

Powys Local Growth Zones Task and Finish Group

**Call for Evidence –
Summary of Responses**



Cefnogir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Supported by
Welsh Government

Introduction

In March 2012, the Powys Local Growth Zones Task and Finish Group was established by the Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science. The remit of the Group was to explore an alternative model to Enterprise Zones which is more suitable to the rural economy of Powys.

Hearing views, opinions and ideas was a critical element of the Group's work and a call for evidence seeking views was issued between 4 May 2012 and 1 June 2012.

A total of 50 responses were received. Respondents generally welcomed the local growth zones proposal, and evidence has been received from a range of sources including individuals, different-sized businesses, umbrella and representative bodies, and politicians. A list of all respondents can be found at the end of this document.

This document summarises the individual comments received through the call for evidence, and groups those responses by theme, town, and geographical area as appropriate.

Summary of Responses

Welshpool

Welshpool – industrial and employment sites

- Use the area around Buttington for the setup and growth of companies in the manufacturing and motor manufacturing sectors.
- Buttington Cross Industrial Park is now almost fully developed and further suitable land must be allocated for development.
- Brownfield land is available close to Offa's Dyke Industrial Estate.

Welshpool – town centre plan

- Implement the Town Council's Town Centre Plan

Welshpool – business rates

- Help with excessive retail rates.

Machynlleth

Machynlleth – LGZ status

- Machynlleth and Bro Ddyfi to have LGZ status.

Newtown

Newtown – commercial premises

- Encourage landlords to offer short term leases to assist take up of retail premises.
- Increase availability of smaller low cost units similar to those at the Lion Works.

Newtown – infrastructure (transport)

- Newtown bypass is vital to the economic growth of the town
- Good access routes off the bypass into the town centre with appropriate signage
- Increasingly congested road network into Newtown.
- Poor local integration of transport services
- Introduction of hourly train service, originally scheduled for 2011.
- Inadequate transport infrastructure
- Newtown is geographically well placed, just not easy to get to
- Introduce free parking for Powys towns for a maximum of 2 hours.

Newtown – infrastructure (ICT / Broadband)

- Prioritise the provision of next generation broadband in the area.
- Expanding internet sales needs fast broadband
- Introduction of next generation broadband and improvements to mobile phone coverage
- In recent years broadband speeds seem to have markedly decreased.

Newtown – training / skills / recruitment of staff / apprenticeships

- Difficulty in recruiting HNC grade engineers.
- Due to the lack of work opportunity, young skilled workforce migrates.
- Support for college courses in construction and engineering
- Supporting apprenticeships and employee training skills at the local college
- Improve links between the college and businesses
- Lower ceilings for minimum numbers so more specialist training can take place
- Create an educational hub – mixed use campus and business incubator units.
- Work closely with college at all levels and across various departments.

Newtown – planning

- Planning restrictions are stifling many proposed developments in the area.
- Involve Town and Community Councils in the pre-planning process.
- Provide premises suitable for micro and small businesses.
- Adoption of mixed use zoning allowing residential above shops.
- Large industrial units to be subdivided to bring back into use.
- Simplify planning regulations and processes.

Newtown – business support

- Lack of support for small businesses in relation to costs for training / certifications.
- Enhance support to new and existing businesses – one stop shop approach
- Set up an all inclusive register of local businesses so that they are more visible to each other and potential customers and clients.
- Business networks – regional business hub.
- Increase availability of grants and loans and extend to retail sector.
- Establish an enterprise co-operative to make borrowing easier for SMEs.

- Grants for local people setting up business.
- Use the concept of “Business Angels” to give advice to all businesses in the area.
- Offer “Dragons Den” type consultancy to start-up businesses.
- Subsidise local press advertising for small businesses.
- Examine ways to cut red tape and assist potential new retailers.
- Incentivise businesses to come here.

Newtown – business rates / rents

- Subsidised rents for small and start-up businesses.
- Rate relief measures for micro and small businesses, tapered over several years.
- Place the onus on landlords to justify leaving premises empty.

Newtown – Mid Wales Manufacturing Group

- Need local support from the Manufacturing Group – more networking opportunities and intertrading and local supply chain development.

Newtown – renewable energy

- Opportunities from the renewable energy industry are considerable – local signals to potential investors need to make potential investors feel welcome.
- Business opportunities that should arise from Arbed II, Green Deal and similar initiatives are considerable.
- Newtown to model itself on the Austrian town of Güssing and become central hub of Powys as the UK's first sustainable county.

Newtown – community spirit / social enterprises

- Very little community spirit – no “heart and soul” to the town centre.
- Build on co-operative enterprises which are very successful.

Newtown – heritage-led regeneration

- Townscape Heritage Initiative or similar heritage-led regeneration to be investigated.

Newtown – role of the town

- Support manufacturing.
- We need to sell the town to business and make sure they are welcome here.
- Newtown to build identity as a centre for retail, manufacturing, and trade.

Newtown – local procurement

- Encourage local businesses to form consortia to bid for public sector contracts.
- Public tender contracts – priority must be given to local businesses.

Newtown – retail and the high street

- Local currencies such as the Newtown or Montgomeryshire £
- Large number of empty retail premises in the town centre – find innovative ways of filling them.
- Seasonal shopping – examine the possibility of main tourist season only shops.
- Set up a training scheme with the local college to encourage entrepreneurship.
- Specialise in “Made in Wales” brand, grown locally, reared locally, organic.
- Click and Collect – order online, then visit the shop to pick up the goods.
- Staffing Agency – a pool of retail employees to cover for holidays, sickness etc
- Community use of empty properties

- Offer empty shop window space to local schools, scouts, guides etc
- Discourage fly-pasting on empty shop premises.
- Free local parking for shoppers for a limited time period

Newtown – tourism / promoting the town / branding

- Explore ways to increase tourism.
- Produce tourism brochure with activities, events, and places to visit.

Llandrindod Wells

Llandrindod Wells – heritage-led regeneration

- Townscape Heritage Initiative to support the restoration of properties within the conservation area.

Llandrindod Wells – tourism / promoting the town / branding

- Local businesses within the Llandrindod Wells area require investment in a wide number of tourism initiatives
- Better signage in town centre would help – big maps etc as in shopping centres.
- Llandrindod Wells as a spa / tourist area into mid Wales

Llandrindod Wells – geographic extent of LGZ

- Old Radnor Community Council area to be included in the Llandrindod LGZ.

Llandrindod Wells – business rates

- More support to entrepreneurs in the form of 'soft loans'.
- Scrapping of business rates for SMEs.
- Targeted rate relief in more rural areas.

Llandrindod Wells – businesses support

- Scheme to help people starting / purchasing businesses

Llandrindod Wells – VAT for businesses

- VAT reduction for all hospitality business sectors.

Llandrindod Wells – training / skills / recruitment of staff / apprenticeships

- Careers Wales to give pupils more information about apprenticeships and becoming self-employed - not to just recommend tertiary education as their only option.

Llandrindod Wells – infrastructure (ICT / Broadband)

- Faster broadband should be invested in – ideally investment in fiberoptic technology, along with other solutions such as G4 and microwave
- Need to put in high tech communications to attract media / creative businesses.

Llandrindod Wells – local procurement

- Local authorities need to use local suppliers.

Llandrindod Wells – loyalty card

- Reward for shopping locally – e.g. a loyalty / discount card scheme.

Brecon

Brecon – role of the town

- Brecon could market itself as an 'outdoor living space' for southern Britain.

Brecon – shopping facilities

- Shop fronts need regeneration and a cash boost.
- Brecon has a poor shopping area for locals.
- Healthy balance needed between larger stores and independents

Brecon – training / skills / recruitment of staff / apprenticeships

- College to link with universities re: conservation, renewable energy etc.
- Purpose built Youth Centre to offer training and skills to young people.
- Develop College as a higher and further education centre.
- Reward local businesses that offer apprenticeships and employment at the end of it.
- New County primary school.
- Improve access to vocational training – e.g. through OU style home learning (needs good broadband connections).
- Stage events to attract university students to Mid Wales.

Brecon – the National Park as a growth area

- Use the Brecon Beacons National Park as a local growth zone that attracts investment in wetland and soil carbon conservation.

Brecon – infrastructure (energy)

- Brecon would benefit from a disaggregated electricity grid supplied through appropriate renewable sources

Brecon – infrastructure (transport)

- A light rapid rail system to Brecon.
- Transport Hub – the new T4 TrawsCymru service to Cardiff needs to be promoted and developed.
- A link road to Bishops Meadow from the Builth Wells road link with the trunk road network.
- Consider a bypass link from Richway onto the Brecon bypass.
- Public Transport is poor in and around the town.
- Reintroduction of the railway – link to Cardiff to enable commuting from Brecon.

Brecon – infrastructure (ICT / broadband)

- Upgraded broadband and mobile technologies are critical in supporting local business promotion and providing information to visitors.

Brecon – importance of arts and culture

- Large number of festivals and arts / culture centres – grow this further.
- Brecon could be developed as an arts town.

Brecon – Olympic legacy

- Brecon Leisure Centre – blend this with the outdoor pursuits offered in the region.
- Question over Brecon Leisure Centre long term future as run by the public sector.

Brecon – tourism

- The LGZ must support the existing BBNPA Tourism Action Plan vision.
- A strong Brecon brand needs to be developed.
- Consideration of LGZ status for Brecon needs to incorporate the BBNPA Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Brecon – planning

- Planning controls need to support the historic townscape.
- Planning and development control is split between the BB NPA and PCC – this is an extra hurdle.
- Will be difficult to establish a growth zone as long as planning remains within the National Park's control.
- The Local Growth Zone must have regard to the statutory purposes and duty of the National Park Authority (NPA) e.g. National Park Management Plan.
- Simplification of the planning system for Brecon Town is not necessary or appropriate.
- Create one planning authority – Powys County Council.
- Allow available brown field sites to be acquired by housing associations.
- Full planning permission is required for small scale renewable development.
- Recent planning application – in timescale, no issues with handling.
- Building control is the responsibility of the local authority so have to deal with two bodies – PCC and BBNPA – this takes time and costs money.
- Experienced delays in planning permission being issued.
- Unclear advice given by BBNPA.
- Planning very helpful and provided relevant legal guidance, although inconsistent advice was given to another on same issue.
- Problems with BBNPA regarding procedures and lost papers.

Brecon – geographic extent of LGZ

- Need to involve the hinterland in the LGZ proposal.
- The Brecon LGZ should encompass the whole of the LD3 postcode area.

Brecon – business support

- Too many business support agencies in operation – encourage a larger and more centralised agency administered directly by Welsh Government.
- Need to support Brecon's micro-businesses.
- Focus on retail chain / multiples and similar hotels will diminish the town's offer.
- Ambassador programme has shown that training, leadership development and knowledge transfer are keys to developing resilient businesses and services.
- Engaging the town's banks in supporting small scale businesses may be as important as any public funding.

Brecon – business rates / rents

- Business rates are too high in Brecon.
- Channel the revenue received from business rates back into business support.

Brecon – community enabling

- Public sector to support the private and community sectors through training and capacity building programmes.
- Need a town partnership to spearhead change.
- Support for grass roots schemes and projects.

Brecon – environmental sustainability

- Environmental management is fundamental to sustainable development

Brecon – regeneration and economic development

- Transfer of the economic regeneration function from its 9 Unitary Authorities to the BBNPA in order to enable the Authority to enable development.
- Townscape Heritage Initiative or similar heritage-led regeneration project.

Ystradgynlais

Ystradgynlais – geographical exclusion

- Ystradgynlais has a buffer between it and the rest of Powys i.e. the National Park – this has a detrimental effect.
- Ystradgynlais should be included in the city region status being proposed by Swansea City Council, Carmarthen Council and Neath Port Talbot Council.
- Question over the value derived by the council in return for rates paid.
- Change the boundaries so that Ystradgynlais is given to a council that cares.
- Ystradgynlais should also be considered as a growth zone

All Three Towns

All Three Towns – business support

- Further support for business growth.

All Three Towns – employment

- Promote existing public sector activities and generate new actions with employers.

All Three Towns – infrastructure (transport)

- Better road links across all three towns with Newtown in particular fast tracked.
- Investment in Welshpool air port to cope with larger aircraft.
- Rail links to be improved across Powys.

All Three Towns – infrastructure (ICT / broadband)

- Next generation Broadband is essential.
- Development of health technology in a rural setting should be one of the core business areas for development.

All Three Towns – infrastructure (energy)

- Energy efficiency and reduction in energy costs.
- Local opportunities to generate and supply electricity.

All Three Towns – geographic extent of LGZ

- Take account of corridors of development, rather than limiting support to the boundaries of the three towns.

Powys

Powys – EU Funding

- Local Growth Zones should be prioritised for future funding from European and domestic sources.

Powys – housing

- Houses are not affordable for local people.

Powys – infrastructure (transport)

- Improve the infrastructure of the roads.
- Do not spend any more money on public transport.
- Trunk roads are substandard and hinder development – make small improvements to enable overtaking.

Powys – infrastructure (ICT / Broadband)

- Businesses will not locate here because of poor ICT infrastructure.
- Invest in and improve the telecommunications network.
- Welsh Government to prioritise the provision of next generation broadband in LGZs.
- Next Generation Broadband and mobile phone coverage – this will support all sectors including manufacturing and tourism.
- Improved broadband will help solve the problem of digital inclusion and address skills, employment, access to services and social issues.
- The quality of the area's environment can be sustained through improved broadband provision.
- Support take up of superfast broadband to tackle digital exclusion.
- Improved broadband connectivity can support improved education and training.
- Broadband will help deliver Government savings from reduction in overheads.

Powys – business support

- Give priority to co-operative / social enterprises and very small businesses.
- Additional sources of funding for small businesses.
- Single point of contact within a new Powys focused service – One Stop Shops.
- Recognise that many businesses in rural areas are non-incorporated.
- Supporting enterprise through mentoring and marketing support.
- Marketing, integration, supply chain development and establishing new outlets for food producers and a similar approach for cultural enterprises.
- Supporting enterprise to develop new products and process through R&D projects or peer to peer mentoring.
- Support organisations need to work together more effectively.
- Exchange of best practice and developing and promoting exemplars.
- Free access to meeting rooms in the key growth towns.
- Investment in pre-start-up.
- The one-stop idea is questionable – better would be an integrated mentoring, training and advice system.
- Success to be measured by numbers of sustainable enterprises.
- Need funding for revenue as well as capital activities.

Powys – business rates / rents

- Enhanced business rate relief to be available to new and expanding businesses.
- Enhanced capital allowances should be made available.
- All business rates within the zone to be retained by the local authority to support its economic priorities.
- Higher rates for properties that are empty for too long.
- Provide reduced rentals for start-up businesses.

Powys – planning

- Improve planning restrictions.
- Ensure low levels of regulation and planning controls.
- Develop radically simplified planning approaches.
- The appropriateness of Local Development Orders to be explored.
- Align Local Growth Zones and the Powys Local Development Plan.
- Both PCC and BBNPA should devise a rapid response system to deal with applications on land that is already designated for development.
- Both planning authorities should examine their policies dealing with businesses in the countryside to ensure that businesses can be established in more remote areas.
- Both planning authorities should re-visit their policies on sign posting to ensure that businesses can achieve visibility while respecting the areas in which they are situated.

Powys – heritage-led regeneration

- Brecon, Llandrindod Wells, and Newtown all have designated conservation areas – propose that a Townscape Heritage Programme be put in place, including a shop front grants scheme.

Powys – training / skills / recruitment of staff / apprenticeships

- Increase training in the area and address skills shortage.
- Incentives for businesses in the LGZ to access support for skill development.
- Mentoring by a peer within the sector for new or less experience businesses.
- Promote apprenticeships in local businesses.
- Identify school leavers who would benefit from apprenticeships / vocational training.
- Ring fenced investment in Apprenticeship programmes in Brecon, Llandrindod and Newtown – this will need intervention.

Powys – land use

- Welsh Government owned land should be used for development of business premises for start-ups.

Powys – empty properties

- Active managing of short lease occupancy to enhance town centres.
- Filling empty shops with local enterprise / business on a short term lease.
- Active managing of short lease occupancy to enhance town centres.

Powys – local procurement

- An active process of local procurement is needed.

Powys – tourism

- Tourism will remain the strongest source of income revenue for the area.

Powys – film locations

- Establish an office to help film makers find locations in Powys.

Powys – sector focus for LGZs

- Green technologies.
- Advanced technologies.
- Sustainable agriculture (farming techniques that are beneficial to the environment).
- Creative industries.
- Energy sector (carbon-free / green).

Powys – renewable energy

- Embrace opportunities for renewable energy industry.
- Uplands play an important role in contributing to a low carbon economy, but more training and skills development is necessary.
- The possibility of wind farm development is likely to deter business from coming to Mid Wales.
- TAN8 to be reviewed.

Powys – LGZ locations

- LGZs in Powys should be located in the Central Growth Corridor identified in the Local Development Plan.
- It is important to reach beyond the towns and into the hinterland.
- If the Zones were too rigid it may cause hot spots of activity and not spots.
- All enterprise should be looked at in the process e.g. Community and Social Enterprises.
- Ensure actions do not displace activity from one ward to another.

Powys – environment / sustainability

- Powys LGZs could complement and support WG's Woodland Strategy and WG's Food Strategy
- Powys's varied natural heritage should provide the cornerstone of the Local Growth Zone proposal – this will lead to environmentally resilient growth.

Powys – supply chains

- Supply side initiatives are critical, particularly in rural locations which are often disadvantaged by economies of scale and distance to markets.

Powys – major hazard sites and pipelines

- The HSE would like to offer further consultation to assist in identifying the potential issues and compatible development types within the consultation zones.

Local Growth Zone Concept

General issues

- Ascertain the support needs of businesses and deliver what they are asking for.
- Identify each Zone's USP and deliver an agreed marketing strategy.
- Co-ordinate the delivery of support to business through a Business Acceleration programme – support those businesses that can / are making a difference
- Promote the current suite of employment support programmes to business.
- Business skills should be a priority for education.

- Spin out into the wider geographic area – benefiting bordering (rural) areas.
- Any initiatives to encourage growth need to have a multi agency approach.
- Zones will require Broadband, investment into new infrastructure, rate relief, fast tracked planning, townscape schemes, and access to finance.
- Enterprise rather than business needs to be the focus.
- The right social, cultural and business mix in town centres is important.
- Needs to ensure that actions do not displace existing patterns of activity.
- Zones should be broad because of low density of population.
- Be aware of what already exists re strong local culture / heritage of areas.
- Acknowledge WG's commitment to balanced definition of Sustainable Development including environmental impacts and social-ethical considerations
- Be mindful of unfairly disadvantaging small businesses outside of growth zones.
- Consider future funding from all sources.

List of Respondents

Richard Hilditch, Border Hardcore Co. Ltd.
Cllr Michael Williams
Robert Taylor, Contact Attachments Ltd.
Phil Rennett, Concord Hydraulics
Stuart Owen, Gareth Pugh Steel Framed Buildings
Andrew Cross x 2
John R. Lewis, Research and Marketing Solutions / Alert Activities Ltd
Simon Williams, NHS Wales Informatics Service
Nick Evans, EvaBuild Ltd
Tony Pettitt, ESDM Ltd
Peter Morris, PCC Planning Official
Paul Sinnadurai x 2
Old Radnor Community Council
Arwyn Watkins, Cambrian Training Co.
Mike Sivier
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority x 2
S. Greenow
John Morgan, Health and Safety Executive
Andy Bull, Severn Wye Energy Agency
Kevin Harrington, Antur Teifi
Cllr Gary Price
Llangynidr Community Council
Caersws Community Council
Brecon Beacons Tourism (5 collated responses)
Cllr Graham Brown, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration
Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council
Cllr Tom Turner
Angela Moore and Tony Haskins, The Simmering Cauldron
Chruchstoke Community Council
Doug Hughes, I Love Newtown
Stephanie Woods, Quickstep Environmental
Brecon Town Council
Welshpool Town Council
Lee Price, Powys Regeneration Partnership
Phil Freeman, Powys Arts Forum
Roger Williams MP
Susanna Thompson, Powys Local Action Group
Sue Mabberley, Countryside Council for Wales
Sue Green, Llandrindod Wells Chamber of Trade & Tourism
Mike O'Carroll, Three Wells Hotel and Restaurant
Russell George AM
Simon Thomas AM
Bruce Whitear, Powys Teaching Health Board
Colin Evans, Cantref Adventure Farm and Riding Centre
John Day
William Powell AM
Cllr Matthew Dorrance
Llandrinio and Arddleon Community Council