could result in the imposition of financial penalties in relation to Planning Policy and Development Management.** A reduction in performance in its extreme could result in financial penalties from the Welsh Government in addition to the removal of planning powers from the Council associated with the preparation of the LDP and the determination of planning applications. Development management officers deal with a varying number of applications over the year depending upon the demand at that time. Planning Assistants deal with smaller more straightforward applications, normally associated with householder development. These applications tend to move swiftly through the process and as such the assistants carry a caseload of between 13 to 17 applications at any one time. This caseload increases for planning officers who tend to deal with both major and minor applications. The increased caseload for planners when compared with assistant planners is as a consequence of the often controversial and complex nature of their caseloads which as a consequence take longer to deal with. As a result, the churn through the system is reduced and planning officers are currently carrying caseloads of between 25 to 55 applications at the present time. The Senior Planning Officers deal with the very large developments in addition to assisting the team leaders in mentoring and supporting officers within their teams. Their caseload ranges from 30 to 47 applications at the present time.

It should also be acknowledged that in addition to processing their caseload, officers within Neath Port Talbot are also expected to validate, register and carry out other administration duties associated with their caseload including the scanning of submitted documents to enable consultation to commence. The time associated with these tasks can be considerable and must be taken into account in terms of the individual caseloads. As stated earlier in this report new performance management procedures are currently being introduced which also includes the redistribution of workload to ensure that it is more evenly distributed.

In order to maximise staffing levels within the service Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) will continue to be secured where applicable. Two members of staff (a planning officer and an ecologist) are currently employed on temporary contracts following the receipt of additional income via PPAs. It is also intended to carry improved agents workshops to ensure that the quality of submitted information is improved thus reducing the amount of time spent by staff to secure both valid and acceptable schemes.

**The failure to secure and appropriately manage S106 infrastructure could result in insufficient supporting infrastructure being provided at a developer's expense.** The monitoring of S106 legal agreements needs to be given greater priority and a dedicated database and protocol delivered. The current database and disjointed procedures endangers the delivery of negotiated schemes and constrains the ability to follow a

clear audit trail relating to submitted funds to the Council and the spending of those funds. This is currently being addressed following the joint procurement of a new IT system with our colleagues in the City and County of Swansea. Unlike our current back-office IT system this has a fully functioning S106 module which together with the intended appointment of a S106 officer should ensure that the monitoring of S106 funds and/or infrastructure is improved going forward.

**Failure to comply with emerging legislative burdens.** A re-focus of approach to biodiversity conservation in Wales, led by Welsh Government could result in a significant increase in workload for the Countryside and Wildlife Team when staff resources are already stretched. The content of the Environment Bill in particular is not currently known but initial consultations indicate a complete overhaul of the approach to nature conservation in Wales with focus being placed on ecosystems, natural resource management and ecological resilience as the main themes; rather than traditionally protected sites and species. This significant change in approach is likely to have a huge impact upon the Team.

**Reduction in grant funding.** A number of the statutory functions associated with Biodiversity are delivered through grant funded posts. The potential reduction in grant funding could result in the loss of the posts but the retention of the statutory responsibilities which are cheaper to deliver in house rather than through consultants. To continue to pursue all grant opportunities is therefore crucial.

### **Priorities going forward**

There are a number of key priorities which have been identified for this year across the whole of the service, some of which intend to build upon and continue to improve upon the success secured up until recently and to address the risks previously identified. Other areas of work which we are concentrating on are as follows:

- To improve the performance of the Development Management section which has lost ground following a reduction in the number of experienced staff. The aim is to re-gain the top performing authority in Wales status, which we held until staff levels reduced.
- To work with the former coal operator/site owners of the former Margam Open cast Coal Site, NRW and colleagues in Bridgend to design an acceptable alternative restoration scheme at Margam to secure a safe and visually acceptable site going forward.
- Improve the training provided to all Elected Members in relation to Planning matters, with bespoke targeted training for those Members who sit on the Planning Committee. Such training will improve the quality of decision making.

- Introduce standardised procedures and protocols in relation to the delivery of the Planning Enforcement Service and the Planning Appeals service to ensure that they tie in with the new Welsh Government targets and to ensure that the decisions of this Council are robustly defended.
- Complete the joint SPG for Fabian Way through collaborative work with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea. This will help to secure a coordinated approach towards the redevelopment of this strategic corridor, in addition to securing funding through planning obligations which will itself deliver essential infrastructure which is required to facilitate our collective regeneration aspirations.
- Establish systems and procedures for monitoring the performance of the emerging LDP.
- Complete the Active Travel Bill commitment in relation to the preparation of an Existing Route Map for the two major settlements within NPT i.e. Neath and Port Talbot. Other settlements will follow soon after.
- To continue to play a leading role within LABC Cymru, contributing to each of the identified work streams within that organisation thus ensuring that this Council is influencing the National Building Control agenda going forward. Key issues to pursue amongst others, relate to the operation of Approved Inspectors and the development of a model for collaborative working in Wales.
- To review and improve upon the working arrangements between Building Control and Development Management in relation to the enforcement of the legislation, without undermining our share of the Building Control market. Work will also progress on designing a service within Building Control for enforcing sections 77 and 78 of the Building Act in relation to both dangerous and dilapidated buildings (which is currently the responsibility of Building Control, and Environmental Health) in addition to serving notices under S215 of the Planning Act (which is the responsibility of Development Management) and relates to untidy land and buildings.
- To develop a Protocol covering the contribution made by the Pollution Control team to Phase 1 / Geoenvironmental Desk Studies for Council projects, and the provision of services to the general public / developers in respect of such matters, including appropriate pre-application advice on the content and methodologies of such reports. It is also proposed to review and develop the Council's website to enhance the provision of information to the public on contaminated land issues, including publication of the Contaminated Land Public Register. The website currently holds a significant amount of information, however its layout and accessibility does not make it user friendly.

## WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

In 2014-15 we conducted two customer satisfaction surveys aimed at assessing the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the period. The first covered the period April 2014 - September 2014 and the second covered the period October 2014 - March 2015. The following feedback is based on the combined results of both surveys.

The surveys were sent to 127 people, 22% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (50%) were from local agents. 42% were from members of the public. 12% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.

We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. They were given the following answer options:

- Strongly agree;
- Tend to agree;
- Neither agree nor disagree;
- Tend to disagree; and
- Strongly disagree.

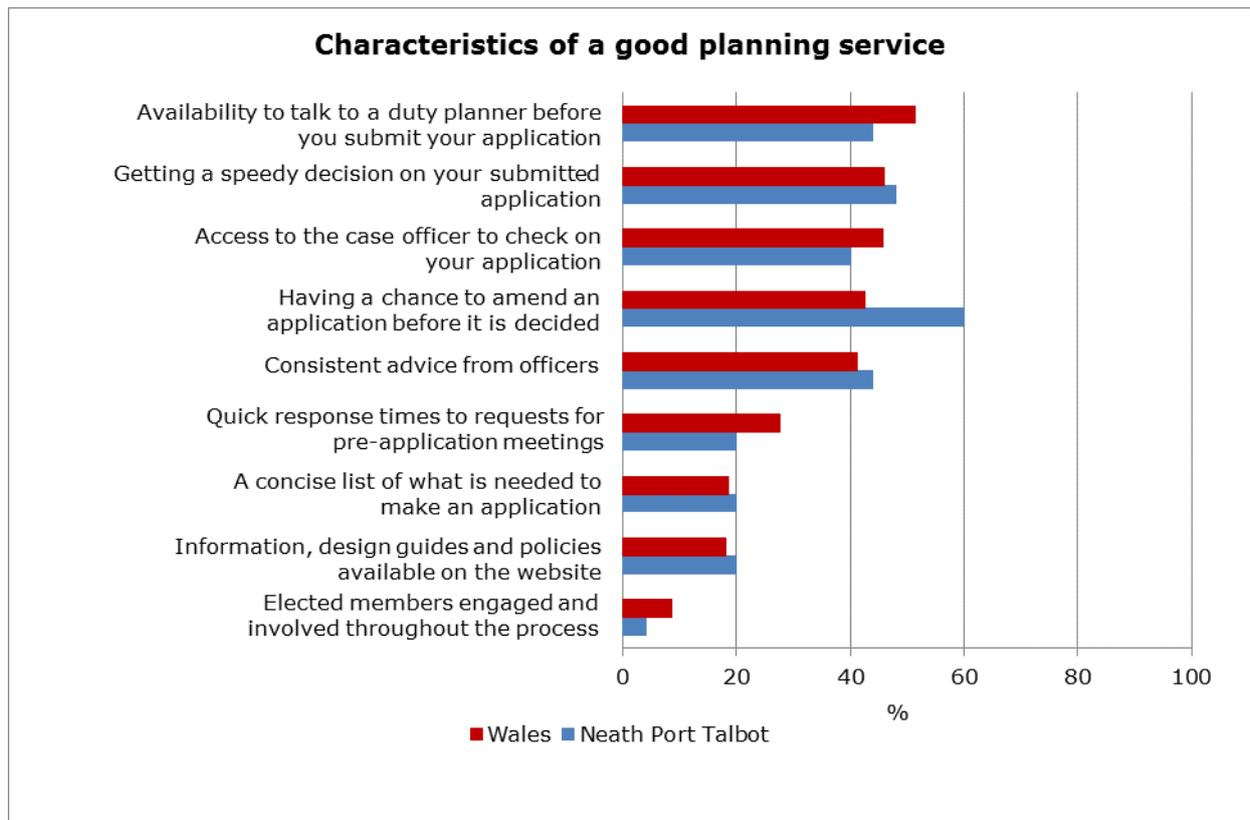
Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

**Table 1: The percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2014-15**

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Neath Port Talbot LPA	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	50	45
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	54	57
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	56	48
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	80	55
They were listened to about their application	56	56
They were kept informed about their application	64	46
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	44	57

We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows how often each characteristic was selected as a percentage of the total number of selections. For us, 'having a chance to amend an application before it is decided' was the most popular choice.

**Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, Neath Port Talbot LPA, 2014-15**



Comments received include:

"Generally very efficient in resolving planning applications."

"This LPA is indeed highly efficient and others LPAs in Wales are being actively told to emulate them. However they can be officious, inflexible and driven by the system rather than common sense and seeking common goals. There is a hint of arrogance and power wielding in some cases rather than "what is the best for all in this case?" [sic]

We were disappointed with the negative response included above and are actively seeking to address this problem within the service. We try to work with applicants and agents to ensure that they provide constructive feedback, to enable us to improve upon our service. However developers are not always keen to provide that feedback direct to the service.

## OUR PERFORMANCE 2014-15

This section details our performance in 2014-15. It considers both the Planning Performance Framework indicators and other available data to help paint a comprehensive picture of performance. Where appropriate we make comparisons between our performance and the all Wales picture.

Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

### Plan making

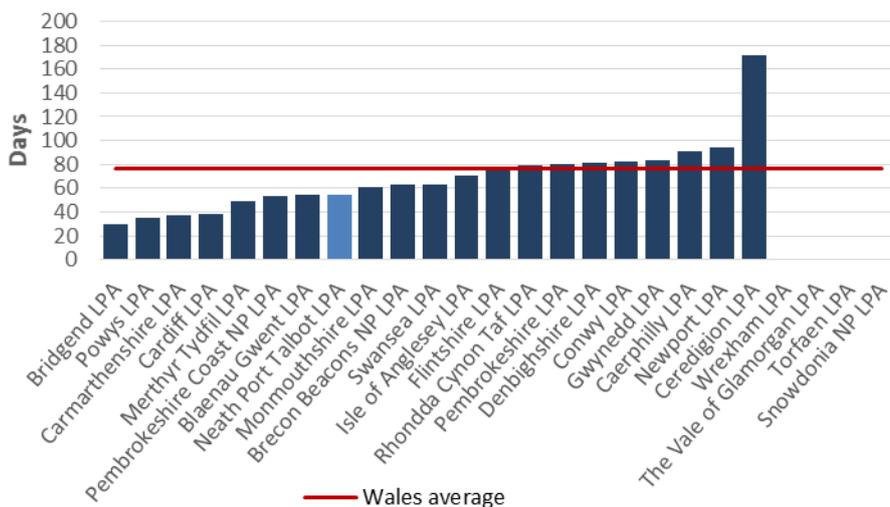
As at 31 March 2015, we were one of 21 LPAs that had a current development plan in place.

During the APR period we had 2.5 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 18 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply.

### Efficiency

In 2014-15 we determined 835 planning applications, each taking, on average, 55 days (8 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

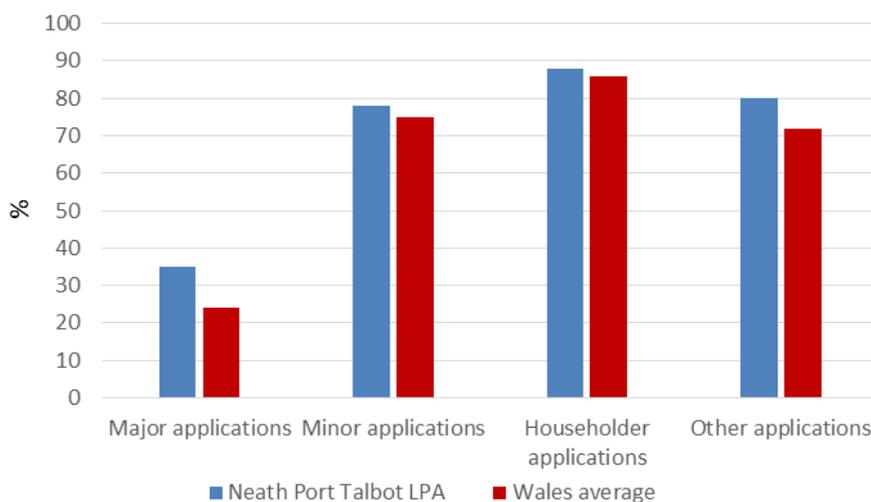
**Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2014-15**



78% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This compared to 73% across Wales, but was below the 80% target. Only 5 out of 25 LPAs met the 80% target.

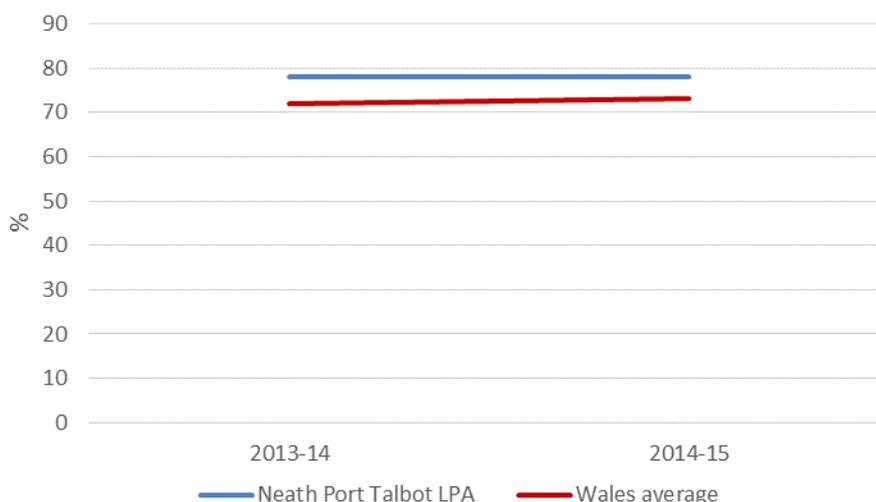
Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 88% of householder applications within the required timescales.

**Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2014-15**



Between 2013-14 and 2014-15, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 78%. Wales saw an increase this year.

**Figure 4: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales**



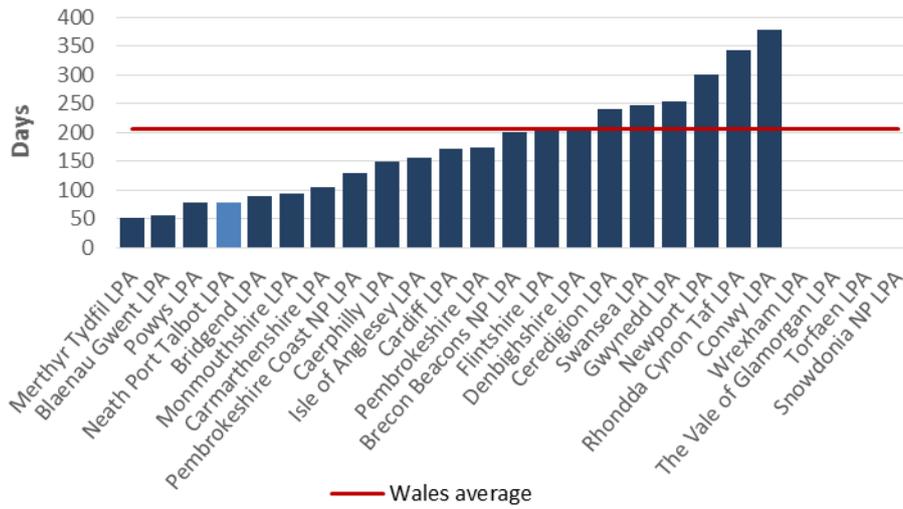
Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received decreased;
- The number of applications we determined decreased; and
- The number of applications we approved decreased.

## Major applications

We determined 23 major planning applications in 2014-15, 9% (2 applications) of which were subject to an EIA. Each application (including those subject to an EIA) took, on average, 79 days (11 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was the fourth shortest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs.

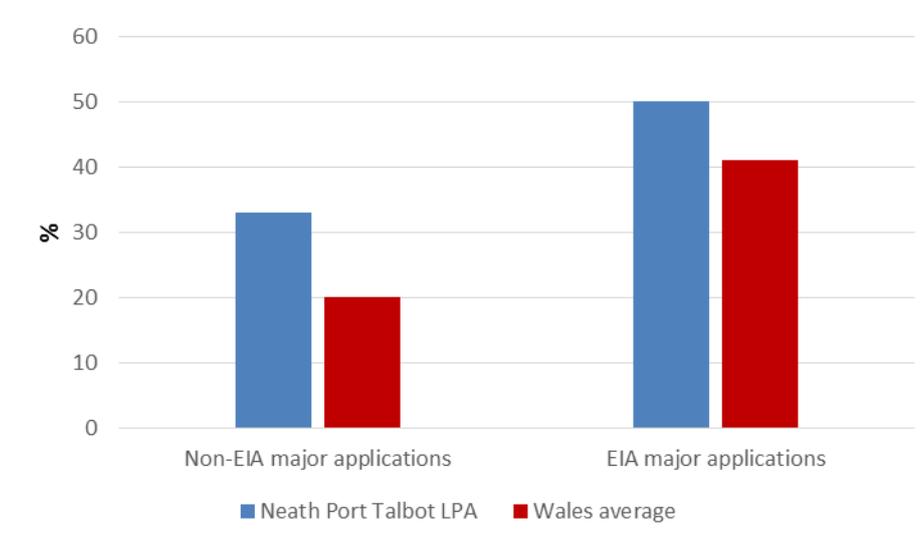
**Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2014-15**



35% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, compared to 24% across Wales.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 33% of our 'standard' major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the required timescales during the year.

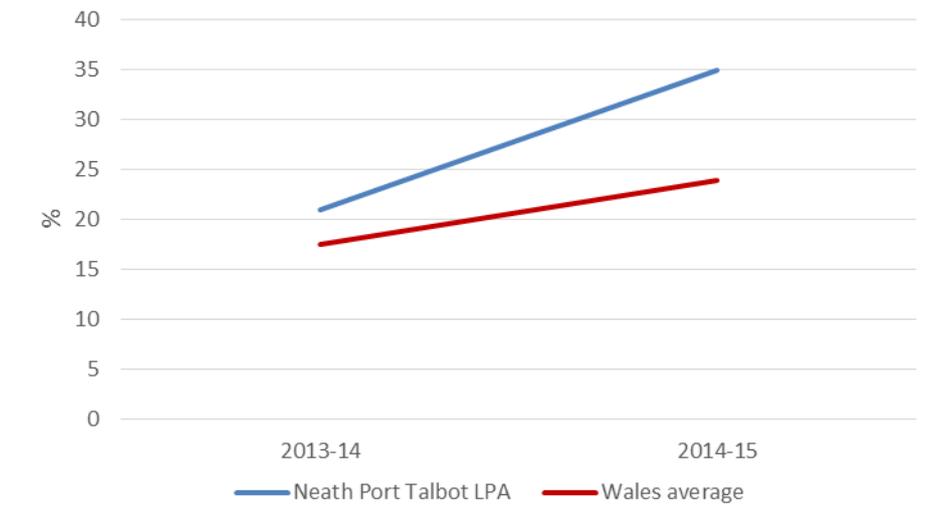
**Figure 6: Percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2014-15**



Since 2013-14 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 21%. In contrast, the number of major applications determined decreased as had the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year.

Figure 7 shows the trend in the percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales in recent years and how this compares to Wales.

**Figure 7: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales**



Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales decreased from 84% to 78%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales decreased from 94% to 88%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within the required timescales increased from 73% to 80%.

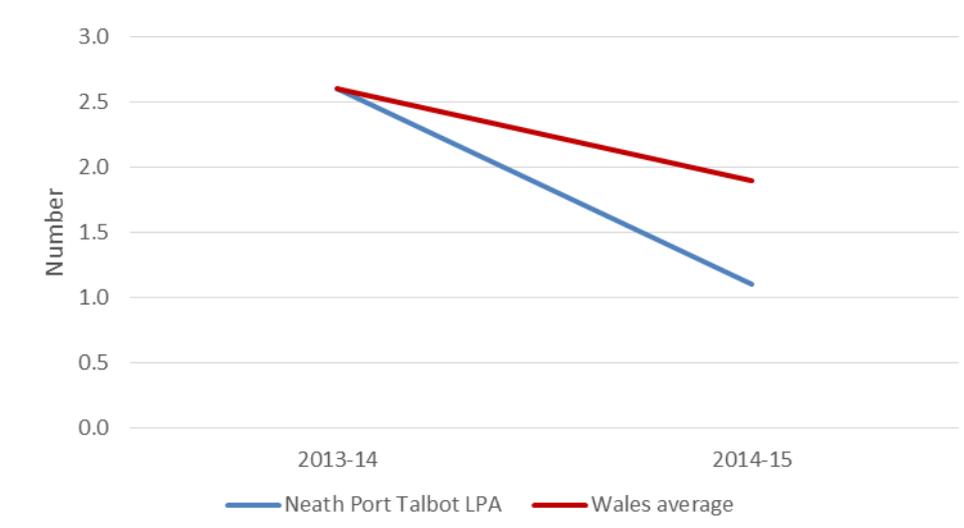
## Quality

In the last two quarters of 2014-15 (October 2014 – March 2015) our Planning Committee made 18 planning application decisions, which equated to 4% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 7% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee over the same period.

6% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.2% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales.

In 2014-15 we received 10 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.1 appeals for every 100 applications received. This was the fourth lowest ratio of appeals to applications in Wales Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2013-14 and how this compares to Wales.

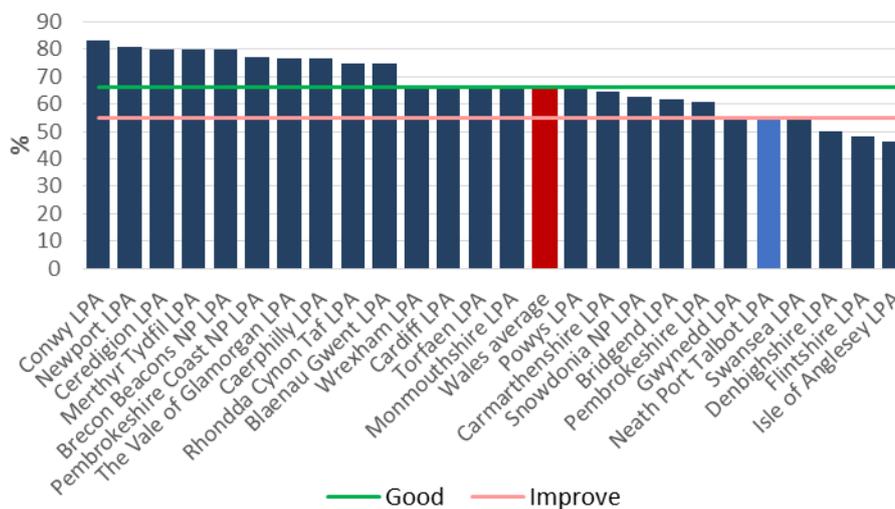
**Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications**



Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved increased from 95% to 97%.

Of the 9 appeals that were decided during the year, 66% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was in line the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and was below the 66% target.

**Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2014-15**



During 2014-15 we had no applications for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld.

## Engagement

We are:

- one of 23 LPAs that allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and
- one of 20 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content).

As Table 2 shows, 54% of respondents to our 2014-15 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

**Table 2: Feedback from our 2014-15 customer satisfaction survey**

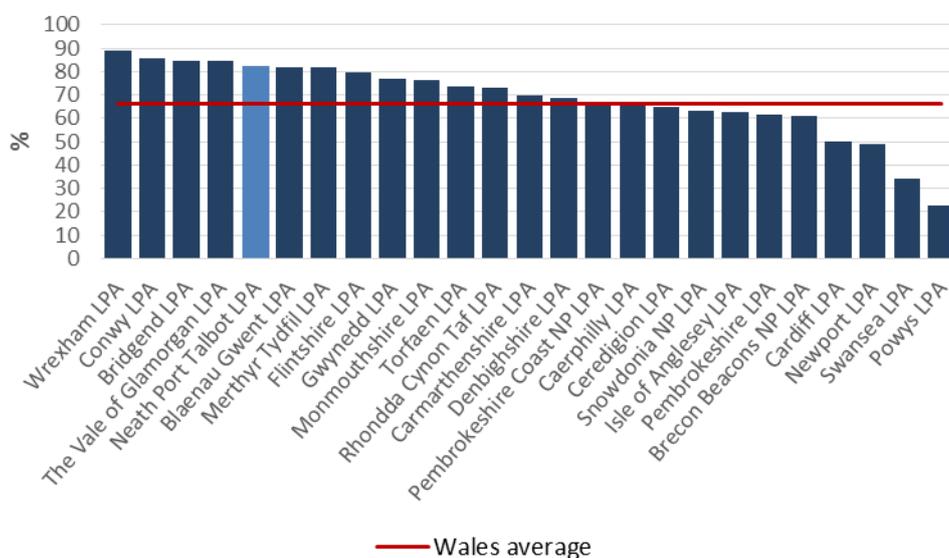
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Neath Port Talbot LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	54	57
They were listened to about their application	56	56

## Enforcement

In 2014-15 we investigated 297 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.1 per 1,000 population. This compared to 2 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 2 days to investigate each enforcement case.<sup>1</sup>

We investigated 82% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 66% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

**Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2014-15**

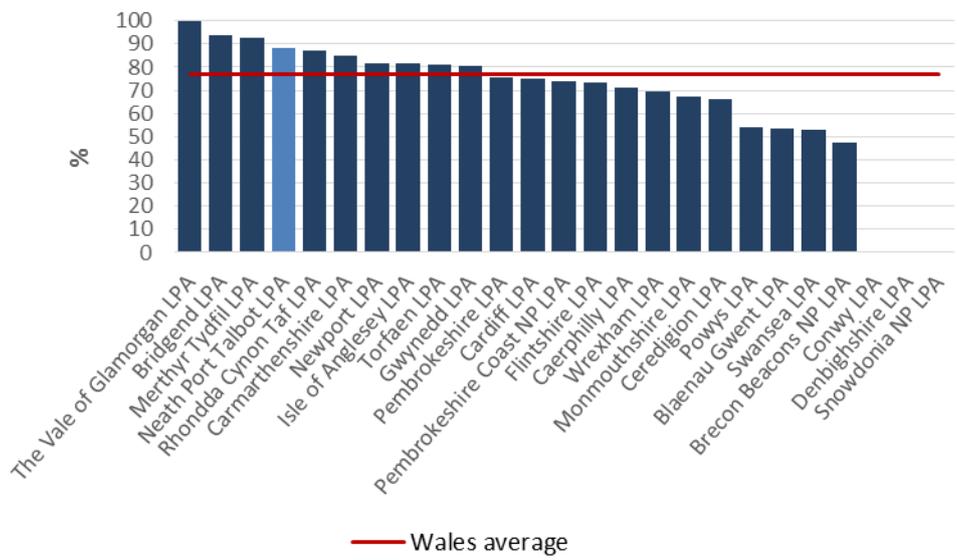


Over the same period, we resolved 139 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 72 days to resolve each case.

88% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 11 shows this was the fourth highest percentage in Wales.

<sup>1</sup> Robust comparisons are not currently available as only 14 of the 25 LPAs supplied data for this indicator.

**Figure 11: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2014-15**



## ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

### OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
<b>Plan making</b>			
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5	4-4.9	<4
<b>Efficiency</b>			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	60.1-79.9	<60
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
<b>Quality</b>			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2
<b>Engagement</b>			
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
60	31	N/A
Yes	N/A	N/A
4.2	6	2.5
24	21	35
206	No Data	79
73	78	78
76	No Data	55
11	0.2	6
66	55	56
0	0	0
Yes	No	Yes
-	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
provide advice to members of the public?			
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
<b>Enforcement</b>			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Enforcement</b>		
66	No Data	82
71	No Data	2
77	No Data	88
175	No Data	71.5

## SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

Indicator	01. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place and within the plan period	N/A	No development plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)

Authority's performance	Yes
<p>The existing UDP incorporates a base date of 2001, was adopted in 2008 and extends up until 2016. It is anticipated that the emerging LDP will be adopted in January 2016 and will ensure that decision making continues to be plan-led.</p>	

Indicator	02. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
The LDP is being progressed within 12 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed within between 12 and 18 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed more than 18 months later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement

Authority's performance	N/A
<p>The Delivery Agreement was re-negotiated with the Welsh Government and the amended agreement was complied with, and in fact the Council were asked and agreed to an extended period of time for the Planning Inspectorate to prepare their draft report on the Plan.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>03. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>		<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
An AMR is due, and has been prepared		An AMR is due, and has not been prepared

<b>Authority's performance</b>	N/A
<p>It is anticipated that the LDP will be adopted in January 2016 and Annual Monitoring Reports will be prepared following its adoption.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years	The authority has a housing land supply of between 4 and 5 years	The authority has a housing land supply of less than 4 years

<b>Authority's performance</b>	2.5
<p>It is acknowledged that there is currently an insufficient housing land supply, however this is not surprising given that we are very close to the end of the UDP plan period. It is anticipated that this housing land supply will increase following the adopting of the LDP in January 2016.</p>	

**SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority's performance</b>	35
<p>Compared to the Welsh Average of 24% and given that we have only two senior planning officers within the development Management team who tend to deal with the controversial major applications, the performance against this indicator is very good.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>06. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority's performance</b>	79
<p>Compared to the Welsh Average of 206 days and given that we have only two senior planning officers within the development Management team who tend to deal with the controversial major applications, the performance against this indicator is very good.</p>	

Indicator	07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 60% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority’s performance	78
<p>This percentage figure has fluctuated over time but since 2008 we have consistently featured in the top half of the performance table as illustrated on the Welsh Government website. As specified earlier in this report, measures are currently being put in place to improve performance management within the section with the aim of getting back into the top quartile of performing authorities.</p>	

Indicator	08. Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	55
<p>Whilst a benchmark has not been established for this data set as yet, we are significantly exceeding the welsh average of 76 days.</p>	

### SECTION 3 - QUALITY

Indicator	09. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	6
<p>The number of decisions made by Members contrary to the recommendation of the Planning Officer is and always has been very low. This is as a consequence of the close working relationship we have with elected Members and sends a clear message to developers that there is certainty and therefore a reduced risk from developing within Neath port Talbot.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal

Authority's performance	56
<p>It is disappointing to secure a below average performance in relation to the number of appeals dismissed. However it must be acknowledged that we deal with only a limited number of appeals on an annual basis (only 9 in 2014/15), and as such the percentages can be easily influenced by a low number of appeals being upheld. Despite these figures we are satisfied that the decisions made by this authority are robust.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	<b>0</b>
<p>This figure confirms that decisions are made for robust reasons and whilst a small number of appeals have been upheld, the reasons for refusing the original planning applications which resulted in the appeals were not unreasonable.</p>	

**SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>12. Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	Yes
<p>Public speaking rights associated with the Planning Committee were introduced in November 2014 and an associated protocol is in place. This has been working successfully since its introduction although additional publicity is required to promote it over and above what is currently in place on our web pages.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>13. Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Members of the public can seek advice from a duty planning officer		There is no duty planning officer available

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	-
<p>Whilst the service does not have a specific officer on duty, our customers have access to all officers during the working day, whether by phone or through face to face contact. As a result general advice can always be obtained. We do however encourage pre-arranged meetings for detailed discussions to ensure that the most appropriate officer is available.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>14. Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress (and view their content)?</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online

<b>Authority's performance</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<p>Our Website has been interactive, enabling members of the public to view planning applications and the associated plans and supporting documents, in addition to being able to monitor progress since 2008.</p>	

**SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>15. Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	82
<p>This is an excellent level of performance given that the Service only has two enforcement officers covering all planning enforcement issues for the whole of the County Borough.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>16. Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	2
<p>Again this is an impressive performance figure given that the Service only has two enforcement officers covering all planning enforcement issues for the whole of the County Borough.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>17. Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	88
<p>Again this is an impressive performance figure given that the Service only has two enforcement officers covering all planning enforcement issues for the whole of the County Borough.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>18. Average time taken to take enforcement action</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	71.5
<p>Again this is an impressive performance figure given that the Service only has two enforcement officers covering all planning enforcement issues for the whole of the County Borough.</p>	

## SECTION 6 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Indicators is to measure the contribution the planning system makes to sustainable development in Wales.

The Sustainable Development Indicators will be used to measure the progress against national planning sustainability objectives, set out in Planning Policy Wales, and can be used to demonstrate to our stakeholders the role and scope of the planning system in delivering wider objectives. The information will also be useful to local planning authorities to understand more about the outcomes of the planning system and help inform future decisions.

<b>Authority's returns</b>	In quarter 1 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 2 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 3 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 4 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our SD indicators are currently being calculated manually and despite recently procuring a new IT system it is unlikely that this will change going forward. As a result the collection of this data is very time consuming and I would question whether it adds value to the planning system.</li> </ul>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted (square metres)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	15,290

<b>Refused (square metres)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

As part of our evidence gathering stage of the LDP process, in conjunction with colleagues from the City and County of Swansea, we jointly commissioned consultants to undertake an Economic Assessment & Employment Land Provision for Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. This study projected the economic growth within the two Council areas, from which we were able to allocate a sufficient area of land for those employment uses and in turn link the number of houses required for future employees, to enable them to live and work sustainably within the County Borough. As a result we have what is considered to be a sufficient area of land allocated for employment purposes within the emerging LDP

Nevertheless, employment uses are not only restricted to employment allocations within the Development Plan. We receive a significant number of employment generating uses outside of allocated areas, which can also be considered acceptable. Therefore the restriction of this SD to calculate employment floor space on **allocated sites only**, effectively under calculates the amount of employment generating floorspace created in general across the County Borough.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted permission (number of applications)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	5

<b>Granted permission (MW energy generation)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	74

Strategic Search Area's E and F lie within the County Borough Council and as such we have been inundated for a number of years by applications for wind farm development. The new definition within the Welsh Government Performance returns only allows Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to count the energy generated within refined SSAs as defined within their development plans. As a result the energy generated from a significant number of operational/previously approved turbines located within a SSA but outside a refined area are not being counted towards the target. This appears to be unreasonable as it dismisses the proactive work previously undertaken by LPAs to work with renewable energy developers in seeking to locate appropriate wind development in accordance with the principles of TAN8 – Renewable Energy. This is going to place further pressure on our upland areas in terms of windfarm developments going forward.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.</b>
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<b>Market housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	144

<b>Affordable housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	87

Whilst we have large areas of the County Borough which are considered to be economically unviable for the provision of affordable housing, the Planning Service is still successfully securing an acceptable proportion of affordable housing.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.</b>
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<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	1

<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	54

The Council is actively working with developers and colleagues within NRW to ensure that development is appropriately located and protected to safeguard future occupiers from the risk of flooding.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.</b>
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<b>Previously developed land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	17.72

<b>Greenfield land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	97

The smaller proportion of redeveloped brownfield land compared to greenfield land is as a consequence of the location of most of our brown field land within existing built up areas, where the densities which can be achieved are normally higher. Greenfield land is mainly located within our valley communities where densities, for reasons of topography tend to be lower.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD6. The area of public open space (ha) that would be lost and gained as a result of development granted planning permission during the quarter.</b>
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<b>Open space lost (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	6.73

<b>Open space gained (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0.252

The loss of open space referred to above was as a consequence of the redevelopment of a single area of underused playing fields. Their poor state dictated that they were underused and arguably not fit for purpose. The playing fields now accommodate a super-school (still under construction) which will provide for both primary and secondary education on one site. The footprint of the building compared to the scale of the site enables for the retention of a large area of the playing fields which are being reconfigured and enhanced to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

As a consequence, this previously underused and poor quality area of open space will soon be available for use, for a variety of formal and informal purposes, by both the school and the local community.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.</b>
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<b>Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	1,144,848

<b>Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

The Council has a Planning Obligations SPG which is consistently used to ensure that planning obligations are secured to mitigate against the impacts of any development.