

# Main Report

## Ten Towns Initiative – progress update October 2024

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work of the Ten Towns initiative and to outline the support which has been secured to progress initiatives at a local level.

### **Background**

The Ten Towns initiative was established as a direct response to the County's [Moving Rural Carmarthenshire Forward Plan](#), which identified a need to increase the resilience and future growth of Carmarthenshire's rural market towns and their surrounding areas.

The scheme was officially launched in October 2019. A key part of the programme was the development of Economic growth plans to drive forward an agenda for change for Ten rural market towns across the County. The Authority secured funding via the Rural Development Plan to commission external consultants, Owain Davies Consulting and The Means, to develop plans in each of the respective areas namely: Cwmaman, Cross Hands, Kidwelly, Llandeilo, Llandovery, Llanybydder, St Clears, Whitland, Laugharne and Newcastle Emlyn.

### **Growth Plans and community engagement**

Work in developing socio economic analysis and baseline data for the respective towns commenced prior to the initial 'lockdowns'. Meetings were also held with the Public Service Board and the Authority's Property and forward planning teams. Whilst the general commission was put on hold during 2020, the consultants were asked to prepare an economic impact assessment of the pandemic on the workforce and businesses within the towns to provide early insights for the local economy. In light of the pandemic, this initiative has been given a new emphasis, with the plans focusing on the immediate economic recovery as well as addressing some of the longer term aspirations for strengthening the towns and surrounding areas.

Growth Plan teams have been established in each of the respective areas which include representation from Town and Community Councils, local businesses and third sector. The Teams are chaired by the local Member and their role is to oversee the delivery of the ideas which have been identified and to collectively take these ideas forward. To support the Growth Plan Teams, a team of 4 officers have been employed to support the local communities to progress the ideas identified.

### **Authority's £1m capital fund**

The Authority has committed £1m capital funding to support the Growth Plan teams to take forward some of the capital aspirations identified within the plans. Each of the growth plan teams were invited to collectively bring forward their priority projects for consideration and initial Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were submitted in February 2022. These EOIs were assessed by the Authority's Grants Funding Panel and an 'in principle' approval granted. Subsequently, each of the towns were required to work up their proposals further before being presented to the Authority's Grants funding panel for final assessment. Each of the applications have been considered by Cabinet and/or Cabinet Member before final award. Details of applications supported per town are provided at Annex A.

## **UK Government Shared Prosperity funding**

£2.27m additional funding has been secured via the Shared Prosperity Fund to further enhance the Ten Towns programme and to ensure the prioritised projects can be fully developed for maximum benefit and impact.

In addition, the funding has enabled the delivery of a number of specifically targeted interventions developed to support the initial programme offer. Details of the schemes are provided below.

## **Ten Towns Capital Development Fund**

The aim of this fund is to support commercial town centre premises whose current state of repair is a barrier to commercial occupancy.

£500,000 has been ringfenced for this fund. 5 applications were approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 29 July 2024. Work has begun in transforming these vacant properties into commercial spaces.

A further 4 applications have been approved in principle and given extra time to develop their projects. These applications are due to be resubmitted by the end of September 2024.

## **Ten Towns Revitalising Rural town Centre Fund (RRTC)**

As a direct response to needs identified by growth plan team members and stakeholders across the Ten Towns, the RRTC was created to support town centre businesses to improve the vibrancy of the exterior of their premises.

The response to this fund has been overwhelmingly positive with 105 applications approved across the Ten towns. This is a targeted fund, with each of the 320 eligible premises across the rural town centres visited by officers to raise awareness of the fund. The impact of the fund has been great, with many premises in the same street supported, providing maximum visual impact within the town.

This fund accompanied by the Tackling towns programme, which will undertake public realm enhancements across the Ten towns, will significantly raise the appeal and vibrancy of the County's rural market towns.

## **Tackling Towns - Ten Towns enhancement programme**

With funds secured from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, each of the towns have been given the opportunity to identify and prioritise areas to invest and develop within their towns. The Tackling Towns scheme is being directly delivered by Carmarthenshire County Council. Each town has agreed on priority projects that will add vibrancy, enhance and green our rural market towns, making them attractive places to both live and work.

This work is currently being delivered with design and engineering work ongoing where needed. These schemes in the main will be delivered by the DLO and completed before the end of this calendar year.

## **Ten Town Events Fund**

The value of local events in increasing footfall to our rural market towns is proven. The Events fund was developed to provide financial support for the creation of new events or add value to existing events to target a new audience.

The Events fund is targeted at town centre events which have the potential to attract additional visitors to the respective areas and have the potential for year-on-year growth. A total of 10 events have been awarded funding which will take place before the end of the calendar year.

### **Ten Towns circular economy activities**

The need to develop the circular economy is a cross-cutting theme identified across all of the Growth Plans. Consequently, we commissioned Afallen consultants to scope, develop and pilot circular economy activities which minimise waste and increase opportunities for communities to access repair and reuse facilities and initiatives across the Ten Towns. As a direct result of the recommendations of the report carried out by Afallen, a small seed fund was developed to support town centre Circular economy projects.

The circular economy fund opened in late Spring 2024. 5 applications have received support from the fund.

### **Projects in development:**

#### **Ten Towns Trail – Street Art**

Following on from the positive response to the street art project already completed in St Clears, the team are in the process of commissioning an artist to create street art designs depicting the history and heritage in each of the market towns.

Freeholder consent has already been gained in a number of towns. The team will continue to scope suitable options to be included in the commission which is expected to be published by the end of September. The work will need to be completed by the end of February 2025.

#### **Ten Towns - art installations recycled or upcycled materials**

For the towns that did not come forward for support under the Ten Towns Circular Economy Fund, we are commissioning an artist to create an art installation using waste products and/or upcycled materials which will be visible within the respective towns. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness in relation to the circular economy and to encourage community participation in creating bespoke installations from waste products.

#### **Ten Towns Marketing and Visual Merchandising Support**

In response to a request made by a newly established business forum in one of the Ten Towns, business fora have been given the opportunity to access specific marketing and visual merchandising support. Town centre businesses will be supported on how best to promote their towns in a collective manner as opposed to on an individual business basis. Many of these towns have visitor focused websites and social media accounts across multiple platforms. The aim of the commission is to explore the best ways to increase footfall from a town perspective.

The addition of visual merchandising support will create exciting, vibrant and cohesive window displays. This will complement a number of the projects such as the Street art commission and Revitalising Rural town Centre Fund.

### **Other initiatives that support the Ten town programme:**

#### **Tim Tacluso**

Officers have been in discussions with the Tim Tacluso since its inception to ensure that cleansing and small scale maintenance issues highlighted in each of the Ten towns can be actioned and undertaken in a timely manner. As the team are currently concentrating on works

across Primary towns, resources will be allocated to the Ten Towns towards the end of the calendar year once each of the Ten towns capital projects have been completed.

The Ten Towns team will be supporting Tim Tacluso by preparing schedule of works, highlighting the areas across the towns that are in need of refreshing.

### **Promoting the distinctiveness of our rural areas**

The Pandemic led to many in the UK to re-examine the attractiveness of taking a domestic vacation, especially to those more rural destinations that can offer outdoor recreation opportunities. To maximise on this, the Marketing & Media Team have secured funding via the Leader programme to help promote the distinctiveness of the Ten Towns, providing stories and reasons to visit which amplify Welsh culture, language, locally produced produce etc.

Specific video content, photography, social media content and PR support has been developed to promote the variety of the offer across our rural towns. The following link provides an example of these: <https://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/places/llandeilo-the-tywi-valley/>

Specific, themed social media campaigns have also been developed in conjunction with local businesses to promote specific sectors e.g. Larder Trail -

[https://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/explore/carmarthenshire-larder-trails/.Yxhqxd\\_TXIV](https://www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/explore/carmarthenshire-larder-trails/.Yxhqxd_TXIV)

The Carmarthenshire Ambassador training project has been launched with presentations made to the growth plan teams to encourage local business and stakeholders to become ambassadors in their respective areas.

### **HWB Fach y Wlad**

Led by the Customer Service Team, each of the Ten Towns are benefitting from access to the service provision facilitated from the Authority's primary town HWBs in a rural location.

Located at key community based venues, this new provision funded by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, provides a vital service for rural residents within the Ten Towns and surrounding areas.

### **Meanwhile spaces**

The Means have been commissioned to deliver the Meanwhile spaces project which is a pilot scheme designed to reduce the number of vacant premises. The project is working in 4 of the Ten Towns. The aim of the project is to develop agreements with interested landlords to allow short term let opportunities for local business thus reducing the number of vacant properties and providing an opportunity for local businesses to gain access to the high street and increasing the town's offer. This project is in the delivery phase and due to complete by the end of December 2024. The first Ten towns space opened in Llandeilo in August with a local crafter occupying the space.

The scheme will complement successful pop up shops undertaken by the team under the 100% Sir Gar brand in the primary towns over the last few years.

### **Holistic Approach**

Officers have been working closely with other team member across the department to support businesses and third sector organisations access wider funds that have been made available

from the Shared Prosperity Fund and other programs such as Arfor. This collaborative approach has enabled us to deliver maximum impact in the respective towns.

## **Conclusion**

A great deal of progress has been made in delivering against some of the key aspirations identified within the respective Economic Growth Plans which were developed at the outset of the programme. The Ten Towns initiative has been delivered through a mix of regeneration models, namely third-party grants and direct delivery programmes. The Ten towns programme has evolved since in its inception with targeted interventions developed as a direct result of engagement with town stakeholders.

During this time, strong working relationships have been established with key stakeholders in each of the towns. It is hoped that the economic and social impact of the Ten Towns initiative will benefit both businesses and the local community.

