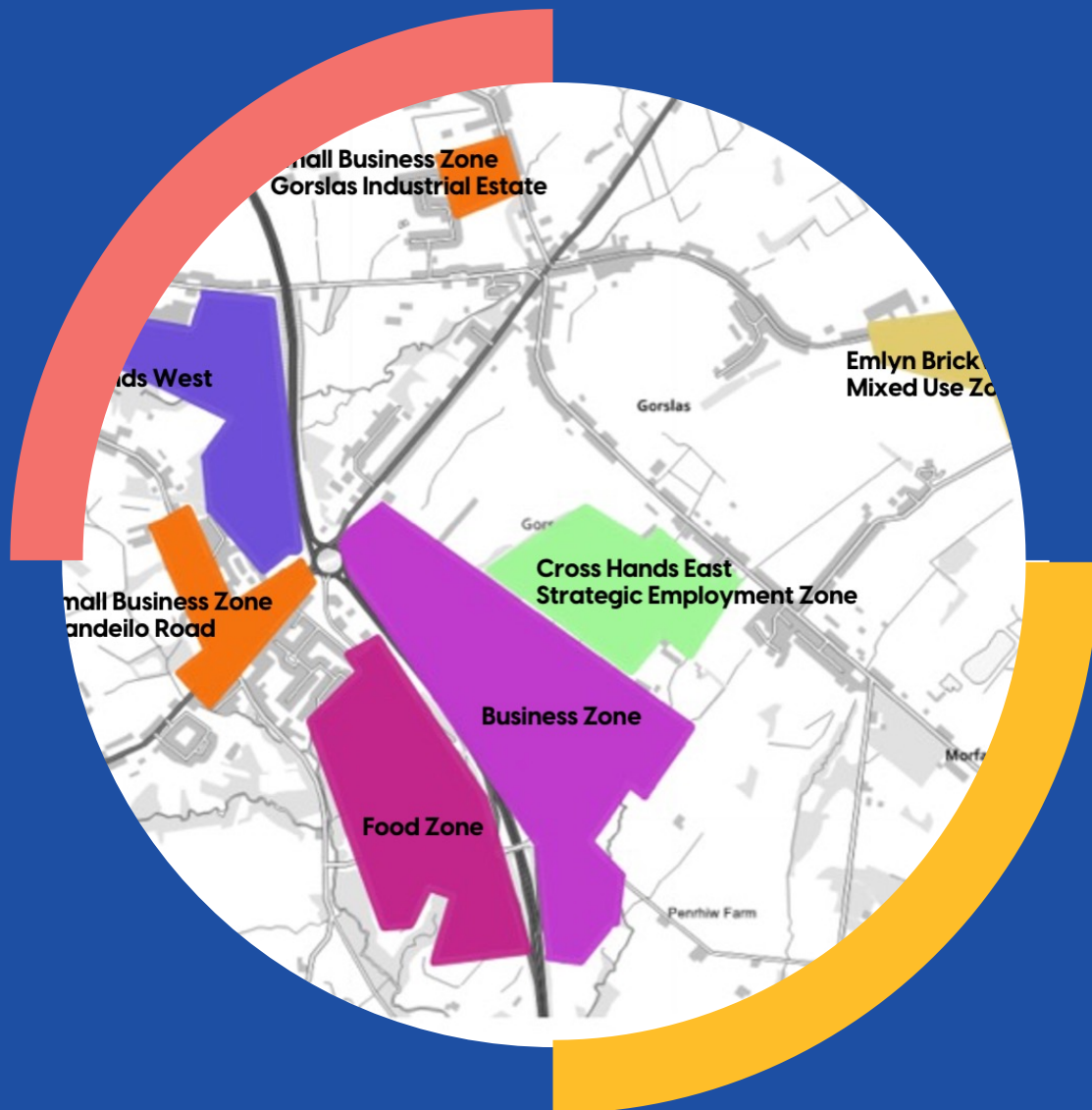


Cross Hands Sustainable Economic Growth Plan



Consultation draft – November 2021



Cross Hands – Sustainable Economic Growth Plan

Consultation draft

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PREPARED BY OWEN DAVIES
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CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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1 – Purpose

This Sustainable Economic Growth Plan for Cross Hands is concerned with economic recovery following the pandemic as well as the longer-term prosperity and growth of the town and surrounding area over the next five years and beyond.

The purpose of the Plan is to provide a long-term strategic vision and to set out detailed proposals to achieve economic sustainability and growth. Aiming to create new employment and stronger economic performance which in turn will lead to the social, environmental, and cultural sustainability of the town and surrounding feeder communities.

The Plan is being prepared as part of Carmarthenshire County Council's Ten Towns Initiative and is being delivered on behalf of the Carmarthenshire Local Action Group (LAG). It is part funded by the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2014-2020, which is funded by the Welsh Government and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural (EAFRD).

This is a public consultation draft that is designed to be accessible and focused on the core themes and priority actions. Further details can be found in the Baseline Performance Vitality and Viability Report produced in February 2021, particularly for the socio-economic context of the town and region.

Figure 1 Study area and location context



2 – Plan area

In recent years, Cross Hands has provided one of the major 'Growth Zones' for the Carmarthenshire economy and the location for strategic investment and growth in housing, employment and commercial land uses. The area is identified as continuing to provide this important economic focus and role as a key driver for the Carmarthenshire economic recovery following the pandemic.

Cross Hands represents an 'economic zone' with the core of the area identified by five zones of activity:

1. Cross Hands Business Park – mixed retail and employment with a range of small, medium, and large-scale businesses
2. Cross Hands Food Park – regionally important food production centre, including several major employers
3. Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Zone which is currently under construction for high quality office and business uses targeting Advanced Manufacturers; Financial and Professional and Environmental sectors and with strong environmental credentials built into the landscape and buildings
4. Cross Hands West Mixed Use Zone including the Maes Yr Eithin retail park, new residential, school, and planned complementary developments such as the community health and wellbeing centre and associated uses
5. Llandeilo Road and Carmarthen Road (part) area which functions as a dispersed assortment of traditional small and independent retail, hospitality, and service businesses and is characteristic of a small business zone.

Figure 2 Cross Hands economic zones



Alongside these zones, there is the Gorslas Industrial Estate and the proposed mixed-use allocation of the Emlyn Brickworks.

Overall, the zonal layout of Cross Hands makes it unique as an employment-centred locality in a rural setting, which continues to attract substantial investment and development of major infrastructure, retail, housing and critically employment uses.

Figure 3 Study area settlement context



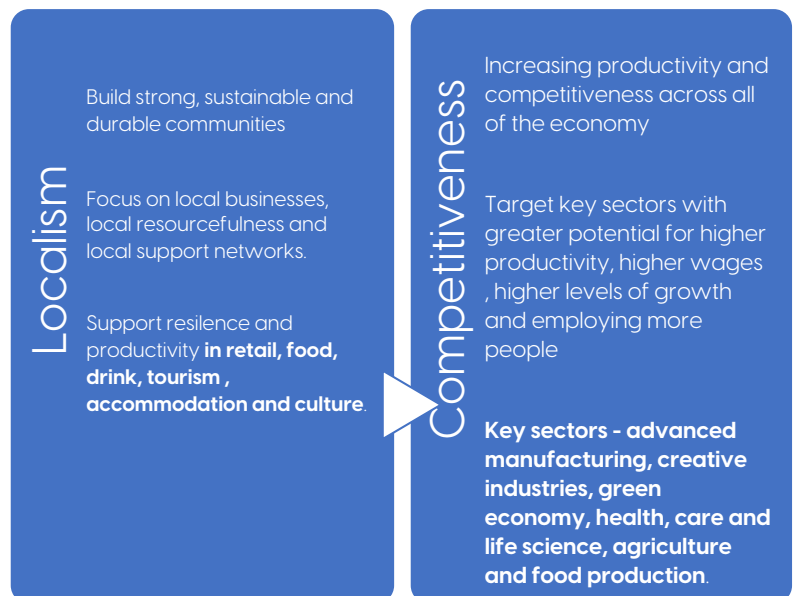
3 – The bigger economic picture

The economic picture for Cross Hands is heavily influenced by the plans for the recovery of the Carmarthenshire economy following the Coronavirus pandemic and the longer-term strategic priorities for the County and Swansea Bay City Region.

There are two main pillars for the recovery of the Carmarthenshire economy which are focused on local level actions and growing the competitiveness of the whole economy including support for Business, People and Place. There are also four cross-cutting recovery themes:

- **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; and
- **Fair and equal economy** and support for the Welsh language and culture.

Figure 4 Economic recovery pillars for Carmarthenshire



The strategic context of the plan has been summarised in the following diagram and reflects the 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 can 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 5 Strategic influences



4 – The key issues

A baseline analysis of the Cross Hands area has been undertaken. The analysis identified the following key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and has helped to evaluate the current performance of Cross Hands to inform the preparation of this plan. The purpose of the SWOT analysis is to find out what's working well, and what's not so good, how the town might wish to grow, and how it might get there – as well as what might get in the way.

Figure 6 Cross Hands SWOT analysis

<p>Key strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth zone – a centre for regional investment and development • Strategically important and accessible location on the A48 corridor and A479 (gateway to Carmarthenshire) • High proportion of Welsh speaking residents • Significant scale and diverse business base, including major employers, larger 'grounded' businesses and small local enterprises • Digital infrastructure and connectivity following upgrade to accommodate essential modern fibre communications • Significant allocations of land (employment and housing) to support future growth • Retail and leisure facilities • Range, choice and affordability of housing supply • Proximity to Llyn Llech Owain Country Park (part of the Valleys Regional Park) 	<p>Key weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disjointed and incremental nature of development • The network of inter-connected rural settlements means the area lacks a clear local identity • Varied mix of all types of business and zoned locations without a unified business voice • Absence of a distinct and functional 'town centre' or core with an attractive public realm and green spaces • Active travel routes and movement by foot or bicycles across the area • Lack of focus on micro and small business and enterprise units to support a foundational economy • Quality and dated condition of some of the industrial buildings and estate environments • Transport connections and road network including the Cross Hands roundabout • Educational attainment and skill levels of local workforce
<p>Key opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for local enterprises and particularly SME's to upscale to drive local growth • Key sector and green growth through strategic employment sites • Investment for the modernisation, and redevelopment of dated commercial stock • Reconsider the role of Llandeilo Road and Carmarthen Road (part) as an area supporting micro and small foundational businesses and maximising opportunities arising from new vacant property • Develop and improve active travel connections • Investigate Business Improvement District (BID) or other tools to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to manage, promote, and maintain the Cross Hands Employment Zones • Investment available for SMART town infrastructure and digital technology • Support available for sustainable industries, growing the circular economy, energy efficiency initiatives and local energy generation for businesses 	<p>Key threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty around the pattern of recovery from COVID-19 and Brexit and managing the longer-term effects on local business and employers including food services, wholesale, and retail • Relocation of public services and attractors from Llandeilo Road / Carmarthen Road area

5 – Draft vision and objectives

The Plan has been drafted at a time when there remains a high level of uncertainty around the nature of the economic recovery following the pandemic as well as the impacts (both positive and negative) of Brexit. Recovery is likely to be slow, and it may take many years for the economy to recover to its previous level.

These underlying issues raise concerns for the food sector and supply chain and the need for safeguarding the industry and the larger companies that are pivotal to the Cross Hands economy as well as the impacts on the retail and hospitality trades that are important to the local community. In addition, alongside the Government and Carmarthenshire's focus on protecting jobs and safeguarding businesses, there needs to be a longer-term focus on challenges that constrain growth and to help unify the economic opportunities that exist in Cross Hands.

Cross Hands is unique among the ten rural towns of the Ten Towns Initiative given that it is a long-term focus for regional scale investment in infrastructure and several growth zones including Cross Hands West, Food Zone and Cross Hands East Strategic Site, the latter targeted at the key sectors including life sciences, advanced manufacturing, environmental, creative, and agri-food technologies. As a result, many of the socio-economic challenges faced by other rural communities are less critical at Cross Hands and its wider hinterland which has experienced significant growth in population over recent years and supports a younger population with higher economic activity rates and a higher level of full-time employment.

Notwithstanding this, the local and foundational aspects of the economy that support the local community and day to day needs of small businesses are also in need of encouragement. Cross Hands is like other rural towns in this regard, where there are too few local businesses 'scaling-up' and need for investment in modern small business infrastructure and premises.

Cross Hands has many advantages including strategic primed development sites, modern grade fibre infrastructure, good road connections and the availability of business support. Together, they help to sustain Cross Hands as one of the most competitive and attractive growth areas and gateway business locations in Carmarthenshire and West Wales.

Recognising this strategic role as well as its importance to the local rural economy, the draft vision set out here proposes that the prestige of the Growth Zone continues to grow. The next stage in the area development is, however, an opportunity to support a more inclusive, greener and sustainable economy that unifies Cross Hands as a place and a business community supporting all key sectors and businesses of different scales. The draft vision proposes a better-connected economy with stronger physical links between individual business zones and strengthened place management and operational ties between businesses.

Furthermore, to reflect the rural setting and contribution in environmental terms, the opportunity exists to promote Cross Hands as a greener economy through investment in low carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy, waste reduction and sustainable homes. Cross Hands is also underpinned by a strong Welsh identity and the growth of the economy needs to sustain and support the use of the Welsh language in business and the culture of the area.

Objectives

The following objectives should be supported and delivered through the actions evolving from this Plan.

Business - grow the prestige of the Growth Zone

1. With investment in a sustainable and better integrated business location that supports all the Cross Hands business locations, and including the foundational economy, strategic employers and employment sites.
2. Creating a stronger 'gateway' brand in support of Cross Hands strategic role for Carmarthenshire and West Wales.
3. By strengthening the image of the Growth Zone as a business location encouraging greener growth, decarbonisation, and the use of modern technology.
4. Through enhancing the status of the Growth Zone with a business responsive support, an organisational and regulatory framework that increases business confidence and levels of investment.
5. By targeting investment from key sectors including life sciences, advanced manufacturing, environmental, creative, and agri-food technologies.
6. Through supporting local and micro businesses with 'scaling-up'.
7. By investing in new small and modernised workspaces and encouraging reuse of vacant plots and buildings.

People – encourages entrepreneurship, support business skills and training

1. Support the up-skilling and training of local employees to address skills gaps together with greater promotion of local job opportunities, apprenticeship opportunities and improved links between local businesses and local education providers.
2. Proactively support self-employed, traders and micro firms in developing their business and associated skills through business support and knowledge, digital, marketing and training skills.
3. Promote greater use of Welsh language skills in the workplace and strengthen the links between language and local business community to promote the cultural distinctiveness of Cross Hands.

Objectives

Place – invest in improving the public realm, key buildings and infrastructure

1. Tackle the weakest areas of the public realm and physical environment in support of a higher quality business location with a particular focus on Llandeilo Road, Carmarthen Road and the mature Business Park Zone.
2. Support investment that strengthens Llandeilo Road as a thriving micro and small business zone.
3. Investigate opportunities to maximise the strategic promotion of the Cross Hands Growth Zones
4. All planned investment should address the need to improve the active travel pedestrian and cycling links between all business zones and the surrounding communities
5. Support investment in SMART technology to provide Cross Hands with the highest quality digital infrastructure available to help support, manage and promote local businesses and services.
6. Investigate the feasibility of a defining food and drink sector visitor attraction and business that promotes, showcases and sells local and regional produce at the gateway location to the County and West Wales.

6 – Priority actions

There is high demand for industrial and business space in Cross Hands, with high levels of occupancy, short vacancy periods and waiting lists for many estates. Many of the smaller units in Cross Hands can be considered as starter workshops and few estates offer opportunities for expansion and growth. There is a requirement for new sites to support companies to expand and to attract new 'footloose' investment from the wider County and beyond. In addition, much of the commercial stock is several decades old and in need of investment and improvements to bring them up to a modern, energy efficient and sustainable standard.

Figure 7 Digital render of Cross Hands East



A) Encouraging investment and responding to the demand for high quality industrial and business space in Cross Hands

A1) - Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Site

Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Site is a regionally significant employment location and provides most of the available serviced development plots in the County. Extending to 10 ha over two phases, the site is the major developable land opportunity with the potential to accommodate some 300,000sqft of modern business space.

Development of this scale is key to the growth of Cross Hands, Carmarthenshire and West Wales economic growth and could create in the region of 1,000 new jobs. The site is also a key feature of the Swansea Bay City Region's strategy to create a strong network of 10 key interconnected centres to deliver the highest quality sites. The key sectors identified as having the highest growth potential at the site are:

- Advanced manufacturing
- Creative Sector
- Food and Agri-technology
- Energy Sector
- Financial and Professional

The Joint Venture between the County Council and Welsh Government has already facilitated the completion of Phase 1 and the implementation of Phase 2 infrastructure, and the site will further benefit from the completion of a new link road to improve local highway infrastructure and facilitate new development and growth. The new road, when fully completed, will provide a further catalyst to its development.

Figure 8 Digital render of Cross Hands East



The strategic site offers the platform to promote the Cross Hands area as a whole as a greener and lower carbon economy which is aligned to modern business requirements. The site has been sympathetically planned to allow commercial developments and the green infrastructure ethos to work together through design, installation of a sustainable drainage system and ecological enhancement.

The green credential of the site is being further explored through the Joint Venture working with the Welsh Government and the Active Building Centre (Swansea University) to develop the first commercial/industrial building in Wales to be developed via the Active Building principles of delivering carbon neutral or carbon positive results.

The self-build mixed use proposals for the site's gateway plot (Plot 3) will test the design and energy use of a mix of offices, hybrid and light industrial activities and the lessons learned should inform the future design framework for the site through development proposals reflecting innovative design, layout, materials, and technology as well as the adoption of operational features to maximise resource efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

A specific proposal of the Plan is to investigate opportunities for a series of Local Development Order's (LDOs) to help deliver the vision.

The LDO is made by a Local Planning Authority (LPA) and creates a simplified planning area that grants planning permission for certain types of development and helps to streamline the planning process by removing the need for developers/applicants to make a planning application to the LPA.

The feasibility study for an LDO at Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Site is moving forward although the Plan identifies the opportunity to investigate the scope for a number of corresponding LDO's which could target specific needs and maturity of different areas of the Growth Zones, subject to identified requirements. The benefits of LDO(s) would provide an opportunity for:

- the delivery of the growth aspirations and responding to the requirements of footloose investment that would otherwise be missed as a result of the time taken to gain necessary permissions for development;
- supporting and promoting the Cross Hands Growth Zones as a friendly and efficient business location;
- delivering a consistent development approach and a coordinated environmental and landscaping theme, creating a high-quality business environment;
- ensuring future development proposals address their environmental impact at the earliest stage;
- managing traffic growth and improving the use of public transport through the use of travel plans;
- integration of the regeneration of the entire Cross Hands Growth Zones with a proactive and enabling approach to the planning process.

A2) – Food Zone

The Cross Hands Food Park accommodates some of the UK's most notable names in food production and has seen the existing businesses grow with the benefit of readily available land; a skilled workforce; good road networks and financial incentives. There is scope for further growth within the food park with the final serviced plot available.

The above-mentioned LDO covering Cross Hands East Strategic Employment Zone could be replicated to cover this area as part of a support for the Food Parks growth and delivering a consistent development approach with a high quality environmental theme and helping to integrate a consistent approach across the Cross Hands Growth Zone.

A3) – Business Zone

The Business Zone at Cross Hands is predominantly retail and business to business trade with excellent road access for shoppers and businesses. The zone is several decades old yet there are a few remaining land opportunities on the site – around 4 hectares, mainly geared towards trade and retail developments but could accommodate other business sectors.

The estate is dated and whilst it supports some significant employers and brand names there is a need for qualitative improvements to modernise many of the existing commercial buildings, improve the overall appearance and physical environment of the estate, and to support existing businesses and to attract new investment arising from a programme of improvement.

Suggested initiatives for qualitative and environmental improvements could include appropriate landscaping and where relevant green buffers; public realm to help place shaping to differentiate the estate and its distinct areas; new estate wide bilingual signage especially at the main entrance points access which adopt an area brand; street lighting; improvements of vacant plots and cosmetic improvements to poor quality buildings (working proactively with landlords) and the improvement of existing recreation routes (walking/cycling).

Such Initiatives would require further investigation and feasibility to ensure a holistic approach is adopted to maximise the benefits to the zone and its businesses. In the case of the Business Zone, a themed LDO could be explored to facilitate certain improvements and /or changes of use, to encourage amongst others:

- Development of new buildings for employment;
- Extensions and alterations to existing buildings;
- Changes of use of existing buildings to, or between employment generating use;
- Green energy generation, energy efficiency, EV charging and carbon reduction measures;
- Provision of structures, shelters, external works;
- Changes of use between retail use;
- Redevelopment to create new small scale retail units.

In addition, other planning tools such as a masterplan or planning guidance, which could be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), could help deliver wider environmental, green infrastructure and public realm improvements to the wider estate whilst Design Briefs could provide an appropriate mechanism for addressing vacant and /or under utilised premises and sites across the zone.

A4) – Residential Mixed Use Zone – Emlyn Brickworks

A mixed-use allocation of the former Emlyn Brickworks site focused on residential led mixed use uses of a 21 hectare site and situated north-east of the Cross Hands Growth Zone on the boundary with Penygroes represents a key development opportunity. The site will further benefit from the Phase 2 works associated with the Cross Hands Link Road. The commercial uses element should seek to complement existing business and employment areas in the local area, and help to strengthen the coherence of the Cross Hands economy.

B) Llandeilo Road / Carmarthen Road Small Business Zone

Cross Hands has no formal 'town centre' although Llandeilo Road, and Carmarthen Road to a lesser extent, provide the main location for small and independent businesses to trade. Whilst the area's business attractions are dispersed along these streets and most properties are in residential use, the area supports over 30 businesses including a mix of retail, hair and beauty, financial and professional services. Currently, there are several important local community centred services in this area including the health centre, pharmacy, cinema and police station although some facilities will eventually relocate to the new Health and Well-being Centre located at Cross Hands West which will also include social care services, a café and re-establishment of a permanent library.

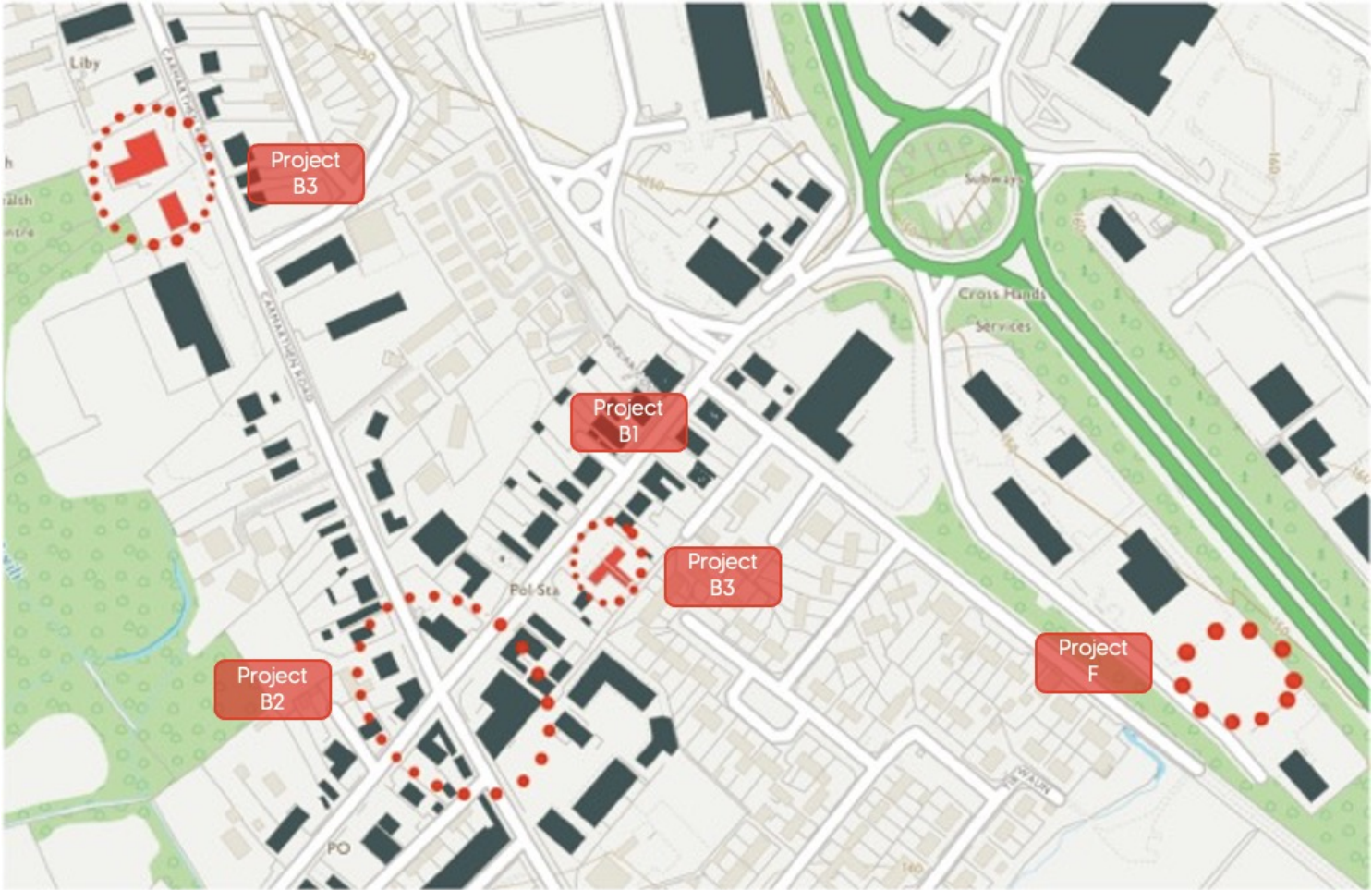
With the decline of the area's traditional shopping/service centre role coupled with the stronger retail and leisure offer available at Cross Hands West (especially the Retail Park), the opportunity exists to promote Llandeilo Road and Carmarthen Road as a small business zone that would help to balance the overall Growth Zone approach with a clear focus on small traditional local businesses.

Whilst the future direction of the area is unlikely to be local independent retail led, the retail and professional services such as hair and beauty, legal and property are likely to remain reflecting the availability of roadside parking and ease of customer access. Future opportunities may exist to transform some of the existing properties including vacant buildings into smaller starter units for a range of new micro enterprises and employment uses which would strengthen the local economy and create a more diverse range of businesses. There's also the larger scale former caravan sales site providing a brownfield redevelopment opportunity.

Longer term, further transport improvements such as the eastern bypass should reduce traffic through the zone and create greater opportunities for improving space for pedestrians and cycling movement. These improvements could enhance the linkages with nearby National Cycle Route 47.

The range and scale of potential change in this area points towards the need for a masterplan or further planning guidance, which could be adopted as SPG to help deliver wider regeneration environmental, green infrastructure and public realm improvements to the whole Llandeilo Road and Carmarthen Road Zone.

Figure 9 Priority projects for the Llandeilo Road Small Business Zone



B1) Llandeilo Road

Improvement of the existing public space and street environment along Llandeilo Road would help to create a more attractive, inviting, integrated and safer business location. A design study should explore options to improve crossing points, enhance legibility, introduce cycling measures, and improve the overall appearance. This would enhance the setting for the existing businesses and attraction of the area for new small customer serving businesses.

Improvements would help counter the declining range of shops and services as well as encourage existing businesses to invest and create opportunities for new businesses to open. Grant support for businesses to invest in their own premises (particularly shop fronts and front elevations) in line with the public realm improvements should also be considered.

B2) - Llandeilo Road and Carmarthen Road Junction

The opportunity exists to consider the re-design of the existing junction that serves as an important approach into Cross Hands from the south. Options should consider the potential to create a significantly enhanced gateway. Despite the space being heavily influenced by its junction layout, traffic and the extent of road carriageway space, improvements could include decluttering the space, repositioning street furniture, and opening up the existing outside space for business use. Improvements to the building frontages in this location would also significantly enhance the space.

B3) - Repurposing Property

Although occupancy levels in the area are relatively high, the new Health and Wellbeing Centre proposed at Cross Hands West will result in the future repurposing of a number of public buildings. These existing buildings offer opportunities for reuse to help support the vision for a small business zone. It will be important for the local authority working with its public sector partners to develop a clear strategy for repurposing opportunities at the appropriate time. An options appraisal study to explore the prospective reuse opportunities should be undertaken once disposal details are confirmed, which could consider a range of options including commercial; employment workspace; and creative uses.

B4) - Local Development Order

Allied to the proposals set out for the Business Park, the potential for an LDO for the Llandeilo Road area could encourage regeneration and investment in the area to support small business growth as part of a mixed-use area. The LDO's focus could focus on change of use and/or opportunities for the modernisation and adaption of existing property.

B5) - SMART Town

Cross Hands has an opportunity to become a SMART town that collects data through electronic methods and sensors to gain insights on how people use the town and to support its economic development. Many different types of data can be collected by a SMART town network, such as footfall and dwell time or the number of new visitors to the town and the origin of their journey.

The data collected through a smart town network is often provided to local businesses free of charge in a visual and accessible manner. Cardigan is an exemplar of a town with a smart town network up and running, where business owners regularly receive data collected (including footfall, dwell time and the number of new visitors to the town) as well as any key trends identified from the data.

A smart town network would allow businesses, the Community Council's and local organisations to gain detailed insights on how people are using the town and what it means for their business. Using this data can inform staffing and hiring decisions, increase the impact of promotions as well as help to identify new markets and capture customer spend. This could provide a significant boost, potentially driving more footfall and spend as well as forming part of a package that also attracts new businesses to set up in the town.

There are already proposals to prepare a digital action plan for Cross Hands through a SMART town initiative led by Carmarthenshire County Council's Digital Connectivity Officer and the proposals set out in this plan should inform this work. Examples of recent investment include the installation of the LoRaWAN gateway network.

C) Improving transport and active travel

Given the scale of the Cross Hands Growth Zone and planned large-scale development opportunities, investment in transport infrastructure and sustainable travel will be key to promoting a greener growth vision for Cross Hands.

The Cross Hands Link Road is being developed to address existing transport constraints (congestion and safety) and will help to support economic growth in the Cross Hands area. Once completed, it will provide improved access to the Cross Hands East Strategic Site and other proposed developments including the relief of congestion and improve safety on the A48 Cross Hands Roundabout, improved journey time and air quality.

Future large-scale development within the Cross Hands Growth Zone can only come forward in conjunction with a substantial highway infrastructure improvement scheme and potential improvements that should support the areas sustainable growth include:

- Further phases of the link road connecting to the Gwendraeth Valley in the west;
- Cross Hands Roundabout capacity and safety improvements;
- Walking and Cycling Linkages to significantly improve active travel between employment and residential areas and to overcome the severance of the A48;
- Further develop Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure (to complement recent delivery of charging points close to the A48 near Aldi)
- Improved Passenger Transport and travel planning ; and
- Feasibility of a 'book a bus' system that encourages public transport & accessibility of employees

D) Growth Zone brand and information

Secondly, subject to the above, a marketing strategy can be formulated with input and resources from key stakeholders including thought on most effective methods of communication including larger ticket projects such as installation of digital advertising screens at key locations around the Business Zone as well as consistent and high quality on-brand messaging.

D1) – Gateway branding, signage and Information

Several opportunities exist to maximise how Cross Hands could be presented as a strategically important business location.

Firstly, a brand positioning exercise should be carried out as this will define the views, thoughts and ideas on how the Cross Hands offering and image can occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the designated target market(s) e.g. how is it different from its competitors and where, or how, does it sit in customers' minds. An audit and review of existing and previous marketing in this sector should also be considered with key considerations in the brand positioning including its gateway location for West Wales, reflection of the distinctiveness of the Welsh local community and culture, strategic importance, economic progress and sustainability.

E) Growth Zone business body and potential Business Improvement District (BID)

The future development of the Cross Hands zones should mean all parts of the economy, including the established business zones and the Llandeilo Road/Carmarthen Road and the Gorslas small business areas, come together under one integrated strategy and Growth Zone identity. This should help present Cross Hands as a more sustainable and co-ordinated economy that supports both the strategic as well as the local foundational economy.

This Plan has made several recommendations for the regeneration of the Llandeilo Road area as a clearly defined small business zone and becoming a strong constituent of the overall Cross Hands Growth Zone. Engagement with local businesses has also identified the absence of business networks or bodies (e.g. Chamber of commerce or Town Council) as one of the main organisational weaknesses in bringing all parts of the Cross Hands business community together.

Previous attempts to come together in the form of a Business Park Traders Group have struggled, however, a voluntary partnership could be a first step for creating a unified business voice for Cross Hands. Although voluntary groups often face the challenge of available time and resources to effectively drive forward a strategy and to make their voice heard, it is an important first step. However, because of the widespread and diverse nature of the Cross Hands economy, it is likely to be a challenge to sustain over the longer term.

This draft Plan is an opportunity to explore the idea of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Cross Hands as a business led and well-resourced body for the Growth Zone. A BID would enable all of the businesses within Cross Hands to prepare a locally responsive business plan and commission improvements that directly benefit the business themselves. The management and delivery of the improvements would be funded principally through the business rates, namely a BID levy.

BIDs are a mechanism to deliver additional projects and services that improve the local business and trading environments. Businesses decide themselves if they support a BID through a secret ballot, and if supported, the funding cannot be used to support or pay for services that are a statutory provision of the public sector and can only be invested in line with the aims and objectives determined by the business community. Once collected, the funding is ring fenced locally and used by the BID company (owned and managed by the business community) to fund, commission, and deliver projects or services as agreed by the business community.

Since the approval of the first industrial area BID in the UK (Winsford Industrial Estate in 2005), the concept has been embraced by companies across the country although there is not an example currently operating in Wales. The first step would be a formal feasibility study in which all businesses would have the opportunity to contribute their views on what a BID might achieve and how much it might cost. Examples are provided below for Ferndown and Uddens, Brackmills and Manor Royal to provide a suggestion of the types of initiatives a BID could deliver.

The creation of a BID for Cross Hands Growth Zone would lead to a five-year investment programme to deliver a range of locally specific business support services, training, reduce operating cost (energy, training, security etc), security upgrades, transport and infrastructure improvement and image/brand enhancement projects. A BID could potentially play a leading role in driving forward the vision for a greener Growth Zone. Additionally, ideas have been put forward that a BID could help support businesses to bring forward additional bi-lingual signage and information, and support for the use of Welsh in their business and support initiatives including the use of SMART digital technology across the area.

The opportunity may exist to build an effective working relationship with Coleg Sir Gar and other local stakeholders, to help deliver a series of benefits to both businesses in a prospective Cross Hands BID and the area.

Case studies

Ferndown and Uddens

Dorset

- Covers multiple industrial estates/business zones
- Travel plan for the two estates
- Established a new daily bus route to serve the estates
- New road & entrance signage
- Tackled problem street parking
- Improved the operational efficiency of businesses on the estate
- Assisted the recruitment of new staff



Brackmills Industrial Estate

Northampton

- Major road improvement projects to reduce congestion
- Improved the attractiveness of the estate - extensive landscaping
- Additional litter removal & road sweeping
- New road & entrance signage
- Helped attract new businesses to the estate



Manor Royal

Crawley

- Broadband
- Area wide security
- Signage
- Pedestrian/cycle linkages
- Buy Local
- Waste Management
- Green Energy – district heating network
- Estate wide environmental improvements
- HR, business training, business directory
- Events, B2B, area wide promotion, regular communication
- District energy system feasibility



F) West Wales Promotional Food Store

As part of the vision to elevate its gateway credentials for Carmarthenshire and West Wales, it has been suggested that the location could combine its 'gateway' location with its reputation for food and local produce, through a retail offering that supports the local visitor economy and producers.

Several examples of successful roadside local food hubs exist across the UK located along strategic visitor routes to showcase local food, drink and producer businesses. The concept of a retail and visitor centre showcasing local and regional produce is a proven concept that could be ideally located at Cross Hands. A feasibility study would be necessary to fully explore the viability, delivery model and location of a facility in Cross Hands. The Cross Hands Food Park already hosts a range of major food manufacturing businesses which could help inform and shape a concept that might showcase their products and services.

In addition, there's also an established local farm businesses providing a shop supporting local producers that could form the basis of a larger scale offering. However, several typical 'roadside' factors are also likely to be important including the ability for easy accessibility to serve passing motorists and opportunities to also purchase fuel, EV charging etc.

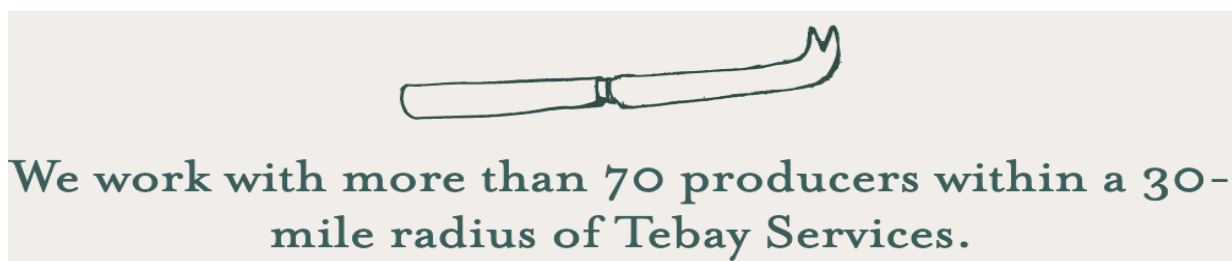
There are several potentially suitable sites and premises close to the A48 junction including available development sites within the retail business zone and an employment site at Meadow Road. The reuse of surplus buildings located on Llandeilo Road could also support the regeneration of this area.

The concept may be viable for Cross Hands and would provide a platform to showcase the best of the local food park as well as the surrounding area, potentially providing both an income stream and a means of attracting more business to the area.

Tebay - Cumbria

The first 'service station' of this kind is in Tebay, Cumbria where a local farm opened a service station and restaurant off the M6 in 1972. Tebay Services has developed into a farm shop, restaurant and services which sources all its products from more than seventy producers, all within 30 miles of the services.

Figure 8 Extract from Tebay Services website



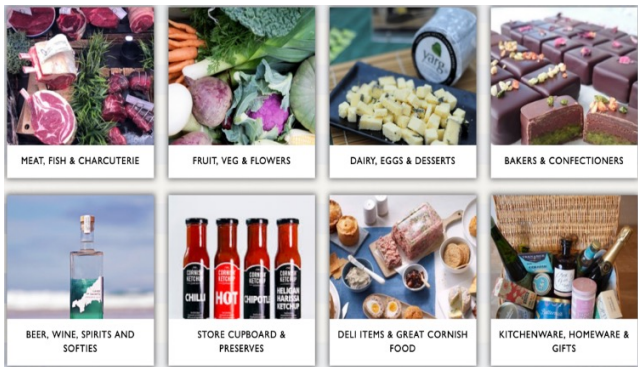
Gloucester Services

The services operate under a similar model as Tebay and receive more than four million visitors a year. The service station has won a series of awards and features a restaurant, farm shop, butchery, fishmonger, deli and patisserie that showcase the breadth of local produce and culinary talent of the area.

Figure 9 Inside of Gloucester Services



Figure 10 Extract from website



The Great Cornish Food Store

This is an independent Cornish food and drink store located in Truro with a butcher, fishmonger, deli and takeaway, and Waitrose alongside with a focus on providing a convenient to buy the widest possible range of top-quality local produce alongside your regular supermarket shop

7 – Funding & next steps

Funding

The County Council has established underpinning resources to support the recovery and growth of rural towns. Working with Welsh Government and the RDP Leader programme, a range of new initiatives and business support will be made available.

The sustainable economic growth plan form an important basis for identifying local needs and the range of opportunities these new funds and resources could help to deliver, which include:

- The appointment of Market Town Officers who will work with the town to take forward actions identified within the economic recovery and growth plans.
- New seed funding to assist the town's growth plan teams to develop innovative solutions to meet both their immediate needs and future growth ambitions.
- Potential for new capital funding to support ideas identified in the recovery and growth plans and also to support the development of much-needed start-up and grow on employment space.
- Carmarthenshire County Council Business Grant Funds – opportunities for businesses to apply for direct support through the Rural Enterprise Fund, Transformational Commercial Property Development Fund, Business Start-Up Fund and Business Growth Fund.
- Town digital solutions – a series of initiatives to support businesses and communities to obtain faster and more reliable internet connectivity and application of digital SMART towns.
- Funding has been secured for local marketing/distinctiveness including branded promotional material, prepared social media content for every town.

- Local energy plans - Carmarthenshire Energy Limited will support communities to identify and scope potential sites for new energy generation.
- Circular Economy - support with initiatives that grow manufacturers design products to be reusable and the reuse of materials.

Next steps

This plan has been drafted based on independent research, business, and stakeholder discussions with the purpose of encouraging wider discussion and comment. The feedback we receive will be used to confirm priorities and key actions for Cross Hands and the final version of the plan to be produced by the end of March 2022.

Contacts

If you wish to comment on the draft plan please share your feedback at:

crosshands.carmarthenshire-towns.info

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