



# Whitland Economic Recovery & Growth Plan

Prepared for Carmarthenshire County Council

June 2021



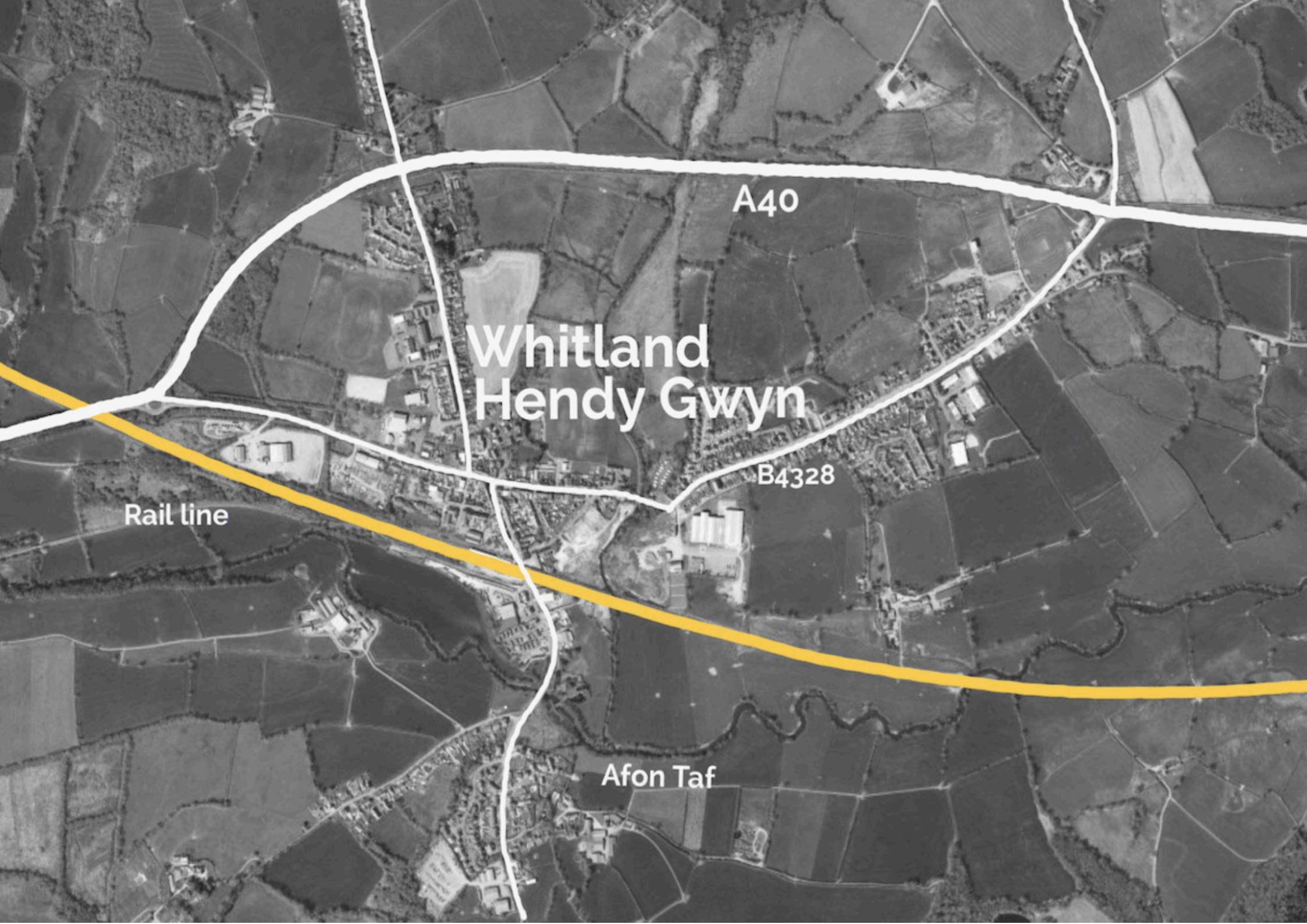
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Rail line

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# 1 Purpose

This Recovery and Growth Plan for Whitland is concerned with the immediate opportunities for sustainable economic recovery as well as the longer term prosperity and growth of the town and surrounding area over the next five years and beyond.

The economic impacts of Coronavirus are extraordinary and unprecedented for our generation. These impacts are mostly negative for the local economy, but there have also been some positives, with communities more engaged and focused on what really matters, and receptive to sustainable actions and supporting their local town and economy.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Carmarthenshire County Council had launched the Ten Towns initiative in support of the growth and resilience of rural towns across the County. The aim was to develop a long-term strategic vision for each town to support economic growth and to encourage more vibrant, economically sustainable centres. This initiative has been given a new emphasis, in light of the pandemic, to address immediate economic recovery as well as building for longer-term growth.





## 2 The bigger picture

### Carmarthenshire Economic Recovery

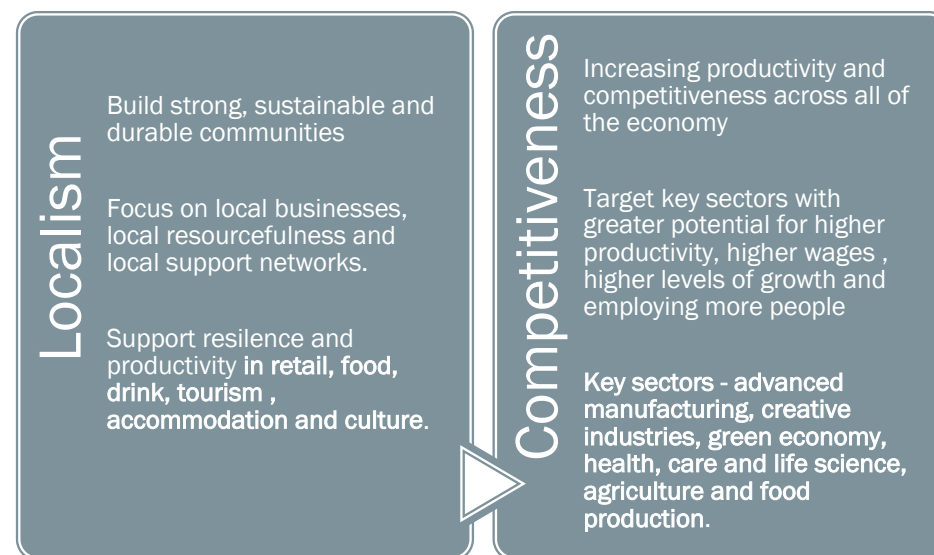
At the beginning of 2021, the economy of Carmarthenshire continues to be heavily influenced by Government interventions in support of jobs and business sectors and uncertainty exists as restrictions fluctuate with the pandemic and fluctuating lockdown measures.

There remains a high level of ambiguity around the pattern of the recovery, as well as the impact of Brexit. Recovery will be slow, and it may take many years for the economy of Carmarthenshire to recover to its previous level, let alone make up the lost ground of the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. Therefore, the immediate priority for Carmarthenshire's recovery is to protect jobs and safeguard businesses. There is also a continued focus on the longer-term challenges that constrain growth in Carmarthenshire including low productivity and wages, skills deficits, too few businesses 'scaling-up', and the need for investment in modern business infrastructure and premises.

There are two main pillars for the recovery of the Carmarthenshire economy, i.e. localism and local level action and growing the competitiveness of the whole economy. Actions in support of the recovery are focussing on overarching themes - Business, People and Place with four cross-cutting priority ambitions:

- **Ultra-reliable digital connectivity** and a digital culture – underpinning recovery and growth across the whole economy
- **Skills** – retrain, re-skill, up-skill and ensuring that people have the right skills to do the jobs created.
- **Green economy** – low carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy and sustainable homes.
- **Fair and equal economy** and support for the Welsh language and culture

**Figure 1 Strategic influences**



## Strategic context

The context for the plan includes wider social, economic and environmental issues facing rural Carmarthenshire including technology, climate emergency and decarbonisation, the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and leaving the European Union (Brexit).

The strategic context also includes priorities of Carmarthenshire CC, the Swansea Bay City Region and the Welsh Government, along with the growing influence of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and local Well-being Plans.

A key aim of the Act calls on public bodies to be more agile to ensure they are able to respond to ever-changing economic circumstances and to maximise new opportunities for growth. Sustainable development is applied throughout, as well as new ways of working ensuring that local authorities take account of the long term, prevent problems occurring or getting worse, take an integrated and collaborative approach and involving people.

The plan is also focused on securing a sustainable and prosperous future for the town that enables the Welsh language to thrive. through enabling entrepreneurship and small business growth in Welsh speaking regions.

Figure 2 Strategic influences



### 3 Whitland today

Whitland is a 'working town' and for its size, it supports a large number of businesses and several employment areas. This includes a small traditional town centre and the livestock market and auctions. The area is in a good location on the road network location halfway between Carmarthen and Haverfordwest on the A40 (the Trans European Network), A477 and the London – Fishguard railway route.

In recent years there has been a modest amount of housing and employment growth with scope for more. However, because of the town's environmental protection and flood risk constraints means the town has limited opportunities to physically grow.

Outside of the town, there exists a broad range of rural enterprises including agricultural, land-based industries, food and drink and tourism. There are many microbusinesses, including 'lifestyle', visitor-related and creative industries combining both living and working in rural areas. There is also an important foundational side of the economy with many people employed in providing essential day to day local services, skilled trades, and professions such as driving instructors, child and home care etc.

As well as providing the secondary school and railway connections for the for nearby St Clears and Laugharne, Whitland's key role is in providing the social, employment, education and localised retail

for the outlying villages across the Llanboidy Ward in Carmarthenshire and Lampeter Velfrey Ward in Pembrokeshire.

Overall, Whitland is a growing town that has experienced a small amount of population and housing growth in recent years. The towns economic growth is also reflected in the higher than average number of people living in the area of working age that are economically active and in fulltime employment.

**Figure 3 Location context**





## Socio-economic picture

The population of Whitland is 6,100 and this includes the 2,370 living in the built-up area of the town. The proportion of people who spoke Welsh (42%) was below the average for rural Carmarthenshire (50%), this was more pronounced in the wider Whitland Hinterland (39%).

In comparison with rural Carmarthenshire, within the last ten years, the Whitland area had experienced:

- population growth
- a growing older-aged population
- an increase in the working-age population.
- above-average economic activity and full-time employment
- a relatively successful although lower-skilled local economy.
- higher than average levels of home working and self-employment reflecting agricultural employment, sole-traders and 'lifestyle' and freelance workers.
- a small amount of new housing development that has helped keep house prices close to the average
- lack of affordable homes
- declining use of the Welsh language.

It should also be noted that despite the general appearance of relative prosperity there are still those who are dependent on a part-time, low skilled and low wage income with pockets of local deprivation.

**Figure 4 Recent socio-economic trends**

|                      | Population    | Working-age  | Gross household income | Median House prices | Economically active | Full-time employment |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Rural County</b>  | Increase 1.8% | Decline 3%   | £28,622                | £135k               | 66%                 | 33%                  |
| <b>Whitland area</b> | Increase 2.4% | Increased 2% | £28,976                | £133k-£154k         | 70%                 | 36%                  |

|                      | Work from home | Self-employed | Largest occupation | No skills | Higher qualifications | Employed agriculture |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Rural County</b>  | 7%             | 14%           | Skilled trades 19% | 25%       | 30%                   | 6%                   |
| <b>Whitland area</b> | 11%            | 20%           | Skilled trades 24% | 27        | 27                    | 11%                  |

**Sources: ONS Census & NOMIS – Baseline study**

## Businesses & employment

Whitland has a diverse economic base with over 220 business across a diverse range including factory, storage, workshops and offices. Most businesses are either micro and small (less than 50 employees) and across sectors that range from medical, engineering, to agriculture-related industries.

Whitland Engineering is a good example of a grounded local business specialising in food industry engineering and project management with over 50 staff working in design and fabrication.

The largest local business is Magstim, an international business headquartered in Whitland manufacturing advanced medical machinery for export and employing some 100 staff.

The largest employment sectors in Whitland:

- **15% wholesale and retail trade**
- **13% human health and social work**
- **11% agriculture**

Whitland Auctions is also key to the economic, employment and community life of the town and supports other businesses such as

farm machinery dealers, feed merchants etc (e.g. Riverlea and David Harries)

There are several employment sites around Whitland including the purpose-built Whitland Industrial Estate, the livestock market and former Whitland Creamery. Outside of the town, there are also sites including Riverlea at nearby Trevaughan.

The key issues and opportunities for sites and premises include:

- high levels of occupancy and demand for small and medium-sized space
- a limited supply of available starter/small units
- existing stock is mostly old/secondary quality and in need of investment to bring it up to a modern standard.
- availability of large distribution and storage premises at the former Whitland Creamery site.
- available land for future employment development

## Town centre

The centre is mostly independent, with a diverse range of key shops and essential services, including the main convenience store (Co-op), newsagent, farm shop and butchers. Comparison (non-food) is equally good with hardware, furniture, gift/craft, baby/toddler and knitting offer. Also, the town centre supports a variety of café, takeaway and public houses together with a range of local services including doctors, dentist, a chemist/pharmacy, hairdressers, laundrette and post office. The centre has:

- a growing number of retail businesses
- a falling vacancy rate of 6.5%
- a small amount of speciality retail
- free town centre Wi-Fi
- +50% of visitors typically stay more than 20 minutes

Several professional services operate from offices in the centre, including solicitors, accountants and architects which add to the vibrancy. However, all the banks have closed with the reliance on ATM's and the Post Office and the Nat West mobile bank.

There is a limited evening economy which is characterised by traditional pub and takeaways. There are also no major leisure and cultural venues.

Before COVID-19, the high occupancy levels and general vibrancy of the centre, together with commuters parking near to the station, meant that car parking was often difficult.





## Visitor economy

Whitland is not an established visitor destination with the same convincing reason to visit as nearby and better-known Narberth, Pendine and Laugharne.

However, the visitor attractions include the seasonal volunteer-run Hywel Dda Centre - historical exhibition and gardens concerning the first Welsh code of law described as one of the wonders of Welsh history. The nearby Whitland Abbey is a low-key ruin but also the reputed site of Hywel Dda.

Outside of the town, it is notable that Whitland is at the centre of a small cluster of regional wine markers with two vineyards (Jabajak Vineyard and Velfrey Vineyard) nearby and a third at Hebron Vineyard near Llanglydwen.

Cycling tourism is also a growing aspect of Carmarthenshire's visitor offer and Whitland benefits as the start and finish of the circular road route connecting with Laugharne and St Clears. However, there are only a few 'Cyclist Welcome' place to stay in the area, partly reflecting the relatively small accommodation base is mostly made up of pubs with rooms and farm-style B&Bs

Annual events - Whitland Week and the Christmas Lights are important but mostly local visitor attractions.



## Brand and marketing

We have found that the town doesn't have a clear, up to date, online place that visitors can go to see what the town has on offer from either tourism or local business offering perspective, and instead is reliant on a range of different sites with different messaging or outdated Tripadvisor listings which do not describe the vibrancy of the businesses, the people and the local points of interest that are on offer. Aside from Wikipedia and the Town Councils site, which describes the history, there is a clear lack of a site that describes the town's current offering(s) to use as a guide for their visit.

## Transport and movement

Accessibility by road and rail is good with the A477 and A40 (the Trans European Network) linking with the Republic of Ireland. The London – Fishguard railway route is a major asset for employment, leisure and visitors to the area and provides hourly services.

However, the town centre experiences issues with car parking areas often being full and is perceived locally as a restriction on the town centres growth. There are also concerns that parking near to the train station and at St Mary's Street are dependent on agreements with private landowners that may not be guaranteed over the longer term.



Travel to work patterns provides a picture of commuter behaviour and understanding of the number of people travelling from the study area to a place of work (shown red) or from another place into the study area for work (shown blue). It shows how the Whitland area is reliant on Carmarthen and other major towns for employment but also how the town also provides employment residents of the wider area.

- The average distance travelled to work was above average (24.3km compared to 22.3km).

- In the wider Whitland hinterland there was an above-average proportion of people working from home 10.9% compared to 6.8%).

## Broadband and digital connectivity

The central town area appears to have good digital connectivity, although it is clear that there are larger areas in the wider countryside and villages with connection difficulties. There are 705 (50%) out of a total of 1,404 premises in the Whitland postcode area without non-superfast broadband. An advantage for visitors to Whitland is free Wi-Fi managed by the Town Council is provided and located in the Town Centre covering Livestock Mart, Car Parks, Train Station and Parc Dr Owen.

## Planning, Development & Environment

Due to significant areas of flood risk, the areas of potential development within the town are limited. This curtails the potential to develop outside of designated sites and higher ground.

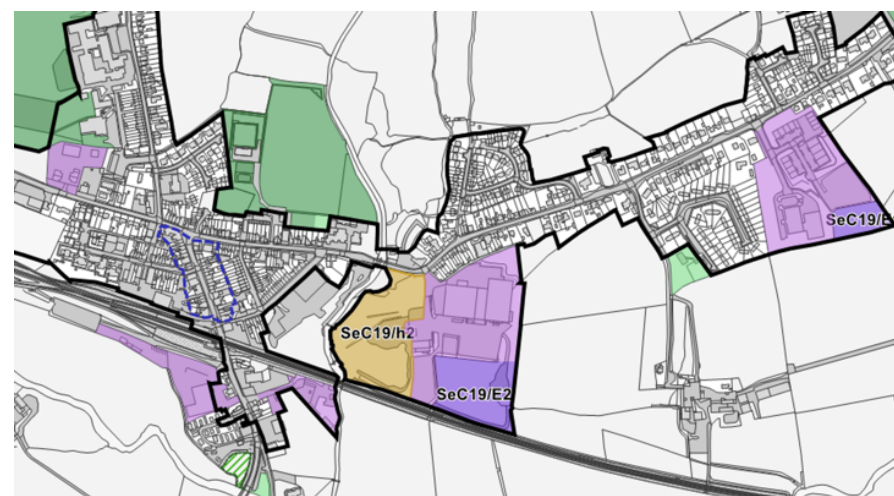
In terms of future growth and development, the Revised Local Development Plan considers Whitland a town for future modest growth given its strategic and accessible location on the A40. This will see a reduced opportunity for the development of allocated residential development and employment in the future. The allocations include:

- 56 new homes including 11 affordable
- 1.97ha for new employment development

As well as the need for more homes, overall, the requirement is for smaller, less expensive housing, to address the imbalance between higher house prices and limited supply of appropriate homes in rural areas, particularly for one-person and couples.

Proposals for a new General Hospital is arguably a potential 'game-changing' opportunity for Whitland. Hywel Dda Health Board has consulted on plans for a new General Hospital on a site in the area between Narberth and St Clears. The Health Board site selection process includes Whitland. Regardless of location, the Hospital holds substantial potentially transformational growth of local business in the Whitland area. The timetable for a decision, construction and opening are within the timeframe of this plan.

Figure 5 LDP Extract





## 4 Key Issues



Not enough convenient & available town centre parking. The potential risk of losing existing parking areas



Investment in new premises & improvement of existing workshops & employment units



More responsive and supportive planning system to encourage investment and regeneration



Concern about the closure of all high street banks



Improve physical & economic connections between the Mart site & town centre.



Prepare to take full advantage of opportunities from the new general hospital near to Whitland



Improve active travel routes between employment areas and with the surrounding villages



Recovery & growth plans require new underpinning funding & resources



Some issues need quick actions to address recovery & growth



Need coordinated & effective tourism signage on the A40



Need additional & high-profile annual events



Need more choice of visitor accommodation



Address the poorer quality of broadband in rural areas. Make more of the town centre free wi-fi



New affordable homes needed to support young people/families & for the town to grow

## 5 Priority actions

Whitland is a traditional market town and has retained many of the functions for living and working in rural places. The aim of the recovery and growth plan is to secure sustainable economic growth which is focussed on retaining and attracting working-age population and maintaining and improving access to services.

### Strategic Priorities

- A SMART Town with reliable connectivity and data-driven growth, marketing and visitor strategies
- Support and grow the employment base particularly small and grounded local firms
- redevelop brownfield site opportunities
- provide parking infrastructure that enable the town centre to continue to thrive
- create walking and cycling links that encourages visitors to access the town
- intercept a greater number of visitors travelling along the A40

Actions in support of the recovery and growth address the aforementioned three overarching themes - **Business, People and Place** with four cross-cutting priorities for creating ultra-reliable digital connectivity, improving skills to do the jobs created, low carbon and green economy and a fair and equal economy that supports the Welsh language and culture.

The priority actions for recovery and growth are:

### 1 – COVID-19 Recovery

The Covid-19 pandemic is the biggest public health and economic crisis in generations. It has had a dramatic effect on communities, the economy and how we live and work. It has reminded us that the strength of the places where we live, and work can at times be fragile.

The quality and accessibility of the town and countryside were hugely important for people's health and their well-being during the periods of lockdown. There has been a collective appreciation of the value of green spaces, walking and cycling routes and the local shops and amenities.

Among the many important challenges in the recovery period are the urgent actions to safeguard local business and employers and

to determine which changes in behaviour that were introduced in response to the pandemic are emerging as permanent features of life and work. These have implications for the town because people are using places differently, travelling less and spending more time working from home. The recovery and growth plan must respond to these changes and contribute to a sustainable recovery, shaping the town around a vision for more economically resilient places.

The impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt for some time and the following actions can be taken in support of businesses and the town:

There is an identified need to safeguard and create jobs particularly in some of the hardest hit key sectors including retail, leisure and hospitality, and to support businesses that are experiencing skills challenges as a result of the pandemic e.g. with digital and IT skills, marketing and diversification including developing new markets tendering where appropriate (linked to local procurement opportunities), efficiency measures etc.

## 2 - Supporting business growth

Where there is a lack of employment infrastructure to accommodate current or future needs, the resilience and sustainability of an area may be undermined, possibly contributing

to decline. The lack of employment opportunities is also a key reason behind rural depopulation, particularly in the younger workforce. And supporting and encouraging the growth and expansion of locally grounded firms, particularly in more specialised industries, is important to create long term higher paid employment, to retain workers, broaden the skills base and help sustain communities.

The foundational economy is the backbone of the rural economy and represents the parts of the economy that supports our everyday needs (social care, retail, tourism, food, drink, construction, energy etc). Similarly, local food and drink processing of agricultural and horticultural products is a growing industry. All of these types of businesses require similar business support and employment infrastructure such as good quality and affordable workspace with the best possible digital connectivity.

### **A) Investment in business premises to support new start-ups, business growth and expansion.**

There is a lack of available and suitable workspace to support the growth of micro and small businesses. However, there are a number of opportunities to create new business space either through new development sites, using surplus publicly owned buildings, acquiring vacant buildings, or establishing new shared workspaces.



In rural areas where large scale developer interest is largely absent, the public sector also has an important role to play working with a range of smaller local developers and landowners to address the hurdles to development. These include addressing the viability gap between the cost of building and modernising new employment spaces and the rental income; and an important economic development role in guiding small developers through the planning process.

Actions include:

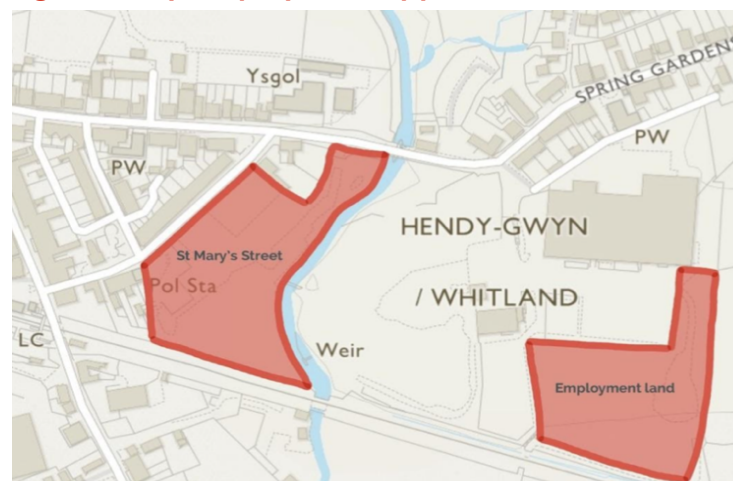
- Former Creamery Site – Whitland Green Park - Privately owned, the area provides available warehouse and distribution space and options for the development of new smaller-scale business units.
- Promoting storage and distribution business opportunities – taking advantage of Whitland's strategic position close to the A40 and the anticipated growth in more localised and shorter supply chains.
- Supporting the development of modern small workspace on land allocated for new employment
- Land at St Mary's Street & Whitland Green Park – A derelict brownfield site located next to the town centre and nearby train station in need of renewal and positive future use. The site is located in the flood zone and suitable for a limited range of uses.

- Long term redevelopment masterplan - subject to the study of the flood risk and planning approval, a range of potential mixed-uses exist include extended the public parking, commercial, leisure, retail and small scale workspaces.
- Town centre business frontage improvements

### **B) Work hubs and Shared workspaces**

Changes to working practices and the growing interest and ability to work closer to home and remotely from main offices may result in a higher demand to live in rural areas and opportunities to retain the working-age population. Actions that help provide flexible workspaces closer to home include:

### **Figure 6 Key employment opportunities**



- Feasibility study – a local study to investigate the specific level of demand and requirements from the local town and rural population.
- Investigate potential for a new public sector work hub created in rural towns to accommodate agile working across the county.

### **C) Re-use of vacant and underutilised buildings.**

These provide opportunities for a range of enterprise and physical regeneration actions.

- Town centre property offers opportunities for 'pop-up' and trial-testing new customer-facing business ideas particularly for young people to become actively involved in the community and to develop entrepreneurial skills.
- New business premises – either re-using surplus public sector buildings or selectively acquiring key vacant buildings that have made a broader contribution to the physical and economic regeneration of the town.

There are few examples of suitable vacant buildings located in Whitland town, although the situation may change with the present economic situation and ongoing review of publicly owned buildings.

### **D) Supporting business growth within grounded firms.**

The growth of the local economy is linked with the success of the towns larger employers and in particular, locally grounded firms that have decision making rooted firmly in the community. There is a strong emphasis on increasing the number of grounded firms, as well as establishing a firmer base of medium-sized businesses (c.50 employees) which are capable of selling outside Wales.

**Medium Size Businesses-** There are a number of medium-size and grounded firms based in Whitland. The measure to support their growth include:

- Engaging with leading employers to identify future investment opportunities and area of future support
- Help to support the up-skilling of the existing workforce and to train and re-skill future employees
- Investigate opportunities for the local economy from within their respective supply chains.

**Micro-businesses** - Identify and target support for the next phase of growth amongst small micro-enterprises, often family-owned firms and self-employed people within the community.

### **E) Promoting the use of Welsh in business.**

Encouraging Welsh speaking and learning into a business can help to connect them to a wider range of people and opportunities as well as Welsh culture and heritage. Support is available through Helo Blod, which includes an officer covering West Carmarthenshire, working with Menter Iaith to enable businesses and organisations to introduce small amounts of Welsh into their business through translation and text checking service.

## **3 - SMART digital town and countryside**

Digital technology has played a significant role in enabling businesses and communities to adapt during the COVID 19 pandemic. Carmarthenshire CC is currently working with both UK and Welsh Government to support businesses, employees and communities to take advantage of all the benefits associated with faster and more reliable internet connections and to develop wi-fi digital applications to promote rural market towns e.g 'push notifications' to members of the public visiting towns.

Actions include:

- Ensuring gigabit-capable connectivity is available to the whole community and ensuring all rural residents and small businesses with less than 100mbps are able to benefit from government broadband upgrade initiatives e.g. Broadband Upgrade Fund. This involves aggregating the demand and uses local needs information to broker improvements with telecom providers.
- The SMART town combines the deployment of a Town Wi-Fi solution with the regular analysis of the data collected so that it is shared with businesses to support customer and marketing insights. Such analytics include visitor trends such as: footfall; dwell time; busiest days of week etc; measure success of event to justify future investment; can be used to attract new business.

- The Internet of Things and LoRaWAN technology is a new innovation network that supports business and community innovation. The technology is new and forms part of developing the right combination of connectivity infrastructure, awareness, skills and support to enable businesses and residents to thrive and take full advantage of the digital revolution.
- Digital training - digital technology is only as good as the skills and confidence that exist to use it. Local training will be essential in order to upskill, share information and encourage the use of technology across the market town.

This is an opportunity to create a better-integrated transport and movement area for public transport, walking and cycling including electric car and cycle charging points. A strategy is recommended, aligned with proposals for a Swansea Bay Metro, to ensure all parking and movement opportunities in the area are effectively planned.

- **Longer-term** - St Marys Street – car parking considered to form part of the site's masterplan and redevelopment.

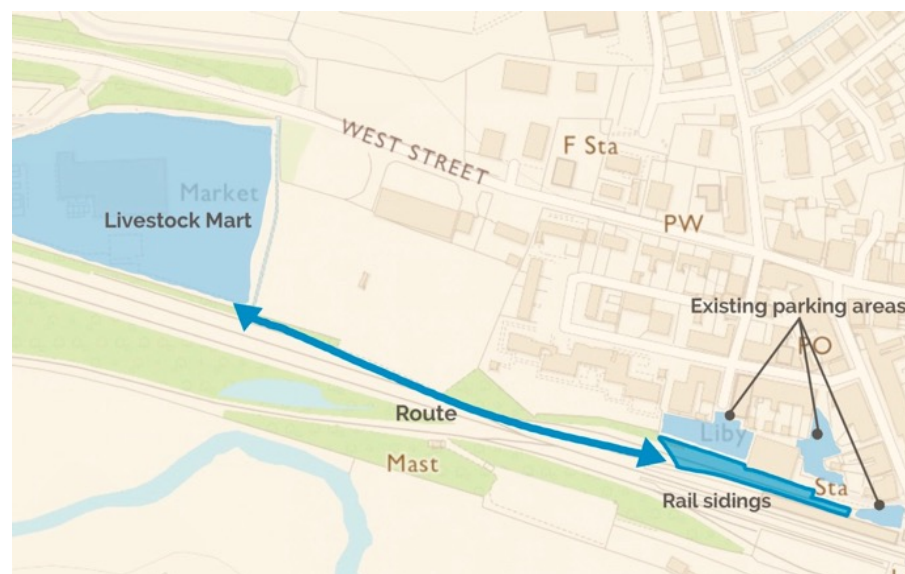
## 4 - Town centre car parking

There are concerns about the insufficient amount of public parking and the impact this is having on the convenience and growth of the town centre.

Opportunities for new parking include:

- **Short term** - a temporary extension of St Mary's Street car park
- **Medium-term** - Old Sidings Train Station - ideas are progressing for an initiative for a new car park located on land at the former railway sidings with Network Rail.

**Figure 7 Parking, walking and cycling links**





## 5 - Walking and cycling links

Prioritising walking and cycling and supporting the implementation of the Active Travel Act will help create a more comprehensive network of routes that connect places that people need to get to for everyday journeys and for travelling to work.

### A) Active travel link between Whitland Auctions and the Town Centre

- Users of the market are discouraged from making linked trips to the town centre due to the insufficient parking for larger vehicles and unappealing pedestrian links. A new walking and cycling route between the livestock market and proposed Old Sidings parking area will encourage more linked trips, and enhance the economic use of the mart site with potential for e.g. major outdoor event, public-facing markets etc. With improved links the site also provides the town centre overflow parking options.

### B) The Cardi Bach Trail

- The trail starts in Cardigan following a section of disused railway line affectionately known as the Cardi Bach. The route is incomplete and there are aspirations to open up the route from Cardigan all the way to Whitland. A feasibility study has started to investigate options to link the strategic rural cycleway and leisure route to the town centre. The route potentially strengthens cycle tourism and rural travel links with villages such as

Llanfalteg and attractions such as Login Railway Station House.

## 6 - Visitor economy

Sustainable forms of tourism including opportunities for active, green and cultural tourism should be supported.

### A) Intercept visitors along the A40

The opportunity exists to intercept a greater number of tourists passing along the A40 and encourage them to visit and overnight in the Whitland area.

- Coordinated signage strategy along the A40 to intercept visitors that promote the areas offer and local businesses
- scope for an app alert for people transiting along the A40, encouraging them to deviate from their usual route to lesser-known areas.

### B) Whitland Abbey & Hywel Dda Centre

Both attractions are of national cultural importance providing combined outdoor heritage and indoor visitor experience. The opportunity exists to promote of a more compelling reason to visit including improved information and interpretation of Whitland Abbey. Road signage improvements and investigate inclusion and promotion via the Celtic Routes (Ireland and Wales) and the Landsker Borderlands Trail. Ideas for enhancing the Hywel Dda

Centre with a café operated by a local business have also been suggested.

### **C) Vineyard Tourism and Trail**

The area supports a small winemaking cluster with three vineyards nearby. The businesses have reported their desire for support to develop this green and cultural tourism as part of a vineyard trail or cluster. Synergy exists with the local heritage with the recent launch of Whitland Abby wine by the Velfry Vineyard.

### **D) Cycle Tourism**

With the advantage of the train station, nearby national cycle network and local cycling routes. The opportunity exists to support businesses and projects that enhance Whitland credentials as a cycling destination on the west Carmarthenshire cycling route:

- encourage more accommodation providers to obtain 'Cyclist Welcome' place to stay accreditation.
- Support the Cardi Bach walking and cycling trail which has the potential to link Whitland to a long-distance leisure trail.
- Enhance cycling storage and parking facilities in the town centre particularly near the train station and explore opportunities for e-charging

### **E) Events**

The town would benefit from a number of additional events of more than local appeal and to attract visitors. Existing events could be supported e.g. the South Wales Rugby Festival originally planned for 2021 in association with the Scarlets.



## 7 - Promoting Whitland

As the economy recovers from the pandemic and positive change occurs, Whitland will need to project an attractive image of the town and the businesses to the local community and visitors.

The actions include:

- Destination marketing initiative to identify the core messages and the key themes, stories and reasons to visit including the towns historic Welsh cultural ties, specialist businesses, local producer and activities. Whitland's past and heritage are the strongest elements for the promotion of the area from its medieval past (Whitland Abbey, Hywel Dda) to the more recent history in Victorian times (mills, forges, buildings), its importance as a vital part in the railways development, agricultural and dairy importance and even in Rugby history, Whitland has many layers that can be brought together to create an overall package
- In addition to a big campaign that shouts loud from one central source about the town and surrounding area, the proposal is to also reach the town's customer and visitors through the local businesses themselves. This would be achieved by harnessing the collective communication power of the individual business and their direct interaction with existing audiences and

customers using town level core messaging and the social media and communication skills that should be developed to empower each business. A dynamic approach to marketing would need to fully exploit the availability of SMART town technology.

## 8 – Progressive Procurement.

The public sector in Carmarthenshire spends hundreds of millions per annum on goods, works and services, providing businesses of all sectors and sizes with a range of commercial opportunities. It is recognised that more can be done to purchase as much of this as possible from within the County. Opportunity

- Employment and business opportunities resulting from the development of the new General Hospital will be significant for the area. It will be important to work with the Hywel Dda Health Board to identify local employment and supply chain opportunities during the construction stage. including engineering, construction, worker accommodation, food and hospitality opportunities.
- The County Council and wider public sector recognise the significance of their spending power and look to purchase as much of this as possible from within the

County. Lower value contracts are attractiveness to a small and new business in particular. Businesses should be encouraged to access advice and guidance on these procurement opportunities.

## 9 - Community energy schemes

Local resilience is a key aim of the Ten Towns initiative and thus a core element is to support the development of community energy plans for the respective towns which will ultimately provide a source of income for businesses as well as help address rural poverty. Opportunity:

- Ynni Sir Gâr (Carmarthenshire Energy) would support business and other organisations to host solar Photovoltaic (PV). The host sites will benefit from a reduction in their energy bill, as electricity used whilst the panels are generating will be available at a reduced cost.



## 10 - Circular Economy

A circular economy is where waste is avoided and the things we use are kept in use for as long as possible. And supporting local investment in circular businesses and enterprises; that is, enterprises which keep things in use longer, through re-use, repair, remanufacture and refurbishment will help regenerate the community by adding jobs and developing skills locally. By doing this locally, the aim is not only to keep money in circulation within the county, but vitally also reduce the impact that the community has on the environment.

- The aim is to support business owner, entrepreneur and volunteer with ideas to help develop the circular economy in the town and Carmarthenshire

## 11 - Affordable homes

Thriving, resilient and sustainable rural towns require a mix of new housing as well as employment opportunities if retaining and attracting a working-age population is to be achieved. The dynamics of the rural housing market includes several factors, not only house price, but other issues such as relative affordability, inward migration, travel-to-work patterns, population projections and new dwelling completions rates etc. Overall, there is the need for smaller, less expensive homes for young and newly forming

households - whether at market price, intermediate or affordable rent.

Rural areas like Whitland have experienced relatively low levels of developer interest in recent years. This lack of delivery has resulted in an overall reduction in the number of planned homes. Through a series of actions, the opportunity exists for the public sector, landowners and smaller local developers to work together to bring forward the planned new growth in accordance with the Local Development Plan and building a sustainable economy.

- De-risking the development process – moving away from the traditional 'shop window' of merely allocating land for housing and providing evidence of housing need, market demand and understanding of the cost and other requirements necessary to obtain planning permission.
- Matching small local developers with landowners of development sites
- Through supporting the local developers there are benefits for the local supply chain including local sourcing for timber, other building materials, use of local skilled trades, training and local employment.

## 6 Delivery Plan

The delivery plan provides an indication of timescales, suggested delivery partners and next steps. In each instance a detailed review of the project scope would be required and or more detailed design work to provide costings.

The plan includes three stages, short, medium and long term with a suggested level of priority afforded based on stakeholder engagement and the need to complete certain tasks such as data collection to enable development of key projects.

- Short term – immediate and next 12 months
- Medium term – 2 or 3 years
- Long term – 5 years and beyond

It is recommended that a series of early, 'quick win' projects are identified and initiated in order to demonstrate action and gain business and community buy in. These will typically be projects that can be funded from existing revenue streams or of low capital outlay. Where more complex but high priority projects are identified, early development of outline business case and design development should be prioritised.

Funding and resource streams often vary from year to year and those available at the time of preparing this plan are set out in the following tables. Following the UK's departure from the EU there will be significant changes to the funding landscape existing programmes that are underpinning existing activity such as the

European Regional Development Fund (LEADER) will eventually be replaced at a UK level and directed through Welsh and local government. At the time of writing there is no certainty as to how this will be done. In light of this, the plan will need to be responsive over the coming 12-24 months and aligned to emerging sources of finance.

**Table 1 – Action Plan**

| ACTION  | TIMEFRAME             | KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER   | POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES   | NEXT STEPS  |
|---|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>1 - COVID-19 RECOVERY</b>  | Short term            | Carmarthenshire CC, Business Wales, and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP)  | CCC Business Recovery and Support Fund for businesses.<br><br>LEADER Seed Funding   | Carmarthenshire CC will be coordinating with partner agencies support for businesses recovering from the impacts of the pandemic.   |
| <b>2 - SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Business premises</b></li> <li>• <b>Work hubs/shared workspace</b></li> <li>• <b>Re-use buildings</b></li> <li>• <b>Supporting business growth</b></li> <li>• <b>Support Welsh language business</b></li> </ul> | Short and medium      | Carmarthenshire CC, business and property owners, Business Wales, and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP)<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Helo Blod | LEADER Seed Funding<br><br>Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds & Commercial Property Development Funds<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Helo Blod | Initiate dialogue with land and property owners and undertake site feasibility and masterplanning studies.<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Working with key local employers to identify growth requirements<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>Continue existing programmes targeting Whitland |
| <b>3 - SMART DIGITAL TOWNS AND COUNTRYSIDE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Broadband upgrade</b></li> <li>• <b>Wifi town</b></li> <li>• <b>IoT/LoRaWAN &amp; Digital training</b></li> </ul>  | Short and medium term | Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council and Business groups   | LEADER Seed Funding<br><br>Wi-fi Towns fund and resources<br><br>IoT/LoRaWAN deployment and training<br><br>Broadband Upgrade Fund                          | Aggregate demand for broadband upgrade.<br><br>Wi-fi towns support and training for local delivery partner<br><br>Identify business interest in IoT/LoRaWAN   |

| ACTION   | TIMEFRAME                   | KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER  | POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES  | NEXT STEPS   |
|--|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>4 - TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>St Mary's Street</b></li> <li>• <b>Old Sidings</b></li> </ul>   | Short, Medium and Long term | Landowners including Whitland Green Park and Network Rail, Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council | Ten Towns Capital Fund<br><br>LEADER Seed Funding or future cycling infrastructure funds   | Continue discussion with landowners to bring forward immediate solution in St Marys Street and develop longer term proposals for Old Sidings etc   |
| <b>5 - CYCLING &amp; WALKING LINKS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Whitland Auctions and Town Centre link</b></li> <li>• <b>The Cardi Bach Trail</b></li> </ul>  | Medium and Long term        | Network Rail, Whitland Auctions,<br><br>Carmarthenshire CC<br>Sustrans                      | Ten Towns Capital Fund<br><br>LEADER Seed Funding or future cycling infrastructure funds   | Feasibility study of the link with Whitland Auctions (combined with parking proposals)<br><br>Cardi Bach feasibility study and recommendations   |
| <b>6 – VISITOR ECONOMY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>A40 Visitor interception</b></li> <li>• <b>Heritage Whitland Abbey and Hywel Dda</b></li> <li>• <b>Vineyard Tourism &amp; Trail</b></li> <li>• <b>Cycle tourism</b></li> <li>• <b>Events</b></li> </ul> | Short and Medium Term       | Discover Carmarthenshire / Town Council, Hywel Dda Centre, Tourism and Vineyard businesses  | LEADER Seed Funding<br><br>Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds & Commercial Property Development Funds<br><br>Digital SMART Town Resources | Develop signage and digital visitor interception proposal.<br><br>Explore feasibility of developing heritage offer with Town Council and Hywel Dda Centre.<br><br>Develop vineyard/food and drink offer with local businesses together with cycling and events with Discover Carmarthenshire and community organisations |
| <b>7 – PROMOTING WHITLAND</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Destination marketing</b></li> <li>• <b>Business digital marketing</b></li> </ul>  | Short and medium term       | Discover Carmarthenshire / Town Council, Business organisations and businesses              | LEADER Seed Funding  | Coordination with Discover Carmarthenshire<br>Link with SMART town & Wi-fi initiatives   |



| ACTION   | TIMEFRAME                   | KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER             | POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES   | NEXT STEPS   |
|--|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>8 – PROGRESSIVE PROCUREMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>New General Hospital</b></li> <li>• <b>Low Value Contracts</b></li> </ul> | Short, Medium and Long Term | Hywel Dda Health Board<br>Carmarthenshire CC | Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds<br>Carmarthenshire CC Progressive Procurement initiatives | Actions in response to the recommendations following the advancing progressive procurement study   |
| <b>9 – COMMUNITY ENERGY SCHEMES</b>  | Short term                  | Business and Ynni Sir Gar                    | LEADER/ Ynni Sir Gâr  | Ynni Sir Gâr have LEADER funding until March 2022 for scoping community renewable energy projects and they are looking for business and other organisations to take this forward with. |
| <b>10 -CIRCULAR ECONOMY</b>  | Short and Medium Term       | Businesses and Carmarthenshire CC            | LEADER Seed Funding and Circular economy initiative   | Circular Economy feasibility study recommendations   |
| <b>11 – AFFORDABLE HOMES</b>   | Short, Medium and Long term | Carmarthenshire CC/developers                | Developer contributions and Carmarthenshire CC and Cartrefi Croeso                                | Secure new affordable homes via the review of the LDP policy and direct delivery via developers and Cartrefi Croeso and housing associations   |

**Table 2: Funding & Resources**

#### MARKET TOWNS OFFICER SUPPORT

Funding has been secured via the RDP Leader programme to recruit 2 x Market Town Officers who will work with the 10 Towns to take forward actions identified within the economic growth plans. These posts will be the key link between the towns and the various directorates across the Authority.

#### LEADER SEED FUNDING

£10k revenue to assist the towns to support and develop recommendations emerging from the growths plan. Examples of activities eligible for support (*not exhaustive*) might include premises costs, tourism and events, training, marketing, specialist advice and COVID-19 recovery measures.

#### DIGITAL/SMART TOWNS

A range of initiatives to support businesses and communities to obtain faster and more reliable connectivity and application of digital SMART towns.

- Wi-fi towns - funding to secure free wi-fi for pilot towns and roll out to all Ten Towns for period of 2 years. The aim is to collect data that provides visitor trends such as: footfall; dwell time; busiest days of week etc; measure success of event to justify future investment; can be used to attract new business. Officer time is also available to work with the towns to analyse the data and to ensure that local businesses receive this information and to develop regular newsletter providing information on the towns; local business offers, events etc
- Internet of Things – initiatives to explore and develop the use of IOT and LoRaWAN technology as a way of supporting the Ten Towns. Funding secured to purchase IOT gateways. Further funding ringfenced for the purchase of sensors and deployment once ideas have been identified.
- Digital training - To facilitate a series of virtual training events in order to upskill, share information and encourage the use of technology across market towns.
- Digital Connectivity - The Authority is currently working with both UK and Welsh Government to promote the Broadband Upgrade Fund to help businesses,

employees and communities take advantage of all the benefits associated with faster and more reliable internet connections.

#### CARMARTHENSHIRE CC BUSINESS RECOVERY & SUPPORT

Subject to formal approval it is anticipated that the County Council led business recovery and support funding streams will be made available in 2021

- Recovery Fund to safeguard/create sustainable jobs within target growth sectors
- Revenue Support Fund to invest in skills, marketing and diversification to safeguard and grow jobs.
- Carmarthenshire Rural Enterprise Fund - development of new and existing business premises
- Transformational Commercial Property Development Fund - to provide financial assistance for the construction of buildings for industrial and commercial use.
- Business Start Up Fund - capital support for the creation of new businesses resulting directly in the creation of jobs
- Business Growth Fund - support towards capital expenditure projects and specialist revenue expenditure, where new jobs are created

#### TEN TOWNS CAPITAL FUNDING

Carmarthenshire CC are currently considering a new capital fund to assist with delivery of initiatives and future funding bids for projects identified in the Growth Plans.

#### LOCAL MARKETING/DISTINCTIVENESS

Funding has been secured via the Leader programme to promote rural Carmarthenshire to tourists - led by Carmarthenshire CC Marketing & Media Team to develop stories and reasons to visit, those that amplify Welsh culture, language, locally produced produce etc and deliver a marketing action plan (including branded promotional material, prepared social media content e.g. text, images and video, a business toolkit.

#### EMPTY PREMISES/MEANWHILE USES

Welsh Government funding to develop a good practice guide for the region enabling communities to develop empty premises into 'meanwhile' spaces or pop up shops, providing practical advice on legal issues, business rates etc . Potential to utilise the £10k Leader funding to fit out empty premises for this purpose

#### A CIRCULAR ECONOMY - A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

County Council is currently developing a strategy to support local investment in circular businesses and enterprises; that is, enterprises which keep things in use longer, through re-use, repair, remanufacture and refurbishment, and in doing so, helping regenerate the community by adding jobs and developing skills locally. By doing this locally, the initiative will not only keep money in circulation within the county, but vitally also reduce the impact that Carmarthenshire has on the environment. New potential projects are encouraged with local stakeholders, business owner, entrepreneur, volunteer etc.

#### COMMUNITY ENERGY SCHEMES

Development of community energy plans for the respective towns which could potentially provide revenue generating opportunities for the towns.

Carmarthenshire Energy Limited have been commissioned to identify and scope potential sites across the Ten Towns working closely with Energy Services Wales that could be further developed into community energy projects.