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Subject: Draft NDF - Monmouthshire County Council Consultation Response
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Attachments: [image001.gif](#)
[Draft NDF - Monmouthshire County Council Consultation Response.pdf](#)

Please see attached Monmouthshire County Council's response to the Draft NDF which was endorsed by the Cabinet Member for Enterprise and Land Use Planning on October 23rd 2019. Please can you acknowledge receipt of the Council's response.

Regards,

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Draft NDF: Monmouthshire County Council Consultation Response

- 1.1 Once published, the National Development Framework will directly affect the content of Monmouthshire/s Local Development Plan, and it will become a primary consideration when deciding planning applications. This is because, once published, the National Development Framework will have statutory Development Plan status. The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 requires that our Local Development Plan be in conformity with the NDF. In addition, under S.38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan is the starting point for making decisions on any application for planning permission, and decisions must be in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
- 1.2 The timing of publication of the NDF presents something of a logistical challenge for us, because our emerging LDP must be in conformity with the NDF, the final content of which will be unknown until an advanced stage of our LDP preparation. There is a risk that our evidence-based LDP will be contradicted by the NDF, which is not evidence based, does not have to comply with the tests of soundness (which it would fail), and has not been robustly scrutinised in the same way as any other Development Plan must be.
- 1.3 The Draft National Development Framework has a number of implications for the nation, region and our county that need careful consideration. The NDF has been written in the context of various policies and objectives, perhaps most notably the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Welsh Government's 'Prosperity for All' agenda, its clear (and welcomed) drive to deliver more affordable housing, the Welsh Government's declaration of a climate emergency, and its ambition to strengthen the Welsh language.

Outcomes:

- 1.4 The Draft NDF sets out 11 outcomes (page 18), namely that, through the NDF, we will develop a Wales where people live....
1. and work in connected, inclusive and healthy places
 2. in vibrant rural places with access to homes, jobs and services
 3. in distinctive regions that tackle health and socio-economic inequality through sustainable growth
 4. in places with a thriving Welsh Language
 5. and work in towns and cities which are a focus and springboard for sustainable growth
 6. in places where prosperity, innovation and culture are promoted
 7. in places where travel is sustainable
 8. in places with world-class digital infrastructure
 9. in places that sustainably manage their natural resources and reduce pollution
 10. in places with biodiverse, resilient and connected ecosystems
 11. in places which are decarbonised.

1.5 It goes on to state that the 11 Outcomes can be achieved over the next 20 years if the planning system, through the NDF and other development plans, is focussed on the longterm and provides quality development in the right places for the right reasons. These Outcomes are inter-related and inter-dependent, and will improve places and well-being across Wales.

1.6 The supporting text on page 20 in relation to outcomes 2 and 6 is particularly relevant to Monmouthshire and is welcomed:

“In rural areas, job opportunities and community services will be supported to help attract and retain people. A balance will be found between development and preserving the character of rural Wales, ensuring our small towns and villages have bright futures as attractive places to live and work. There will be support for the agricultural sector and its supply chains to boost resilience through diversification.”

And

“Development Plans will have a forward thinking, positive attitude towards enabling economic development, investment and innovation. Increased prosperity and productivity will be pursued across all parts of Wales, building on current activity and promoting a culture of innovation, social partnership, entrepreneurialism and skills-development in sustainable industries and sectors. The culture, heritage and environment of Wales will play a positive, modern role in the economy by attracting the interest and expenditure of tourists, and providing a distinctive and trusted brand for Welsh businesses.”

1.7 However, with regard to Outcome 2, providing job opportunities and sustaining community services will require demographically mixed and resilient communities. Employers will be attracted by a workforce, which in turn requires housing and affordable housing that retains younger people and families. The supporting text should therefore be expanded to state that job opportunities, community services and appropriate levels of housing will be supported in rural areas.

1.8 Overall, it is considered that there is little in these broad outcome statements that many people would disagree with. Unfortunately, however, the remainder of the draft NDF does not appear to deliver on the above statements.

Levels of Growth

1.9 The draft NDF sets unambitious levels of growth for the whole nation based on projecting forwards to 2038 trends from a period of significant economic downturn. Although 50% of the housing need figure is apportioned to the SE Wales region, it is 50% of a small number. The reduced rate of household formation is used by some as evidence that less new housing is needed. Conversely, others recognise it as a symptom of unaffordable housing (perhaps combined with high levels of student debt) meaning many young people are unable to move out from their parents' home, with the solution being to increase housing supply not further constrain it.

1.10 The estimates of additional homes have been derived from the 2018-based Estimates of Housing Need in Wales by Tenure published by the Welsh Government in January 2019. The statistical release for the Estimates of Housing Need provides caveats that they are estimates based on a given set of assumptions, aimed at forming a basis for policy decisions. It is clear that the figures in the statistical release “should not be used as housing targets,” yet there is

a real danger that the inclusion of a single figure in the NDF without a full explanation of what this figure is will result in it being treated as a target.

- 1.11 To provide some context, the housing need figure suggests a total housing need for Wales to 2038 of 114,000 homes. It states that some 8,300 dwellings per annum are required in the first 5 years, of which 57% are needed in the SE Wales region. This 8,300 figure is broadly comparable to current rates of housing completions (the past completion data used in the draft NDF is known to be unreliable as it is based on incomplete Building Regulations completion certificate data). If 8,300 homes are required in each of the first 5 years, this leaves a need of just 4,800 homes per annum for the remaining 15 years for the whole nation.
- 1.12 The levels of growth indicated by the draft NDF do not depict a nation with any meaningful ambition or hope for its future. It is an inward-looking document that fails to fully consider the connections and opportunities with the south west of England. Despite the Severn Tolls being abolished to remove an economic barrier to Wales, the proposed greenbelt (see below) and the current absence of a solution to the M4 congestion in Newport, relegate the south of Monmouthshire to accommodating a 'queue with a view' rather than a prime gateway to Wales.
- 1.13 The remainder of the draft NDF is considered to be lacking any clear aspiration for economic growth or increased prosperity. This fails to reflect the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal and associated future opportunities, or the economic strengths associated with the Western Powerhouse or the emerging 'Great Western Cities' concept comprising Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. Monmouthshire is perfectly located to benefit from such initiatives, although key aspects of the draft NDF threaten to obstruct that, most notably the proposed greenbelt (see below).

Affordable Housing

- 1.14 Policy 3 emphasises the importance of publicly owned land in delivering development including for mixed use and affordable housing. This is welcomed in principle, and our Estates Department has already proactively submitted a number of candidate sites for equal consideration alongside proposals submitted by others. With all other matters being equal, the use of public land allows for a range of benefits, including securing better outcomes, potentially holding a long term interest in what is developed rather than having a short term profit-motivated approach, and the ability to recycle land sale receipts into maintaining public services. The Minister's recent letter requires that affordable housing led sites should be promoted, if possible on public sector land, securing 50% affordable housing. The outcomes resulting from that requirement are supported, insofar as it relates to vacant or underused sites. However, it must be recognised by the Welsh Government that Councils use receipts from land disposal to deliver other strategic objectives such as the 21st Century schools programme. This is particularly the case where the Welsh Government's settlement funding mechanisms disproportionately underfund some Councils such as Monmouthshire. An alternative funding source will be required for those other initiatives. In addition, under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations, CIL contributions cannot be sought from affordable housing. A much higher affordable housing requirement achieves one laudable objective but has the potential unintended consequence of significantly reducing funding towards community infrastructure. A number of Councils apply the CIL Regulations approach to S106 agreements and do not seek education or all leisure contributions from the affordable housing element of a development.

- 1.15 While Affordable Housing supply through public sector, RSL, Council housing and support for SME builders is a laudable ambition, the NDF appears to be somewhat dismissive of the role the private sector, in particular volume house-builders, have in delivering Affordable Housing, which has been significant in the last 20 years. To achieve the ambition of delivering affordable housing, which is an essential component of social justice and the 'prosperity for all' ambition, all players must be enabled to maximise their contribution.
- 1.16 The role of the private sector in delivering affordable housing will be largely influenced by market forces such as development viability, land/build costs, developer risk and return on investment, which varies across Wales. In parts of Monmouthshire, we have been successfully securing 35% affordable housing on private sector sites, which provides a valuable contribution to our affordable housing need. In this regard, it is still important to allocate land in locations where developers want to build and where development viability is strong enough to support a strong policy requirement for increased levels of affordable housing and other necessary infrastructure.

Spatial Distribution of Growth

- 1.17 Policy 4 supports 'appropriate proportionate growth in rural towns and villages' but recognises this is best planned at regional and local levels. This is welcomed and should be based on evidence prepared at LDP level.
- 1.18 Otherwise, the draft NDF seeks to focus growth on existing town/city centres and urban areas within the nationally important growth area, in particular brownfield sites in Newport and the Valleys. The number of vacant / available sites (particularly brownfield sites) within existing settlements in the region is limited and the draft NDF's policy does not appear to be evidenced by urban capacity studies or similar. Many of these sites have been developed in recent years for housing and they are a finite resource. An overreliance on growth within existing settlements could stifle growth within other parts of the region and undermine the delivery of the NDF and its outcomes.

New Settlements

- 1.19 Page 22 of the draft NDF states: "Choosing to develop new towns and enabling sprawling greenfield development would be to ignore the untapped potential of places which already have town centres, universities and colleges, public transport infrastructure and a good range of public services. It would also squander key assets in the form of productive countryside and natural resources."
- 1.20 This would appear to rule out the opportunity to deliver sustainable growth in the longer term via the development of new settlements, in contrast to Planning Policy Wales edition 10 (PPW10) setting out the circumstances where they may be appropriate. The NDF should be amended to reflect the policy advice in PPW10 and recognise that there may be a role for new settlements if they create more sustainable places than the continued incremental growth of existing settlements. Such matters should be given detailed consideration as part of SDP and LDP strategies.

Greenbelt

- 1.21 The draft NDF states that:

“In South East Wales we are proposing to enhance Cardiff’s role as the capital and secure more sustainable growth in Newport and the Valleys. A green belt around Newport and eastern parts of the region will support the spatial strategy and focus development on existing cities and towns. Transport Orientated Development, using locations benefitting from mainline railway and Metro stations, will shape the approach to development across the region. There is support for the growth and development of Cardiff Airport.”

It goes onto to explicitly state that The Strategic Development Plan must identify a green belt that includes the area to the north of the M4 from the Severn Crossings to North Cardiff. The schematic plan on page 63 shows a swathe of greenbelt across the whole of the south of this County, stretching almost as far north as Monmouth. A plan is provided at **Appendix 1** illustrating how the indicative NDF plan appears when plotted against the current Bristol greenbelt.

- 1.22 Despite repeated requests to the Welsh Government to be signposted to the evidence supporting the proposed greenbelt, no response has been received at the time of writing this report. The wording proposed in relation to Policy 30 and the associated supporting text should be amended to require the SDP to consider the evidence of the need for a greenbelt.
- 1.23 A greenbelt is a permanent protective designation that should look to protect an area from development for a period of at least 50 years. Designation of a greenbelt is a major longterm policy decision that should be based on robust evidence. The implications of the greenbelt for Monmouthshire must therefore be considered in the context of several LDPs hence, not just the one currently under preparation. Discussions with Welsh Government officials suggests they may not have fully understood the permanence and restrictive nature of a greenbelt. Within a greenbelt, the only development permitted is essential accommodation for agricultural, forestry and rural enterprise workers, and essential outdoor recreation facilities. Ironically, the draft NDF text requires that the greenbelt should be considered in relation to the greenbelt around Bristol, where emerging development plans are seeking to de-designate parts of the greenbelt because it has overly constrained growth.
- 1.24 Some Members may recall that when Council considered the current adopted LDP at Deposit Plan stage, a far smaller greenbelt area than that indicated in the draft NDF was added by Members adjacent to Chepstow. This was subsequently rejected by the Planning Inspector at Plan examination. The Inspector’s report made the following pertinent comments [my emphasis]:

“8.11 An area of land on the western edge of Chepstow, between the town and villages of Pwllmeyric and Mathern, is designated as Green Belt in the LDP under Policy LC6. This designation would fulfil some of the purposes set out in PPW, particularly preventing coalescence, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and protecting the setting of Chepstow. There are however other policies in the LDP which serve this purpose. Primary amongst these is Policy LC1 which presumes against new built development in the open countryside. A limited number of uses which would be appropriate in a rural setting may be permitted as long as they would meet criteria governing their visual and environmental impact. The green wedge designation formerly applied also had the same functions as Green Belt whilst much of the land is also protected by its conservation area status.

8.12 The significant difference between Green Belt and green wedge is its permanence; Green Belt boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances and land within should

be protected beyond the LDP period. PPW also states that before designating land around an urban area as Green Belt the local planning authority must consider and, importantly, justify which would be the most appropriate means of protection.

8.13 Chepstow is tightly constrained by its location on the River Wye which demarcates the national boundary with England, is covered by various conservation designations (such as the SSSI and SAC) and is the basis for a C2 flood risk zone. Immediately to the north and north west of the town is the Wye Valley AONB. The demands for housing and employment development in and around Chepstow, which will be of fundamental importance to its vitality and viability, indicate that land beyond that allocated in the LDP will be needed, probably by the time of the next LDP review. The area to the west of Chepstow might be the least harmful location for such development in which case the Green Belt designation would be unduly constraining.

8.14 Furthermore, the designation does not appear to have been soundly based on a formal assessment of its contribution to urban form and the location of new development as required by PPW. That the area will have been retained as a green wedge beyond the end of the UDP period in which it was first designated is not an indication that permanence can be assured or is desirable. The Green Belt designation is therefore deleted by IMAC7. There is a need, however, for the land to be protected from development in the short term and IMAC8 restores the green wedge designation.”

- 1.25 The permanence of the greenbelt and its harm to the vitality and viability of our communities was recognised by the Inspector. These reasons are equally applicable to the far larger greenbelt now proposed affecting the whole of Severnside and beyond.
- 1.26 In this context, it is worth noting that, in relation to Policy 31, the draft NDF states that “Development plans must ensure long term strategic decisions maximise opportunities in areas that will benefit from improved accessibility and investment in public transport, including from the Metro.” The supporting text to Policy 28, which advocates the regional focus of growth on Newport, recognises the city’s established road and rail links with Cardiff, Bristol and London. This equally applies to parts of Severnside. It is therefore vital to the social sustainability of our communities that the proposed greenbelt be wholly re-thought and properly evidence-based, and that this Council seeks to maximise the benefits from future Metro phases.

Regional connectivity

- 1.27 As drafted, the NDF ignores links to SW England and Monmouthshire’s strategic location between the great western cities. The approach to regional connectivity is inconsistent between the sections on North Wales and on SE Wales. There is a specific policy (Policy 17) that states Wrexham and Deeside’s role within the North region and wider crossborder areas of Cheshire West, Chester and Liverpool City Region should be maintained and enhanced. It goes on to state in the policy that “the Welsh Government will work with cross border authorities to promote Wrexham and Deeside’s strategic role and ensure key investment decisions support Wrexham and Deeside and the wider region”. It is unclear why such an approach is not taken in the South: in fact, the draft NDF actively places obstacles in the path of maximising the economic connectivity between SE Wales and Bristol/SW England.
- 1.28 Intra-regional connectivity should also be shown between the South East Wales region and England and Mid Wales. The M4 connectivity is shown, but surprisingly (given the significant

public investment and importance to the Valleys), the Heads of the Valleys route is not shown. This passes through Monmouthshire to our primary sustainable settlement of Abergavenny and on to the Midlands and Herefordshire, and west towards Neath Port Talbot, which is identified as a regional growth area in the draft NDF. In addition, the mid Wales plan shows the A470 connectivity southwards to be important, but this is not reflected in the plan for SE Wales: the A470 link should be shown northwards from Merthyr Tydfil. The A449/A40 also provides a key regional route linking to the M50 and should be shown.

Renewable energy

- 1.29 The draft NDF proposes a traffic light policy approach. National Parks and AONBs are red, and large scale renewable energy will not be permitted in these areas. The draft NDF identifies a number of (evidence based) areas for strategic renewable energy, where the policy support for renewables will take priority. Within the remaining amber areas, large scale renewable energy will be supported subject to usual landscape etc policies. Monmouthshire is within amber and red zones (the latter being the AONB and Brecon Beacons National Park). The policy clarity is welcomed. The amber rating for the majority of our county need not obstruct the Council's commitment to renewable energy and to delivering a second solar farm, provided our landscape etc policies are worded and applied appropriately and the proposal is suitably located.
- 1.30 The draft NDF is silent on the potential for tidal lagoons, which is a significant missed opportunity.

Conformity

- 1.31 The Development Plan system is predicated upon an evidence base that demonstrates the viability and deliverability of its proposals. There is no such evidence to support the NDF outcomes or to demonstrate they are deliverable. The NDF is setting outcomes that SDPs and LDPs will need to conform to and prove through examination that they are deliverable, based on robust evidence. This could lead to conflict between the NDF and the evidence-based SDPs and LDPs that could seriously hamper development plan preparation and undermine the plan led system.

In conclusion:

- 1) The NDF is very light on any substance relating to the economic prosperity, investment or growth of the nation. This lack of positive ambition reflects poorly on the nation. On a regional basis, the NDF does not align with the ambition of the Cardiff Capital Region or the City Deal and does not back up the supporting text to Outcome 6;
- 2) The focus of growth on brownfield sites in Newport and the Valleys is not based upon any evidence of site availability or viability, in particular taking into account the success of Newport's current LDP in regenerating and redeveloping its large brownfield sites. Any focus of growth on these areas should not, and need not, be at the expense of the opportunities for other parts of the region to grow appropriately to meet their needs;
- 3) The ability to deliver anywhere near the scale of affordable housing sought is highly doubtful without unprecedented levels of public subsidy, in particular when development is focused on brownfield sites in Newport and the Valleys. While it is acknowledged that new delivery mechanisms are required to deliver more affordable housing, over and above the current focus on cross-subsidy by market housing developers, it must be recognised that the

main house-builders make a vital contribution to affordable housing delivery that should be supplemented by, not replaced by, new measures. This requires development in a range of market areas, including those more buoyant areas like Monmouthshire and the Vale of Glamorgan. This Council could work to the Minister's ambition of developing public land with 50% affordable housing, however most of the Council's land is located within the proposed greenbelt and it would therefore be sterilised for the long term;

4) Obstructions to sustainable growth in Monmouthshire fails to address this County's very real issues centred around our ageing demography, housing supply and affordability, and the social sustainability of our communities. Ultimately, this would thwart the Council's ability to achieve its core purpose of helping to build sustainable and resilient communities. The policy wording relating to the greenbelt should be re-written to invite the Strategic Development Plans to consider if there is evidence supporting the need for a greenbelt in the region;

5) Regional connectivity should be better reflected in the SE Wales section, with a similar policy to Policy 17 provided, and the key routes for regional connectivity should be referenced and shown, namely the A465 Heads of the Valleys road and the A449/A40 road and rail from Wales to the Midlands, and the A470 link from south to north Wales.

6) The renewable energy policies should refer to the opportunities for tidal lagoon power. The region has the second highest tidal range in the world, and tidal power represents a huge opportunity for carbon neutral energy production on a very large scale.

As currently drafted, Monmouthshire County Council cannot support the National Development Framework

Appendix 1: Indicative Green Belt Map

