



# Laugharne Economic Recovery & Growth Plan

## Draft for Consultation Plan

Prepared for Carmarthenshire County Council

February 2021



## Table of Contents

1 Purpose.....	2
2 The bigger picture .....	3
3 Whitland today.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4 Key Issues.....	13
5 Priority actions.....	14
6 Delivery Plan.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

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An aerial photograph of a coastal region. The land is divided into numerous irregular agricultural plots of varying shades of brown and grey. A white line, representing a road, winds through the landscape from the bottom left towards the center right. To the right of the land, a large body of water is visible. The text 'Laugharne Talacharn' is centered over the land area, and 'River Taf' is positioned near the water. The road is labeled 'A4066' in the lower-left quadrant.

# Laugharne Talacharn

River Taf

A4066



# 1 Purpose

This Recovery and Growth Plan for Laugharne is concerned with 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

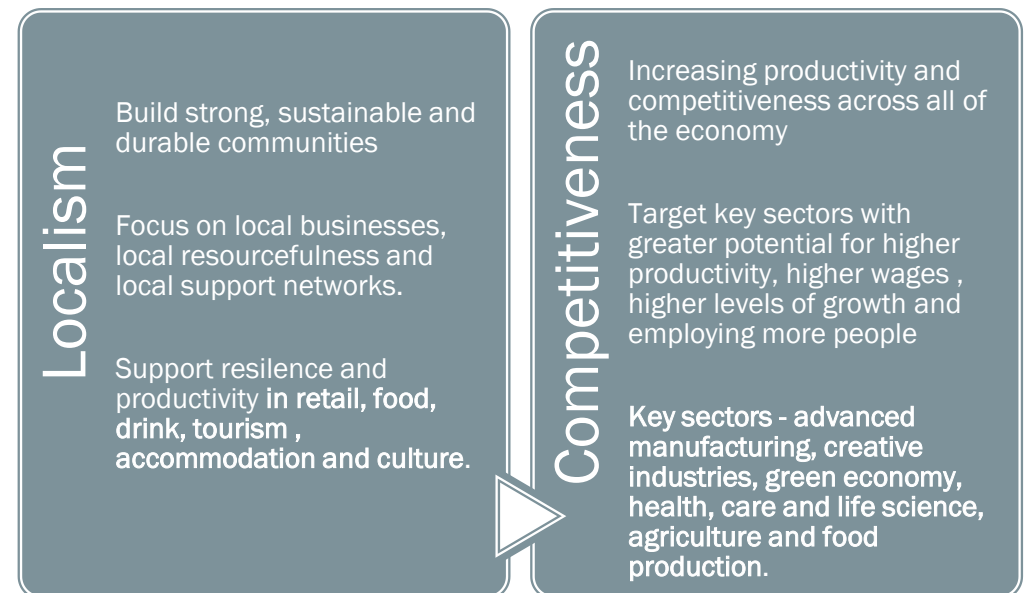
At the beginning of 2021, the economy of Carmarthenshire continues to be heavily influenced by Government interventions in support of jobs and business sectors and uncertainty exists as restrictions fluctuate with the pandemic and fluctuating lockdown measures.

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.

Figure 2 Strategic influences



### 3 Laugharne today

Laugharne is a small town with a large reputation because of its castle and historical architecture, the international profile associated with poet Dylan Thomas and picturesque coastline and attractive foreshore.

The township historically grew around the area of the original harbour and River Coran and is densely developed. Apart from small infill developments, most of the towns recent growth, including the primary school and housing, has taken place on the higher ground above the town (Gosport Street) and in the outlying countryside. The town has become a popular place to live and for second/holiday homes.

The A4066 between St Clears and the coastal resort of Pendine passes through the centre of the Laugharne, allowing relatively easy access to and from the A40, although the historic streets through the town are unsuited for large volumes of traffic. The local economy appears to be dominated by tourism accommodation and hospitality businesses, although the population benefits from employment opportunities further afield including light industrial and commercial employment areas around St Clears and a broader range of opportunities, including public sector employment in Carmarthen.

Outside of the town, the economy supports a range of rural enterprises including agricultural, land-based industries, food and drink and tourism. There are also many microbusinesses, including newer 'lifestyle', visitor-related and creative industries that combine both living and working in rural areas.

Laugharne's residents are mostly dependent on St Clears for access to a bigger range of local shops and services including the nearest supermarket, cash machine/ATM and leisure centre.

**Figure 3 Location context**



## Socio-economic picture

The population of Laugharne is 2,700, and compared with rural Carmarthenshire over the last ten years there has been:

The data shows a large part of the local economy is dependent on part-time, low skilled and lower wage incomes.

- population growth
- significant population decline
- growing older-aged population
- decline in the working-age population.
- average economic activity and full-time employment
- below average full-time employment
- relatively successful although lower-skilled local economy.
- higher than average levels of home working and self-employment.
- house prices higher than the average
- 6% decline in people speaking Welsh.

**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>Laugharne area</b>	Decrease 5.3%	Decreased 12.5 %	£29,161	£154k-£180k	66%	29%

	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>Laugharne area</b>	8%	19%	Skilled trades 22%	26%	28%	9%

**Source ONS, NOMIS, 2001 and 2018**



## Businesses & employment

65% of the businesses in the Laugharne are in the hospitality, accommodation and retail sectors, whilst there are only 10% in traditional workshop and manufacturing industries. The largest local employers are also in the leisure sector with several resort hotels including extensive Seasons Holiday (Dylan Coastal Resort Luxury Lodges). However, a large proportion of residents find employment outside of the town in sectors including retail and health and social work.

The higher than average levels of self-employment reflect the scale of the agricultural sector, rural enterprises as well the part-time and seasonal nature of the economy. The foundational economy covers businesses providing essential local services, which includes local trades, car repair, child and social care.

Employment in agriculture and land-based industries (quarrying) remains higher than the rural average and continues to be a key part of the local economy. However, there are very few associated agri-businesses such as feed merchants, mechanical and engineering, trailers, tractor dealerships because they are located in nearby St Clears.

The largest employment sectors:

- **13% wholesale and retail trade**
- **12% human health and social work**
- **12% accommodation & food services**

The nature of manufacturing and light industry is sporadic, and premises tend to be small and dotted across the town. Some of these premises are currently for sale or have permission to convert into residential, further reducing the scale of the local manufacturing and industrial business base.



## Town Economy

The historic and distinctive town centre includes the dominant castle and stunning coastal views. However, Laugharne's historical 'high street' only provide basic local shopping for the residents and visitors. Even though the centre is small, there are some 20 business units mostly providing food, drink and accommodation. Even though the number of businesses is in decline, these have been converted to residential or holiday accommodation and there are very few vacant premises.

The centre is drawn out with the main and most vibrant area located opposite the castle and the main car park at The Grist. The area has a cluster of retail and hospitality businesses and includes the Select convenience store and a gift shop. The upper part of the town centre includes a deli, jewellers, pharmacy, hairdressers and post office.

The broad range of hospitality businesses has given the town a strong evening economy; however, this is typically seasonal with many businesses reducing opening hours during the winter. A major drawback, particularly for a visitor destination, is the absence of a cash machine/ATM's, although banking services are provided in the Post Office. Several important local community facilities are located in the town centre, including the town hall and doctor's surgery and community hall.





## Visitor Economy

Laugharne is an iconic visitor destination, painted by Constable and Turner and strongly associated with poet Dylan Thomas, and quaint historic and natural environment, the town's reputation has grown to attract a wider audience providing the film location for popular TV series Keeping Faith. In 2018 the Dylan Thomas Boat House received 29,180 visitors and Laugharne Castle 14,620, with both attractions seeing a small increase in visitor numbers.

The Laugharne Weekend is a festival normally held in April with a national profile and is a 'leftfield' celebration of literary and musical talent, attracting local, regional and national performers.

The town has a strong range of serviced accommodation including Brown's Hotel with its 15 rooms, the Cors Country House and the Boathouse B&B. nearby establishments include Corran Hotel and Spa and Broadway Country House and Pods. Self-catering accommodation is available in town at Great House, Gwalia House and Seaview, with Seasons Holiday Park offering a range of lodges, including a new luxury lodges option with spa facilities, treatment rooms, hydrotherapy pool and restaurant and bar and are growing the number of chalets to around 300 in the town.

Laugharne is one of Carmarthenshire's main tourism magnets able to attract international visitors into the County. It is also located on the popular Wales Coastal Path. However, there are several challenges including visibility and pedestrian access to the famous Boathouse and traffic management and visitor parking during the peak seasons.

The new major tourism attractor development at Pendine includes the Sands of Speed Museum, Eco Activity Holiday resort and major outdoor events facility. This is likely to positively benefit local accommodation and secondary spend, but negative impacts in terms of increasing traffic passing through the town centre.



## Brand and marketing

Laugharne's online presence is tourism focussed and heavily reliant on Discover Carmarthenshire and the Dylan Thomas connection. However, it needs updating (*Trip Advisor*, for example, offers a '*Tin Shed Experience*' which has been closed for some time and the cover image on Discover Carmarthenshire is of a business that has been closed for some years). And aside from the Boathouse and castle, there isn't much else being promoted to do once you arrive.

We have found that the town doesn't have a clear, up to date, and 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 including Visits Wales, Visit Carmarthenshire, the BBC etc.

However, there are businesses such as the *Ferryman Deli* and the famous *Brown's Hotel* which have harnessed their online platforms to market their brand and product offerings and the Laugharne Weekend Festival seems to communicate regularly and effectively with its audience which helps to give the town a feeling of vibrancy and significance.





## Transport and movement

Traffic and parking are both significant concerns for the future growth and attractiveness of Laugharne. Several studies have examined in detail the issues and opportunities. The key issues include:

- During peak periods (both daytime and evening) parking areas fill quickly which forces many tourists to displace along the main thoroughfare, and into the surrounding residential streets.
- The narrow street network means the access and traffic flow can easily be obstructed by a small amount of inconsiderate parking, leading to congestion.

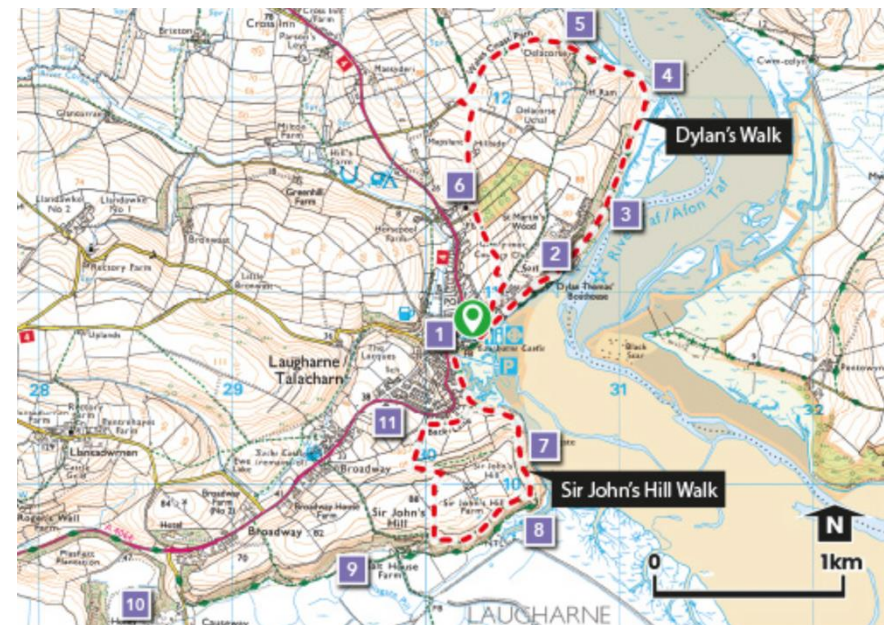


- Large vehicles – visitor coaches, agricultural vehicles and quarry lorries regularly passing through the centre adding to congestion

New visitor attractions at Pendine (from 2021) are expected to increase traffic volumes through Laugharne as well as visitors. The key issue is that all traffic passing through the region from the east (A477) and west (A40) toward Pendine directed along the A4066 through the historic and narrow centre of Laugharne.

Walking and cycling links towards and around the town are however well established including the National Cycle Network, Wales Coastal Path and shorter local routes.

**Figure 5 – Walking & Cycling routes**



## 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 210 (70%) out of a total of 298 premises in the Laugharne postcode area without non-superfast broadband.

## Planning, Development & Environment

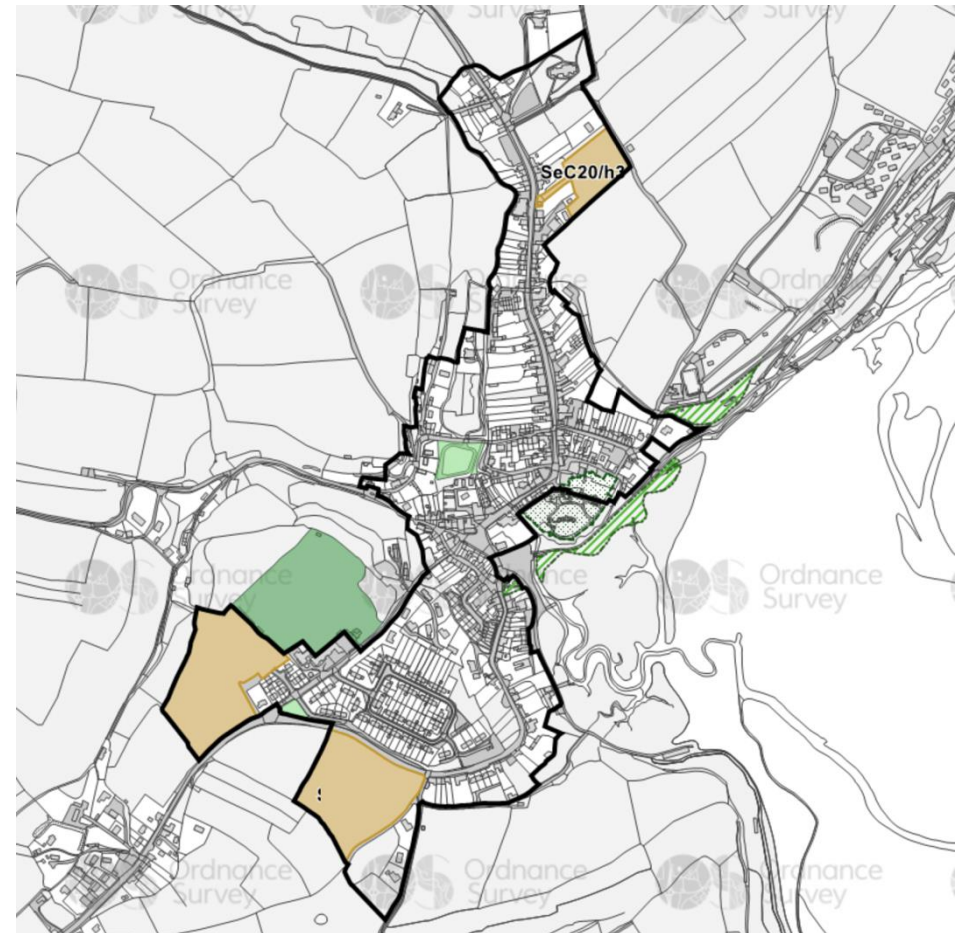
There are limited opportunities for new development in or near the town centre due to the protected historical environment and low-lying areas at risk of flooding. This has contributed to the demand for converting existing employment and commercial premises into higher-value residential uses.

A long-term empty and semi-derelict building positioned in the centre of the town is Island House, a grade II\* residential property. The building is dilapidated and in a poor state of repair with a long-running local campaign to find a viable future use and to restore and reoccupy the building.

New developments are restricted to the higher areas located above the town. The Revised Local Development Plan considers Laugharne suitable for a small amount of residential growth including 3 sites with potential for 72 units (of which 15 will be affordable), although there are no new employment sites planned.

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.

**Figure 6 Local Development Plan**



## 4 Key Issues



Address the critical issues with town centre parking (cars and coaches) through a range of management measures & new parking areas



Need strategic coordinated & effective visitor signage on the A40 to manage traffic volumes for Laugharne and alternative route for Pendine from Red Roses (B4314).



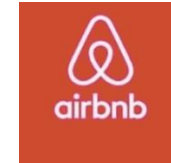
Investment in a mix of commercial/maker workshops premises to encourage business growth and diversification of the town's economy



Address the derelict condition and positively support investment in Island House



The marketing of Laugharne and Pendine areas as one destination



Growth in holiday lets negatively impacting on available affordable homes



Strengthen the number of businesses and attractions around the town to increase the time spent and circulation around Laugharne



Address the poorer quality of broadband in rural areas.



Funding & resources to support businesses



More responsive and supportive planning system to encourage investment and regeneration



The big Issues need quick actions to help recovery & growth



Limited housing delivery which impacts on affordable housing supply and the employment growth of the town

## 5 Priority actions

The main challenge for Laugharne is how to manage the town's growth as a sustainable place to live, work and visit without damaging the special qualities that make it one of Carmarthenshire's main tourism magnets with the qualities to attract international visitors.

The evidence indicates the population has been in decline as well as getting older, and the number of people of working age has been falling.

House prices are higher than average, and affordability is an issue for young people and those working in the town. The number of traditional manufacturing and light industrial businesses has been in a steady decline with numerous business properties converted into residential.

Nevertheless, opportunities for seasonal employment in accommodation and hospitality are very good and the area benefits from good accessibility for employment opportunities in St Clears, Pendine and Carmarthen.

### Strategic Priorities

- Affordable housing to support the local population and to sustain local employment.
- Resolving parking problems at peak times of the year to avoid damaging the town's attractiveness and to encourage the growth in the number of visitors and new businesses.
- Traffic management through the town centre to manage seasonal peaks and the predicted increases in traffic from the new visitor attraction at Pendine.
- Protection and creation of new workshop/maker spaces to diversify the local economy.
- A SMART Town with reliable connectivity and data-driven growth, marketing and visitor strategies.
- Restoration and re-use of the historic Island House to create a new viable attraction and reason to visit the town.



## 1 – Restart and recovery measures - responding to COVID-19

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 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 - Affordable homes

Affordable housing that supports local and in particular young people remain living and working in Laugharne has been a key priority raised by stakeholders in the preparation of the plan. 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.

Laugharne has experienced relatively low levels of new development in recent years at the same time that existing housing has been frequently bought at inflated prices for second homes. Although new homes have recently been built at Pludds Meadow and a new site allocated at Wooford, prices remain higher than average and there are pressures on the existing stock. As well as building more viable and affordable homes, there is a need to

identify methods to manage the loss of existing housing to the second home market.

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 following 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.

### 3 - Parking, Walking & Traffic Management

#### A) Increase town centre parking opportunities

The location and management of parking is a significant concern for the future growth and attractiveness of Laugharne. Several studies have examined the causes and opportunities to address them. The problems are seasonal and weather dependent, however strategic and long-term solution coordinated between Carmarthenshire CC and the Town Council are required if the ambition to grow the number of visitors and to encourage people to stay for longer are to be achieved. The risks of the current difficulties continuing include lost trade, discouraging investment, damaged reputation and delayed return visits. Parking issues are also linked to the amount of through traffic, including visitors directed towards Pendine.

Several potentially immediate and longer-term options exist :

- **White line existing parking areas** – a lower cost quick win opportunity is to improve the efficient uses of existing on-street and designated parking areas through 'white line' parking bays. This potentially increases the number of available spaces and helps reduce inconsiderate parking. Key locations include Clifton Street; King Street; The Grist; The Strand/Foreshore Car Park. Reliance on street parking also require regular enforcement measures.
- **Clifton Street** - the location is ideal to intercept long stay visitor and employee parking without the need to drive through the town centre or occupy centrally positioned parking spaces suitable for shorter visits. The location is perfect to attract visitors

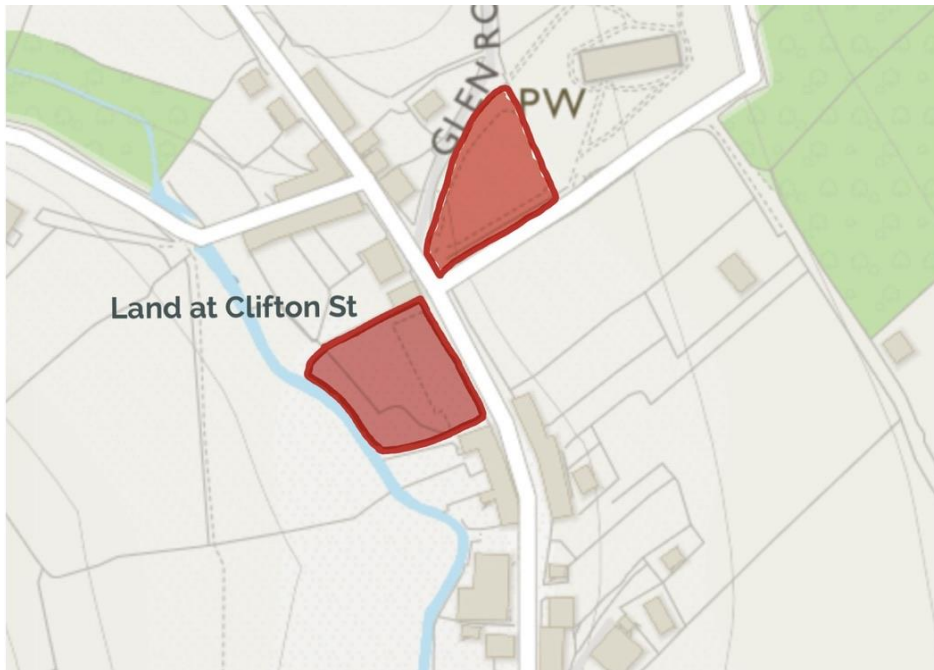
to Dylan Thomas's grave and the waymarked Laugharne Heritage Walk. The walking distance to the centre is less than a kilometre and the opportunity could be created to direct footfall along King Street to support existing as well as new business. Two parking options exist, and, in both cases, effective advanced road signage will be required to intercept visitors before they reach the edge of the town.

- The Church car park uses an honesty box payment arrangement, but the area is not consistently available due to church services, funerals, weddings etc.

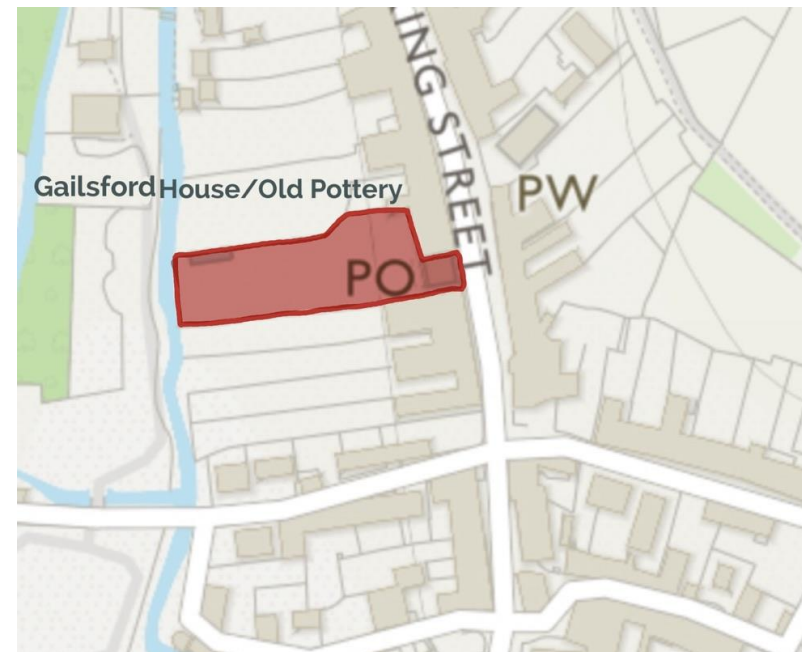
- Land opposite the church has been freely offered by agreement with the private owners for the Council to create a formal and managed car park and small amount of coach parking. The site will require planning permission and surfacing.

- **Land at Gailsford House and Old Pottery, Kings Street** – permission was granted in 2015 for the construction of 14 residential units and 50 public parking spaces. This is a more centrally located site although notwithstanding the recent residential development on the land the opportunity for the new parking scheme remains uncertain.

**Figure 7 Parking options Clifton Street**



**Figure 8 Gailsford House site option**



**Laugharne Parking Strategy** – wider parking management and charging strategy recommendations were made in 2016 and include the temporary overflow parking option using the grassed areas of the Foreshore car park, introduction of unified visitor parking charges and residential permit parking areas. It is likely that in future some of these measures will be necessary to effectively manage traffic and parking.

### **B) Visitor traffic and destination signs**

The quality of visitor traffic signage and information positioned from the A40 is patchy and inconsistent. A coordinated signage strategy for both Laugharne and Pendine's through traffic is necessary to effectively manage traffic flows. Options for re-routing traffic heading for Pendine's via alternative and more direct routes (e.g Red Roses) should continue to be investigated to manage predicted seasonal increases in traffic through the town.

## **4 - 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. By supporting and encouraging the growth and expansion of locally grounded firms, particularly in more specialised industries, this will help to create long term higher paid employment, retain workers, broaden the skills base and help sustain local communities.

The foundational economy is the backbone of the rural economy and represents those 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 are few suitable workspaces to support the growth of micro and small businesses in Laugharne. However, opportunities should be explored 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.



## 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. Opportunities that help provide flexible workspaces closer to home include:

- **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/private 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 opportunities. 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 a number of examples of suitable empty buildings located in Laugharne town, although they are often with permission for residential use. Increasing the overall amount of

available commercial spaces (retail, office, services) is of key importance for the long term growth of the town centre economy.

## 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- The hospitality and accommodation sector support many medium-size and grounded firms based in Laugharne. 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) Agriculture and food production

The plan supports small and medium-sized food based business and the establishment of production units to support added value food products, which could include artisan cheeses, ice creams and other dairy products capable of commanding a premium based on local provenance.

The aim is to support initiatives that create higher value and more productive businesses by increasing the productivity, diversity and efficiency of farming. Proposals in the plan for new modern workspaces, digital infrastructure and marketing and promotion seek to support and contribute towards this aim.

## 5 - Promoting Laugharne

As the economy recovers from the pandemic and positive change occurs, Laugharne will need to project an attractive image of the town and the businesses to the local community and visitors. For a well-known and established destination, it's surprising that Laugharne doesn't have its own online presence as a destination for visitors and depends on a fragmented approach with various sites (Visit Carmarthenshire, Discover Carmarthenshire, BBC, Laugharne Weekend, Visit Wales, CADW) all have their own approaches. The key actions are:

- 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. The opportunity exists to also work with

Pendine businesses to create a 'coastal resort destination' that increases dwell times and extended day and overnight visits.

- 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.

## 6 – 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.

## 7 - Key Sites & Public Realm

The high quality and historic town centre experiences a traffic dominated public realm, narrow pavements and public spaces that also provide parking areas.

With the growth of the town as a visitor destination, there is the need is to establish a more spacious and leisurely environment particularly since COVID-19 has added to the challenge of maintaining a safe and socially distanced streets. Public realm improvements that achieve a more equal balance between vehicles and pedestrians would strengthen the attractiveness of the town centre. In addition, supporting the restoration and improvement of some of the most prominent buildings is key to maintaining the town's historic charm.

### A) Island House

Island House was purchased by Island House Restoration Ltd in March 2020 following a period of 16 years dilapidation. The 16th century Grade 11\* listed house has played a part in some of the most important chapters of Laugharne's past and treasured by the local community who have campaigned for it to be saved.

Located next to the castle and at the heart of the town, the highly visible building is planned to be restored to its original condition and convert it into a boutique hotel, bar and restaurant. Carmarthenshire County Council and Cadw (the historic environment service in Wales) have been involved at various stages.

The Restoration and re-use of Island House is of national importance and has the potential to add a new commercial and heritage attraction to the town centre. The levels of investment necessary to fully restore the building require long term viable commercial uses.

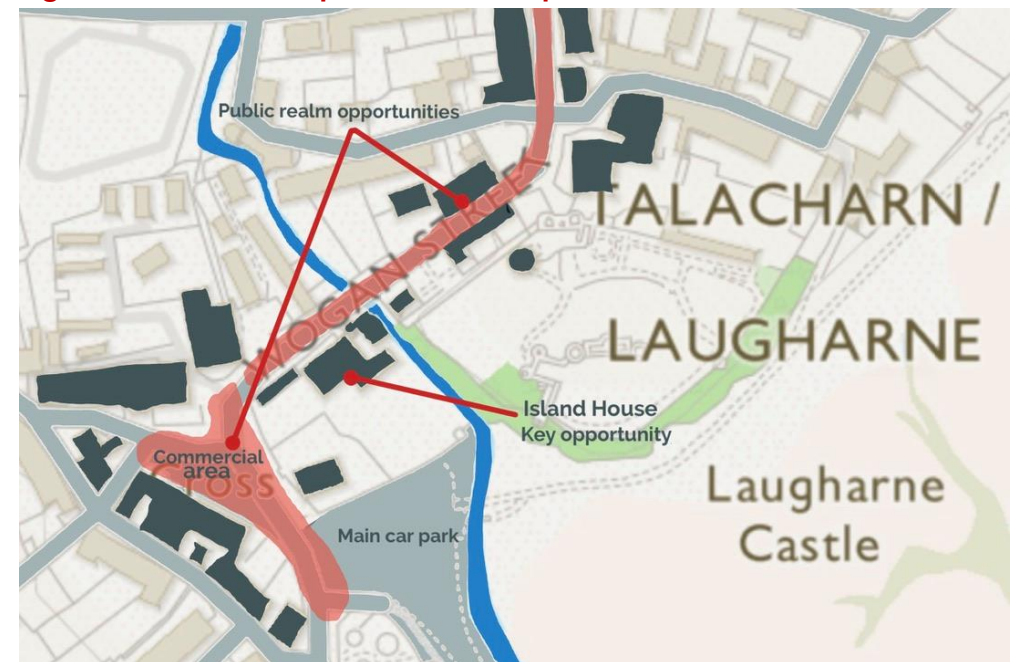
Actions that would either directly or indirectly encourage the restoration of Island House include addressing the shortage of car parking spaces and public realm improvements addressing pedestrians and vehicle movement in the area that would help to enhance the setting of Island House as well as the commercial heart of the town.

## B) Town Centre Public Realm

The narrow street and pavements in areas of the town centre have created difficulties with safe and leisurely pedestrian movement. COVID-19 has added to the challenge of maintaining a safe and socially distanced pedestrian environment for people walking the streets as well as for queuing outside venues.

Several environmental and urban design measures can be used to enhance the public realm to better balance pedestrian spaces and the movement of traffic through the centre. The aims include sensitively redesigning on-street public parking spaces and resolving key pinch point in the area around Wogan Street and The Grist. Landscape improvements would potentially enhance the overall setting for businesses and visitors to the main commercial area of The Grist.

**Figure 9 Town centre public realm improvements**



## 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. 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. More can be done to support local procurement with opportunities to:

encourage local businesses to access advice and guidance on local procurement opportunities.



promote opportunities, particularly to small and new businesses, for lower value public sector contracts which may traditionally not have been attractive to smaller suppliers.

## 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 local communities and local businesses as well as help to address fuel poverty in rural areas. This Plan outlines the potential to embrace the opportunities linked to renewable energy which is well established in the County particularly in terms of its direct benefits for local communities and supporting greater environmental resilience.

To help achieve this Ynni Sir Gaŕ (Carmarthenshire Energy) will support communities to identify and scope potential sites for community energy generation. 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.

## 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.  LEADER Seed Funding	Carmarthenshire CC will be coordinating with partner agencies support for businesses recovering from the impacts of the pandemic.
<b>2 – AFFORDABLE HOMES</b>	Short, Medium and Long term	Carmarthenshire CC/developers	Developer contributions and Carmarthenshire CC and Cartrefi Croeso	Secure affordable homes via LDP site allocations & directly via developer, Cartrefi Croeso and housing associations. Investigation of control mechanism for second homes
<b>3 - TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>• White lining and enforcement</b></li> <li><b>• Clifton Street opportunities</b></li> <li><b>• Land at Gailsford House</b></li> <li><b>• Laugharne Parking Strategy</b></li> <li><b>• Traffic &amp; destination signage</b></li> </ul>	Short, Medium and Long term	Private landowner/Church, Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council (recommend a task force to comprehensively address available opportunities and coordinated action to address parking issues)	Parking Strategy capital funding pot, Ten Towns Capital Fund	Decision to be made on the use of Clifton Street sites before private sector land option ends. Traffic management monitoring and measures agreed with CCC Highways in alignment with completion of Pendine tourism attractor project. Quick win – parking white lining and enforcement
<b>4 - SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>• Business premises &amp; Work hubs/shared workspaces</b></li> <li><b>• Re-use buildings &amp; Supporting business growth</b></li> </ul>	Short and medium	Carmarthenshire CC, business and property owners, Business Wales, and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP)	LEADER Seed Funding  Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds & Commercial Property Development Funds	Identify future land and property with potential for providing employment space.  Working with key local employers to identify growth requirements

ACTION	TIMEFRAME	KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER	POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES	NEXT STEPS
<b>5 – PROMOTING LAUGHARNE</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  Wi-fi Towns fund and resources Destination Carmarthenshire brand initiatives	Coordination with Discover Carmarthenshire/ Link with SMART town & Wi-fi initiatives. Quick wind town visitor web site
<b>6 - SMART DIGITAL TOWNS AND COUNTRYSIDE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Broadband upgrade</b></li> <li><b>Wifi town</b></li> </ul> <b>IoT/LoRaWAN Digital training</b>	Short and medium term	Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council and Business groups	LEADER Seed Funding  Wi-fi Towns fund and resources  IoT/LoRaWAN deployment and training  Broadband Upgrade Fund	Aggregate demand for broadband upgrade.  Wi-fi towns support and training for local delivery partner  Identify business interest in IoT/LoRaWAN
<b>7 - KEY SITES &amp; PUBLIC REALM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Island House</b></li> <li><b>Town Centre</b></li> </ul>	Medium and Long term	Private sector (Island House)  Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council and Business Group	Business Support Funds  Ten Towns Capital Fund	Island House – ensure enabling and regulatory support is available from statutory bodies and CCC.  Commission design brief and feasibility study for public realm improvements



ACTION	TIMEFRAME	KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER	POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES	NEXT STEPS
<b>8 – PROGRESSIVE PROCUREMENT</b> <b>• Low Value Contracts</b>	Short, Medium and Long Term	Hywel Dda Health Board Carmarthenshire CC	Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds 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 Gaŕ	Ynni Sir Gaŕ have LEADER funding until March 2022 for developing 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

**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.