



# Blaengwrach Community Action Group

## P-05-844 Immediate review of the Neath Port Talbot LDP Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 17.10.18

This petition asks for a mechanism or process to be implemented to enable communities to request immediate exceptions into their Local Development Plans.

As highlighted in the response from Lesley Griffiths AM, the next scheduled review of the NPT LDP is set for 2020 although it is lacking key information now. This has severely impacted our ward of Blaengwrach with a devastating roadside services development and could affect many more planning applications in the Neath Valley before this is next reviewed.

The reasons behind approving this development are largely due to what we believe are inconsistent interpretations of the LDP by our Local Planning Authority. As highlighted in various letters to the Local Planning Authority and to Lesley Griffiths AM, many policies in this LDP are being broken to accommodate this development. We even found that a policy on local valley regeneration in our LDP, (*VRS1/1 Park Avenue, Glynneath Development Framework Supplementary Planning Guidance*), due in April 2017, that was used in the decision making process, has not even been produced and there is still no idea when this may happen or when a public consultation may be available.

Unfortunately for residents, the only method to address the content or application of the Local Development Plan is with the Local Planning Authority. This can prove impossible when, arguably, they can use the ambiguity of information in the LDP to enjoy almost unlimited freedom in planning decisions. Also, if relationships are already strained over difficult planning applications, many communications and requests are refused directly.

As residents, we should have more rights and powers to ensure the best interests for our wellbeing and local environment. For many of us not in the planning profession, LDP issues are only highlighted when policies are interpreted poorly in planning decisions.

We are not asking to interfere in the statutory review process, but instead for a method to submit immediate changes into the LDP to correct mistakes or missing information that cannot wait until the statutory review schedule. This process



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needs to give residents confidence that these changes are officially logged and duly considered, despite any previous correspondence with their LPA.

Please find below details of what we are urgently looking to change in our own LDP, should we be given the opportunity, and why these are needed for our community. Please note that these points have been raised with our Local Planning Authority to no avail leaving us with no real avenue to pursue. This, however, does not negate the necessity of making these changes.

## 1. Blaengwrach Settlement is missing from the Settlement Hierarchy

A planned Petrol Filling Station and Fast Food Drive-Through Restaurant has been approved by the Local Planning Authority for a site in the settlement of Blaengwrach under the settlement type for Cwmgwrach. Although both are identified as separate settlements in the same planning application, Blaengwrach is missing completely from the LDP settlement hierarchy table. This means that this development was passed under the settlement type for Cwmgwrach which was a 'small local centre'.

If Blaengwrach were in the hierarchy table it would be the lowest category consisting of only a church as a 'Dormitory Settlement'. This development will now change this category to 'small local centre' which is something that the Local Development Plan should have been safeguarding against.

**We ask that Blaengwrach Settlement (not ward) is added to the LDP and appropriately classifies as a Dormitory Settlement.**

## 2. Guidance on Petrol Filling Stations and retail units attracting high volumes of traffic.

There is no guidance for petrol filling stations in our LDP in the current version. Any developments attracting a high volume of traffic should surely be allowed outside of a settlement area for reasons of residential safety. Policy R3 is aimed at safeguarding the retail centres in the Neath Valley and is meant to ensure that 'large scale' developments serve a local community instead of taking business away from their heart.

In our case, this policy was used to refuse this petrol station development from being built on a more suitable piece of land outside of our residential area. This would have been safer for residents and our primary school and would have allowed for larger vehicles, fulfilling the original brief to provide services on the A465 for HGVs. Instead, the Local Planning Authority deemed it more appropriate to approve this in our tiny residential community, blocking the only access point into our



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villages with high volumes of traffic because this site was attached to a settlement area.

LDP guidelines make it clear that planning decisions in rural areas should be more flexible with settlement boundaries (however, in our case, the more suitable site was refused for being just 49 metres outside of Glynneath). By agreeing for this development to be constructed 100 metres across the road into our village, more business will be taken away from the Glynneath retail centre, as vehicles from the same A465 stretch of road will turn into the opposite side of the junction into our residential area. This will not even serve our settlement area as we already have a shop, a local PFS and even a fast food restaurant. It will certainly inhibit Active Travel for residents and will be detrimental to our health and safety – as well as visual amenity.

**We ask that where high volumes of traffic are involved, these developments should be added into policy R3 as being allowed outside of settlement areas.**

3. An enforcement policy is needed to ensure that the size and scale of developments are kept in proportion to the attached settlement (amendment to Policy SC1)

Policy SC1 is aimed at ensuring that developments are in scale to their attached settlement. In our case of a major scale development of 2 retail units, this development is aimed at the passing traffic on the A465 which receives over 18000 vehicles daily. It is up to the 'opinion' of the Planning Officers to determine the size of a development (referred to as minor in the application). There is no official guidance to determine the size and scale of this settlement and no policies to enforce this according to the hierarchy table. Policy SC1 is used according to the 'whim' of the LPA and with no supporting guidance to ensure consistency across the board which is missing from the LDP.

**We ask for an amendment to Policy SC1 which requires evidence of the size of a development in scale to an attached settlement.**

In summary, we are asking for the facility to enable residents throughout Wales to correct and question details in their LDP which urgently affect their communities. We understand the high cost implication involved in reviewing and producing a full LDP, however the importance of an up to date and correct LDP is more vital than ever. This is especially highlighted with regard to third party rights and the comments regarding the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 in our other submitted petition response.



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The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) as described by Lesley Griffiths is simply a compilation of key indicators for the council to review. Contrary to the wording used in her response, it is not a mechanism to review the LDP as we the public would be involved in. It is not a call nor a means for residents to input or make amendments. If, however, the AMR is indeed meant in this capacity, it means that we have been grossly misinformed by the leader of our Local Authority.

A mechanism to ensure that content changes to an LDP, between statutory reviews, to be logged and properly considered is much needed for residents. This would also save time, money and resource for the Local Authorities rather than producing full reviews and would keep information updated more accurately. Currently, requests for changes from residents have been met with a blanket refusal followed with advice to simply attend the next statutory review. We need the intervention of the Welsh Government to add improvements and governance to this system, in the interest of Welsh Residents across the country which will benefit everyone and contribute to a more cooperative and efficient future.