

Ammanford Town Centre

Recovery Masterplan

Prepared for
Carmarthenshire County
Council

October 2021



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1 Purpose & Context

This recovery masterplan has been commissioned for Ammanford town centre by Carmarthenshire County Council (Carmarthenshire CC) in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The masterplan reviews existing regeneration activity and provides a fresh focus on the priorities and the strategy for recovery and future growth.

At the current time, the long term effects of the COVID-19 crisis are highly uncertain which makes it difficult to draw a clear picture of the future. As we manage and adjust to the pandemic moving forward, there is the need to rethink the shape and purpose of the town centre and how to positively respond to longer term changes.

This recovery masterplan has been prepared with the contributions of local businesses and stakeholders to help steer the immediate actions in support of town centre recovery and to provide the framework to help re-imagine longer term regeneration and growth. Furthermore, at a time when Carmarthenshire as a whole is suffering from the effects of the pandemic, the recovery masterplan aligns with the priorities and actions that will support the Carmarthenshire wide economic recovery¹.

¹ Carmarthenshire Economic Recovery and Delivery Plan, Carmarthenshire Council 2021

Ammanford town centre profile

- A multifunctional town centre with a strong local convenience and community role
- Business and activity are concentrated around College Street, Quay Street and the edge of the town centre along Foundry Road
- The centre comprises of mainly independent businesses with strong interpersonal relationships and loyalty with their local customers
- Edge of centre Tesco and Lidl anchor the town's convenience shopping together with the town centre Co-op
- The Friday street market is the town's busiest day
- Competition for the town centre derives mostly from regional scale shopping located at Llanelli Parc Trostre, Swansea and Carmarthen
- Recent regeneration programmes have focussed on physical projects, buildings for commercial use and job creation funded through the Ammanford Regeneration Development Fund and Targeted Regeneration Fund (TRI)
- Local wards are some of the most deprived in Carmarthenshire and Wales which is reflected in the levels of prosperity and the characteristics and challenges facing the town centre as a whole

2 The Impact of COVID-19

The impacts of COVID-19 are huge, unprecedented and continue to cloud the economic outlook. The effects on the town centre have been driven by several inter-related shocks including forced closures, social distancing, accelerated online shopping and structural changes for national multiple retailers.

Whilst impacts have been largely negative, some positive changes have also arisen including strengthened community networks, support for local businesses and 'shop local'. It has also supported growth in business innovation, diversification and created new business opportunities.

The Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on Ammanford town centre² identified the immediate and some potentially longer term impacts that shape this masterplan.

² Ammanford Town Centre – Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19, December 2020, Owen Davies Consulting Ltd



- £472k – the estimated amount of weekly spending on non-essential retail, services, leisure and hospitality that has been lost during periods of lockdown.
- A 70% decline in footfall at its lowest level in April 2020 compared to a year earlier. By September 2020, footfall remained 24% lower year on year. However, footfall levels have recovered at a higher rate compared with the other Primary Towns in the county. Footfall is highest on Friday market days.
- **18% - the vacancy rate reflecting the loss of national multiples and independents in the last 12 months.** Future closure of New Look is expected in 2021.
- Impacts on the wider Ammanford economy have been modelled and show reduced productivity, loss of employment with accommodation and food services businesses expected to **experience significant closures.** Prosperity measured in terms of average household income is lower than average.

Future drivers of change

Post COVID-19 life will likely be different to what many were used to with the pandemic accelerating many pre-existing structural trends as well as people forming new habits. This means people are unlikely to return entirely to the old behaviours. However, there remains uncertainty with how permanent these changes will prove once COVID-19 is no longer a threat and people can return to normal work patterns and socialising. The future drivers of change (Figure 1) are likely to have both positives and negatives effects for businesses and the people that use the town centre.

	Negatives	Positives
National multiple retailers	Loss of footfall as brands that once provided an important customer draw continue to restructure/close	Prime frontage become available for ambitious independents
Office space	New pattern of working from home reduces number and frequency of office workers commuting to the town	Working from home and reduced out-commuting increase opportunity for more localised spending and activity
	Demand for office spaces decline	Opportunity for combined agile office hubs and shared workspace
Online shopping	Continued growth of online shopping results in long term loss of footfall	Brick & mortar businesses grow trade online to reach new markets & customers
	Retail – require smaller sales areas and different type of space to allow increased storage and back office	Business offering quality, specialist and experience led retail and personal services likely to grow
Property	Decline in demand for retail and office space results in decline in property value/income for owners/investors	Lower 'attractive' rents and more flexible terms encourages independent business start-ups and existing business growth
	Declining viability and willingness to adapt property and invest	Landlords/property owners are incentivised to work in partnership with public sector and play an active role in regeneration
Place & attractiveness	Cautious consumers and ongoing health concerns attracts customers to locations considered safer e.g. retail parks	Opportunity to re-shape public spaces and improve pedestrian environments
	Loss of retail character and dominance of shopping	Space for new and intensified uses – residential, leisure, health, culture. Growth of new customers – e.g., homeworker meetings/ lunchtime hospitality
	Loss of hospitality, culture, leisure businesses that offer 'experiences' but have also been hardest hit	Greater emphasis on experience & 'place'

Figure 1: Drivers of change

3 Key Issues & Opportunities for the Town Centre

People

Understanding the characteristics of the people who live nearby and potentially work, visit and use the town centre is an underpinning element of the masterplan. Once social distancing restrictions are lifted, it will become clearer how people’s behaviour and preferences have been altered, and this will determine how businesses, leisure and cultural attractions adapt as a result. It will be important for the masterplan to safeguard the businesses and activities that current customers want as well as attracting new users by understanding who they are and what they desire.

Community Profile

Approximately 14% of comparison (non-food) expenditure made by residents living in Ammanford is currently spent in the town centre with circa one third (£58m) leaking to nearby locations including Parc Trostre, Fforest Fach Retail Park, Carmarthen and Cross Hands. Local working patterns are anticipated to account for expenditure away from the town centre.

Whilst the majority of weekly spend is on convenience (food and essentials), expenditure on clothing/footwear, and eating & drinking is also important (Figure 3). The centre’s local convenience role is clearly important as is the value retail role. In addition, safeguarding the established hospitality sector will be important for the future recovery and growth in the town centre

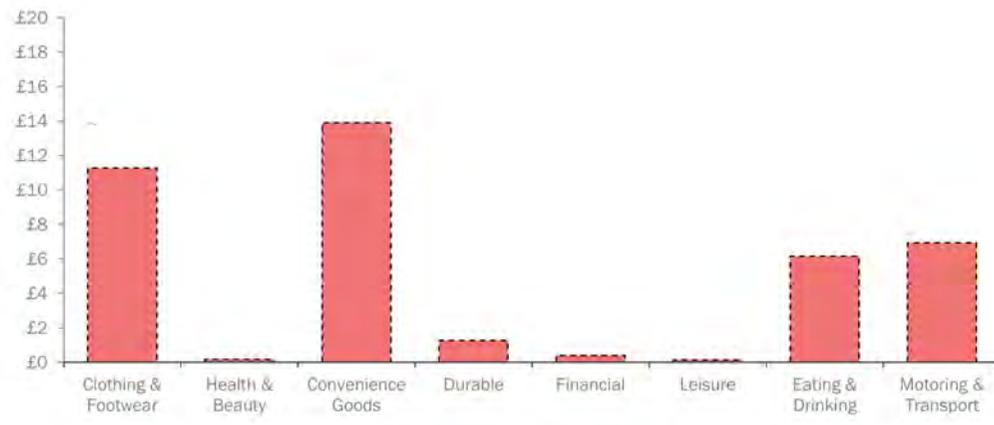
Category	% Using the centre
Affluent & prosperous	12%
Financially stretched	26%
Comfortable	58%

Figure 2 – Acorn consumer segmentation. Source CACI 2020

Spending

Approximately 14% of comparison (non-food) expenditure made by residents living in Ammanford is currently spent in the town centre with circa one third (£58m) leaking to nearby locations including Parc Trostre, Fforest Fach Retail Park, Carmarthen and Cross Hands. Local working patterns are anticipated to account for expenditure away from the town centre.

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Outlook

The emerging local development plan (LDP) identifies Ammanford as playing a localised service centre function rather than being a primary focus for new development. With no major housing development or major economic development plans for the town, it is the investment in local infrastructure that will drive forward the town's regeneration. In Ammanford, this includes the proposals to remodel and modernise the primary school settings in the town with a new facility for children, staff (and parents) in the town centre and investment in leisure facilities.

Carmarthenshire's Modernising Education Programme currently contains a scheme to develop the existing educational provision within the Ammanford area, which will entail a review of the current infrastructure and facilities.

Figure 3: Average weekly household spend
Source: CACI 2020 – Dash line represent average for towns located in the Swansea Bay city region

Carmarthenshire’s Leisure Services have appraised the market and identified the potential to expand the Health and Fitness suite offer in the town. This cannot be accommodated within the current shared school/leisure centre and a separate leisure/school site masterplan is expected to be completed within the next 10-15 years. Consequently, Leisure Services are considering several options including town centre properties suitable for an extension of leisure services.

Business

The key considerations are the need to safeguard viable businesses particularly those in key sectors and that will contribute to a higher quality experience and diversity of uses. The masterplan also needs to support businesses capable of capturing new customers and opening up new markets whether they are new enterprises or established businesses ambitious for growth.

The business footprint demonstrates the number of businesses by type and how Ammanford town centre is dominated by retail across several categories. Whilst it is likely that retail will continue to decline (notably clothing and footwear and durable) as a proportion of the town centre, growth categories providing more personal and experience led services such as health, beauty and eating and drinking will have the potential to grow as part of an evening economy offer. The leisure offer is also an opportunity for growth.

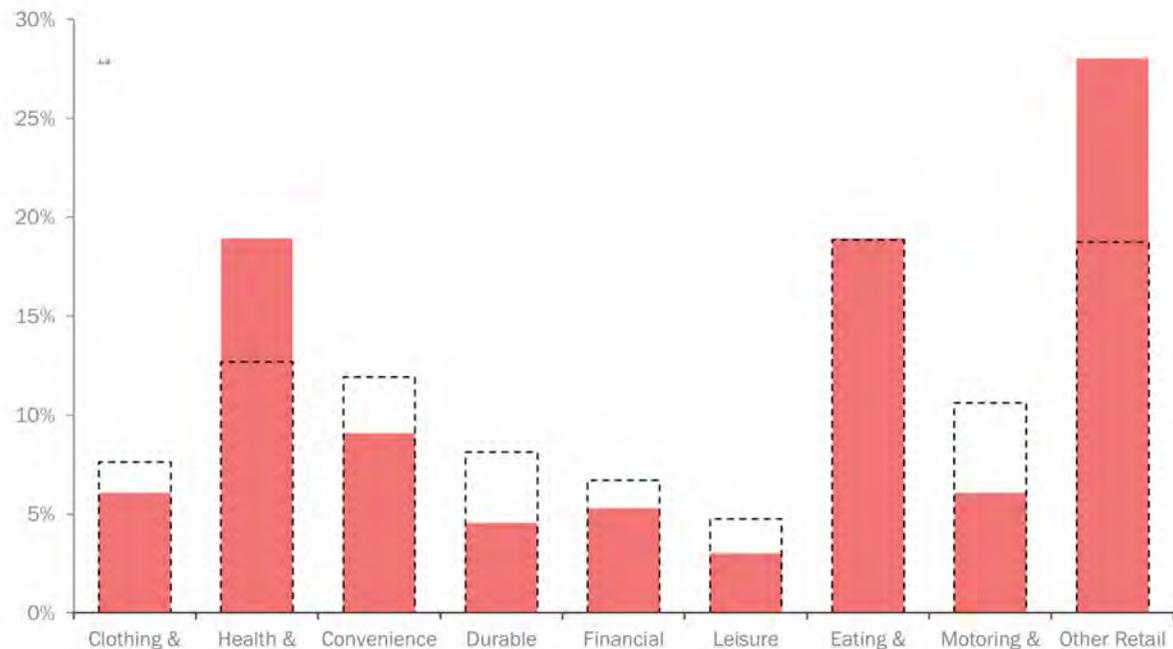


Figure 4: Town centre business footprint
Source: CACI 2020 – Dash line represent average for towns located in the Swansea Bay city region

Diversity & Speciality

It's possible to buy most essentials in the town centre from either the Co-op supermarket or independent businesses. There are independent bakers, butchers, pharmacy, florist and hardware shops. There are also a number of independent specialists including jewellery, cobblers, health and beauty and women's clothing. Furthermore, there is a notable quantity of book shops and antique shops. The evening economy is characterised by a handful of pubs and a large number of takeaway/ fast-food restaurants.

The specialist nature of several businesses may not be immediately apparent to a visitor because they are dispersed across the centre, but they signify a high quality of local business.

Research of the Ammanford areas has also identified a range of specialist 'home based' businesses that have the potential to provide the basis for further growth of the town centre and strengthen the quality independent charm. Businesses include 'maker business' such as Bespoke Wood, Y Gegin Maldod, Piece of Cake Wales, Hometime Crafts, Augustus Gloop Cake. There might be potential to established new cooperatives comparable to Ammanford Arts and Crafts, local artists and crafters located in a communal town centre shop and sharing their talent and costs in Ammanford's first arts co-operative.



Figure 6 Examples of specialist businesses located outside of the town centre

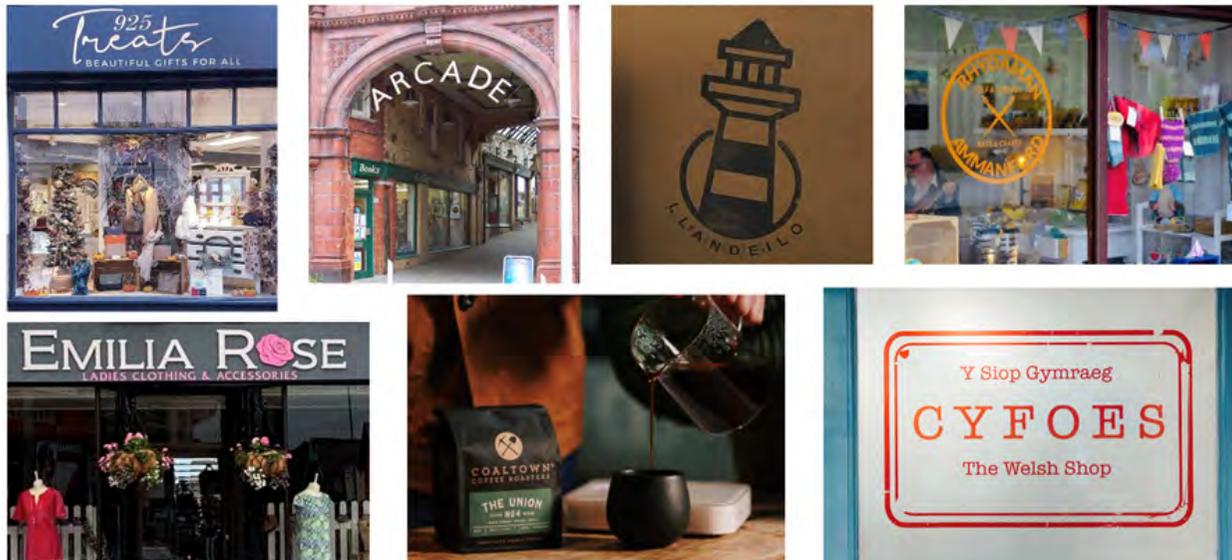


Figure 5: Examples of independent businesses

Business Property

With the decline in retail and larger format stores, there is a need to repurpose and adapt a large amount of town centre property. Vacancy rates have grown in Ammanford and sustaining occupation levels, particularly if the new growth arises from the small business and independent sector, will require fit for purpose and attractive property with greater flexibility with rents and lease terms.

Vacant properties are distributed across the town centre, with a mixture of small and larger units available to let. Since the announcement in February 2021 that Poundstretcher will occupy the former supermarket building off College Street, the larger premises are now concentrated on Quay Street. The likelihood of large businesses closing in 2021 will compound this situation and lead to a concentration of empty frontages.

For some of the largest units, different opportunities in need of greater floorspace could arise including the reposition of the Councils leisure offer to provide centrally located facilities and potential for bringing college education and training closer to the town centres.

However, the dynamics of the property market are complex and require both the demand for units and willing landlords. If adaptation is necessary, a viable return for the owners/investor will be necessary. The potential for growth of the small independent business community and the need for recovery to cultivate closer to home solutions means that

commercial property needs to reflect the changing shape of demand whilst encouraging green shoots and opportunistic businesses willing to invest.

The proposed Local Development Order will be a critical policy tool to promote flexibility that can be enacted relatively quickly. An LDO, if approved in 2021 will provide general planning consent for the ground and upper floors, removing the need for planning applications and streamlines the planning system, lowering barriers to a range of new uses and investment.

Digital and Social Media

Growing small businesses and transitioning to medium and potentially larger-scale operations requires improved productivity and market reach. Growing an effective online customer base will likely be an important part of this future business growth.

Our review of Ammanford's digital health suggests that not enough is being done by most local businesses online to maximise their communication - although the presence of community groups is relatively strong. There are, however, notable leaders such as Coaltown Coffee and RedStar 13 which set a precedent for communication, interaction and subsequent growth.

66% of UK consumers spend 3hr day on social media

52% of UK consumers use social media to research purchases

Only 27% of Ammanford's town centre businesses active on social media

Ammanford online profile is notable mostly for the nearby natural attractions and the sizeable building and manufacturing businesses situated close by, but not necessarily as a destination in its own right. There are some exceptions such as Coal Town Coffee which is a thriving cafe and roastery serving a spirited local community and is a clear county-level leader in its online retail approach.

The online community suggests the night-time economy is healthy thanks to a collection of good takeaways and restaurants and a quirky strong community spirit with Ammanford's Guinness Book of World Records for the Largest Gathering of Santa's Elves

However, with retail in decline in the town (even before the pandemic) and the online presence of the town and its businesses generally weak. This could be strengthened considerably to drive further local and independent business growth, as well as supporting and development of the weekly Friday market, which was once a destination point for people in the surrounding area and visitors alike.

Marketing and communication will also need to focus on the local community and catchments area with opportunities to create a sustainable regular event (e.g local market) which acts as a platform for small and local businesses to showcase their wares. As well as marketed to the local community and grown into a stronger local offering the potential grows to become an attraction for visitors.

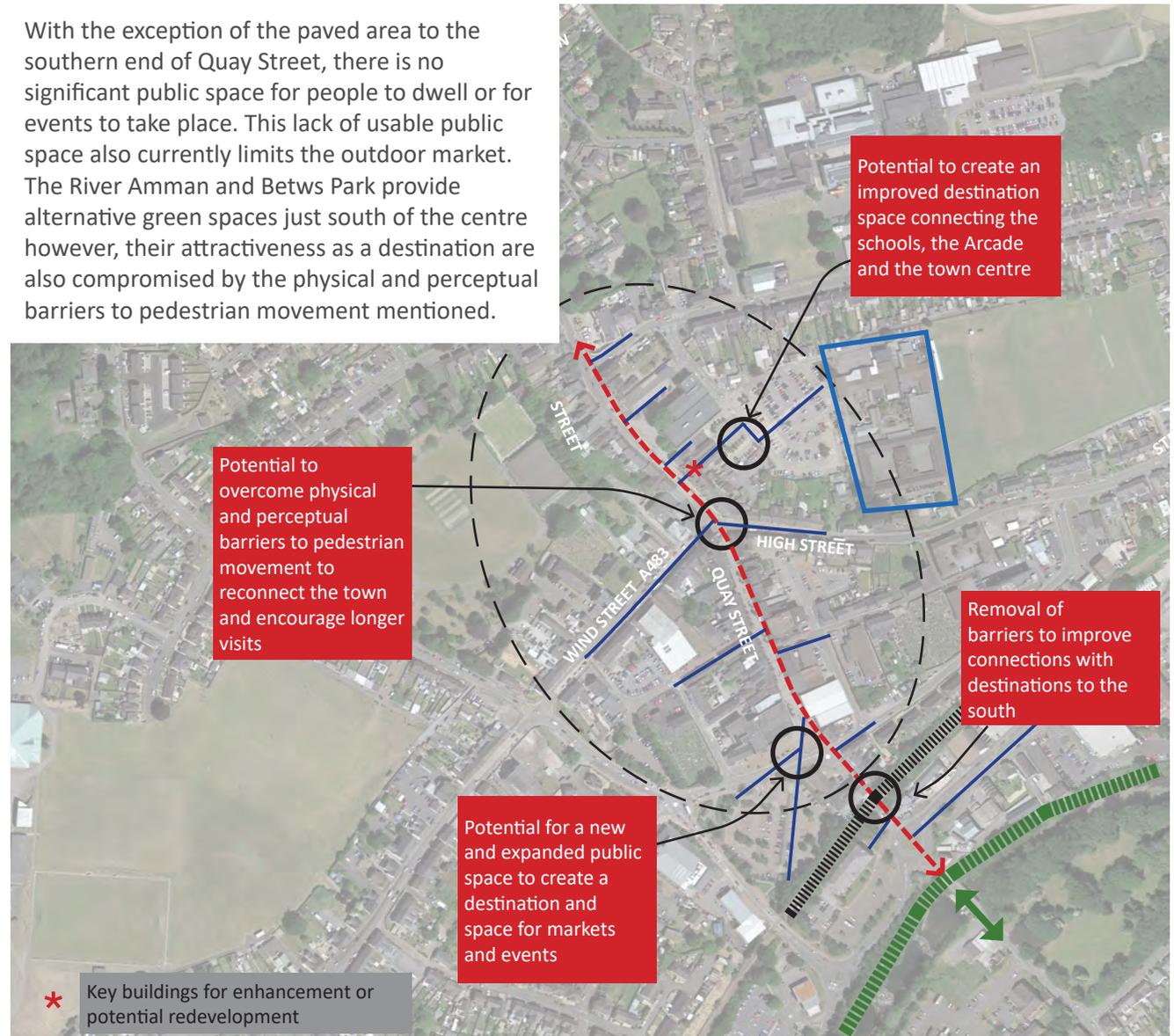
Place

Ammanford's town centre has a linear form focused around the north-south alignment of Quay Street and High Street / College Street. Numerous lateral side streets connect with this route along its length, providing additional retail frontage and access to other facilities. This simple arrangement results in a highly legible town centre however, pedestrian connectivity, is significantly undermined by the east-west Wind Street (A483) High Street route. This route is dominated by traffic and presents a severe physical and perceptual barrier to pedestrian movement.

The compactness of the town centre has also been compromised in recent years by the increase of key destinations to the south of the town centre especially along Foundry Road. The distance of these locations is further compounded by the perception of severance by the railway line south of Quay Street.

Areas either side of the north-south axis behind the retail frontage comprise a mixture of important facilities such as the schools and car parks, together with numerous areas of fragmented and poorly planned urban form. The town also benefits from some notable attractive buildings and non-more impressive than the Arcade which provide an elegant location for high quality independent retail and is an important link between the schools and the town centre.

With the exception of the paved area to the southern end of Quay Street, there is no significant public space for people to dwell or for events to take place. This lack of usable public space also currently limits the outdoor market. The River Amman and Betws Park provide alternative green spaces just south of the centre however, their attractiveness as a destination are also compromised by the physical and perceptual barriers to pedestrian movement mentioned.



Summary of Key Challenges & Opportunities

Challenges

- Decline of retail the national brands that attracted footfall
- Large amount of local spend 'leaking' to Parc Trostre, Swansea, Carmarthen and Cross Hands (partly reflects commuter flows)
- Underlying lower levels of prosperity
- Growth of vacant property including several larger units
- Viability of adapting/reconfiguring commercial property with weakening demand
- Low levels of digital business engagement
- Cautious consumers
- Safeguarding – business 'surviving' the pandemic
- Place management – e.g. communication/marketing & car parking

Opportunities

- Strengthening the local convenience community role
- Working from home/reduced out commuting increases localised spending
- New town centre education & leisure facilities
- New models of shared office workspaces
- Entertainment, hospitality, arts, culture and theatre
- Street markets that are distinctive and vibrant
- Existing base of interesting and specialist independents
- The Arcade, character buildings, riverside area and parks

Summary of Key Objectives

To drive forward the plan for recovery and growth and to provide a focus for the strategy and delivery plan the following objectives for the town centre have been identified:

- Focus on attracting local families and younger people through securing new leisure, education and cultural uses, to help broaden the range of activities and extend 'dwell time' and spend throughout the day and evening
- Ensure plans to redevelop the town centre primary school and the expansion of leisure facilities provides new 'anchors' that drive footfall and directly benefits for the town centre
- Encourage the growth of the weekly market to include a greater number of stalls and new types of markets
- Unify the disjointed areas of the town centre through better-quality highway design, pedestrian links and the redesign and animation of key open spaces
- Safeguard viable businesses, cultivate new local enterprise and support independent businesses to locate and grow in the town centre
- Establish a SMART town with businesses making best use of digital technology to grow their market reach, turnover and footfall
- Using the towns natural 'green & blue' infrastructure to create a stronger sense of place and distinctiveness
- Effectively communicate what the town centre has to offer to the local community and grow local loyalty and new custom
- Initiatives that ensure a range of stakeholders are involved in delivering improvements for the town centre
- Encourage decarbonisation through low carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy and sustainable developments
- Support for the use and promotion of the Welsh language and culture.

4 The Recovery Masterplan

The social and economic impact of the pandemic and Brexit are expected to fall most heavily on places like Ammanford that are relatively more deprived. However, the town centre is likely to feel less directly impacted by the pandemic, because of its localised customer base and a smaller proportion of office workers and retail space to start with. Nevertheless, Ammanford needs to rethink the path for recovery and growth in light of the changes brought about by the pandemic, as small changes will have dramatic impacts such as the closure of national retailers creating large voids in the heart of the town. However, new commercial opportunities could also be created from the reduced level of outward commuting and the increased demand for living in rural towns.

The path towards town centre recovery and growth needs to be flexible in response to this uncertainty, but also it needs to focus on building a stronger, more sustainable and durable local economy based on local business, inspiring local people and strengthening the distinctiveness of the place.

The overall strategy for Ammanford town centre focuses on the town's community scale and purpose. With an emphasis on localism, the masterplan aims to harness closer to home solutions that build a stronger and more resilient town centre at the same time as capturing the positive effects of planned investment in local education and leisure facilities. Rooted in local people using the centre more often, the masterplans approach also seeks to support the

micro and small business community to grow and to upscale, to build the towns profile and positive character through the local brands, local culture and promoting access to the local environment.

The centre also needs to become more walkable and better connected by reducing the separation between the town's principal commercial areas and car parks located at both ends of the town centre. Better linkages are also needed to connect with the services and retail attractions located on the outer edge of the centre beyond the railway line.

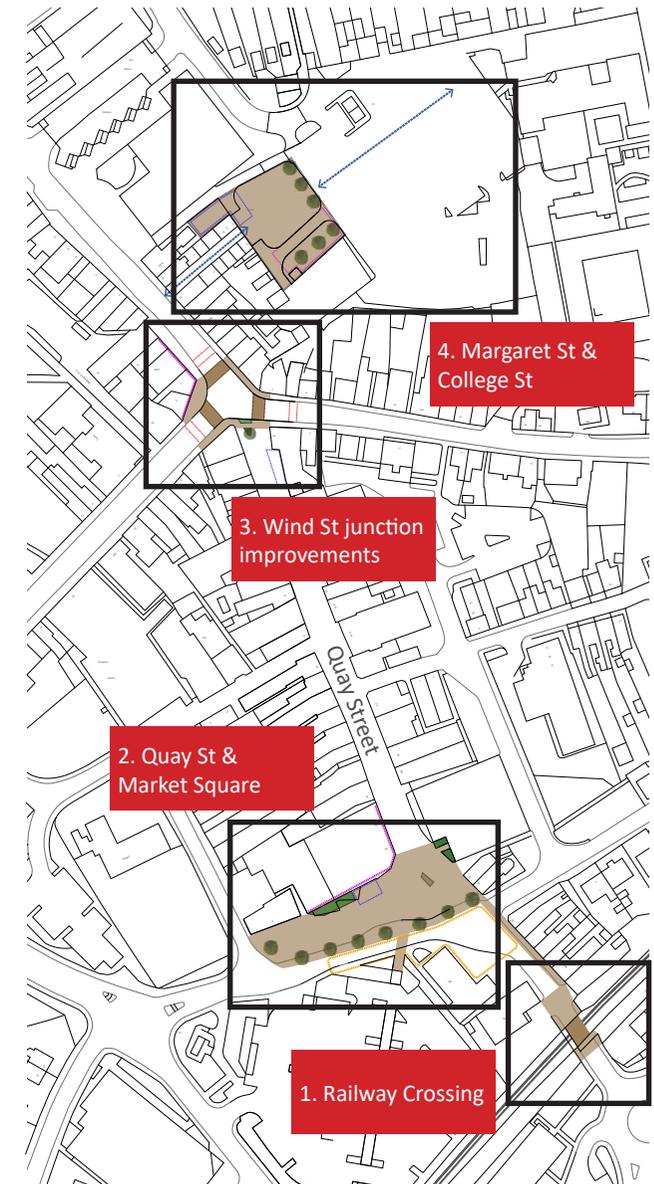
The place-making approach also helps to create more functional and attractive public spaces located at each end of the centre. This will improve connection with the riverside environment, support local businesses, help the weekly market to grow and encourage people to spend more leisure time in the centre.

As retail uses will command less space, especially in Quay Street, the centre will have to become more multi-purpose to replace the national retailers and to safeguard the business that remains and are reliant on footfall.

Spatial Priority Areas

The masterplans spatial priority areas provide a focus for interventions based on both need and opportunity.

These are located on the adjacent plan.



Project 1. Railway Crossing

Objectives

Redesign of and environmental improvements to the existing pedestrian railroad crossing to ensure attractive inviting and safe connection with numerous destinations south of the rail line.

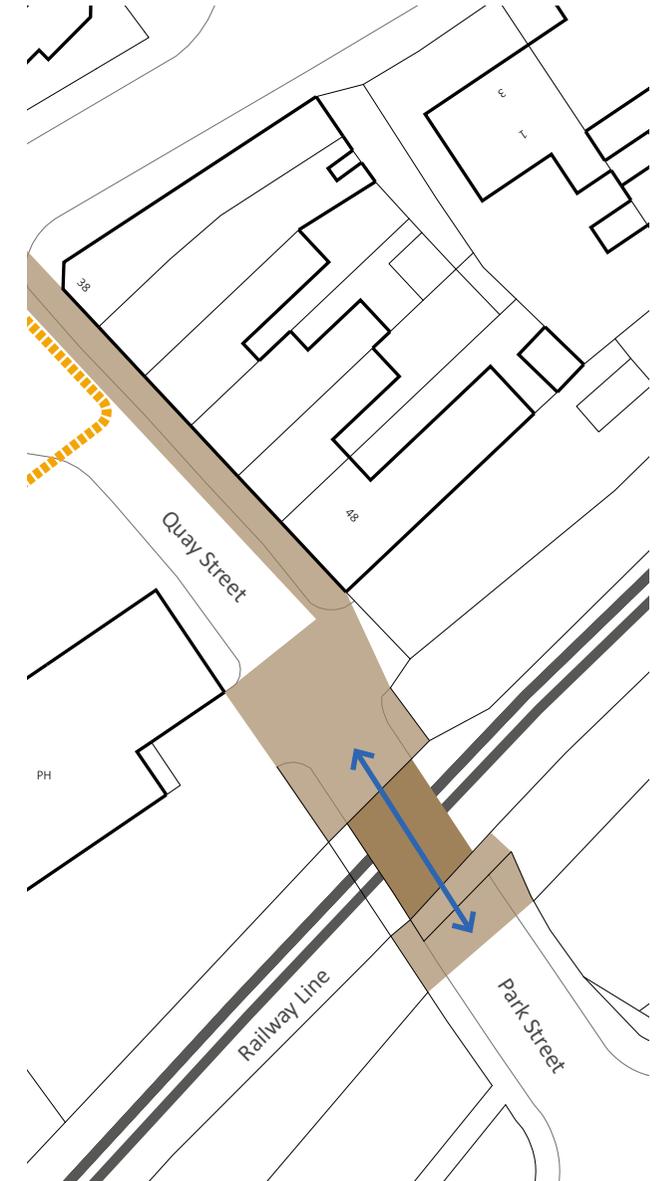
Many important commercial attractions, services and natural features are located along Foundry Road on the edge and outside of the town centre. Improved walking and cycling links between destinations such as Coal Town Coffee, Lidl, the Job Centre Plus offices and other office investment underway will be necessary if the town centre is to function more effectively as a whole. The riverside walk, Betws Park and the national cycle route are important elements of the towns green and blue infrastructure in need of better connections with the centre.

The infrequently used railway line acts as the main barrier to walking and cycling direct routes between these destinations, and the redesign and environmental improvements to the existing pedestrian rail crossing would ensure the link is more attractive, inviting and safe.



Tasks

1. Preparation of a brief for a feasibility study (approximate RIBA Stage 2) to create improved pedestrian crossing of the railway line. Including:
 - Liaison with railway line operators to understand key parameters.
 - Engineering report and concept designs with associated public realm proposals to create a safe accessible and attractive route.
 - 'Access for all' appraisal of options
 - Guidance regarding costs, risks, delivery process and timescale



Project 2. Quay Street & Market Square

Objective

The redesign of the existing public space to create a significantly enhanced 'Market Square'. This re-imagined space should function as a focus for the town's civic activities, informal leisure an improved location for the town's market.

Quay St is the heart of the town centre shopping area and is likely to experience significant changes as a consequence of the decline of national retailers. The risk of large store closure and long term vacant premises, requires positive intervention to safeguard and prevent the street from declining further. The requirement for a new leisure gym and fitness suite is the obvious opportunity with the potential to occupy the scale of property available or if necessary, in a new building in this area.

The southern end of Quay Street is the location of the weekly market, however, space is constrained and hindered by its layout and other features including the road space and pedestrian crossings. The priority is for an improved public space designed to create a significant enhanced 'Market Square'. This reimagined space should function as a focus for the town's civic activities and an area for events and leisure activities.

Tasks

1. Capacity study exercise that identifies options for expansion of the outdoor market including options for temporary use of the road space and use of part of the adjacent car park. The options could be tested on a trial basis to help support the development of permanent proposals for Market Square'.
2. Support the adaptive reuse of the 'Store 21' building and encourage an occupier that will contribute to the active use of the building to enliven Market Square. Consider the potential for increased opening of the blank wall to create active frontage, or the potential for a 'green wall' for visual and environmental benefits. Also explore the viability of a new-build property.
3. Liaise with Home Bargains to consider visual enhancement of their boundary walls and entrance area.
4. Preparation of a brief for a feasibility study (approximate RIBA Stage 2) to explore ideas for the redesign of Market Square. Including:
 - Options for the expansion of the usable public space through the reduction, removal or sharing of the adjacent highway, bus stop, roundabout (Heol Wallasey) and consideration of the wider implications of these approaches on the highway network
 - In conjunction with the above, options for improved and more direct pedestrian access from the south including the adjacent car

park and with Quay Street railway crossing.

- Coordination with the results of the market expansion capacity study.
 - Review pavement licensing arrangements and extend to encourage more active use.
 - Concepts for the significant redesign of the space in terms of its arrangement and aesthetics, to create an attractive, dynamic and contemporary public space that benefits from trees and planting and provides opportunities for sitting, shelter and informal leisure - as well as unconstrained usable space for market stalls.
 - Furniture / signage audit and proposals for the de-cluttering of the street environment.
 - Lighting proposals to create a more ambient setting for evening activity and power supplies for market stalls.
 - Review of existing TROs and 'Access for all' appraisal of options
 - A palette of materials, street furniture and lighting that is coordinated with Quay Street
 - Strategy for stakeholder/ public engagement
 - Cost appraisal / Risk assessment / Delivery timescale
5. Commission Topographical survey; utilities, basement and radar survey; Liaison with statutory undertakers and assess funding opportunities



- a** Potential to expand the public space and reduce or share the road space, to create a more attractive and usable destination town square, with opportunities for performance and events.
- b** Potential for occasional use adjacent highway space (or adjacent car park) for a larger scale outdoor market.
- c** Improved direct crossing to connect Quay Street with the car park.



Existing

- d** High quality and contemporary landscape treatment to create a genuine attraction in the town centres and encourages people to dwell and enjoy the space.
- e** Potential to improve the existing building edges through increased visual permeability, active frontages, 'green wall' solutions and seating areas for cafe or street food stalls.



d e

Project 3. Wind St junction improvements

Objective

Explore opportunities to redesign the junction to maximise direct, intuitive pedestrian connection and minimise the dominance of highway infrastructure together with coordinated public realm improvements.

The Wind Street junction is a key space that connects the two halves of the town centre between College Street and Quay Street, yet the pedestrian experience is one of the barriers to smooth and convenient movement through the town. There is a need for a technical study to explore opportunities to redesign the junction to maximise direct intuitive pedestrian connections and minimised the dominance of the highway infrastructure.

In this location, the group of modern design building that frames the junction on the Wind Street corner are in poor condition and visually detract from the quality of the town centre and would benefit from improved façades. The redesign of the public realm and improvements to the adjacent spaces especially at the north end of Quay St will provide opportunities for commercial use of the external space including opportunities for the public house.

Tasks

1. Preparation of a brief for a feasibility study (approximate RIBA Stage 3) to create improved pedestrian crossing at the junction of Wind Street. Options should seek to create wide crossings in-line with the pedestrian desire lines connecting Quay Street with High Street to the north. The study should include:
 - Technical highways appraisal of traffic flows, vehicle swept paths, traffic signal timings, and consideration of the wider implications on the highway network.
 - Consideration of the corresponding removal of the pedestrian barriers, kerbs and signage.
 - Liaison with the Highway Authority to understand key parameters and approval process for the exercise.
 - Associated public realm proposals to create a safe environment without the use of pedestrian barriers, and an attractive, welcoming setting at the northern end of Quay Street.
 - Street furniture and signage audit and proposals for the de-cluttering of the street environment.
 - Lighting proposals to create a more ambient setting for evening activity
 - Review of existing TROs
 - 'Access for all' appraisal of options
 - A palette of materials, street furniture and lighting that is coordinated with Quay Street
 - Strategy for stakeholder/ public engagement
 - Cost appraisal, risk assessment, delivery timescale
2. In support of the feasibility study, undertake or commission the following:
 - Topographical survey of the study area
 - Utilities, basement and radar surveys
 - Liaison with statutory undertakers to understand potential future works in the area
 - Assessment of funding opportunities
3. Promote the use of the outside space on Quay Street adjacent to the public house, for tables and chairs
4. Liaise with building owners especially those front the junction on Wind Street and High Street, to improve the appearance of the building and shop-fronts.



a Existing crossings and highways infrastructure replaced to contemporary pedestrian crossing solution and removal of pedestrian barriers to create a more convenient and attractive connection between north and south.

b Corresponding improvements in the public realm to coordinate with the materials used in Quay Street

c Cosmetic improvement to Key buildings and shop-fronts

d Use of the external spaces for outside dining areas

Project 4. Margaret Street & College Street

Objective

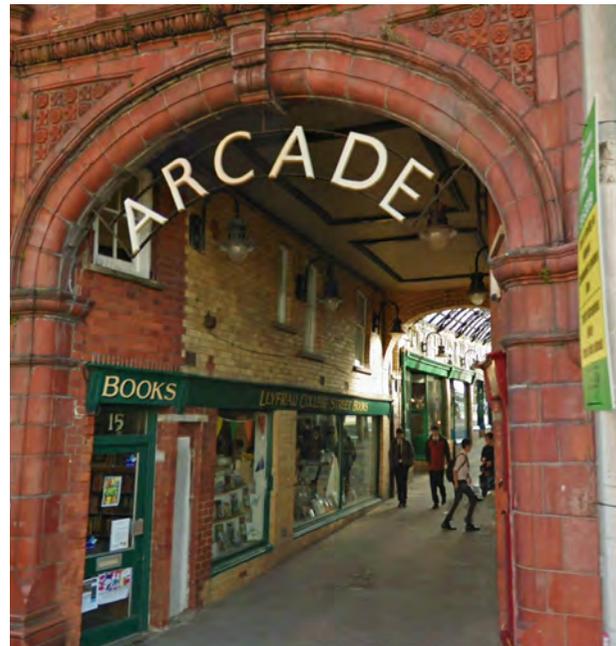
Re-imagining of the existing public space as 'Arcade Square' to create an inclusive facility to encourage families to remain in the area beyond school and use the arcade and wider town centre.

Carmarthenshire's Modernising Education Programme contains a Band B scheme for the development of educational provision within the Ammanford area. Whilst the scheme is currently in development it is hoped to provide medium to longer-term investment in community-focused education with potentially significant benefits for the town centre. This would be achieved through developing and providing fit for purpose, 21st century facilities which are appropriately located to support improving buildings, infrastructure and adjoining spaces that foster links with the town centre. Throughout the progression of the scheme, careful consideration will be given to ensure that any development supports and complements the town centre masterplan objectives.

In the immediate and shorter-term there are opportunities to address public spaces to connect the school to the town centre. 'Arcade square' is the existing public space positioned next to the car park and reimagined to create an inclusive facility to encourage families to remain in the area beyond school and use the arcade and wider town centre.

There is the possibility of installing imaginative play facilities and opportunities for table and chairs etc. that would support the hospitality businesses located in the Arcade.

The former Co-op building will be re-occupied by Poundstretcher, possibly on a soft short term lease. Longer-term, the building remains an option for the redevelopment and potentially expansion of larger-scale activities and uses including leisure facilities. There are several smaller vacant premises concentrated along College Street that would benefit from investment, potentially mixed uses and the encouragement of independent businesses.



Actions

1. Liaise with local stakeholders and owner of the Arcade to agree objectives for the enhancement and redesign of the public space adjacent to the Arcade.
2. Prepare a design brief for the development of design concepts (approximate RIBA Stage 2) for the space including the incorporation of seating areas for a cafe, imaginative play facilities, paving and planting. The study should also include:
 - Strategy for stakeholder/ public engagement
 - Cost appraisal
 - Risk assessment
 - Commissioning of a topographic survey
3. Commission consultant to set out key development principles and design expectations for the future development of the school site specifically with regard its relationship with, and connection to, the adjacent car park, Arcade and town centre, to help inform the school masterplanning process.



a High quality redesign of the space to create greater enclosure and separation from the car park and enhance the route to the Arcade.

b Define areas for outside dining in support of cafés.



c Inclusion of an imaginative play area to encourage parents and children to dwell in the town centre

d Include improved pedestrian connections between the schools and the square



Property Strategy

A core element of the recovery masterplan is property led and reflects the importance of a property strategy which directly supports and contributes to the objectives of recovery and future town centre opportunities.

The impact of the Covid pandemic has accelerated many structural trends which have increasingly shaped the high street over recent years. This is most evident in the changing composition and use of the town centre, especially the growth in vacant retail premises, which include a concentration of small shop vacancies on College Street and Wind Street and larger voids in Quay Street driven by the closures and pressures facing national multiple retailers and the challenge for securing new and viable reoccupation. The oversupply of retail combined with the loss of many traditional town centre footfall attractors emphasise the importance of securing alternative uses, including new anchors, to help broaden the range of activities and offer, extend 'dwell time' and diversify the reasons to visit the town centre throughout the day and evening. For example, this could include securing a new gym and fitness suite under consideration by Carmarthenshire CC and opportunities for providing college teaching and workshop facilities closer to the centre.

A key objective will be to encourage and promote new uses with attention on vacant and underutilised premises, including support for re-purposing to create a wider mix of uses including workspace, residential, leisure, education and community uses. This will require engagement with property owners, investors, the development industry and prospective occupiers. There will be 'areas of opportunity' which offer scope for qualitative improvements to existing property together with some sites that represent more comprehensive refocusing in the longer term. The Quay Street area is the prime example with modern empty units suitable for larger scale new uses and College Street has several opportunities for reoccupying units suitable for start-ups and smaller independents. Both areas will need safeguarding to support and encourage new businesses.

The role of public sector land and assets further offer opportunities to drive co-location and asset collaboration in the town centre to generate footfall. The town centre Hwb building and possibly the Job Centre offices (if pedestrian linkages are improved) are key opportunities for this type of use.

Project 1: Local Market Insight

Objective

In order to investigate and encourage realistic opportunities for new town centre uses, particularly through the reuse/re-purposing of vacant and underutilised premises, a property strategy requires market knowledge and proactive engagement with property owners/landlords/investors and commercial property agents active in the town centre. This is considered essential to early understanding of ownership intentions and aspirations, and market/occupier requirements. This will also align closely with the business support strategy which seeks to encourage new business activities, including the role of property in supporting a range of innovative and flexible accommodation and commercial terms/conditions for occupiers. This objective will:

- Investigate and identify key property assets that represent suitable, realistic opportunities for new uses beyond retail;
- Encourage property owners, investors and developers to consider alternative uses and re-purposing of assets that deliver economic and community value and drive town centre investment;
- Build and promote investor confidence in the town centre with support for a wider mix of uses and encouragement of modern and flexible uses;

- Encourage more flexible and innovative commercial terms/conditions for prospective occupiers especially independents to maximise affordability and de-risk exposure for landlords.

Benefits

- Reduced vacant property rates
- Increased investor confidence
- Increased level of property improvements and refurbishments that supports the local demand
- Broader range of town centre uses including residential
- Greater flexibility that encourages enterprise and business growth



Tasks

1. Undertake regular audit and monitoring of vacant premises in the town centre to identify key landowners and investors and establish where possible owner intentions.
2. Liaise with the development industry where known requirements exist, with priority to direct new investment to the town centre.
3. Investigate potential to establish a Property Owners/Investors/Commercial Agents Forum on a regular basis to monitor property issues, identify actions/opportunities for the town centre and investigate incentives to support and encourage take up of vacant properties.

Project 2: Local Development Order

Objective

Proposals are being examined for town centre Local Development Order, a planning policy tool that promote greater flexibility and opportunity for a wider range and mix of uses in the town centre. If approved, it is important this is promoted to property owners and commercial agents to communicate the benefits of the LDO particularly at a time of major change in the property market.

Benefits

- Greater flexibility for the property market
- Directing investment towards town centre priority areas
- Increasing the viability of building improvements and mixed uses

Tasks

1. Publicise and actively promote the advantages of the Local Development Order (LDO) to property owners/landlords/developers and local commercial agents to encourage opportunities for greater flexibility of uses and re-purposing of assets, including signposting of relevant Council support initiatives where appropriate.
2. Once implemented, keep under review the LDO boundary to ensure it reflects the need for a smaller town centre and to maintain a concentration of investment in the core commercial areas.
3. Promote the opportunities for residential uses in the town centre particularly in supporting more viable development. This could include opportunities to partner with Carmarthenshire County Council Housing Services to deliver increased levels of affordable properties to rent.

Project 3: Funding Support

Objectives

There are key town centre properties which contribute to the objectives of the recovery masterplan and the wider health of the town centre, but which are likely to require a targeted regeneration investment through public sector intervention given the scale, significance and potential complexity of the properties. It will be crucial to ensure these key properties, whether vacant or subject to a change in circumstances, are brought back into beneficial use given their prospects to accommodate, potentially via re-purposing, new activities and uses which can act as anchors and footfall attractors and deliver new investment. The opportunity also exists to target properties in need of qualitative improvement to improve the quality of the built environment.

Benefits

- Intervening in property to deliver objectives for targeted priority areas
- Increasing the viability of building improvements and mixed uses
- Increasing investor confidence and encouraging the private sector to invest

Task

1. Establish a target list of strategic acquisitions that can draw down funding from the Welsh Government Transforming Towns Programme which is available for key properties in the town centre.
2. Identify and establish key target properties in town centres and keep under regular review (which align with market knowledge from Project 1 Local Market Insight and Project 4 Public Sector Land and Assets).
3. Identify a target list of properties identified as in need of qualitative improvement and prioritisation of actions, including potential support for refurbishment and fit out.

Project 4: Public Sector Land and Assets

Objectives

The role of public sector land and assets offer opportunities to investigate greater co-location and public sector asset collaboration in town centre locations. The objectives of the Transforming Towns Programme and emphasis on Town Centre First clearly support this objective, particularly given the strong presence of the public sector locally and the scope to investigate new service delivery and activities from town centre premises. This approach would contribute to major footfall generators alongside enhanced community access for services and contribute to a mixed-use destination. In Ammanford, the opportunity exists to review the existing public sector office estate and identify the potential for extending the role of the existing Hwb alongside new agile working space for Carmarthenshire CC and other public and Third Sector staff.

Benefits

- Co-location of services and office space
- Retain town centre office footfall and spend

Task

1. Proactively working with its public sector partners, including Ystadau Cymru, Carmarthenshire CC will investigate and encourage opportunities for more focused use of town centre locations by the public sector, including the Council's own services.

Project 5: Reform of business rates

Objective

The liability of business rates represents a barrier for many town centre businesses especially independents looking to grow into larger premises, but equally has cost implications for property owners when vacant and considering adaptation. The year-long business rates holiday granted for most Retail, Leisure and Hospitality businesses during 2021/22 as a part of Covid-19 economic support provides a welcome breathing space and encouragement for business to grow whilst a review of longer-term measures should be supported alongside initiatives to encourage business growth.



Benefits

- Property related business costs that support and encourage small business growth.

Task

1. To champion changes to the business rates relief and overall taxation model that support the small and independent business to grow in town centre locations.
2. Encourage property owners to investigate the adaption of town centre property which offer the greatest business rates efficiency, including innovative approaches to minimise empty rates liability which can be a major barrier to intervention.

Business Support Strategy

Recovery will also be reliant on safeguarding key sectors and cultivating local and independent business growth and scaling up through a business strategy that supports businesses to become more competitive with greater potential for attracting footfall, paying higher wages and employing more people.

This can be achieved through a targeted multi-agency approach and the encouragement of the transition from meanwhile use and market trader through to a business located in the town centre.

Key areas that will help to build the town centre of tomorrow includes improving its digital health and installing SMART technology. This will assist in attracting new investment and business resilience alongside support to develop the skills and confidence to fully exploit technology.

Project 1: Entrepreneurship and Business Support

Objective

For the town centre to recover and grow there is the need to safeguard businesses in key sectors and cultivate new local enterprises and independent business growth. The masterplan has identified an appealing range of local independent business, many making specialist goods, located outside of the town that could be encouraged to establish

a presence in the centre and improve the quality of the offering. One option is to explore the cooperative model already proven by Ammanford Arts and Crafts.

Closely aligned with the property strategy, the business support strategy is about creating a pipeline of business occupiers across a range of sectors that adds diversity and attraction to the centre. The town centre business support strategy serves several purposes:

- Establishing a place-based approach to business support reflecting the needs and opportunities specific to the town and town centre
- Encouraging new businesses with the potential to occupy a range of requirements - meanwhile spaces, market stalls or traditional commercial property
- Inspiring micro businesses to transition into larger town centre premises
- Supporting businesses to become more competitive with greater potential for attracting footfall, paying higher wages and employing more people.
- Stimulating local demand in support of public and private sector investment e.g. strategic property acquisitions, creation of business incubation space, shared work hubs and investment in reconfiguring property to match new requirements.

Benefits

- Increase business enquiries supported with advice and mentoring
- Increased number of businesses and jobs safeguarded
- Increased number of new businesses
- Increased rate of micro and small business growth
- Creation of tailored support packages to encourage investment in key sectors
- Decreased levels of vacant property

Tasks

With several agencies providing support to businesses of various sizes and operating across a broad range of sectors, the delivery of business support at a place-based level requires a coordinated and targeted approach.

1. Bring all aspects of business support into one place (either virtual and/or as part of a Hwb), making it clear and simple for businesses to access and find the help they need. The role of the Carmarthenshire CC Economic Development team is helping to simplify for entrepreneurs and businesses a complex picture of entrepreneurship and business support products and ensuring coordinated multi-agency delivery. Partners include the Council, Business Wales, Federation of Small Businesses,

South Wales Chamber, Centre for Business and Social Action, MenTrau Iaith, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Coleg Sir Gar, etc.

2. Promote and communicate at a town level the range of support available and target entrepreneurs and businesses via schools and colleges, businesses groups and organisations and targeting existing town centre traders.
3. Provide access to a helpline, website, and one-to-one sector-focused support, provide free support and guidance at any stage of the business life-cycle:
 - Starting a business
 - Growing a business
 - Developing skills
 - Networking
 - Finding finance
 - Finding a property

Project 2: Digital Town Centre & Skills

Objectives

Given the pressure on the High Street and the impact of COVID-19, it's important that businesses can exploit digital technology, in the same way as supermarkets and shopping centres have done for years. This provides businesses with the opportunity to grow their market and increase turnover locally and globally whilst remaining rooted in the town.

The digital health of Ammanford has demonstrated that just 27% of town centre business are active on social media where the majority of consumers 'hang-out' and can be influenced. Digital health is also influenced by the availability of new technology that exists and is already being used in Welsh towns to help business and places make informed decisions and plan for the future. The objective is to invest in infrastructure in support of creating a SMART town with businesses supported to make the best use of digital to grow their business. This includes:

- Putting in place ultra-fast, ultra-reliable connectivity and innovation networks
- Providing the support, training and encouragement network that helps to create a digital culture and enhanced business skills.

Benefits

- Increased levels of town centre business active on social media
- Increased digital competency levels, qualifications and use of digital technologies
- Increased frequency of business collaboration using social media & technology

Task

1. Carmarthenshire CC as lead authority for the Digital Infrastructure Programme of the Swansea Bay City Deal will work to ensure ultra-fast, ultra-reliable digital infrastructure and connectivity is available for the town to include but not limited to full-fibre gigabit-capable broadband, 4G/5G mobile, and Internet of Things (IoT) innovation networks.
2. Continue to build the Carmarthenshire Innovation Network, an 'Internet of Things' network for businesses, communities, and partners to exploit. Ensure Ammanford is prioritised for coverage along with other primary towns in the County.
3. As part of the business support package, and alongside initiatives including Super-Fast Business Wales, investigate and target the town centre with a Digital Initiative through a combination of, but not limited to, digital events, awareness, skills and support to thrive and take advantage of the digital opportunities
4. Adopt a social media data and insights tool for the town and its businesses that provide data, expertise, knowledge, training and support to help them to connect with their audience, to analyse what content engages them and measure what's impacting business results.

Place Management Strategy

Town centres are places that attract a diverse mixture of people from the everyday user, creative, entrepreneurial and explorer, and no masterplan can force a lively attractive centre into being, but it can create the conditions that allow that to grow.

A prosperous town centre must be a place where people are safe, well managed and excited to be. And as it's no longer possible to guarantee the daytime footfall of shoppers and local workforce, more than ever the town centre must become more stimulating, exciting, community and cultural destinations both during the day and at night.

Ammanford has a strong track record of local events that enliven the town and generate a lot of local support. In 2018 the town was Carmarthenshire's Cultural Town with a wide-ranging events programme covering language, culture, sports and seasonal events such as Halloween and Christmas. Many of these events have been led by the County and Town Councils and moving forward there is the need for a sustainable local group or organisation with strong business representation and the necessary time and resources to drive forward events and promotion in the town. Also, such an organisation can provide businesses with a stronger influence in shaping business support and investment in local infrastructure and town centre improvements.

Project 1: Place Management Organisation

Objective

Investigate option for the creation of a place management group or organisation with a strong business voice and the necessary time and resources to drive forward a local programme of events, marketing and coordination of local initiatives. There are several options to consider including a voluntary partnership and a Business Improvement District similar to Llanelli and Carmarthen.

Benefits

- Business-led group or organisation driving forward town centre activities and the promotion of the town.

Task

1. Undertake consultation/feasibility work with local businesses and stakeholders to establish what new programme of events and marketing might look like, how much it might cost and how to fund it.
2. Identify funding opportunities to support either a town centre management group/organisation and/or feasibility study for a BID.



Project 2: Culture & entertainment

Objective

As the town centre becomes less about shopping and more about the experience, cultural activity and attractions become more important than ever in ensuring vitality. Cultural destinations (arts, heritage, entertainment) with a broad appeal anchored in the centre need to be safeguarded. In Ammanford, this includes The Miners theatre and local art galleries. Local events also provide an important part of the cultural experience covering language and culture, heritage, food and drink, sport and entertainment.

Benefits

- Increased footfall and town centre visitors
- Enhanced local identity and positive reputation

Tasks

1. Prioritise growing the calendar of events led by a town centre management group/organisation.
2. Draw up a marketing and communication plan with a focus on attracting the local community and visitors from the nearby catchments area

Project 3: Transport & Movement

Objective

The reliance on private vehicles needs to diminish if we are to meet the challenges of climate change and a fully integrated public transport service connecting rail, bus and cycle hire schemes would allow people to easily connect with and travel into and around the town from surrounding neighbourhoods.

As part of the wider investment in cycling across Carmarthenshire, Ammanford has grown its reputation as a stopping off point along local and national cycling routes. Growing the active travel infrastructure of the town, the option exists to extend the new Brompton Bike Hire scheme introduced for Carmarthen and Llanelli to link either of the two out of town train stations at Pantyffynnon and Dyffryn Road with the town centre and the bus station. The Brompton scheme provides a versatile folding bike scheme that supports travel to work, home, and on public transport.

An E-bike charging points will also be installed in the town at the Leisure Centre as part of a wider network of electric bike improvements. And the Carmarthenshire CC have also purchased E-Cargo Bikes for town centre businesses to utilise.

Car parking charges have been a concern of some town centre businesses for some time and Carmarthenshire CC has developed free parking days planned and advertise with local businesses and the current free parking scheme on Mondays and Wednesdays between 10 am and 2 pm in Council car parks. Revenue from car parking funds directly supports highway improvements and transportation services in support of the town centre.

Benefits

- Increased levels of walking and cycling journeys
- Increased use of active travel for business journeys

Tasks

1. Investigate opportunities for a Brompton Bike Dock located in the town.
2. Helping local businesses with new local logistics solutions through E-cargo bikes will require a clear strategy to encourage businesses to adopt the bikes as part of their business and to overcome practical barriers including adequate bike storage.
3. Continue to monitor the impact of town centre car parking charges during the period of their recovery from Covid-19 and the effectiveness of the free parking initiatives already in place.

Delivery

Whilst investment in projects funded through programmes such as the Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) continue to make a difference, the masterplan identified that more is required.

The recovery masterplan is for everyone, not just Carmarthenshire CC, and it will require commitment and effort from all stakeholders if the town is to achieve success and deliver continued prosperity for the centre. This new plan is necessary to provide a clear pathway to town centre recovery and growth and it will be focused upon Business, People and Place, providing the framework in which prioritised actions over three levels of importance:

1. Immediate - actioning of quick-win permanent or temporary schemes, to take advantage of potential opportunities arising after the end of lockdown and for the remainder of 2021
2. Short term - delivery within the next 24 months - priority transformational projects that may require planning, funding, approvals and may cause some disruption during delivery
3. Strategic - Significant projects and strategies that will help guide the town centres direction to be resilient and to respond to long term changes

Place projects

- Project 1: Railway Crossing
- Project 2: Quay Street & Market Square
- Project 3: Wind Street Junction Improvements
- Project 4: Margaret Street & College Street

Property projects

- Project 1: Local Market Insight
- Project 2: Local Development Order
- Project 3: Funding Support
- Project 4: Public Sector Land and Assets
- Project 5: Reform of business rates

Business projects

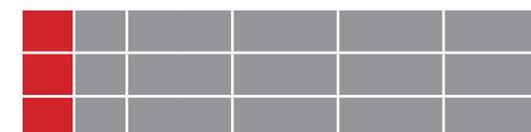
- Project 1: Entrepreneurship & Business Support
- Project 2: Digital Town Centre & Skills

Place management projects

- Project 1: Place Management Organisation
- Project 2: Culture & Entertainment
- Project 3: Transport & Movement



Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4 Year 5+



Priorities

A series of projects are set out by the masterplan, however, it is recognised that it is unlikely that everything can be tackled at once and there will be the need to focus on the most important and high impact projects. All the actions identified support recovery and long term growth. Where more complex but high priority projects are identified, early development of outline business case and design development should be prioritised.

Projects that are likely to be funded from existing capital or revenue streams or through the immediate funding opportunities identified below, should be a priority.

To help deliver and drive forward the masterplan, the potential exists for funding support to the Local Authority to support improved town centre management/organisation with specific responsibility for the recovery of the town centre and the implementation of town centre initiatives.

Funding

The funding landscape in Wales is experiencing a period of rapid transformation, this is being led by Welsh Government and the Local Authority in response to the pandemic and the UK Government with responsibility for the replacement funding programs following the UK's departure from the EU. At the time of writing some uncertainty exists around how some funding will be delivered. In light of this, the masterplan needs to be responsive over the coming 12-24 months and aligned to these emerging programs.

Welsh Government – Transforming Towns Programme

Existing Targeted Regeneration Investment (TRI) program comes to an end in 2020/2021 and is replaced by the Transforming Towns Programme. This is a broad and flexible package of support that allows partners to decide upon the most appropriate mix of interventions and how to put them into practice effectively in each town. The new funding package will offer support for a wide range of projects, from green infrastructure developments, internal and external improvements for business owners, improvement of town centre markets, the support of new uses for vacant buildings, and driving activity to support the 'digital towns' agenda. Those eligible to apply for funding include local authorities, town centre businesses, Business Improvement Districts and Town and Community Councils.

UK Government

- The UK Government published in March 2021 the prospectus documents on how local areas in Wales will be able to submit bids for the Levelling Up Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund (Community Renewal Fund for 2021-22) as a direct replacement for EU structural funds in Wales.
- Levelling Up Fund – small in scale and geography including regenerating a town centre, local investment in cultural facilities or upgrading local transport infrastructure. Delivered by local authorities who can submit one bid for every MP whose constituency lies wholly within their boundary with preference given to bids from higher priority areas including Carmarthenshire.
- Shared Prosperity Fund – EU Structural Funds will continue until 2023 and replaced through the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This new Fund, to be launched in 2022, will operate through the UK Government but to start with the UK Community Renewal Fund being provided for 2021-22 and targets priority local authority areas including Carmarthenshire.

Carmarthenshire County Council

In response to COVID-19, the Council has established underpinning resources to support the recovery and growth of towns and the wider economy. Working with the Welsh Government, a range of new initiatives and business support will be made available.

Business Recovery and 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

Local Marketing and 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 that keep things in use longer, through re-use, repair, re-manufacture 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.

The delivery plan indicates time-scales, 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 the development of key projects.

* Since the publication of the Recovery Masterplan, the Wales Audit Office has published a Regenerating Town Centres Tool Kit for Local Authorities to self assess their approaches and improve their work on town centres. The masterplan has followed the principles of the Tool Kit and Carmarthenshire Council will fully adopt these principles going forward.

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