

SUSTAINABLE SETTLEMENT ASSESSMENT

This document is available in Welsh
Mae'r dogfen hon ar gael yn Cymraeg

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Settlement Assessment establishes an evidence-based framework to identify which settlements within Blaenau Gwent are best placed to accommodate future growth under the Replacement Local Development Plan (2018–2033). The methodology is based on the proposed approach set out in the draft South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) Pathfinder Group Sustainable Settlement Appraisal Paper (SSAP). This seeks to set out a common methodology for sustainable settlement appraisals to be used across the South East Wales region. However, some elements of the methodology have been adapted to ensure that it is relevant to Blaenau Gwent which is typified by valley towns with some small rural communities.

It evaluates the role, function, and relative sustainability of ten settlements by applying a structured methodology centred on three core principles:

1. Sustainable Transport & Accessibility,
2. Availability of Facilities & Services, and
3. Employment Opportunities.

These principles are weighted to reflect national planning priorities—most notably the strong emphasis in Planning Policy Wales (PPW10) on reducing car dependency and creating sustainable, well-connected communities.

Purpose and Approach

The assessment aims to promote a sustainable spatial pattern of growth, ensuring development supports active travel, access to essential services, strong local economies, and reduced out-commuting.

To achieve this, the document:

- Audits local facilities, services, and employment opportunities (2019 survey).
- Applies a quantitative scoring system across the three principles (40% transport, 30% services, 30% employment).
- Considers contextual indicators such as population, age structure, Welsh language usage, housing, and self-containment.
- Produces a settlement hierarchy guiding future development strategy.

Key Findings

1. Settlement Performance

The following hierarchy of settlements within the County Borough has been identified:

Tier 1: Primary Settlement

- **Ebbw Vale (86.4%)** – The County Borough’s most sustainable and strategic hub, scoring highest across all principles. It benefits from strong multi-modal transport links (including rail), extensive services, education and health facilities, and significant employment sites.

Tier 2 – Main Settlements

- **Brynmawr / Nantyglo / Blaina (79%)**
- **Abertillery (incl. Cwmtillery & Six Bells) (78.5%)**
- **Tredegar (77.9%)**

These settlements offer substantial services, varied employment opportunities, and relatively strong accessibility. They function as key service and commercial centres for the valley communities.

Tier 3 – Secondary Settlements

- **Cwm (57%)**
- **Aberbeeg / Brynithel / Llanhilleth (53%)**

While these settlements offer some facilities and benefit from proximity to larger hubs, they have lower self-containment and more limited service provision.

Lower-Tier Settlements (Tiers 4–5)

- **Swfrydd (30.7%)**
- **Trefil (13.7%), Pochin (21.1%), Bedwellty Pits (16.8%)**

These small communities lack critical infrastructure, services, and employment opportunities, and are least suited to accommodating significant growth.

2. Contextual Insights

- **Population distribution:** Ebbw Vale contains 30% of the County Borough’s population, followed by Tredegar (22%) and Brynmawr/Nantyglo/Blaina (21%).
- **Demographics:** Age profiles vary, with Swfrydd notably younger and Aberbeeg/Brynithel/Llanhilleth older on average.
- **Welsh language:** Usage is low (7.8% county average), with slight variation between settlements.
- **Housing:** Terraced housing dominates; affordability is highest in Abertillery and lowest in Swfrydd.

- **Employment:** Ebbw Vale exhibits the strongest self-containment (34%), reflecting its role as an employment hub.

3. Implications for the Replacement LDP

The assessment provides a robust foundation for shaping a **settlement-based growth strategy**. It supports:

- **Directing growth to the most sustainable, well-connected settlements** (Tier 1 and Tier 2).
- **Prioritising investment** in infrastructure, services, and regeneration where it will have the greatest strategic impact.
- **Protecting smaller settlements** with limited services from development that could increase car dependency or strain local capacity.