



# St Clears Economic Recovery & Growth Plan

Prepared for Carmarthenshire County Council

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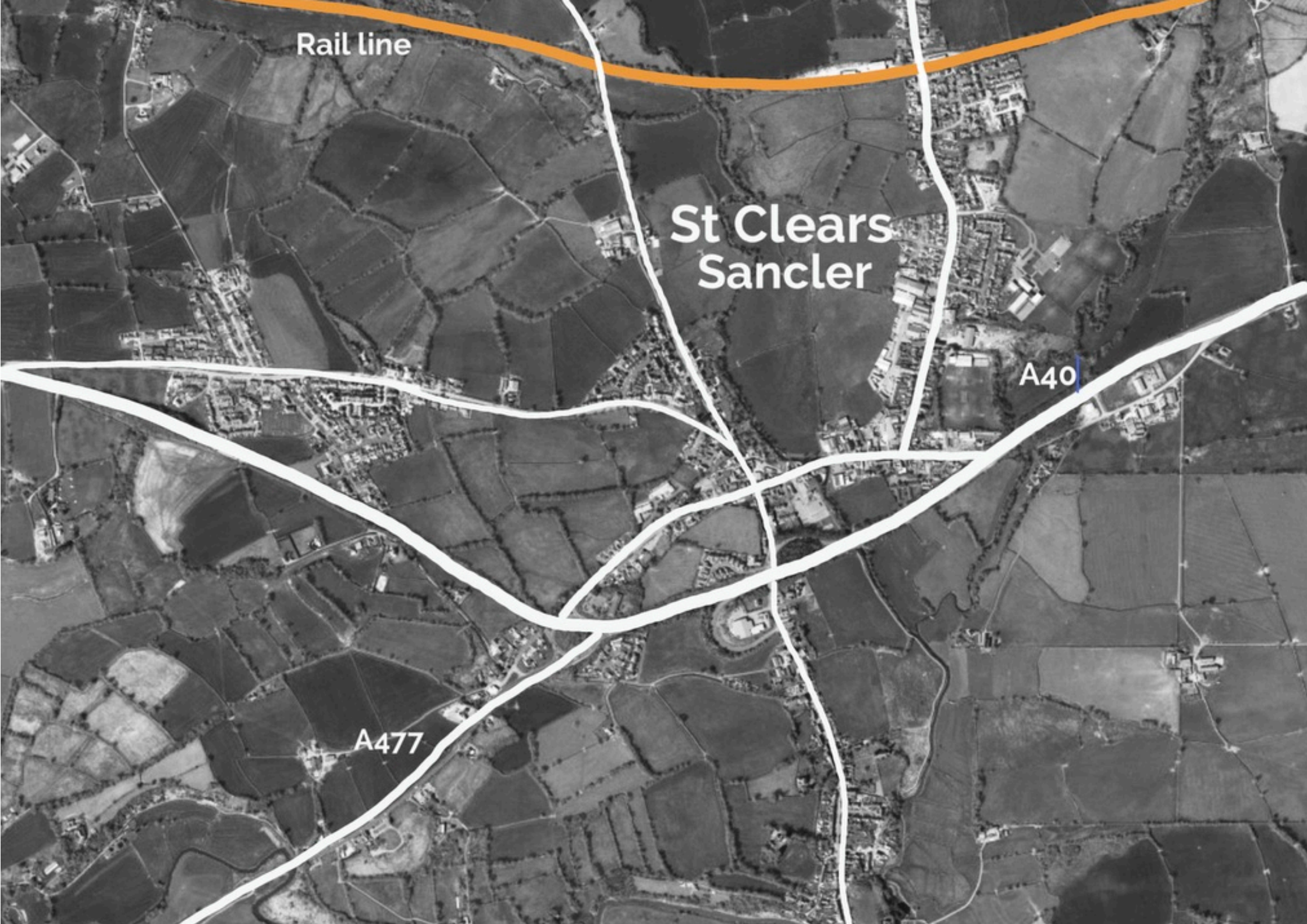
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Rail line

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape with agricultural fields and some built-up areas. Overlaid on the image are several white lines representing roads and a thick orange line representing a rail line. The text 'St Clears Sancler' is centered in the upper half, 'A477' is in the lower left, and 'A40' is in the middle right.

St Clears  
Sancler

A40

A477

# 1 Purpose

This Recovery and Growth Plan for St Clears 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

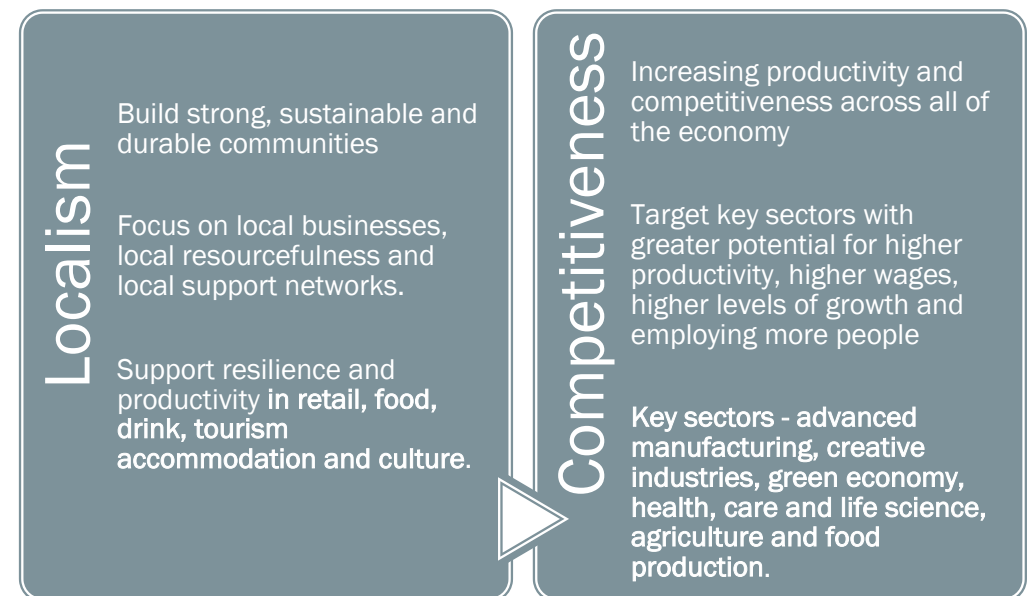
At the beginning of 2021, the economy of Carmarthenshire continues to be heavily influenced by Government interventions in support of jobs and business sectors and uncertainty exists as restrictions fluctuate with the pandemic and fluctuating lockdown measures.

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 St Clears today

St Clears is a growing town that has experienced population and housing growth in recent years. The town is a short commute from Carmarthen, and this has helped drive the residential development. This growth has helped sustain the number of people of working age, economically active and in fulltime employment.

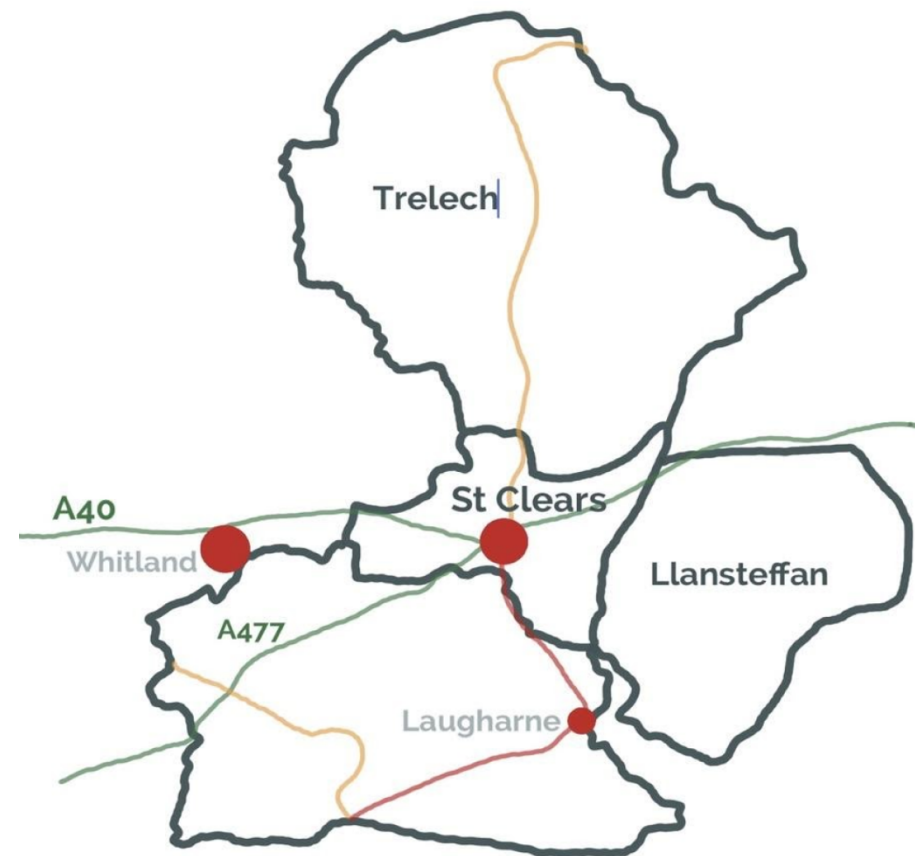
The town's direct access to the A40 (the Trans European Network) has encouraged the growth of strong traditional employment including several light industrial and commercial employment areas throughout the town. There is also a small traditional town centre mostly serving the need of the local community.

Outside of the town, the economy supports a broad 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.

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, pc repair and personal instructors etc.

St Clears wider role includes supporting the social, employment, education and localised retail role for Laugharne and smaller outlying villages such as Bancyfelin and the communities of the Llansteffan and Trelech Wards. St Clears leisure centre also serves the needs of its neighbouring towns.

**Figure 3 Location context**



## Socio-economic Picture

The population of St Clears is 7,300 and includes the 3,230 living in the built-up area of the town. In comparison with rural Carmarthenshire - within the last ten years - the St Clears 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 large amount of new housing development 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
Rural County	Increase 1.8%	Decline 3%	£28,622	£135k	66%	33%
St Clears area	Increase 7.9%	Increased 1.7%	£29,476	£133k-£154k	70%	37%
	Work from home	Self-employed	Largest occupation	No skills	Higher qualifications	Employed agriculture
Rural County	7%	14%	Skilled trades 19%	25%	30%	6%
St Clears area	11%	19%	Skilled trades 18%	28%	29%	11%

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



## Business and employment

There are over 165 business across a diverse range including light industrial, storage, workshops and offices. There appear to be no major employer, although the town includes a broad range of micro, small and medium-sized businesses.

Employment in agriculture is higher than the rural average and is key to the economic and employment opportunities of the town with many businesses supporting the sector including feed merchants, mechanical and engineering, trailers, tractor dealerships etc (e.g. A & M Group, CLH Trailers, Wynnstay).

The largest employment sectors.

- **20% wholesale and retail trade**
- **14% human health and social work**
- **11% construction**

There are five employment areas including the traditional industrial area at Tir Owen Estate and the more modern St Clears Business Park.

The key issues and opportunities for sites and premises include:

- high occupancy levels with the area maintaining good levels of demand reflecting the access onto the A40.
- a limited supply of available starter units and grow on units.
- large amount of property is old/secondary quality and in need of investment to bring up to a modern standard.
- small number of sites available to redevelop or for new build.
- lack of viability that discourages speculative build.



## Town centre

There are some 40, mostly independent businesses located in the town centre with the majority in retail. The in-town convenience offer includes a new CK's supermarket and Spar together with two butchers and specialist cake shop. The level of comparison uses is more varied although remains relatively limited reflecting the competition from nearby Carmarthen. This includes a chemist/pharmacy, women's clothing, hardware/bargain and charity shop uses together with several larger units for bulky goods retail associated with, electrical appliances, garden machinery and discount store.

A basic range and choice of food and drink (café, restaurant, takeaway and public house) exists through the centre. The offer mainly appeals to the daytime trade with a limited evening economy including the traditional pub and takeaways, however, there are no entertainment and cultural venues.

Health, beauty and personal services businesses appear to prosper in St Clears together with, physiotherapy, fitness and aromatherapy use. Another important reason to visit is the GP practice located in the main town centre car park.

The town centre no longer has a bank except for an ATM in the Spar which also provides the Post Office. The nearest banks are located in Tenby and Carmarthen. Nat West provide a mobile bank that visits for only 45minutes on a Tuesday.

Overall the centre has experienced:

- Demand in the town centre from new businesses has been subdued – several long term vacancies
- 9% vacancy rate with empty units often reoccupied by non-retail
- Decline in the number of retail businesses
- Sustaining some speciality retail e.g. women's clothing, cakes & local butchers
- Free town centre Wi-Fi
- +50% of visitors typically stay more than 20 minutes

One major drawback to the centre is its length and dispersed nature without a clear centre point. The amount of out of town leisure/retail is also a disadvantage, including the main supermarket (Co-op) semi-retail uses at St Clear Business Park and Starbucks and Travelodge positioned on the A40. In 2020 permission was granted at appeal for a 24-hour, 100-seater McDonald's together with a Costa Coffee in the same location.

Overall the town centre has a surprising amount to offer but the environment for visitors and shoppers is dominated by traffic and narrow pavements and this diminishes the attractive browsing and pedestrian experience. The potential exists to improve the public realm and attractiveness of the centre.



## Visitor economy

Unlike nearby and better-known Pendine and Laugharne, St Clears is not an established visitor destination with the same compelling reason to visit. Poor quality and slightly confusing visitor signage don't assist the town, or the local attractions, maximise the advantages of the A40 and the passing visitor traffic. This includes the low-key West Wales Craft Centre (Y Gat/The Gate) that was given the "Hidden Gem" award. However, local businesses report the town is popular with local holidaymakers making short shopping trips for food and other essentials.

There is a broad range of accommodation - Llety Cynin Health and Leisure Club on the outskirts is a prime example of farm diversification into luxury spa provision. The town also has a Travelodge, the Savoy Country Inn and The Forge Lodge and Restaurant. There is a good range of self-catering accommodation locally, including farmhouse conversions and wooden lodges.

St Clears has an important local and national heritage including its associations with the 'dramatic' Rebecca Riots (1842). This has been marked with an attractive wooden town centre sculpture near to The Gate. However, there is very little information to draw in visitors.

Cycling tourism is also a growing aspect of Carmarthenshire's visitor offer and St Clears features as part of the circular road route connecting with Laugharne and Whitland. However, there are only a few 'Cyclist Welcome' places to stay in the area in the area.

Annual events - the Summer Spectacular and Carnival, Fireworks and the Christmas Lights are important but mostly local visitor attractions.



## Brand and marketing

St Clears does not seem to have any unique presence online and it is difficult to find the information that exists. The most effective online offering is from local business Got Cake which has nearly 4000 followers on Facebook and a surprisingly high 'Buy & Swap' FB group which is over 6000 members strong. Businesses like the 'Y Gat' (The Gate) Art Gallery and Craft Centre are a perfect combination of visitor destination, experience and shop but don't seem to market themselves aside from a mention on Tripadvisor and small following on Facebook. It feels there is a strong community in St Clears, but they are for some reason not communicating clearly online (at least externally) and/or building a case for St Clears being an attractive town to visit.

## Transport and movement

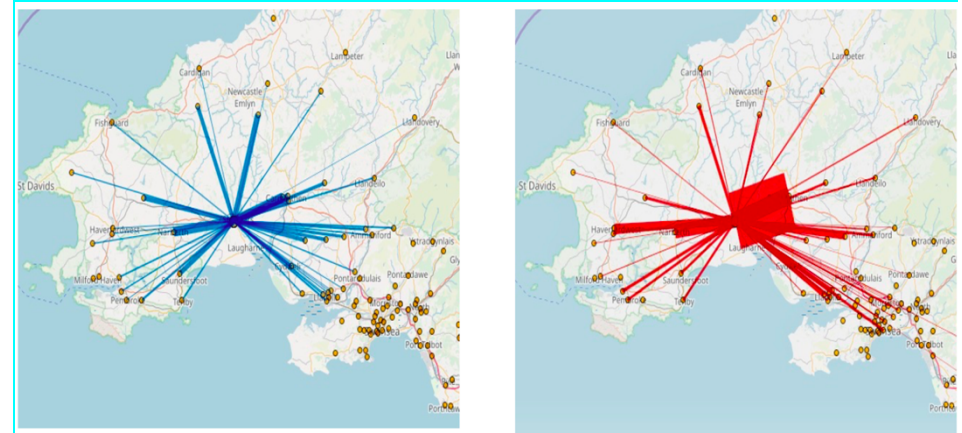
Accessibility by road is very good with direct access onto the dual section of the A40 (the Trans European Network) linking with the Republic of Ireland.

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 St Clears area is reliant on Carmarthen and other major towns for employment but also how the town also provides employment for residents of the wider area.

- The average distance travelled to work was similar to the rural average (23.7km)

- There is an above-average proportion of people working from home (10.5%).

**Figure 5 Travel to work patterns**



**Source: 2011 Census - DataShine: Commute**

## Broadband and connectivity

The central town area appears to have good connectivity, it is clear that there are larger areas in the wider hinterland and villages with difficulties.

- 383 (38%) out of a total of 1,020 premises in the St Clears postcode area have non-superfast broadband.

However, free Wi-Fi exists in the Town Centre which offers a host of future user/visitor benefits and marketing opportunities.



## Planning, Development & Environment

In terms of future growth and development, the Revised Local Development Plan considers St Clears suitable for future growth given the towns strategic and accessible location on the A40. There has been strong residential demand and developer interest in the area, and this will see the development of c.200 new homes including 38 affordable. The allocation for new employment land is 0.44ha.

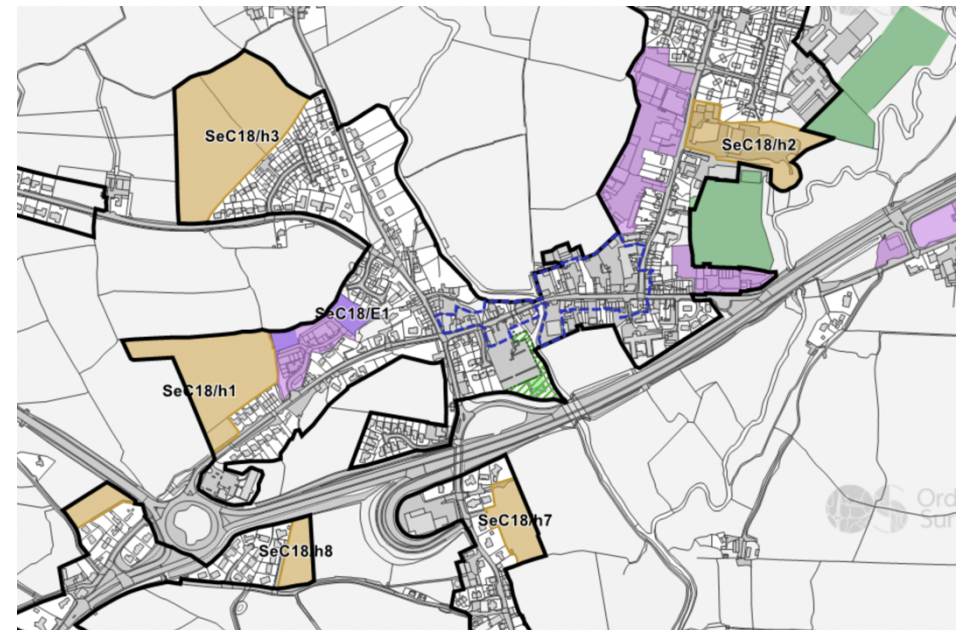
As well as the need for more homes, overall, the requirement is for smaller, less expensive housing, to address the imbalance between higher house prices and limited supply of appropriate homes in rural areas, particularly for one-person and couples.

New General Hospital - 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 St Clears. Regardless of location, the Hospital holds substantial potentially transformational growth of local business in the St Clears area. The timetable for a decision, construction and opening are within the timeframe of this plan.

New Rail Station - In June 2020 the Welsh Governments put forward proposals to UK Government Restoring Your Railways Fund for four new stations including St Clears. The proposals for St Clears have strong community and business backing from the town and surrounding areas as evidenced by the consultations in early 2020. Benefits of the scheme include closing a geographical gap in West Wales network and improving sustainable travel for a growing town and area.

However, several feasibility challenges are depending on the final location and layout including possible closure of the existing level crossing depending, creating alternative road access and land purchase.

**Figure 6 Local Development Plan**



## 4 Key Issues



Support for the new train station proposals to improve living, visiting and working



Improve the town centre environment, public spaces for shoppers and pedestrians



Concern about the closure of the high street banks



Need coordinated & effective town centre and visitor signage on A40



Issues need quick actions to address recovery & growth



Prepare to take full advantage of opportunities from the new General Hospital



Improve the appearance & broader use of the town centre parking at Pentre Road



Investment in a mix of modern employment premises for business growth/expansion



Improve the marketing and promotion of the town centre as well as the area as a destination



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



Need additional & high-profile annual events



Improve active travel routes from the Co-op/proposed train station and town centre



Funding & resources to support businesses



More responsive and supportive planning system to encourage investment and regeneration

## 5 Priority actions

St Clears 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

- deliver the new St Clears train station
- support and grow the employment base
- create a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly town centre environment
- protect employment land for the future development of modern small and medium scale workspaces
- introduce initiatives to intercept more visitors travelling along the A40 and to promote the town centre facilities and attractions
- a SMART Town with reliable connectivity and data-driven growth, marketing and visitor strategies

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 – 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 – 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.

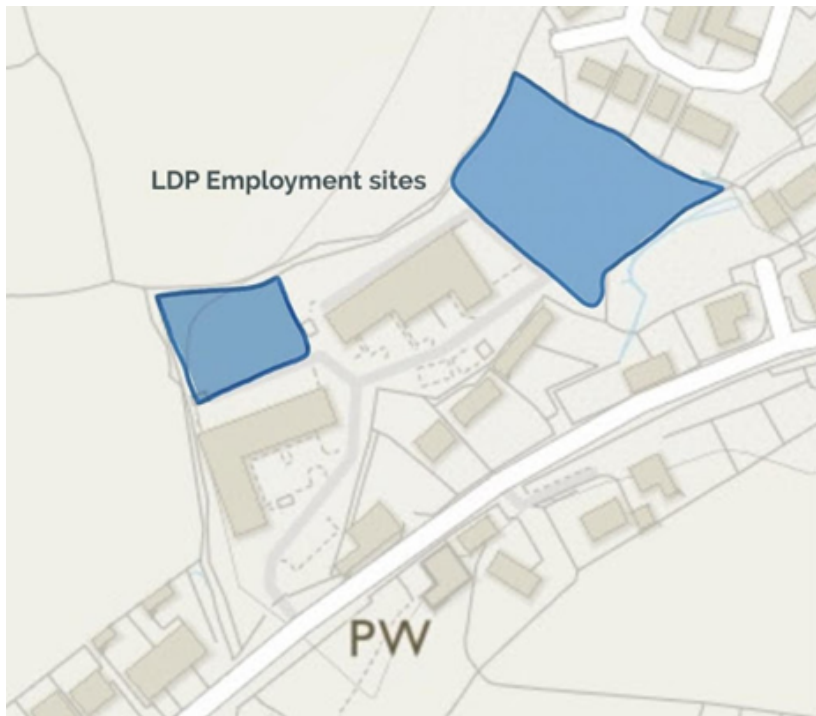
Actions include:

- St Clear's Business Park – provides the only allocated employment site located in the town with the two parcels of land (0.44ha). Protecting and encouraging

the development of this site for future employment growth is important for growth.

- The existing employment and industrial areas such as Tir Owen Estate provide opportunities for future investment and partial redevelopment to provide smaller modern workspace.
- The location of the new train station provides a catalyst for creating much needed new employment and workspaces adjacent to the transport hub.

**Figure 7 St Clears Business Park Sites**



## **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:

- Feasibility study – a local study to investigate the specific level of demand and requirements from the local town and rural population.
- The Gate craft centre is a multi-use building managed by Carmarthenshire CC and is currently supporting several workspaces for craft/maker businesses. The model demonstrates the potential and there may be opportunities to expand or establish of similar shared workspace in the town.

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

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

- Town centre vacant properties - 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.

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

The growth of the local economy is linked with the success of the town's 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 St Clears. 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.

#### **F) Agriculture and food production**

Much of the area's agriculture is in the dairy sector, and at present, Carmarthenshire has no direct milk processing facility; in view of this, the Rural Task Force have suggested that a micro/macro milk processing facility based on a cooperative model be investigated. It is also supportive of 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.



### 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.

### 4 – Town centre public realm

The quality of the town centre environment suffers from a traffic dominated public realm, narrow pavements and few public spaces that encourage people to spend time shopping. There is the need is to establish a more spacious and leisurely shopping and visitor environment particularly as a result of COVID-19 which 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 allow the carriageway to be narrowed, establish wider pavements and larger public spaces with opportunities for new green landscape features. Improvements could also help to define the centre of a drawn-out high street. Improvements should focus on the area from the river, including a new pedestrian footbridge on the northern side,

and Station Road, taking advantage of the spaces where buildings are set back from the road. Additional improvements that would improve the appearance of the centre could also include a building frontage painting/improvements

## 5 – St Clears train station

In November 2020, the UK Government announced £4.8m for the opening of a new St Clears train station. The Town Council has been working in partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council with the support from the local MP for a number of year for inclusion in the UK Governments Restoring Your Railway Fund. The station is likely to have a transformational effect on the town as a place to live, work and for attracting visitors as part of an improved Swansea Bay Metro.

The precise location and layout of the station is subject to further site and landownership investigations. However, this investment could also provide a catalyst for creating much needed new employment and workspaces adjacent to the transport hub. The development should also lead to improved active travel links with the town centre.

## 6 – 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.

Station Road is an important route connecting the town centre, the school, leisure centre, industrial estates, residential areas and the out of town supermarket. The new train station in this area strengthens the need for improvements to encourage safer walking and cycling between the two areas and with the possibility of connecting with the National Cycle Network (4) to the south of St Clear's town centre. Wider active travel route improvements with outlying villages such as Bancyfelin should also be considered.

**Figure 8 Train station location and active travel route improvements**



Figure 9 Town Centre Initiatives





## 7 – 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 visitors passing along the A40, large numbers are already stopping to use the popular edge of town stopping off services.

- Coordinated signage strategy on the A40 and slip road to intercept visitors through promoting the town centre and facilities, local heritage and businesses attractions e.g. The Gate/Y Gat and boutique hotels
- Scope for an app alert for people transiting along the A40, encouraging them to deviate from their usual route to lesser-known areas.

### B) St Clears Car Park – Aire Camping Car Park

St Clears major advantage is its location off the A40, the main route for travellers heading towards west Wales and Ireland. The location is already a natural stopping off point for visitors as evidenced by the growing number of food and accommodation business located on the edge of town.

A key objective of the plan is to encourage travellers to use and explore the town centre more often and the concept of the 'Aire' follows the French model of providing approved motorhome

parking areas close to villages and towns to encourage people to visit the area.

St Clears town centre car park is in an ideal location with amenities including parkland and riverside. It is already used informally by HGV's for overnight stops, and the proposal is to create a site that becomes well known and popular for the growing number of motorhome and campervan travellers passing through west Wales.

### C) Rebecca Riots and The Gate/Y Gat

Much more could be made of the town's association with this important moment in Welsh History and the craft centre named after the historical events. It is possible to encourage more visitors to call into the town centre through:

- improved visitor information and road signage including for The Gate/Y Gat
- inclusion as part of Celtic Routes (Ireland and Wales) initiative featuring other nearby national heritage.

### D) Cycle Tourism

With the advantage of the national cycle network and local cycling routes, the opportunity exists to support businesses and projects that enhance St Clears credentials as a cycling destination:

- encourage more accommodation providers to obtain 'Cyclist Welcome' place to stay accreditation.

### **E) Events**

The town would benefit from several additional events of broader appeal to visitors to bolster the existing calendar of local events.

## **8 – Promoting St Clears**

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

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. St Clear's heritage provide the strongest elements for the promotion of the area as well as its convenience as a stopping off and shopping destination for visitors. In the near future the towns importance may also be as a place for connecting with the railway and overnight stays. St Clears 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.

## **9 – 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.

## 10 – 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 Gar (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.

## 11 - 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.

## 12 – 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.

St Clears is an unusual rural area that has experienced relatively high levels of developer interest in recent years. This delivery has resulted in a steady increase in the number of open market and affordable homes. Support should be given for new developments such as the proposed 45 houses, flats and bungalows at a former butter factory Parc Owen Industrial Estate to meet the needs of St Clears residents on the county council's housing register.



## 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 - 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 businesses</b></li> </ul>	Short and medium	Carmarthenshire CC, business and property owners, Business Wales, and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP)          Helo Blod	LEADER Seed Funding  Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds & Commercial Property Development Funds          Helo Blod	Initiate dialogue with St Clears Business Park and Tir Owen Estate and the Train Station project team and undertake site feasibility and masterplanning studies.          Working with key local employers to identify growth requirements. Continue existing programmes targeting St Clears
<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</b></li> <li><b>Digital training</b></li> </ul>	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>4 - TOWN CENTRE Public Realm</b>	Medium and Long term	Carmarthenshire CC, Town Council and Business Group	Ten Towns Capital Fund	Commission design brief and feasibility study (combine with 6 Walking & Cycling Links and 7 Aire Camping proposals)

ACTION	TIMEFRAME	KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER	POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES	NEXT STEPS
<b>5 - ST CLEARS TRAIN STATION</b>	Short and medium	National Station Improvement Programme, Carmarthenshire CC, Transport for Wales, Town Council.	Restoring Your Railway Fund (secured)	Site location and landownership investigations. Include consideration of employment space (see 2)
<b>6 - CYCLING &amp; WALKING LINKS</b> • <b>Station Road active travel link</b>	Medium and Long term	Carmarthenshire CC	Ten Towns Capital Fund  Active Travel Funds	Feasibility study of the link between the proposed new station and town centre. Combine with station location studies
<b>7 – VISITOR ECONOMY</b> • <b>A40 Visitor interception</b>  • <b>Aire camping site</b>  • <b>Rebecca Riots/Y Gat</b>  • <b>Cycle tourism</b>  • <b>Events</b>	Short and Medium Term	Discover Carmarthenshire/ Town Council, Tourism businesses	LEADER Seed Funding  Carmarthenshire CC Business Grant Funds & Commercial Property Development Funds  Digital SMART Town Resources	Develop signage and digital visitor interception proposal.  Explore feasibility of developing heritage offer with Town Council  Develop offer with local businesses together with cycling and events with Discover Carmarthenshire and community organisations
<b>8 – PROMOTING ST CLEARS</b> • <b>Destination marketing</b>  • <b>Business digital marketing</b>	Short and medium term	Discover Carmarthenshire / Town Council, Business organisations and businesses	LEADER Seed Funding	Coordination with Discover Carmarthenshire/ Link with SMART town & Wi-fi initiatives
<b>9 – PROGRESSIVE PROCUREMENT</b> • <b>New General Hospital</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

ACTION	TIMEFRAME	KEY STAKEHOLDER/DELIVERY PARTNER	POTENTIAL FUNDING & RESOURCES	NEXT STEPS
<b>10 – 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 developing community renewable energy projects and they are looking for business and other organisations to take this forward with.
<b>11 -CIRCULAR ECONOMY</b>	Short and Medium Term	Businesses and Carmarthenshire CC	LEADER Seed Funding and Circular economy initiative	Circular Economy feasibility study recommendations
<b>12 – 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.