

Gwent Public Services Board

Blaenavon well-being assessment

A Torfaen local area well-being assessment

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Contents

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Description of the area | 2 |
| 2 | About Blaenavon | 3 |
| 3 | Social Well-being | 4 |
| 3.1 | About the community | 4 |
| 3.2 | Getting around | 5 |
| 3.3 | Access to services and crime | 7 |
| 3.4 | Housing, households and health | 9 |
| 4 | Economy | 14 |
| 4.1 | Education, skills and work | 14 |
| 5 | Environment | 17 |
| 6 | Culture | 21 |
| 7 | What people are telling us | 24 |
| 8 | References | 26 |

1 Description of the area

Blaenavon and the surrounding area form the north of Torfaen. Pontypool is to the south, the market town of Abergavenny to the north east with Brynmawr and the Heads of the Valleys to the north west. The Brecon Beacons National Park is located directly to the north.

Blaenavon was established to exploit the non-renewable coal and iron resources in the area, as those industries declined over the last 100 years so did the prosperity of the town.

Characterised by a **dramatic environment** abundant in **cultural and historic assets**, and rich in **ecological diversity**, the cultural landscape around Blaenavon was inscribed by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) as a World Heritage Site in 2000. One of only four World Heritage Sites in Wales and 32 across the UK, UNESCO recognised that the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is one of the prime areas in the world where the full social, economic and technological process of industrialisation through iron and coal production can be studied and understood.

Attracting thousands of visitors each year, the area has many important heritage features linked to its industrial past and the town is now famous for the Big Pit National Coal Museum, its 18th century ironworks and Blaenavon Heritage Railway.

The dramatic natural environment and proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park also brings many walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers to the area.

Its location in the **upland valley** means the Blaenavon is relatively geographically isolated. Despite welcoming lots of **tourists**, the town is **small** and mainly serves the **local population**.





Figure 1: The World Heritage Centre, Blaenavon



Figure 2: Winding Gear, Big Pit National Coal Museum

2 About Blaenavon

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Area | 17.8 km² – approximately 14% of the total area of Torfaen at 126km ² |
| Population  | The estimated population is 6,500 – approximately 7% of the total population for Torfaen at 94,000 ¹ . |
| Population density | The population density is 3.65 persons per hectare, with most people living in Blaenavon 1 and 2. There are 7.45 people per hectare in Torfaen ² . |
| Dwellings  | The dwelling count is 2,971 – approximately 7% of the total number of dwellings in Torfaen at 42,645 ³ . |
| General | Blaenavon consists of 1 Medium Super Output Area (MSOA), containing 4 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). By looking at smaller geographical areas, we can see any differences that can impact on well-being. |

| LSOA | MSOA |
|-------------|-------------|
| Blaenavon 1 | Torfaen 001 |
| Blaenavon 2 | |
| Blaenavon 3 | |
| Blaenavon 4 | |

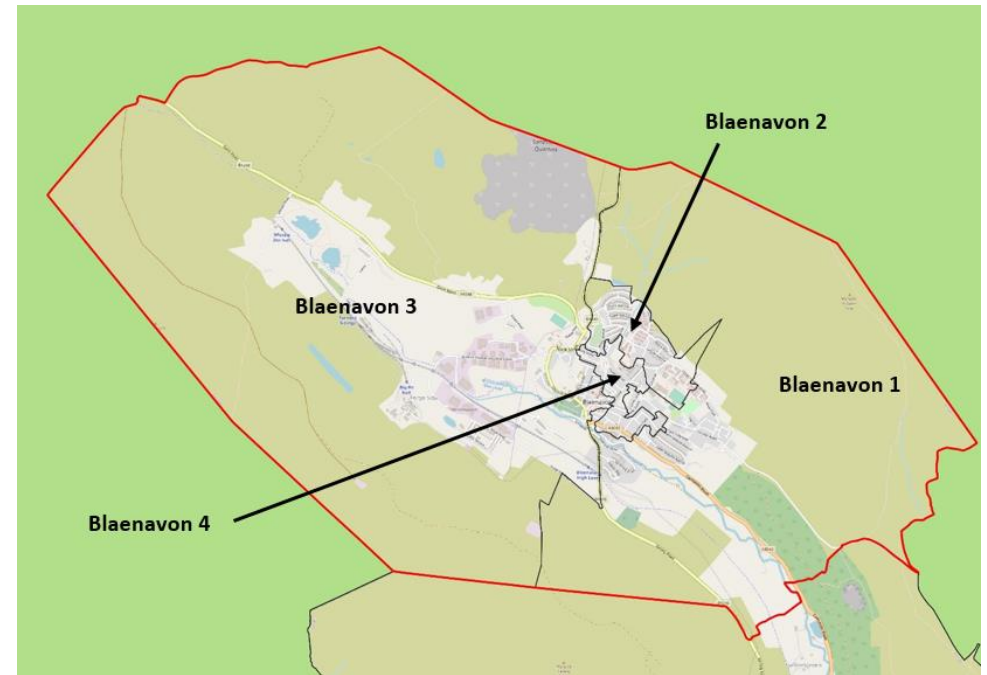


Figure 3: Map of Blaenavon showing the 4 LSOAs.

3 Social Well-being

3.1 About the community

The overall estimated population of Blaenavon has **increased** by approximately **690** residents from 5,760 in 2001 to **6,450** in 2019 (+12.0%), compared to Wales (+8.6%). All 4 LSOAs in Blaenavon have seen an increase in population over this period, with the largest net in-flow of residents in Blaenavon 1 (+252) ⁴.

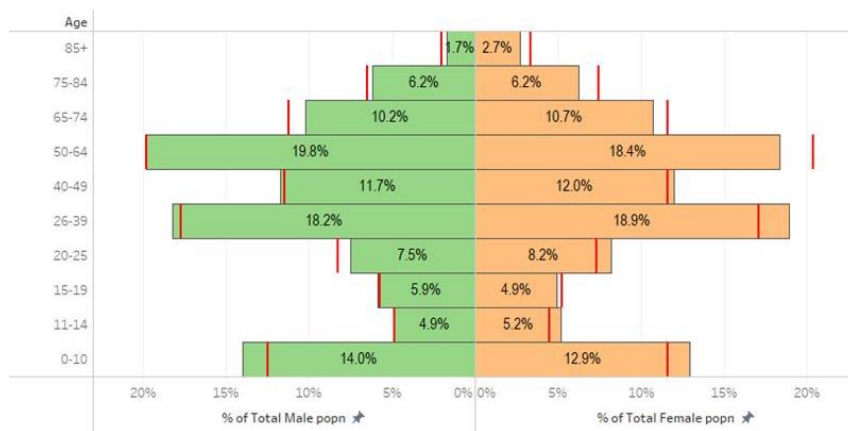


Figure 5: Mid-2019 population estimates by age for Blaenavon vs Wales.

Understanding how the population might change in the future can help us think about key well-being challenges and opportunities.

The overall population in Torfaen is projected to increase by 5.2% between 2019 and 2043⁵. For Blaenavon this would mean an extra **336** people⁶.

A growing population could attract and sustain a retail offer in the town centre.

The number of people aged 0-15 living in Torfaen is projected to **decrease** by **3%** between 2019 and 2043, roughly similar to the Welsh average⁷. For Blaenavon this could mean **40 fewer** people in this age range⁸.

The number of people aged 16-64 living in Torfaen is projected to fall by 14% by 2036 but then returning to its 2019 level by 2043⁹.

Blaenavon of the future might attract new residents who are able to work from home and want to enjoy an outdoor lifestyle.

The number of people aged 65 and over living in Torfaen is projected to **increase** by **28%** between 2019 and 2043, roughly similar to the Welsh average. ¹⁰. For Blaenavon this could mean an extra **340** people in this age range.¹¹.

The number of people aged 85 and over living in Torfaen is projected to **increase** by **70%** between 2019 and 2043, roughly similar to the Welsh average¹². For Blaenavon this could mean an extra **100** people in this age range¹³.

There are many potential benefits to family and community well-being from people living longer.

There could be higher demand for social care and health services in the future.

An aging population will require housing that meets their needs.

The latest data from the 2021 census isn't available to use yet but from the previous census:

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Welsh speakers | 10% of residents in Blaenavon can speak Welsh which is less than the Welsh average (19%). The highest number of Welsh speakers is in Blaenavon 1 (12.1%) and the lowest is in Blaenavon 3 (8.5%) ¹⁴ . |
| Country of birth | 88.6% of residents in Blaenavon were born in Wales ¹⁵ . |
| Ethnicity | 63% of residents are of a White ethnicity. There are less than 100 people who are of non-White ethnicity ¹⁶ . |
| Religion | 51.6% of residents have a Christian based religious faith. Only 60 people have a non-Christian faith. 40.26% of residents have no religious faith ¹⁷ . |

Taking action to help support and grow the Welsh language will help preserve Welsh culture and identity for future generations.

Enabling all parts of the community to get involved with the areas where they live and local decisions will help support cohesive communities.

Blaenavon Town Council has been working with Torfaen Public Services Board to develop a community participatory budget with a focus on supporting healthy lifestyles.

Participatory budgeting can be a good way to catalyse community led solutions that leave a positive legacy for future generations.

3.2 Getting around



People travel for a range of reasons both within the town and beyond; for recreation or to meet with friends and family, to attend education or work, for the movement of goods or the delivery of services, or to access services themselves. There are also travellers to the town including for tourism or those enjoying the greenspace.

Blaenavon is relatively geographically isolated. The main transport route for goods, services and people between Blaenavon and Pontypool is the A4043, giving access to Cwmbran and beyond to the M4. The road carries approximately **15,148** vehicles per day (both north and south bound)¹⁸ and although mainly free moving, there can be localised congestion.

The B4248 Blaenavon to Brynmawr is the primary link for goods, people and services accessing the A465 Heads of the Valleys Corridor and on to west and mid Wales or east towards the Midlands.

Approximated **6,228** vehicles are carried per weekday (both north and south bound)¹⁹. This road is of poor quality.

The B4246 is the most direct route to Abergavenny and currently carries approximately **3,000** vehicles per day²⁰. Heavy Goods Vehicles are prohibited from using the route. due to its steep gradient.

A recent study looking at industrial provision in the Heads of the Valley area identified poor connectivity between Blaenavon and the A465 as a possible employment risk as industrial estates on the Heads of the Valleys road may be more attractive to industries than those further from the A465²¹.

There is a regular bus service between Blaenavon and Pontypool, which acts as the public transport hub for the north. There is no direct bus to Abergavenny – the route goes via Pontypool.

The nearest railway stations are in Abergavenny and New Inn in Pontypool.

Transport and its accessibility can have a significant impact on households with low or limited incomes, current prices can make public transport an expensive option for those dependent upon it.

Reducing **transport costs** can increase disposable income and bring people out of in work poverty.

In 2020, Blaenavon had its first public electric vehicle charging points installed in James Street car-park. Much of the housing stock in Blaenavon is terraced and doesn't have access to off-road parking. This could limit future take up of electric vehicles as charging could

be problematic. **Future Blaenavon is going to need access to more electric charging facilities.**

The nearest Hydrogen fuel station is in Abergavenny. **More vehicles in the future may also be powered by hydrogen.**

Walking, cycling and public transport can make an important contribution to local transport needs, whilst also helping to address issues of **congestion, pollution** and **climate change** associated with car dependency.

Safe active travel routes particularly those which provide commuting potential can help support **health lifestyles**, however parts of the town and surrounding area are very steep which can present mobility challenges for some.

In the future more people might choose to travel actively so that they can keep healthier into old age.


Future generations might use electric bikes to navigate the steep gradient of the town and beyond, connecting with public transport links.

Covid-19 has seen many of us walking and cycling more and appreciating the value of our local green spaces. Blaenavon is on the national cycle route has an abundance of public rights of way and open access land, which is one of the reasons it is so popular to visitors.




Figure 6: Terrace housing, on a steep incline, Blaenavon.

Covid-19 has seen more of us working from home and accessing services on-line, but there are certain types of work that can't be done remotely or digitally.


 Nearly a fifth of working residents (460) are employed in manufacturing²².

Future generations may not travel as much for work.

Broadband access
 Nearly all households in Blaenavon are able to access broadband with a minimum speed of 30Mb/s, just 2.8% of households unable to do so²³.

Being able to access broadband isn't the same as having it. Affordability and/or digital literacy can be a barrier to parts of the community.

Communities of the future may be less reliant of fixed telecommunication systems and more people might use 5G etc.

 Before the pandemic, just over **20%** of people living in Blaenavon also worked in the town, but the majority of people travel to access employment²⁴.

We don't know if homeworking will be a permanent arrangement or if people will begin to return to their places of work or choose to access services face-to-face. It's probable that we will have a blend of on-line, remote and in person interactions.

Blaenavon of the future needs to be cyber secure and digitally inclusive.

3.3 Access to services and crime



Although there are many visitors, the town mainly serves the local population. A core number of services and facilities are available, for others, residents need to travel to Abergavenny, Brynmawr, Pontypool or elsewhere.



Prior to Covid, **vacancy rates** in the Town Centre were at **24.1%** ²⁵. Monitoring in 2021 showed that vacancy rates have increased to **28%** ²⁶. This increase is likely linked to the pandemic restrictions and the increase in on-line retailing.

There are no banks or building societies in Blaenavon, but the Post Office provides some banking services. The nearest hospitals are the new Critical Care Centre in Cwmbran and Nevill Hall in Abergavenny. The town has a primary school and the closest secondary school in the borough is in Abersychan.

| Type of Asset | Theme |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 x Library | Local Service |
| 1 x Post Office | Local Service |
| 1 x Primary School | Local Service |
| 2 x Electric vehicle charging points | Infrastructure |
| 1 x National Cycle Route | Infrastructure |
| 1 x Site of Special Scientific Interest | Greenspace |
| 2 x Local Nature Reserves | Greenspace |
| 5 x Children’s Play Areas | Recreation |
| 1 x Active Living Centre | Recreation |
| 1 x Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site | Cultural |
| 1 x World Heritage Centre | Cultural |
| 1 x Town Centre Conservation Area | Cultural |

Figure 7: Key assets in Blaenavon

Blaenavon’s Primary Care Resource Centre is a key public service hub for the town. Alongside the medical practice, the council’s Customer Services and Housing Support, Citizen’s Advice, Department for

Work and Pensions, and third sector drop-in services can all be accessed at the Hub. Care navigation and social prescribing are approaches adopted by staff at the centre to support patient well-being in a more holistic way.

Local demand will affect the provision of services and facilities in the future, as agencies and businesses assess whether provision will be cost effective.

Unless people feel safe in their homes and the places they live and work, they may not have the confidence or desire to access services or participate in community life.



Criminal damage in Blaenavon is **78%** higher than the Wales average with 2.03 cases per 100 population compared to 1.14. Violent crime is **37%** higher than the Wales average (3.65 compared to 2.67 per 100 population)²⁷.

Tackling the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour will support greater cohesion in Torfaen’s communities.

3.4 Housing, households and health

A key consideration for the future of the Blaenavon is ensuring there is the right sort of housing to support the needs of the community.

If the housing of the future was improved in terms of energy efficiency, homes would be warmer, cheaper to run and would produce less carbon emissions.

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|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Housing stock | The majority of housing is older 19th and 20th Century stock with poor energy efficiency and is lacking range and variation. |
| Council tax band | The majority housing in Blaenavon (83.7%) is rated as council tax band A or B , the lowest valued housing category. Nearly all (95.7%) of the housing in Blaenavon 2 is A and B rated . ²⁸ . |
| Tenure | A third of housing in Blaenavon is owned outright (34.4%) and about 30% is owned with a mortgage of loan. A quarter is rented from the Local Authority or RSL* (26.4%), considerably higher than the Wales average (16.1%) – this is highest in Blaenavon 2 at 44.2% ²⁹ . <i>*In Torfaen no housing is owned by the local authority, so this data relates to Registered Social Landlords only.</i> |

Homes of the future will need to be resilient to a changing climate.

The UK climate risk assessment identifies risks to health and well-being from high temperatures. It also highlights that the risk to Welsh homes is unknown³⁰.

The housing being built now will be a legacy left for future generations.

Defining housing need is complex and several factors will have an influence on the overall levels of demand.

WIMD data, which is based solely on two factors: overcrowding and central heating, would suggest that levels of housing deprivation are low in Blaenavon, and that housing need is adequate. However, there are several issues, outlined below, that are not considered.

There is reasonable supply of 2 bed social properties in the town, but these remain unaffordable for single person applicants in receipt of benefits, who cannot access them due to welfare benefit reforms³¹.



The average cost of a property in Blaenavon during 2020 was **£129,178**³².

Average annual incomes in Torfaen are about **£32,600**³³ and the house price to income ratio is about **4:1**. This means single applicant would have to spend 4 times their salary to be able to purchase a property, which would mean most single people are prevented from buying without assistance.

There is a strong demand for social and intermediate housing in Blaenavon, including a particularly high need for 1 bed social

Blaenavon Well-being Assessment

housing; with an average of 130 applicants applying for every property advertised³⁴.

Much of existing housing stock is old and does not meet owners' current needs or requirements; with no parking making access difficult and poor energy efficiency making them expensive to maintain.

The quality of housing can also impact on health, with poor quality housing often exacerbating chronic conditions,

So, whilst properties in Blaenavon may not be overcrowded or lack central heating, they are not necessarily adequate for local needs, with some residents unable to access, afford or maintain accommodation in the town.

Blaenavon Well-being Assessment

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative poverty. It identifies those communities, at a LSOA geography, with the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation. WIMD ranks all LSOAs in Wales from most to least deprived.

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Overall deprivation | Blaenavon 2 is in the top 20% most deprived LSOAs in Wales. |
| Income deprivation | 21% of people living in Blaenavon are in income deprivation. |
| Education | Blaenavon 2 is in the top 10% of most deprived areas in Wales. |
| Community safety | Blaenavon 3 in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales. |

Figures 8 and 9 give an overview of the degree of relative deprivation across Blaenavon. Based on data from the Welsh Index of National Deprivation (WIMD) ³⁵.

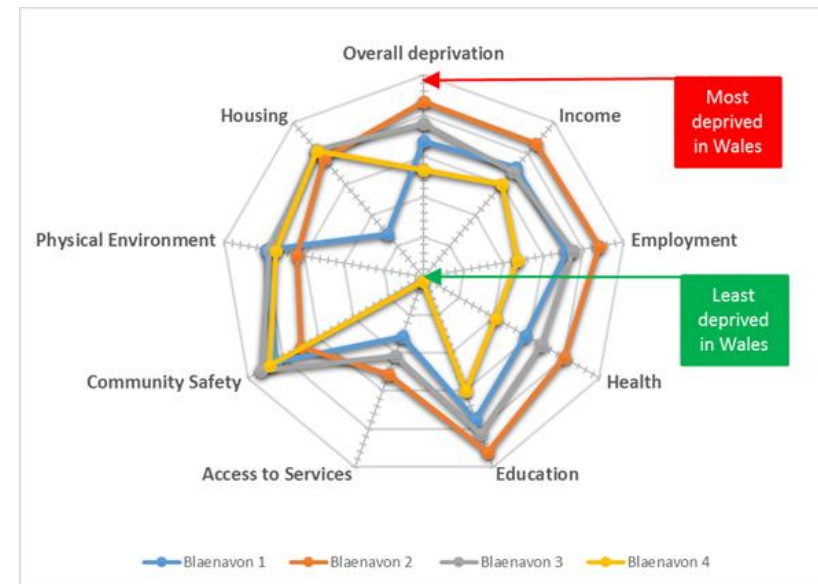


Figure 9: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) ranks for Blaenavon 1-4.

| WIMD 1-1909 |
|--------------------------------|
| 1-191: 10% Most Deprived |
| 192-382: 10%-20% Most Deprived |
| 383-573: 20%-30% Most Deprived |
| 574-955: 30%-50% Most Deprived |

Figure 8: WIMD ranks, Blaenavon 1-4.

| Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 - Blaenavon | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------|------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|---------|
| MSOA-Name | LSOA-Name | Overall deprivation | Income | Employment | Health | Education | Access to Services | Community Safety | Physical Environment | Housing |
| Torfaen001 | Blaenavon 1 | 626 | 560 | 539 | 801 | 476 | 1315 | 300 | 404 | 1381 |
| Torfaen001 | Blaenavon 2 | 252 | 261 | 230 | 379 | 147 | 935 | 580 | 691 | 446 |
| Torfaen001 | Blaenavon 3 | 462 | 605 | 483 | 627 | 333 | 1120 | 140 | 435 | 336 |
| Torfaen001 | Blaenavon 4 | 898 | 764 | 1012 | 1132 | 762 | 1866 | 230 | 490 | 350 |

Having work is generally considered the best route out of poverty, but where pay is low, working hours limited or both, then this is not always the case. The data suggests that some people living in Blaenavon are experiencing in-work poverty.

A fifth of working age people in Blaenavon 2 are in receipt of employment related benefits ³⁶.

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| Foodbank parcels | 9752 food parcels were given to Torfaen residents by Eastern Valley Foodbank between January 2018 and June 2021. This equates to 232 parcels per month on average. Blaenavon residents received 928 parcels over the same period, an average of 22 parcels per month. |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Foodbanks are an important indication of the economic inequality that exists in our communities. Eastern Valley Foodbank isn't the only foodbank that residents in Blaenavon are able to access.

During Covid-19, Bethlehem Chapel began running 'Fare Share' on a weekly basis. Here those in the community needing support can access redistributed food from supermarkets that would otherwise go to waste. Surplus supplies are donated to a community pantry.

Allotments can provide an affordable source of good quality food, essential for a healthy diet. The physical activity involved in keeping an allotment can also have wider health benefits. Not every resident has a suitable garden or space to grow fruit and vegetables and there are no vacant allotments plots currently available on the two Council owned allotments in Blaenavon.

Communities of the future need access to suitable areas to grow food locally.

Future generations will need local, sustainable food which keeps them healthy, provides good jobs and doesn't damage our environment.

Food co-operatives are a good way of making good quality, affordable food available.

Sourcing food locally, reducing food miles and eating seasonally can all help reduce carbon emissions.



32.3% of children resident in Blaenavon that attend Torfaen schools are eligible for free school meals³⁷

Free school meals indicate that economic inequality that exists in our communities. Providing healthy school meals can help improve overall health, support a child's ability to learn, and can influence food choices away from school.

Taking action to reduce inequalities will reduce the impact of poor health on particular communities.

There are a particular set of challenges in Blaenavon related to employment, transport, housing, educational achievement and levels of deprivation that could be having an impact on health.

Although self-reported health is good, the rate of premature death is significantly higher than the average rate for Wales and 24.9% of the people living in Blaenavon have a limiting long-term illness.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Limiting long-term illnesses | Overall, 1 in 4 residents in Blaenavon have a limiting long-term illness – a rate of 24.9 per 100 population. This is marginally higher than the Torfaen average (24.2), but even higher than Wales (22.7). Within Blaenavon, the smaller geography LSOA areas range between 21.3 in Blaenavon 4 and 28.3 in Blaenavon 2 ³⁸ . |
| All cause death rate | The all cause death rate in Blaenavon is 1092.7 per 100,000 population, which is higher than both the Torfaen (1078.7) and Wales (1048.3) rates ³⁹ . |
| Premature death | The rate of premature death (under 75) in Blaenavon is 458.0 per 100,000 . The average rate for Wales is 382.4 per 100,000. Blaenavon 2 has the highest rate at 636.7 per 100,000 ⁴⁰ . |

Tackling the leading causes of premature death and illness, delaying frailty and helping working age adults live healthier lives for longer by preventing health-

harming behaviours and promoting mental well-being. will help create a healthier Blaenavon.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A pre-Covid survey of Blaenavon residents ⁴¹ told us that..... | |
| Physical health | 67% of respondents rate their physical health as very/fairly good. About 8% rate it as very/fairly poor. |
| Mental and emotional health | 77% of respondents rate their mental and emotional health as very/fairly good. About 8% of residents rate it as very/fairly poor. |

An Integrated Well-being Network was set up in Blaenavon in 2019 to bring together wider community services with health and social care provision with the aim of providing a strong mechanism to address these local health challenges with the focus on prevention and early intervention.

4 Economy

4.1 Education, skills and work

Childhood experiences can determine long-term development and overall life achievements.

The WIMD data tells us that Blaenavon 2 is in the top **10%** of most deprived areas in Wales in terms of education. It also has a high concentration of several different types of deprivation. The data tells us the social-economic factors could be contributing to attainment gaps between communities.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences in childhood that can directly hurt a child, such as abuse or neglect, or affect them through the environment in which they live, such as growing up in a house with domestic violence or with individuals with alcohol and other substance use problems ⁴²

Information on Adverse Childhood Experiences is not available at a local level for Blaenavon. However, it is known that those living in areas of deprivation are at greater risk of experiencing multiple ACEs ⁴³.

Future generations will get the best start in life through experiencing healthy family behaviour, especially in the first 1000 days and breaking the cycle of adverse childhood experiences.

Ensuring all children receive a good quality education and raising the aspirations of future generations of young people will support their long-term economic well-being.

Work has taken place across the borough to improve learning facilities and to support modern teaching methods that benefit pupils and communities, now and in the future. Blaenavon has benefited from a new primary school with strong links to the adjacent health resource centre to provide holistic services to families in the area. Investment has also been made in new post-16 provision in Cwmbran.

The data shows that less pupils are entering higher education in Blaenavon (**22%**) than the average for Wales (**30%**). It also shows that **24.3%** of adults aged 25 – 64 have no qualifications, this is significantly higher than the average figure for Wales (**19.4%**) ⁴⁴.

A survey of 1058 year 11 pupils (aged 16) leaving school across Torfaen in 2018, shows that 35% go to 6th form, 49% go to college, 8.6% go into work-based training and 4% go into work. A follow-up survey undertaken a year later in 2019 shows that for the same cohort those continuing in full-time education at school dropped by 21% and those full-time at college dropped by 91% ⁴⁵.

For some young people, their financial circumstances and the cost and availability of transport can be barriers to entering and staying in higher education.

Current and future generations of young people need to be supported and empowered to prevent them becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

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|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Repeat school absenteeism | Repeat absenteeism of school pupils in Blaenavon is 7.1% , being higher than Torfaen (6.2%) and Wales (5.4%). Blaenavon 2 and Blaenavon 3 LSOAs have the highest level in Blaenavon with 8.0% . The lowest is Blaenavon 4 with 5.7% ⁴⁶ . |
| Pupils not entering higher education aged 18-19 | 78% of pupils in Blaenavon do not enter higher education aged 18 to 19, which is higher than Torfaen (73%) and Wales (70%). Blaenavon 2 LSOA is the highest with 85% ⁴⁷ . |

Improving local skills through work-force planning, training, apprenticeships, and volunteering opportunities will help future generations find decent work and avoid in-work poverty.

Manufacturing, hospitality, construction, health and care sectors will benefit from a future workforce equipped with vocational skills.

| | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Employment  | There are approximately 2,760 economically active residents in Blaenavon, of these: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,187 are employees • 242 are self-employed • 249 are unemployed ⁴⁸. | | |
| Skills  | | No. | % |
| | No Qualifications | 1,580 | 32.5 |
| | Level 2 | 786 | 16.2 |
| | Level 3+ | 1,365 | 28.1 ⁴⁹ |
| Industry of employment | The largest industry of employment in Blaenavon is manufacturing - 38.2% of all jobs. This is considerably more than the Wales average (10.9%). There are approximate 663 jobs in manufacturing in Blaenavon, 27.5% ⁵⁰ . | | |
| Main employment sites | 2 major industrial estates - Gilchrist Thomas (30 hectares) and Kays and Kears (6 hectares). Both of which have some development potential. | | |

Delivering employability support to help those furthest from the job market can enabling them to fulfil their potential and will help support a prosperous economy.

The most successful towns offer a range of jobs in different sectors. Having work can have a positive impact on a person’s health.

Torfaen along with 9 other local authority areas is part of the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) which over a 10-year period seeks to deliver a set of targets in the region including 25,000 new jobs by 2036, the leveraging of £4bn of private sector investment and securing economic growth. 8 priority sectors have been identified as important for the region going forward⁵¹:

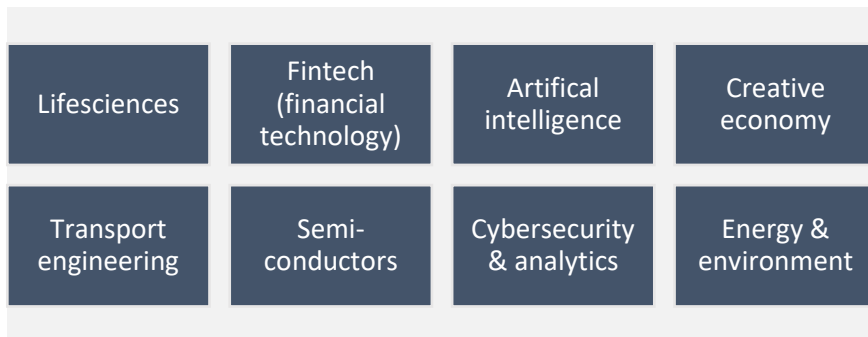


Figure 10: Cardiff City Region priority sectors

With its main employment base of manufacturing, Blaenavon is well-placed to link to the transport engineering priority sector, but there may also be other opportunities for both new and existing businesses.

Blaenavon’s historic and natural landscape is a popular location for film and small screen alike, making it well placed to contribute the regions creative economy offer.

2021 has seen the impact on business of energy supply chain issues and increases to the cost of wholesale gas.

In addition to being energy efficient, both current and future businesses in Torfaen need secure supplies of energy.

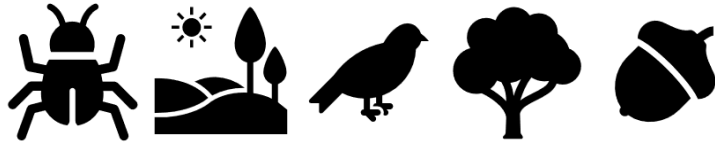
We also know that Torfaen has an aging population, and this might mean increased demand for certain care and health services in the future. Technological advances may mean that new skills are required to work in this sector.

The foundational economy which provides the everyday services that our residents and businesses rely on, such as energy and food and healthcare has an important part to play in contributing to the long-term resilience of the local economy.

Forecasting long-term education and skill requirements will provide opportunities for future generations in the employment sectors of tomorrow.

We don’t have any information about the number of people in Blaenavon that were furloughed, had their working hours reduced or lost or changed employment as a result of Covid-19. We also don’t know what the longer-term impact of the pandemic will be on employment.

5 Environment



Our air, land, water, wildlife, plants, and soils provide our most basic needs, including food, timber, fuel and recreation, they also provide less visible services including water management, supporting pollinating insects, and carbon storage.

This part of the assessments tells us about the condition and resilience of Blaenavon’s natural resources and identifies long-term management challenges.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Notable features | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ancient woodland valley sides. - Waun Afon bog. - Extensive areas of common land, post-industrial habitat, upland heath, wetlands and grassland. |
| Notable species | Red Grouse, Lapwing, Wood warbler, Alpine clubmoss, Scarce blue-tailed damselfly, Grayling butterfly. |
| Key nature conservation designations | The Bloreng Site of Special Scientific Interest Garn Lakes Local Nature Reserve. |

Blaenavon’s natural environment is strongly influenced by its industrial past. The locally distinctive landscape of coal tips and

ponds are now a significant **ecological resource** supporting a range of notable species.

On the hilltops, bracken, marshy grassland, moors and heathland support iconic species such as red grouse and lapwing.

Historically much of the upland areas around Blaenavon were managed for red grouse. Today the heather moorland is managed not just for grouse but for recreation, fire control and for agriculture through livestock grazing.

Upland habitat is particularly sensitive to a changing climate. Some species may need to migrate away to higher, cooler altitudes to survive, leading to changes in the biodiversity and landscape of the uplands⁵².

Habitats at risk from a changing climate include peatland and upland heath and beech woodland ⁵³.

Working in partnership, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and Torfaen Council carry out strategic burns in the Blaenavon area and cut fire breaks to help prevent large scale wildfires.

A changing climate could increase the frequency of grassland fires.

Where the environment is already stressed, for example through habitat loss and fragmentation, then the risks from climate change are greater ⁵⁴.

Our natural resources have an important role to play in supporting our capacity to mitigate climate change by storing carbon. They can also help support our adaptation response by, for example, managing water in the landscape and reducing the impact of temperature rise.

Waun Afon bog to the north of the town is the source of the Afon Lwyd. The river winds its way through the length of Torfaen to its confluence with the River Usk Special Area of Conservation.

This area of peat soil and its associated bog forming vegetation has taken thousands of years to establish. The mossy vegetation on the surface of the bog prevents oxygen reaching the wet, decomposed vegetation beneath the surface, **locking away carbon**.

There is some indication that the peat bogs in Blaenavon need management to prevent them from **degrading**. When bogs degrade the carbon they store is released back into the atmosphere. Their ability to hold water is also impacted meaning that water from the uplands can reach the river more quickly adding to water levels further down the valley.



The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment identifies that more action is needed in Wales to restore degraded carbon stores, particularly peatlands ⁵⁵.

If current and future generations are to benefit from the important carbon storage and water management benefits of Waun Afon bog then appropriate management is needed.

Water quality

Under the Water Framework Directive, the upper Afon Lwyd and tributaries, in the Blaenavon area, is classified **poor ecological status**.

Reasons for the poor ecological status of the river between Blaenavon and Pontypool include **barriers** on the river affecting the passage of fish; suspected **sewage discharge** impacting upon fish and phosphate levels and probable **pollution** from an abandoned mine infrastructure⁵⁶.

Air quality

Monitoring undertaken in Torfaen in 2020 reveals that air quality in Torfaen meets all national standards, with concentrations of all pollutants measured being within stipulated air quality objectives ⁵⁷.

Blaenavon has extensive common land which comes with certain community grazing rights, the land is also open access to the public. The number of active grazers and livestock grazing has been steadily decreasing over recent years. While overgrazing can be problematic for biodiversity, lack of grazing may cause this mainly moorland

habitat to start to scrub over, leading eventually to woodland and loss of the characteristic open landscape. The number of active graziers is expected to continue to decline.

Traditional land management approaches and skills might be lost to future generations which in turn could impact on the distinctive natural landscape.

Blaenavon World Heritage Site Commons Management Group make an important contribution to managing the area, carrying out practical management activities on the common. The group is funded through the micro-hydro scheme.

Made up entirely of volunteers, Blaenavon World Heritage Environmental Group also carry out management activities in the landscape.

Future biodiversity could be significantly improved if the natural regeneration that is taking place could be a managed process.

Leaving Blaenavon to the south, the valley landscape is dominated by ancient woodland, recently felled commercial conifer plantations and enclosed fields.

Valley side woodland works effectively to moderate water run-off. Future Torfaen is predicted to experience more extreme weather events – including intense rainfall.

To the north-west of the town, Garn Lakes is managed as a local Nature Reserve (LNR) and supports a variety of habitats including species rich grassland, ponds and a reedbed.



Figure 11: Garn Lakes, Blaenavon.



There are currently no vacant allotment plots available in the two council owned allotments in Blaenavon.

Blaenavon's mean tree canopy cover was estimated at **19.8%** in 2013⁵⁸.

Renewable energy potential

Studies have shown the potential for generating more energy using hydro power⁵⁹.

Torfaen's first micro-hydro scheme can be found in Blaenavon - the Dragon's Teeth, which demonstrates some of the potential for renewable energy generation within the area. Given the World Heritage Site status, further opportunities for renewable energy generation will be subject to careful consideration of impact on landscape and building designations but may include additional hydro schemes and roof top photo-voltaics.

Community energy projects can provide useful income that can be invested back into the places people live.

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Landscape crime | Illegal off-road biking is an issue causing damage the landscape. Churned up ground also can channel water run-off and cause localised water management issues. |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|


Delivering measures to reduce anti-social behaviour and landscape crime will make Blaenavon safer for people to enjoy.

As part of joint work to improve well-being in Torfaen, a shared Green Infrastructure Strategy has been developed which outlines priorities and opportunities for strengthening the resilience and connectivity of Torfaen's green infrastructure network. It sets out how this resource can be used to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits, including helping to tackle climate change⁶⁰. Key priorities for Blaenavon include:

- Managing the common land to keep it healthy.

- Maintaining and enhancing the condition of the Heritage Site
- Improving access and encouraging greater understanding and enjoyment of the environment.
- Tackling the barrier such as landscape crime that impact on public use and enjoyment of the environment.
- Providing more public open green space in appropriate places.
- Enhancing existing or creating new green corridors between key habitats. These both link fragmented habitats and can be used as active travel routes.

As well as local action, taking a regional approach to managing green space and collaborating with partners, sharing learning and resources will help us create resilient, well connected networks of green space that future generations will rely on.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Cardiff Capital Region has identified energy and environment as a priority economic sector with the potential to create prosperity in the region over the next 10 – 20 years ⁶¹ . |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Blaenavon's natural environment has the potential to create more local jobs and contribute to economic well-being in Torfaen.

6 Culture

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Key attractions | Big Pit National Coal Museum, Blaenavon Ironworks, Blaenavon Heritage Railway, World Heritage Centre. and Blaenavon Community Museum. |
| Key heritage designations | UNESCO World Heritage Site– the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape inscribed in 2000. |

Blaenavon is rich in cultural history and community spirit that remains today. The town forms part of the World Heritage Site and is considered to be the best-preserved iron town in Wales. Its surviving streets of workers’ housing, chapels, churches, schools and the Workmen’s Hall powerfully reflect the distinctive culture that developed in iron making and coal mining communities during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Engaging the local community in the significance of their globally recognised heritage is important in ensuring a sense of place and increasing community pride and well-being.

Blaenavon and Torfaen can expect to experience a changing climate with more extreme weather events in the future. This could impact on the historic townscape.



Figure 12: Blaenavon Ironworks.

Blaenavon is home to a range of clubs and societies, from a Cribbage League and Townswomen’s Guild, to Brownies and Scout Groups, Blaenavon Town Band, Blaenavon Male-voice Choir, photography groups and an active 50+ Forum.

Taking part in cultural activities can be a good way of bringing all parts of the community together and building community cohesion.

Volunteers play a key part in sharing Blaenavon’s rich cultural heritage – from Blaenavon Heritage Railway to the Workmen’s Hall, which as well as being a venue for hire is home to Blaenavon Digital Cinema and Blaenavon Community Heritage Museum. Famous novelist Alexander Cordell took inspiration from Blaenavon’s rich heritage and items from his writing room are on display for the

benefit of future generations of the town's community, tourists and other visitors alike.

The many churches and chapels are also home to volunteering efforts, providing lunch clubs and food distribution to those in need.

Heritage volunteering provides the opportunity to meet new people, to gain confidence and learn new skills for future employment and to have fun in an informal setting.

The mental and physical benefits that exercise can provide are well documented. Through the hard work of members of the community, there are many activities taking place in Blaenavon including rugby, football, dance, netball, running, lawn bowls, grappling and walking groups.

Childhood experiences can seed a lifelong interest in sports and cultural activities.

A pre-Covid survey of residents told us that not everyone who enjoys sport and leisure activities participates in them regularly.

Pre Covid, what Blaenavon residents tell us.....

Sport and leisure



82.6% of respondents said sport and leisure was very/fairly important to them.

35.5% of respondents participate in sport and leisure activities on a weekly basis ⁶².

Arts and culture



58.6% of respondents said that arts and cultural activities were very/fairly important to them.

22.3% of respondents participate in arts and cultural activities on a monthly basis. **34.9%** said they never participate in arts or cultural activities.

Some people living in Blaenavon are experiencing several different types of deprivation, this means that affordability is likely a barrier to getting involved with sports and other cultural activities.

If future generations are to realise the health benefits of being active, then barriers to participation need to be addressed

Blaenavon's rugged landscape offers a range of trails to explore and there are also set walking routes taking in the townscape and its various 19th century buildings. The area is very popular with walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers.

Covering a distance of 6km, with a 10% incline to the summit of the Blorenge, Tumble Climb is well known as a challenging cycling route. It has featured in both Velothon Wales and the Tour of Britain.



Figure 13: Cyclists in Blaenavon.

Blaenavon Rugby Club was founded in 1877 and the sport continues to be popular. Talented members have gone on to play for Pontypool, Barbarians, British Lions and the national team for Wales.

Supporting people to live healthy lives, where they can achieve their potential and become part of a healthy workforce will contribute to wider economic well-being.

Food is an increasingly important part of the town's culture – with a brewery and a cheese making company being among well-known local producers.



Cardiff Capital Region has identified the creative economy as a priority economic sector with the potential to create prosperity in the region over the next 10 – 20 years⁶³.

Maximising the opportunities from the inspirational natural environment and cultural heritage of Blaenavon by promoting wildlife, outdoor activity and heritage tourism can provide future employment opportunities.

7 What people are telling us

Alongside looking at the data, we have involved our communities to get a better understanding of people’s experiences and appreciate how we can all work together to improve well-being, focusing on the strengths of our people and places. This section tells us what people living in Torfaen think about well-being in their community.

During late summer 2021 residents across Gwent were asked to complete a well-being questionnaire. A total of 127 responses were received from people living in Torfaen. Our communities were asked 4 questions:

What is special about your community?

What things are important to you and your family?

What would you like your community to look like in the future?

How can your community work with us to make that happen?

Figure 14 is a summary of the key themes that people thought were special about Torfaen’s communities and what they thought would make their communities better.

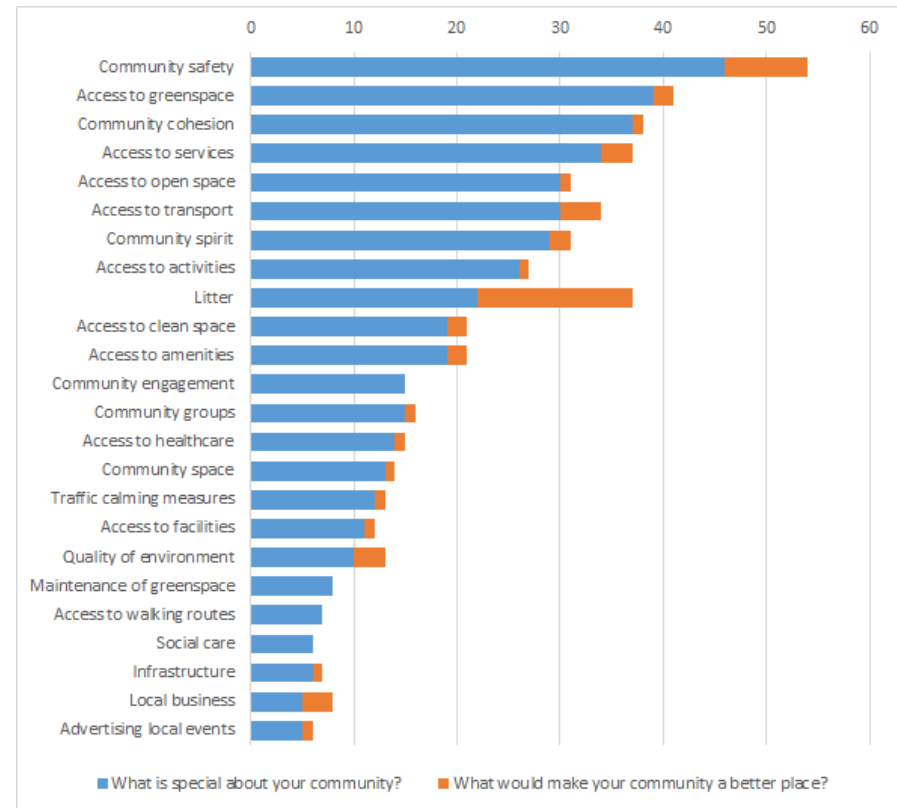


Figure 14: What residents in Torfaen say is special and what would make their communities better

Blaenavon Well-being Assessment

| Q1 What is special about your community? | Q2 What would make it a better place? | Q3 What things are important to you and your family? | Q4 What would you like your community to look like in the future? | Q5 How can your community work with us to make that happen? |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access to open space (30) | Community safety (20) | Community safety (48) | Community safety (20) | Community engagement (11) |
| Community cohesion (24) | Litter (15) | Access to services (15) | Community spirit (16) | Community cohesion (4) |
| Community spirit (15) | Traffic calming measures (10) | Access to activities (14) | Access to clean space (14) | Community groups / Community spirit / Volunteering (3) |

Figure 15: The top responses from Torfaen residents

Figure 15 shows the top responses to the survey questions from people living in Torfaen.

People living in Blaenavon told us that improving community safety, community funding and access to greenspace would make their community a better place.

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Blaenavon Well-being Assessment

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