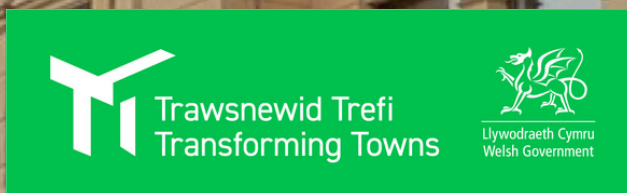


WELSHPOOL TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN

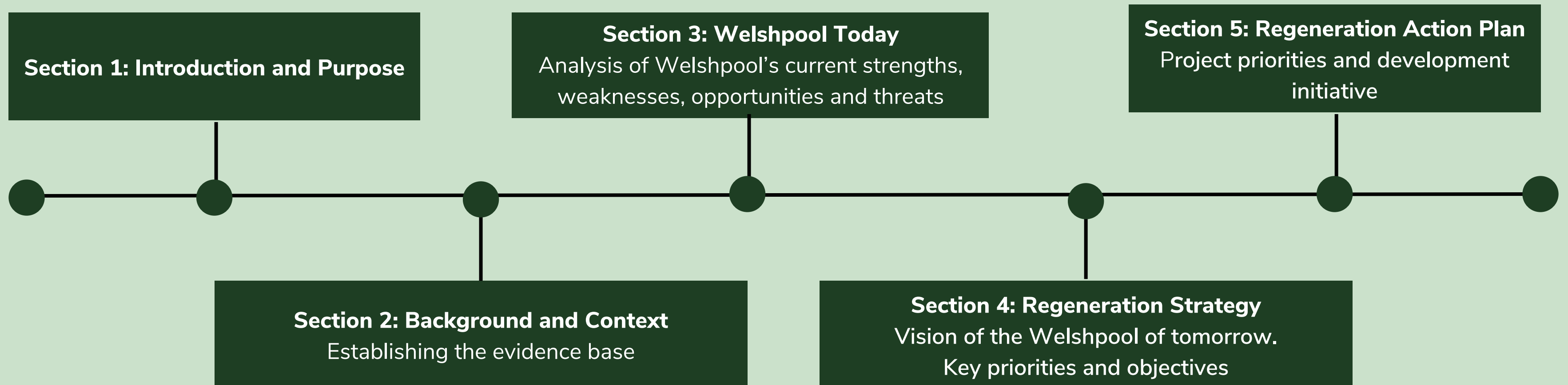


Action Plan

April 2023



Structure of the Welshpool Action Plan

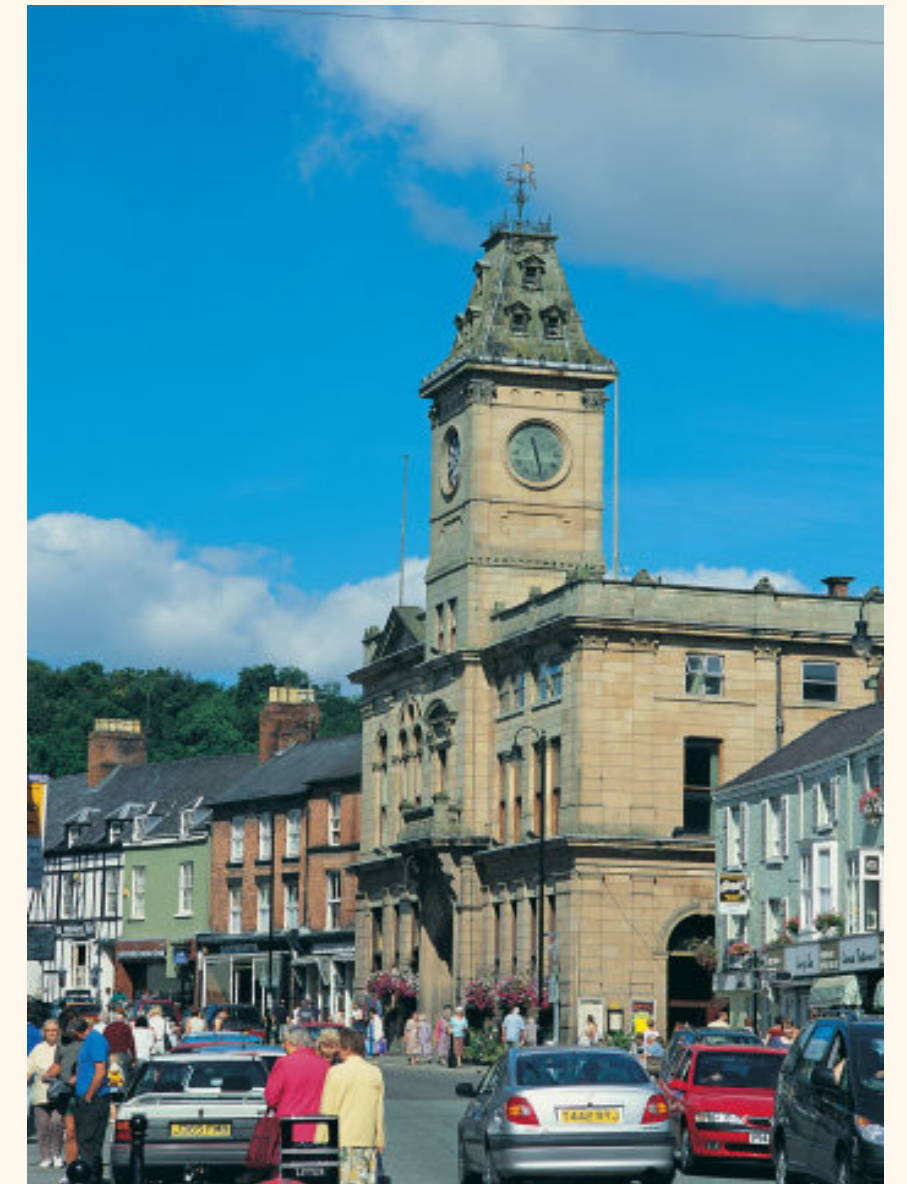


Section 1:

Introduction & Purpose of the Action Plan

In 2022, Powys County Council commissioned Rose Regeneration to produce investment plans for five market towns - Llandrindod, Welshpool, Knighton, Machynlleth and Presteigne - as part of a regeneration programme for the county of Powys. This Executive Summary outlines the key findings and recommendations of an investment plan for the town of Welshpool.

This Action Plan focusses on the vision, strategic objectives and actions required to implement the Welshpool Town Investment Plan (WTIP). This is a crucial element of a County-wide regeneration strategy for Powys County Council and provides supporting evidence and an economic rationale for a range of current and future investment opportunities.



The Welshpool Town Investment Plan

- Is structured in 4 sections taking the reader step by step through the process of developing the Regeneration Action Plan
- identifies and assesses the likely impacts of a range of potential investments and initiatives targeting:
 - Tourism and the visitor economy,
 - Town centre improvements to respond to changing consumer, visitor and local community and business needs,
 - More economically and socially effective use of public sector assets,
 - Greater exploitation of natural, leisure and historic assets through improved co-ordination and communication,
 - More responsive co-ordination of public transport.
 - Appropriate governance and delivery arrangements that harness local capabilities and acknowledge the constraints on the availability of public sector support.
- has been informed through extensive stakeholder engagement and articulates a vision and defines priorities for the future of Welshpool to help attract and shape investments from a variety of both public and private sector sources.
- provides a Regeneration Action Plan, a route map for the economic sustainability of the town and includes detailed evidence and feedback from a range of statutory, non-statutory and local stakeholders as well as a dedicated residents survey.
- is framed within the wider policy context to ensure that there is a direct read across from proposed interventions to strategic outcomes contained in:
 - The 6 Principles of Placemaking Charter;
 - Powys County Council policy focus on Economy: Health and care: Learning and skills: Residents and Communities including the Powys Joint Health and Care Strategy;
 - the 2015 'Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act' (WFGA), with a wider set of social and environmental wellbeing goals moving away from a sole focus on material economic prosperity.
 - Powys County Council Strategy for Climate change - Net positive Powys 2021-2030

Section 2: Background & Context

Evidence gathering & Stakeholder Engagement

The Plan has been informed through:

- A comprehensive desk-based review of local, regional and national policies and plans including recent Welshpool specific resident and business surveys.
- An analysis & comparison of data sets from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the economy, jobs and broader socio-economic conditions.
- A use survey that examines the dynamics of the retail core of Welshpool.
- A local Project Steering group comprising Town and County Councillors and Powys County Council representatives to identify issues and opportunities for the town.
- One to one engagement with key local stakeholders in tourism and hospitality, high street businesses, property, commercial operators, education and third sector representatives.
- Wider community consultation via a dedicated residents survey and relevant social media.
- Direct discussion with existing investment bodies including inter alia the Montgomery Canal Partnership and Powis Castle Estate where substantial investments have been secured and where there is the potential to maximise impacts.

Section 3: Welshpool Today

Headline findings and recommendations

Welshpool is an attractive market town situated in a classic Welsh rural environment. Distinctive features of the town include its range of impressive Georgian architecture, the proximity of the historic Powys Castle and grounds, wildlife parks, national trails, the light railway and its central position on the Montgomery Canal.

The town benefits not only from its surrounding landscape and natural environment but also from a variety of cultural and leisure related assets. Some of these assets, including access to national trails and parks derive from its location, while others have developed over time and have benefitted from previous investments as well as new planned investments from the public, private and third sectors.

Harnessing private sector investment potential

Stakeholder engagement has revealed a strong sense of place within the town. It also indicates positive attitudes from the private sector towards investment in the town with some examples of private sector driven initiatives bringing together a variety of interests to redevelop and re-purpose town centre buildings.



Collaboration

The town has a strong sense of community and a willingness to realise the potential of the town. There are opportunities for community and public sector collaboration working together with the private sector that could benefit the town.

Opportunities for hybrid and remote working

There could be positive implications for Welshpool and other towns across Wales in what is being termed 'hybrid working'. The Centre for Towns recently reported that its research indicates "big potential for places to market themselves as online working destinations."

Digital Connectivity and related skills

There is considerable potential to harness the significant transformative effects of digital media on the Welshpool economy.

Local business and industry

Outside of the town centre there are several larger employers. Employment in some of these industries is largely low skill and low wage. There are some notable high value engineering and design businesses providing high value employment opportunities.

Potential Innovation Cluster

Employing in the low hundreds these are nonetheless significant assets to the town and there is great scope to harness this high value business ‘cluster’ that extends to other local towns including nearby Newtown.

Supporting business growth and inward investment

Government owned land adjacent to the Livestock Market could provide ‘grow-on’ space for existing Welshpool businesses as well as encouraging inward investment.

Maximising the value of tourism assets

Tourism is a major, though possibly under-performing sector for Welshpool in view of the wide range of attractions both in and around the town. There is a very limited range of accommodation in the town centre and there is potential to increase and diversify the local accommodation offer.

Festivals and events

Welshpool plays host to a range of popular events throughout the year. The town business survey identifies real enthusiasm to extend the events calendar.

Town Centre built environment

There are buildings in the town centre that have fallen into disrepair, with some becoming vacant, dilapidated, and no longer serving any economic function.

Public Realm

Improvements to the town’s Public Realm, signage and car parking arrangements are all considered to be important elements in presenting a welcoming appearance to residents and visitors.

Transport and Connectivity

Welshpool/Y Trallwng railway station is on the Cambrian Line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth; most trains run from/to Birmingham International. The town connects to the trunk road network via the A458 (Shrewsbury) and the A483 (Oswestry) which gives strategic access to the north Wales, north east England, and the Midlands.

Addressing housing constraints

There is currently ‘more demand than supply’ in Welshpool for both purchase and rental. Lack of starter homes and pressures on the rental market as people relocate from other parts of the UK to find their ‘perfect rural home’ to buy exacerbate this ‘market failure’ with interventions from the public sector required to address shortages and stimulate private sector investments.

Education

Welshpool is well served with primary and secondary education, though a limited sixth form offering means that many students must travel to Shrewsbury to pursue their chosen studies.

Welshpool – Well-Being of Future Generations

Welshpool is well placed to address the policy objectives of the 2015 ‘Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act’ (WFGA) which proposes a wider set of social and environmental wellbeing goals – moving away from a sole focus on material economic prosperity.

Opportunities for Collaborative Action



- In the context of the wider economy in the County it is also important to consider the opportunities for the towns to collaborate on funding bids and tourism initiatives.
- It is important for Welshpool to actively engage with key stakeholders in a process of 'Place Branding' which will support sustainable economic development.
- Significant opportunities for investment and strategic collaborations to build on and maximise the broader social and economic impacts of existing planned and potential future investments. The potential £multi million restoration of the Montgomery Canal is such an example where proposed investments in physical infrastructure and restoration will provide solid foundations on which the town can capitalise through further developments in the town.
- Stakeholder engagement has revealed a strong sense of place within the town. It also indicates positive attitudes from the private sector towards investment in the town with some examples of private sector driven initiatives bringing together a variety of interests to redevelop and re-purpose town centre buildings.
- Welshpool has a significant 'quality of life' offer, with a good range of local services. If the town is to successfully encourage economically active inward migration, connectivity and related infrastructure will be a key consideration.



Key messages from Residents Survey



- A strong sense of community.
- Real commitment to realising the potential of the town with respect to its natural assets, quality of life offer and a desire to see improvements in the broader public realm and 'townscape'.
- The need to better represent the needs of residents including older people and young people.
- Support for the regeneration of town assets including the Town Hall and other buildings in the town centre in poor repair/vacant.
- A desire to see better co-ordination of public transport and connectivity across Wales and England.
- A desire for greater variety in the retail and hospitality offering in the town for residents and visitors
- Better access for residents to existing sporting and cultural assets within the town.
- Greater exploitation of tourism assets and the natural environment to create wealth and employment within the town.



Welshpool in statistics

Data has been considered for the immediate town and surrounding area to provide an understanding of the issues faced using Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) as the immediate building blocks. The Investment Plan also examines the dynamics of the retail core of Welshpool.

Economy

- The retail overview suggests a relatively resilient High Street with a number of multiples but a healthy distribution of independent stores.
- The town's commercial centre comprises mainly small independent retailers which accounts for 80% of the offer whilst the multiples account for 20%
- The vacancy rate for retail units is around 11% which is lower than the Welsh average.
- there has been a decline of banks in the town in line with many other primary towns.
- The town centre has a significant leisure sector accounting for 31% of the town centre offer but has low levels of visitor accommodation suggesting that the offer is predominantly geared for residents and day and visitors.

Employment

- an increase in the number of jobs in Welshpool over the Period 2015 – 2020 with manufacturing and retail leading the increases.
- a major issue to be addressed is the level of skill and pay and the nature of employment as a whole as the Town.
- In Welshpool the status of the town as a main service centre is clearly borne out by the retail, real estate and other service category strengths in the town.
- In line with a number of modest sized market towns in Wales the town also has a significant manufacturing base.

Welshpool's Strengths & Weaknesses

The Plan provides a comprehensive analysis of Welshpool's Strengths & Weaknesses with an assessment of Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) which reflects the statistical data, available information as well as local feedback from a range of stakeholders. The analysis summarises the characteristics of Welshpool that are successful and set it apart from others, things that are not successful or put Welshpool at a disadvantage, areas where there is chance for change or external factors that offer a chance to make improvements, and conditions that are harmful to the success or character of Welshpool or that could damage its chances to improve.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Significant tourism assets within and near the Town and the fact that the Town has retained its TIC	Co-ordination between tourism assets to maximise opportunities and footfall for the town centre and wider locality.
Strong sense of place	Limited affordable housing for younger and economically active
Private sector led Town Centre investment potential	No clear investment plan and prospectus reduces investor confidence
Significant planned investment in the Canal	Partners/potential partners are not fully engaged
Attractive town centre	Several buildings in poor repair and/or not in economic use. Relocation of the Livestock Market impacted footfall into the town centre.
Good range of shops	Limited offering to service resident and tourist footfall..
Attractive landscape and natural environment	Lack of co-ordination between stakeholders.

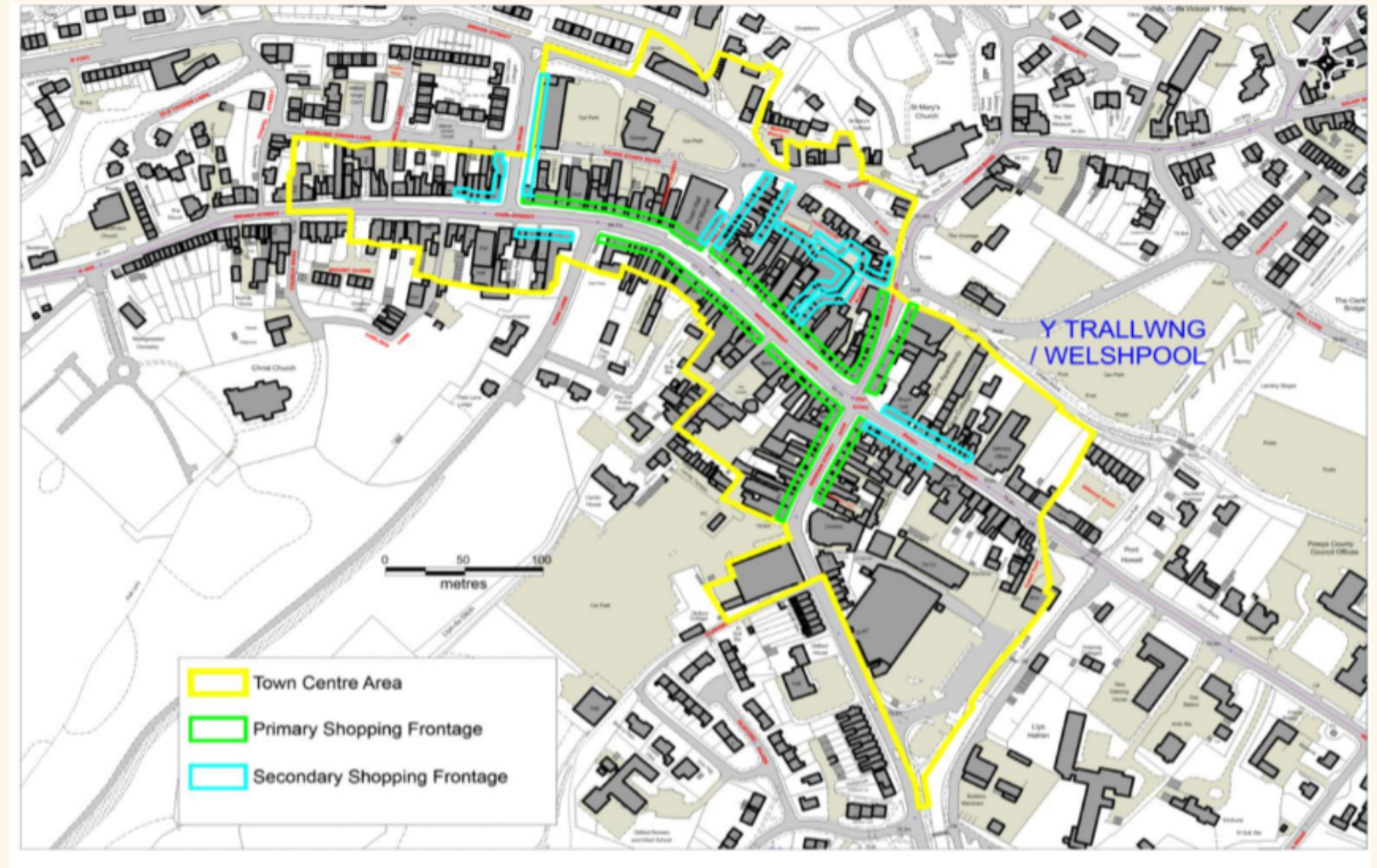
Strengths	Weaknesses
Ample parking provision in the town centre	Limited usage of town car parks
Rail Station – access to Shrewsbury and Birmingham	Station environs are not well maintained
Good leisure, sporting and cultural amenities	Some sports including tennis and hockey poorly served.
Relatively good employment levels, award winning businesses	Predominance of low value employment opportunities
Emerging core of ‘new’ technology businesses in engineering and electric vehicles	Lack of employment sites and grow-on facilities to support indigenous growth and inward investment
Development and investment sites in the town including the Canal Yard, Wharf and Y Lanfa	Mixed ownership and lack of development ‘masterplan’ constrain development and limit new investment in commercial developments.
Provision of ‘Prestige’ employment sites and plots at Offa’s Dyke Business Park and Buttington Cross Enterprise Park	Sites where employment led mixed use require Public Sector funding in order to stimulate private sector investment and development.

Strengths	Weaknesses
High quality hotel in town centre	Very limited range of accommodation in the town centre.
Transparency of ambitions of the Town Council	Limited ability of the Town Council to deliver major investment without support from County Council and other Agencies.
Strong volunteering activities around tourism assets and local environment	Fragmentation & lack of co-ordination of opportunities fails to harness the full potential & social, economic & health benefits of volunteering.
Popular festivals and events	Organisation of events dependent on motivated and willing ‘volunteers’.
Diverse Community	Integration and sense of place for migrant workers and families
Strong and diverse education offering	Limited sixth form offering means students need to travel to Shrewsbury
Significant local agriculture sector with high quality local produce	Some farms and sectors face much greater challenges than others,

Section 4: Regeneration Strategy

The emphasis of this Plan is to identify opportunities for investment from a variety of sources to support a vibrant and relevant town centre for residents and visitors. The area of impact for these potential investments is related to its effects on the town centre as identified in the Welshpool Local Development Plan.

Projects outside of this area should be considered as 'outside but serving' given the multiple factors that influence footfall, spend leisure and recreation in the town centre.





Vision of the Welshpool of tomorrow.

Following an analysis of key local, regional and national policies and available data sets as well as comprehensive consultation with the local community, a SWOT analysis has been completed to inform the development of a shared Vision and a set of Regeneration Objectives for the Town. This has in turn informed the development of a package of projects which are consistent with the six principles of placemaking in the Welsh Government’s transforming towns.

A vision for Welshpool

“Build on our significant assets, fully exploit our potential for investment, create the right environment for residents and tourists and work collaboratively to achieve and maximise outcomes for the benefit of all.”

Key regeneration priorities for Welshpool

The Plan has synthesised the data, with feedback, local and national policy drivers to create three main priorities for the town:

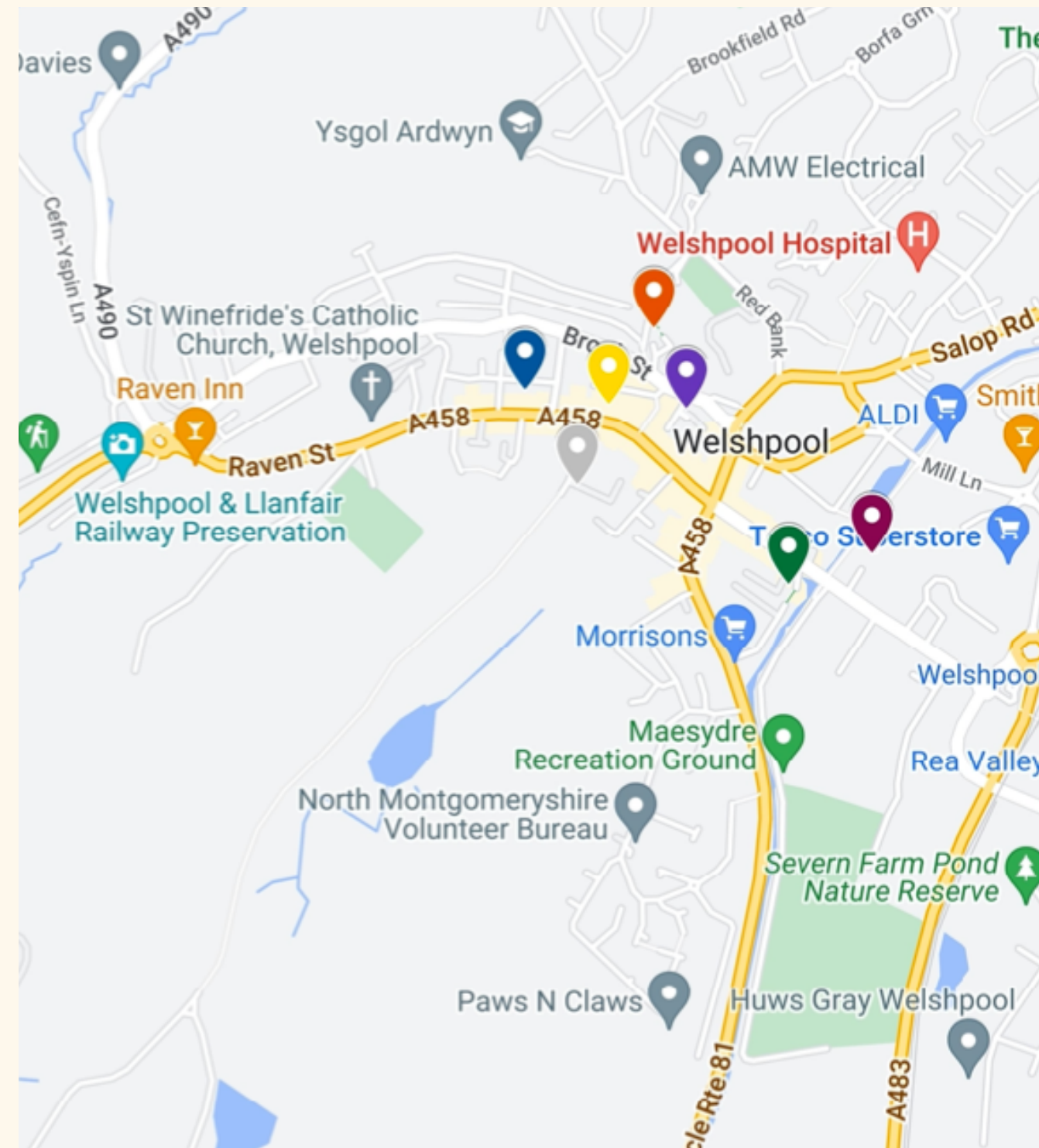
Priority 1.	Maintaining and developing an attractive SMART town relevant to the needs of all residents, visitors and businesses.
Priority 2.	Maximising the impact and potential for the town of the visitor economy.
Priority 3.	Improving connectivity and travel options.

Section 5: Regeneration Action Plan

Regeneration Priorities

The Plan includes a series of 4 tables covering:

- Priorities for Welshpool as illustrated above;
- A 'theory of change' to illustrate how the proposed interventions are expected to lead to specific changes,
- An evaluation of the Six Principles of Placemaking against Powys County Council strategic objectives to provide a 'read-across' to the 3 Welshpool Priorities;
- A high-level summary of project requirements including an estimate of costs where appropriate or available, an assessment of delivery timescales, delivery lead and any governance arrangements and potential next steps in moving forward.



Key

-  Canal Wharf Development including review of options for Museum & Library
-  Review of Options for Museum and Library
-  Town Hall Refurbishment
-  Development of area opposite y Lanfa
-  Shop front improvements
-  Street furniture Public Realm and Green Infrastructure
-  Bringing vacant dilapidated buildings into economic use

Investment Projects

The Following table is representative of the full analysis undertaken for each potential investment or intervention.

Project/initiative	Estimated Cost £000	Link to six Principles of Placemaking	Timescale	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Set up an effective regeneration partnership between the public, private and third sector	£20k Revenue	People & Community Public realm Mix of uses	Short	Town Council with PCC lead to include local private sector stakeholders	Identify constituents, scope and brief
Town Hall refurbishment	£3.5M	People & Community Location	Medium	Town Council with PCC lead	Review options and costings
Maximising Economic Impacts of the Montgomery Canal Restoration	TBC re individual projects	People & Community Movement Public realm Location Mix of uses Identity	Medium	PCC, TC, Canal Partnership, Wildlife trust	Develop options list with costings
Increase housing provision for local working and young people	TBC	People & Community Movement Location	Medium-long	PCC to oversee and co-ordinate private sector and social housing interests to develop housing investment prospectus.	PCC to review LHMA and bring together local stakeholders and private sector to define issues and opportunities
Canal Wharf Development including consideration of the role of Museum and Library	£1 million (est)	Identity Location Public Realm	Medium-long	PCC to lead with TC and landowners	PCC to bring together Canal Partnership, Town Council and relevant stakeholders to define development plan and commission site masterplan options
Improved co-ordination and integration of public transport	TBC	Identity Location Public Realm	short	PCC, TC bus and train operators	Determine need for explicit coordination of regional PT services

Project/initiative	Estimated Cost £000	Link to six Principles of Placemaking	Timescale	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Identify opportunities to increase visitor accommodation offer	£30k revenue	People & Community Movement Public realm Location	Medium-long	PCC strategic lead on Tourism	Undertake review of accommodation supply and identify options
Improve co-ordination of existing local tourism assets to increase visitor footfall into the town	£30K revenue to support co-ordination role	People & Community Movement Public realm Location	Short	Town Council to provide support for co-ordination and secretariat for stakeholder group	Town Council to bring together stakeholders and agree objectives for Tourism Group and assessment of funding support required to provide support.
Car Parking Improvements	£500k (est)	Identity Location Public Realm	Short-medium	TC	Develop options with cost/revenue implications
Town Navigability	TBC	People & Community Identity Location Public Realm	Medium	TC	Develop options with cost implications
Facilities for Campervan Parking in Town	£200k (est)	People & Community Identity Location Public Realm	Short-medium	TC	TC to develop options with cost/revenue implications
Shop front improvements	£500k	Identity Location Public Realm	Short-medium	TC to include property owners	Identify priority properties, engage with owners/tenants
Street furniture Public Realm and Green Infrastructure,	£500k(est)	Identity Location People & Community	Short - medium	TC with PCC	TC to develop options with cost implications
Bringing vacant dilapidated buildings into economic use	£1million (est)	People & Community Location Public Realm Identity	Medium-Long	TC to lead with key stakeholders including agents etc.	Identify priority properties, engage with owners/tenants

Project/initiative	Estimated Cost t £000	Link to six Principles of Placemaking	Timescale	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Increasing number of Festivals and events and making them more inclusive/representative	TBC	People & Community Location Public Realm Identity	Short-medium	TC to lead – with local organisers	Identify opportunities with costed plan
Improving digital connectivity of town centre businesses	£50k revenue for business support	Overarching theme	Short	TC + Superfast Business Wales	Identify Retail & Hospitality Businesses to form user group to interface with Superfast Business Wales
Development of area opposite y Lanfa	£3million (est)	People & Community Public Realm Identity Movement	Medium	TC with PCC	TC to bring together Canal Partnership and relevant stakeholders to define development plan and commission site masterplan options
Health and Wellbeing Hub	TBC	People & Community Location	Medium	Health Board, PCC and Third Sector	Confirm location and range of services to be provided

Project description and link to Welshpool Priorities

The consultation process identified 18 projects that could support the development of the Town. These projects are described in further detail below and are linked to Welshpool priorities.

Welshpool Priority	Project /Initiative	Description
Maximising Impacts and benefits of tourism	Establish an effective regeneration partnership	An informal collaboration between the public, private and third sector based on implementation of the Town Investment Plan projects and other opportunities for investment.
	Town Hall refurbishment	Restoration and refurbishment of the iconic Town Hall Building including structural works and up grading to provide a functioning cultural and economic space in the heart of the town centre
	Increase housing provision for local working and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase stock of 1/2 bed apartments • Opportunities within the wider canal development programme to include permanent moorings of up to 50 barges just outside town with access along the towpath • Potential to create accommodation above shops in the town Centre
	Canal Wharf Development including options for Museum and Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve ownership of wharf/finger moorings to maximize use, including use of the slipway • Resolve ownership of potential development site close to the Lock/working up a development plan • Putting in boat mooring rings for visiting boats • Review of small marina site possibilities • Maximize benefits of new nature reserve at Red Lane with Towpath as active travel route
	Car Parking Improvements	Review car parking charges which are currently a barrier to longer stay visits and constrain trade in the town (See also WTC business Interviews Sept.2021)
	Town Navigability	Improve signage in the town (See also WTC business Interviews Sept.2021)
	Shop front improvements	Incentivising owners/tenants to improve external appearance of shops through shop front grants
	Street furniture Public Realm and Green Infrastructure,	Including traditional lighting for streets and passages, benches and planters. Review of Public Realm.

Welshpool Priority	Project /Initiative	Description
<p>Maximising Impacts and benefits of tourism</p>	<p>Bringing vacant dilapidated buildings into economic use</p>	<p>Redundant Building Grant to encourage investment in refurbishment of vacant town centre properties</p>
	<p>Improving digital connectivity of town centre businesses</p>	<p>Harnessing digital technologies to support individual retailers and businesses to enhance the collective town centre offer</p>
	<p>Development of area opposite y Lanfa</p>	<p>Development plan for the site</p>
<p>Improving Transport and Connectivity</p>	<p>Co-ordination and integration of public transport</p>	<p>Improve communications between existing service providers to ensure integration and effectiveness of public transport services e.g. coordinating bus and train services.</p>
<p>An attractive town relevant to the needs of all residents, visitors and businesses</p>	<p>Increase visitor accommodation offer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase local accommodation offer. Review current position and availability. • Hotel study and soft market testing to determine scope for an additional hotel in the Town - Options to be reviewed including Dolanog House as location for a budget hotel.
	<p>Improve co-ordination of existing local tourism assets to increase visitor footfall into the town</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway - re-instate Welshpool stop • Coed-Y-Dinas -Charlies - towpath partway, bus stop to improve connectivity to the town • Glyndwr's Way and Offa's Dyke Path - providing facilities for walkers in the Town Centre to attract footfall. Potential to link to other towns including Knighton for collaboration on promotions • Wildlife Trust – Planned nature reserves for mitigation of canal development • Shuttle bus (electric) and overflow car park in town for Powys Castle
	<p>Maximising Economic Impacts of the Canal Restoration</p>	<p>Restoration of the Canal in four phases, fits with the ambitions of Welshpool Town Council to restore the Canal to Welshpool and so obtain the economic benefits of restoration.</p>
	<p>Facilities for Campervan Parking in Town</p>	<p>Parking and related facilities to allow camper vans to overnight in the town centre and increase visitor footfall</p>
	<p>Increasing number of Festivals and events and making them more inclusive</p>	<p>Events focused on young families, such as the dragon hunt. More events for teenagers, particularly older teenagers. Strong support for the Winter Festival and opportunities to increase activities and impact. (See also WTC business Interviews Sept.2021)</p>
	<p>Health and Wellbeing Hub</p>	<p>A new integrated model of care and wellbeing that sits under the overarching Powys Health and Care Strategy developed jointly by the County Council, Health Board and third sector.</p>

Conclusion & Next Steps

Welshpool has some distinctive advantages and opportunities notwithstanding the challenges faced nationally and locally.

The nationally challenging economic backdrop has had a significant impact on the high street, accelerated the move towards online shopping and resulting in significant pressures on the viability of many high street businesses. Within this context there is an accelerated need for revitalisation, regeneration, re-purposing of town centres and the importance of the proposals set out in this Plan should not be underestimated. While the strong independent shopping scene in the County's retail centres means they are well placed to weather the current storm, the town centres will still need to adapt to survive.

The projects identified provide an investment proposition and work programme for the public, private and voluntary sector players who have a stake in the towns future success. The County Council will need to work with stakeholders in Welshpool to establish appropriate governance arrangements and to secure the funding required to implement the projects identified and deliver the Plans in a co-ordinated way.

In the context of the wider economy in the County it is also important to consider the opportunities for the towns to collaborate on funding bids and tourism initiatives.

