

# Ystradgynlais Action Plan

Consultation Draft

January 2023



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# 1 Purpose

The purpose of this Plan is to articulate a vision and priorities for the future of the Ystradgynlais area to help attract and shape investment and support the vitality of the town and its recovery from Covid. The Plan has a town centre focus whilst taking into consideration the importance and influence of the opportunities found within the wider area.

The Plan provides a focus on the town's unique challenges and opportunities and aims to realise the following:

- Develop a shared vision and strategy to give the private, public and community sectors confidence to invest in the town and support its vitality.
- Ensure investment and activity is appropriate to the individual character so it maintains and builds on its assets and strengths.
- Confirm the individual characteristics and assets are used effectively to build on the town's potential.
- Attract investment to better meet the future retailing, economic, leisure, cultural, housing and service needs of the town and local community.
- To consider good practice lessons from other towns.

One of the main benefits of the Plan is that it will help access support from the UK and Welsh Governments' programmes aimed at towns with a strategic plan in place with a vision and priorities reflecting the community and key partners. Potential programmes include:

**Transforming Towns - Placemaking Grant** aimed at revitalising town centres throughout Wales and available in any town centre prioritised by Local Authority partners.

**The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)** is being delivered by Powys CC aligned with the Growth Deal and working in partnership with Ceredigion County Council as part of the Mid Wales region. Funding is available to support three Investment Priorities:

- Communities and Place
- Supporting Local Business
- People and Skills

The Plan will also assist with applications for additional fund from a range of organisations supporting businesses, heritage, tourism and voluntary and community programmes such as the National Lottery and Heritage Lottery.

# 2 Introducing Ystradgynlais



## Strategic position

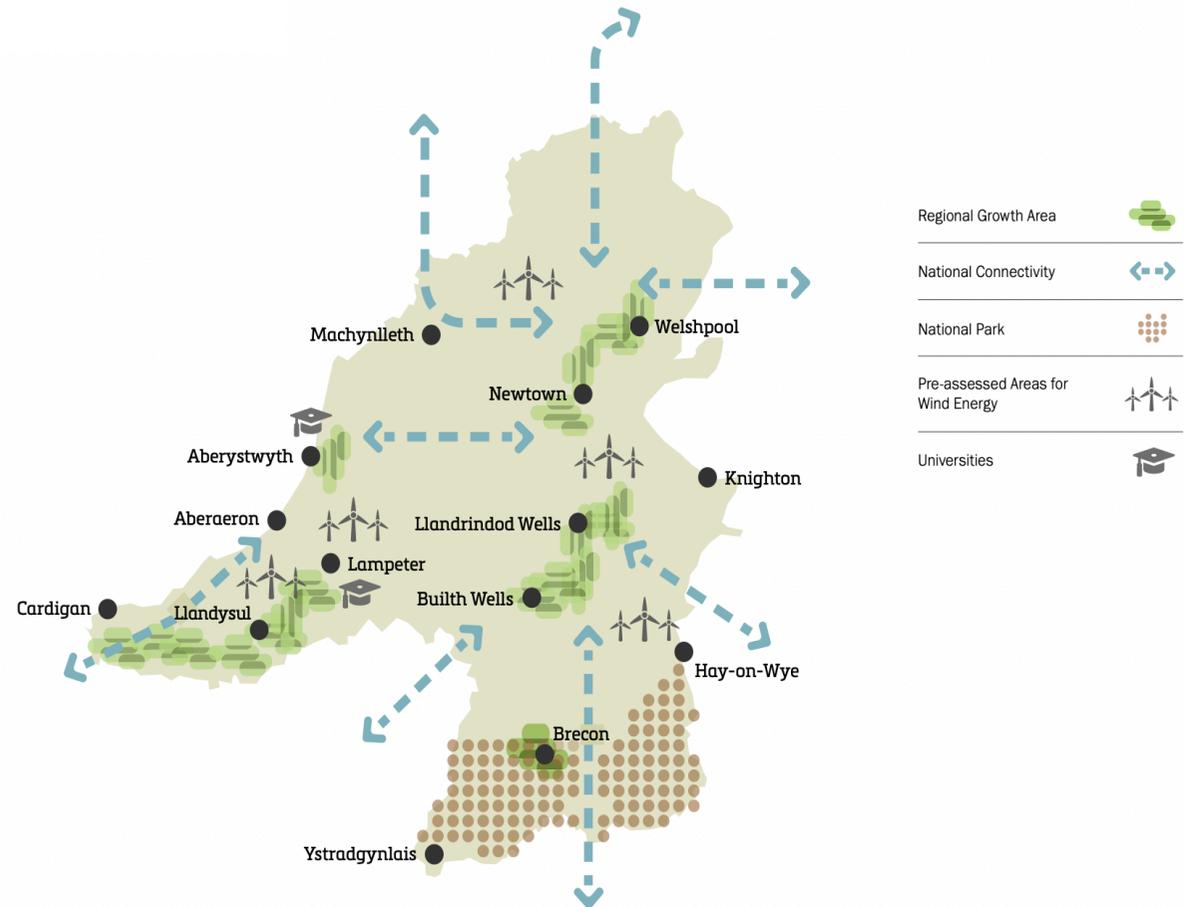
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 identifies the town's location on the border of the Mid Wales and South Wales West regions and on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Ystradgynlais is sited between a Regional Growth Area (Brecon) and National Growth Area to the south (Swansea Bay, Cardiff, and the Valleys). As a result, the town's development is intended to support local aspirations and need, complementing rather than competing with efforts to grow cities and other towns.

The town is located on the A4067 and within 20 minutes journey of the M4. The town's position on the road network is a reason for its status as a centre for manufacturing in the region. Ystradgynlais is also located on the national bus network (Traws Cymru) providing a regular service to Brecon and Swansea.

Figure 1: Mid Wales Regional Strategic Diagram

Source: Future Wales: The National Plan



## Orientation

In the Upper Swansea Valley, Ystradgynlais is the southernmost town in Powys and acts as a link between Mid Wales and the industrial valleys to the south. Ystradgynlais is a former mining town with a population of 10,600, making it the second largest town in Powys.

The town is located on the southern fringe of the Brecon Beacons, neighbouring the border of the National Park. Brecon and Swansea are within a 40-minute car journey and a large proportion of residents travel to Swansea for work, leisure, and shopping.

Notable features of the town and surrounding area include:

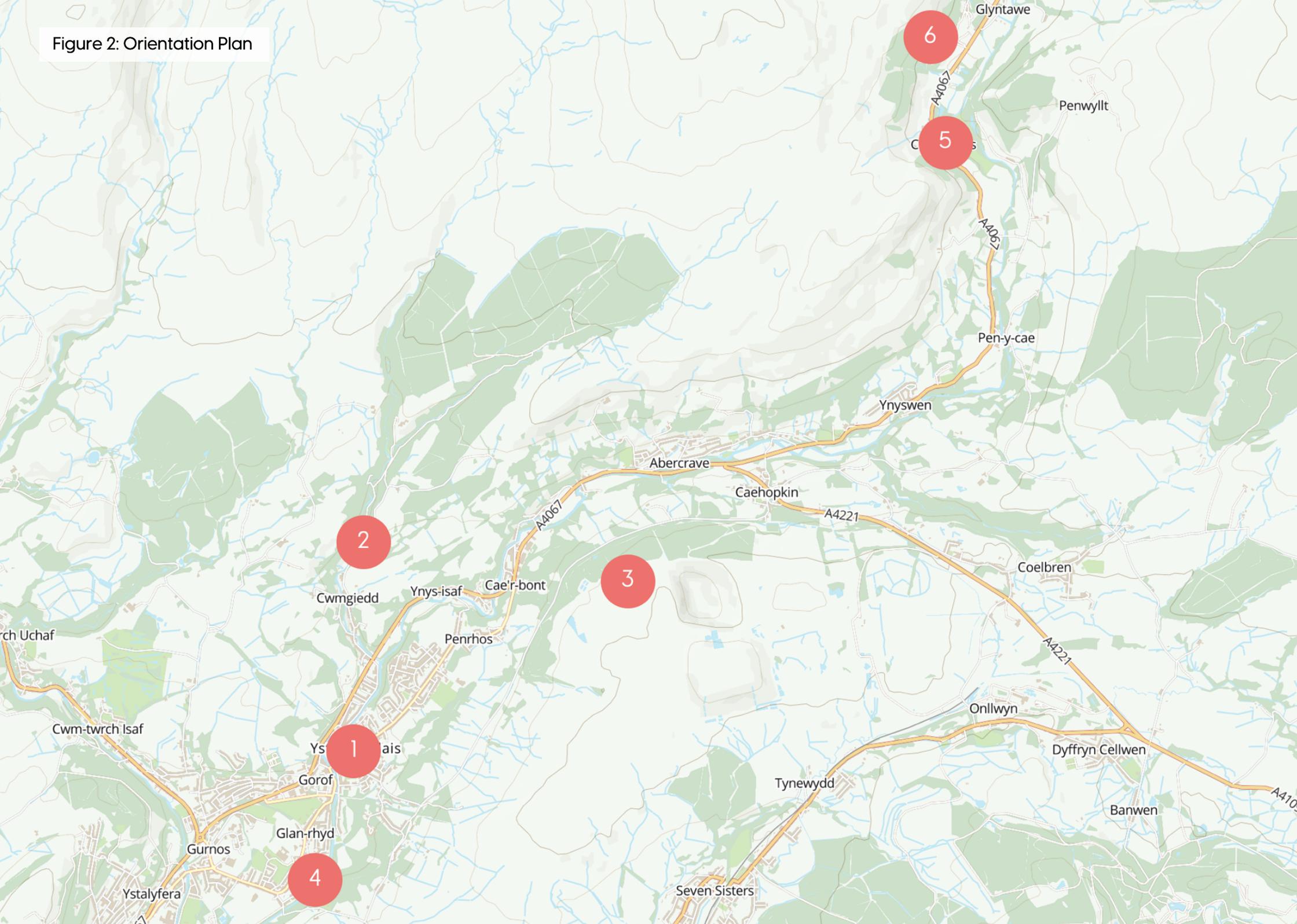
- 1. Town centre** – serves a substantial urban and rural catchment area. Features a range of local facilities and services that draw in people living from a wider hinterland including an arts centre (The Welfare Hall), library, bus station, bank and community centre.
- 2. Brecon Beacons National Park** – The boundary of the National Park is to the north of the town.
- 3. Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE)** – The GCRE is a joint Welsh Government, Powys County Council and Neath Port Talbot Council project to build a world class innovation and rail testing centre at the site of the former Nant Helen opencast mine.

The centre, which is expected to be operational in 2025, will be a site for the testing of rolling stock, infrastructure and new technologies that aims to fill a gap in the UK and wider European rail industry.

At more than £200 million, the project is one of the largest public sector investments in South Wales. Nant Helen will be the main site of the development and host testing facilities, including two electrified high-speed testing tracks and a dual platform train station (for testing purposes). The Onllwyn site will host a research, development, education and training centre as well as a storage, maintenance and decommissioning area.

- 4. Ystradgynlais Community Hospital** – A day hospital with a minor injury unit and a major local employer, part of the Powys Teaching Health Board.
- 5. Craig-y-Nos Castle** – A 19<sup>th</sup> century country house designed in the Scottish Baronial style and a 16-hectare country park which saw more than 250,000 visits in 2019.
- 6. National Showcaves Centre for Wales** – A national tourist attraction, the Centre attracts more than 85,000 visitors annually to visit three different caves.

Figure 2: Orientation Plan



### 3 The key issues & opportunities

#### People

The demographic and socio-economic profile of Ystradgynlais shows a younger population with fewer affluent households than the average for Mid Wales.

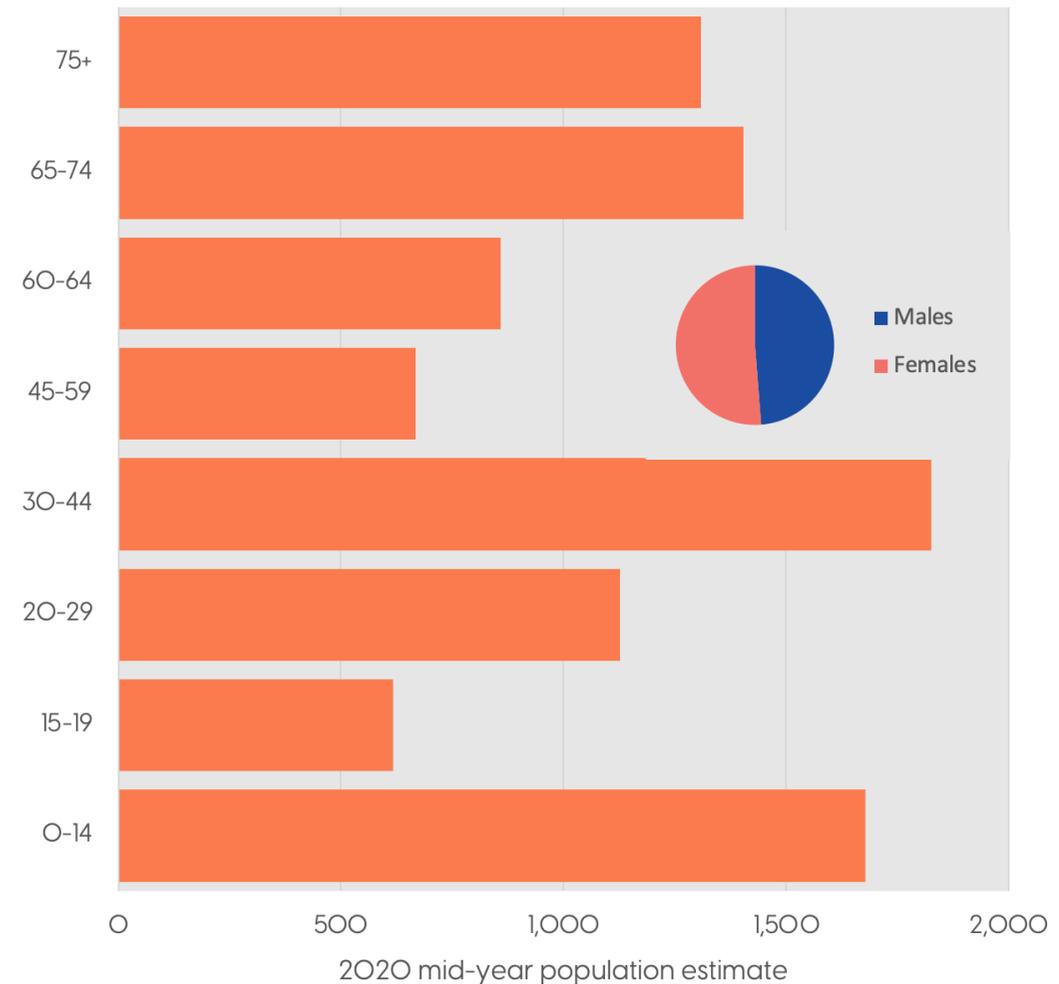
The 2021 Census recorded a population of 10,585, an increase of 337 since 2011. This is similar in scale to the increase between 2001 and 2011, reflecting a long-term trend of population growth.

There is potential for further residential growth in Ystradgynlais with 7 sites allocated for housing in the Local Development Plan alongside an additional site in Abercraf. If all 7 sites are fully implemented, they have the potential to deliver around 400 units.

Housing at these sites has the potential to help grow and sustain the local economy and services as well as contribute towards affordable housing options. The allocations also highlight the importance of the town as a centre for leisure, retail and culture and the role of these facilities in sustainably accommodating future growth.

As such, the potential residential growth of the town is considered a factor that should inform future investments in facilities and services in the area.

Table 1: Age structure of Ystradgynlais



Ystradgynlais is designated as a 'Welsh Speaking Stronghold' in the Local Development Plan, the only town with the designation in the south of Powys. Data from the 2021 Census shows that around a third of the town are Welsh speakers, with the highest proportion in the south of the town.

Between 2011 and 2021 the proportion of Welsh speakers fell by 2.2% in Powys and 1.8% in Neath Port Talbot. The proportion of speakers in Ystradgynlais has likely fallen by a similar number.

Welsh remains an important part of the community, local identity and heritage as well as an asset for the local economy, helping to reinforce the town's distinctiveness. As such, supporting and growing the language in Ystradgynlais is considered an important issue and there is potential to do so through the sustainable growth and development of the town.

ONS estimates show that there are fewer affluent and prosperous households in Ystradgynlais compared with the Mid Wales average and unemployment is at a higher rate. Before housing costs, Ystradgynlais is amongst the 10% of lowest income areas in the UK according to 2021 estimates.

This is also reflected in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) which identifies Ystradgynlais as the most deprived area in Powys with parts of the town amongst the most deprived in Wales. Low household income and high levels of deprivation are considered key issues that need to be addressed, in part, through future economic development.

## The local economy

Workforce data shows that Ystradgynlais has a higher percentage of residents with no qualifications than the Powys average and a lower percentage with Level 4 qualifications (equivalent to the first year of a bachelor's degree) and above.

The employment base is comprised of manufacturing and the foundational economy. This includes construction, education, public administration and, in particular, health and social work which employs 17% of working age adults – 4% above the Powys average.

The Local Development Plan and recent studies have identified the manufacturing sector in Ystradgynlais to be of particular economic significance. The concentration of manufacturing businesses is driven by the town's closeness to the motorway network, workforce skill and availability, and external markets.

Most of the local workforce travel outside of the town for employment with half of all residents travelling outside of Powys for work. The most popular destinations are Swansea (18.9% of residents) and Neath (5.4%).

Ystradgynlais is believed to have a low level of seasonal employment in contrast to more rural towns in Mid Wales where tourism is a larger part of the local economy.

Figure 3: Plan of the GCRE © Welsh Government



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



STORAGE,  
MAINTENANCE &  
DECOMMISSIONING  
AREA

## Global Centre for Rail Excellence

The GCRE is the largest public sector investment in the region, with the initial phases of the centre expected to be operational in 2025. It will be a site for the testing of rolling stock, infrastructure and new technologies that aims to fill a gap in the rail industry in the UK and across Europe.

The GCRE is a long-term project that may take up to 20 years for the full economic opportunities to be realised. It includes the construction of a £250m railway and further phases include the creation of a business technology park and hotel. The total investment for the development, including initial property developments and the traction power supply, is £400m.

Ensuring that the nature and scale of the opportunities linked to the project are communicated to the town is likely to be key to maximising its impact and benefits.

### Development phases

- By 2025 rail testing tracks and a station environment open alongside a research centre and storage, maintenance and decommissioning area.
- Medium to long-term, there are aspirations to develop the research centre into a large-scale technology park linked to the rail industry and universities in addition to a hotel to serve the site visitors and wider visitor economy.

### Employment facilities

The GCRE site is expected to employ 150 people on site with 50 academic/research roles. The technology park would be geared toward new business with a direct link with R&D and the use of the testing facilities

In addition, there is likely to be a longer-term need for a new tertiary business park in the Ystradgynlais area to support supply chain growth and new enterprises.

### Accommodation

The need for new visitor accommodation as part of the GCRE development has been identified by the GCRE Ltd. During the construction phase there is likely to be a short term increased demand for local bed spaces met from existing accommodation providers. Longer term, the proposals include a new 3 or 4 star hotel to meet the operational needs of the GCRE as well as supporting the wider economy.

### Skills

The GCRE will create a cluster of advanced manufacturing and engineering organisations and is developing links with universities from across the UK, some of whom will be tenants of the technology park. This is a unique and important opportunity to address local skills deficits and create new employment pathways into the manufacturing and engineering sectors.

## Employment sites & workspace

Ystradgynlais is a major employment hub in Powys with large amounts of industrial stock across the five main employment sites. Units vary in age and size with large, newer units available at the Woodlands Business Park whilst smaller units, workshops and a small number of large units are available in the industrial estates.

Local agents report significant demand for industrial units, in particular for smaller units and units that can accommodate companies seeking to scale up. Published data shows that there is a low level of available units with low levels of vacancy.

This suggests that businesses looking to enter the market have difficulty finding appropriate premises as well as for existing businesses to find grow on space. Overall, this is likely a barrier to future economic growth with negative implications for the economically significant manufacturing sector.

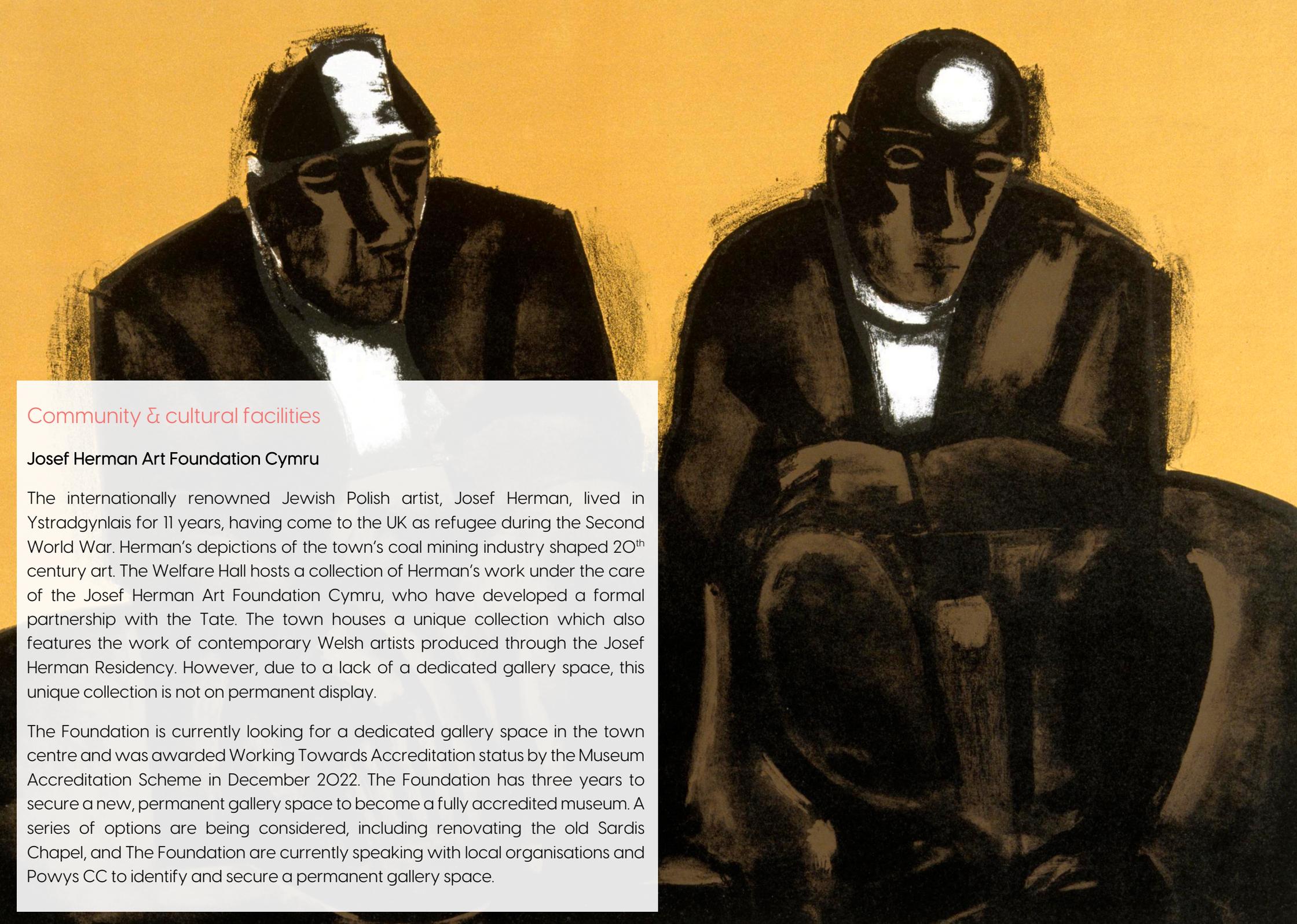
In addition, studies have identified the age and quality of the available stock, particularly the energy efficiency, to be placing a "competitive pressure" on the town's manufacturing sector.

Figure 4: Map of principal employment sites in Ystradgynlais



The nature of the challenge has been highlighted by reports of some owners considering the disposal of industrial premises because the cost of upgrading/refurbishment is prohibitive. Ensuring the viability of refurbishing existing premises is a key issue.

Whilst the economic growth opportunities created by the investment in the GCRE are expected to be significant, there are concerns about the pressures the investment could add to the supply and availability of sites and premises. The need for a new tertiary business park in the Ystradgynlais area has been identified by the GCRE to fully capitalised on the economic opportunities created.



## Community & cultural facilities

### Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru

The internationally renowned Jewish Polish artist, Josef Herman, lived in Ystradgynlais for 11 years, having come to the UK as refugee during the Second World War. Herman's depictions of the town's coal mining industry shaped 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The Welfare Hall hosts a collection of Herman's work under the care of the Josef Herman Art Foundation Cymru, who have developed a formal partnership with the Tate. The town houses a unique collection which also features the work of contemporary Welsh artists produced through the Josef Herman Residency. However, due to a lack of a dedicated gallery space, this unique collection is not on permanent display.

The Foundation is currently looking for a dedicated gallery space in the town centre and was awarded Working Towards Accreditation status by the Museum Accreditation Scheme in December 2022. The Foundation has three years to secure a new, permanent gallery space to become a fully accredited museum. A series of options are being considered, including renovating the old Sardis Chapel, and The Foundation are currently speaking with local organisations and Powys CC to identify and secure a permanent gallery space.

## The Welfare Hall

'The Welfare' is a multi-use community and arts facility with a cinema screen, a theatre auditorium, bar, art gallery, meeting spaces and a foyer. It provides a range of facilities for community use and runs a programme of theatre, art and wellbeing projects. The facility is of regional importance and one of the town's only year round community and visitor attractions

The Welfare faces major challenges because of the age and quality of the building. Ambitious plans have been developed for investment and modernisation of the building that will create new spaces for local organisations, a space for the performing arts, increase income and reduce running costs.

Developing the facilities of The Welfare would help sustain leisure and arts facilities in the town centre that support the local community and visitors.

## Community infrastructure

Ystradgynlais has high quality community infrastructure that brings people of all ages into the town throughout the week whilst supporting an active community. Key facilities include The Welfare Hall, Ystradgynlais Community Centre, Ystradgynlais Library and the Welfare Ground that hosts a number of local sports clubs with dedicated tennis, bowls, cricket, football and rugby facilities.

The role this infrastructure plays in attracting people to the town centre likely has a range of knock on benefits for the town centre, including increased dwell time, footfall and spending.

## Visitor economy

Positioned on the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park the visitor economy is largely driven by attractions and activities taking place near to Ystradgynlais.

There are several major visitor attractions located a short distance from the town, the most significant include Craig-y-Nos Castle, Wales Ape and Monkey Sanctuary and the National Showcaves Centre for Wales. In 2019, the three attracted a combined total of around 370,000 visitors, with Craig-y-Nos Castle ranked amongst the top ten visitor attractions in South East Wales by visitor numbers.

The high proportion of Welsh speakers in the town and surrounding villages contribute to the area's distinctiveness as a visitor destination, highlighting the area's unique local identity and heritage.

There are also several activity and experience operators in Ystradgynlais including the Triumph Adventure Experience and Off Road Skills who run motorbike tours and Call of the Wild who run training and team building courses.

In contrast, the town centre has a very limited visitor offer, with The Welfare Hall providing the main draw. Spending data has shown that tourism is not currently a major component of the town centre economy.

In the absence of a major hotel, the town also has a relatively small accommodation base comprising of Airbnbs and traditional B&Bs.

Local organisations are looking to meet this demand and there are proposals for a new 5-bed hotel located in the town centre and an extension to the Ystradgynlais Community Centre to create new accommodation for visitors. There is scope to develop more and supporting initiatives of this nature will likely be key to growing the visitor economy.

Local businesses and organisations suggest that demand for bed spaces often exceeds supply when large group of visitors book offroad motorbiking sessions or when larger acts and bands perform at The Welfare Hall.

The demand for accommodation during the construction phase of the GCRE is also likely to add to this shortage over the short term and the potential exists to bring more accommodation to market. In the longer term, the GCRE aspires to build a 100-bed hotel (on site) to cater for visitors to the site and tourists visiting the Brecon Beacons.

The visitor offer is currently low-key and groups like Discover Ystradgynlais are working to improve the visitor experience and animate the town centre by enhancing the public realm (e.g. awnings for shops), organising events such as The Big Weekend Ystradgynlais, Christmas light switch on and live music at the Gorsedd Park. There are also plans to hold larger events which draw on the town's mining heritage.

Strategic priorities for tourism in Mid Wales align with the opportunities identified in Ystradgynlais including developing more

outdoor experiences, an indoor and year-round visitor offer, the arts and culture sector, and an expanded events programme.

## Town Centre

### Character

Ystradgynlais town centre possesses a well-maintained appearance and interesting public realm with local organisations, such as Blodau Ystradgynlais introducing murals celebrating the town's heritage, knitted items on street furniture and attractive planting schemes. However, the town centre lacks the historical charm found in the traditional market towns of Powys and is likely a reflection of its origins as a mining town with terraced streets and a functional and industrial feel.

Much of the town centre's street furniture is in a heritage style and features a 'crane' insignia, referencing the late George Crane, a pioneer of iron smelting techniques and mine owner. This provides a sense of distinctiveness and design consistency to the centre's public realm.

The commercial area of the centre is focused on the intersection of Commercial Street, Heol Eglwys, Brecon Road and Station Road. The compact layout is easily accessible from the town's two main car parks (Maes-y-Dre and Heol Eglwys).

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## Diversity

There are 63 commercial units in the town centre. The vast majority of units are occupied, with only one vacancy (2%) although this building is undergoing refurbishment. This is significantly below the Welsh average of 17% and reflective of a buoyant and healthy high street. Data for 2016 shows that the vacancy rate has remained consistently low over the last 6 years.

The town has a wide range of retailers, most of which are independent, that provide day-to-day essentials including a butcher, bakers, grocers, pharmacies, optician, bank, Post Office and newsagents. The town has successfully retained a bank (Lloyds) with the former Barclays being refurbished and converted into a wine bar and hotel that will help strengthen the evening hospitality offer.

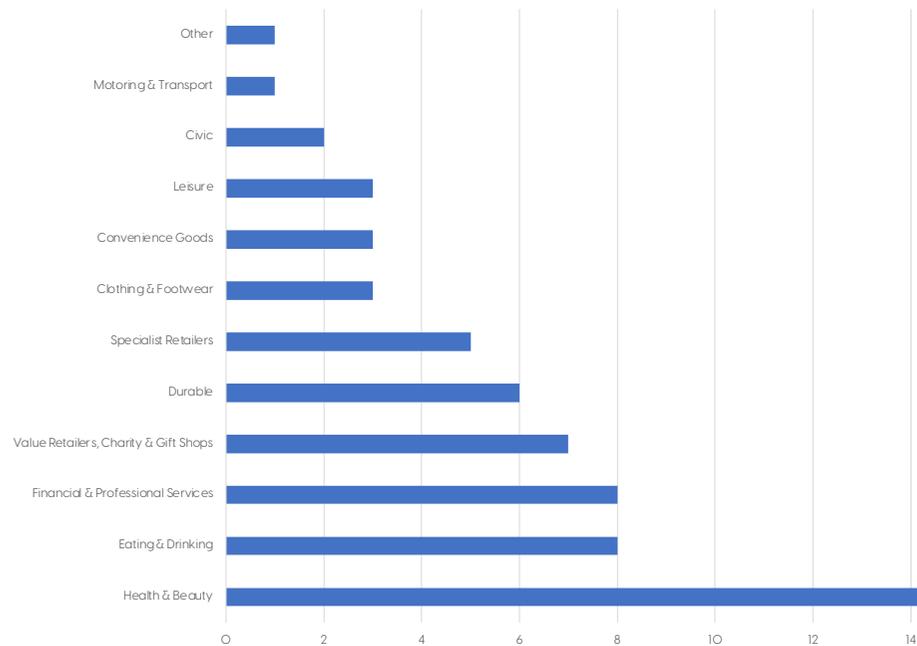
These shops are complimented by a range of specialist retailers, professional services and other businesses. Including a tattooist, gift shops, garden centre, women's clothing shop, hairdressers, barbers, estate agents and solicitors. The number and range of businesses reflect the vitality of the town and quality of the town centre's offer. Whilst traders have indicated that footfall has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the overall picture for the town centre appears positive.

South of the town centre, there are a significant number of out of town national retailers, including most notably a Tesco Superstore and petrol station on the site of the former clock factory.

In addition, Home Bargains and Asda operate out of town, within 5 minutes by car.

The largest retail category is health and beauty which accounts for 25% of all businesses in the town centre. Financial and professional services (12.5%) and eating and drinking (12.5%) are also leading categories. The data show that whilst traditional shopping retains a strong role within the town centre, leisure and services are of growing importance.

**Table 2: Category of business by units occupied in the centre**



## Spending patterns

Annual spending pattern data shows £3.8 million is spent in the town centre with a further £2.4 million spent online by people living within the town's catchment area. Residential spend accounts for 95% of the £3.8 million spent, with worker spend accounting for 5%. There is no estimated tourist spend in town.

The town's shopper population is estimated to be 2,200 people whose spending pattern are broadly in line with the regional average (base). The primary and secondary catchment areas are highly concentrated in the towns built up area, accounting for 75% of shoppers and 77% of spending.

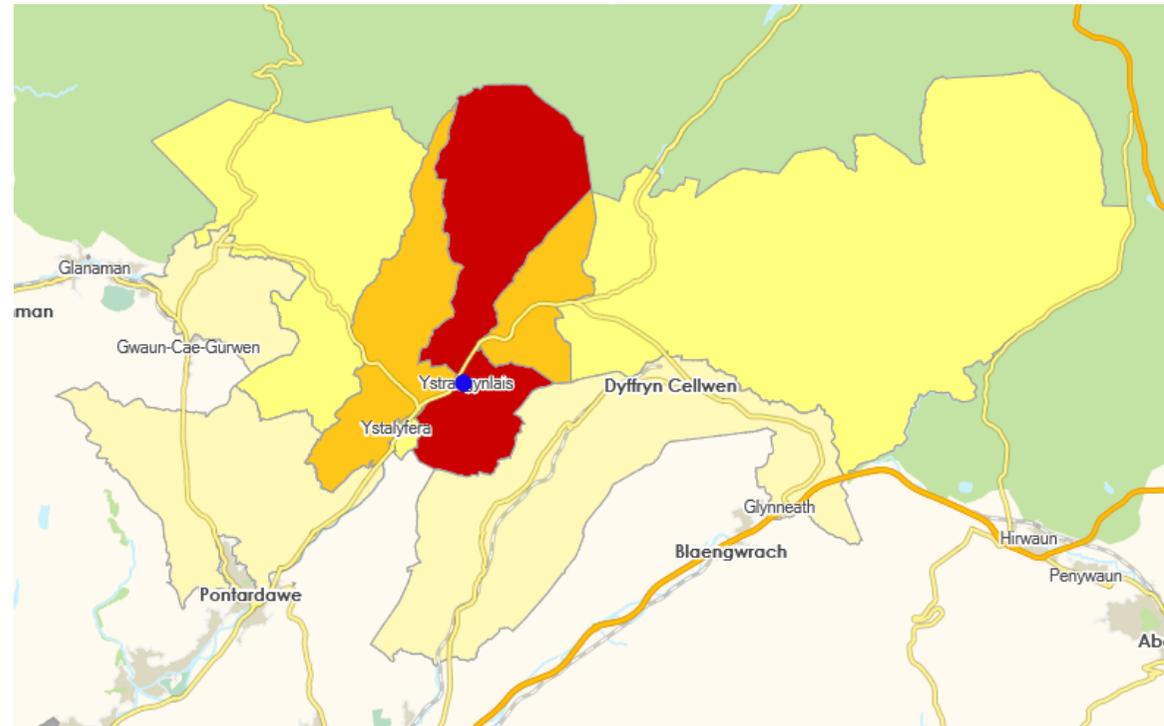
Spending primarily leaks to Swansea, with the Morfa Shopping Park, city centre and Enterprise Retail Park accounting for 17% of all leakage from Ystradgynlais. The Morfa Shopping Park is calculated to have a marginally larger market share of the retail catchment than Ystradgynlais town centre.

## Infrastructure

Ystradgynlais bus station with an indoor bus shelter and toilets is located in the town centre adjacent to the Welfare. It is part of the national bus network and a regular service runs between Brecon, Ystradgynlais and Swansea.

The Town Council run public toilets on Station Road which are available 7am – 6pm Monday to Saturday and include a baby change station. There are no changing places or public showers currently available in the town centre.

Figure 5: Map of Ystradgynlais' retail catchment



- Primary catchment – 50% of shoppers
- Secondary catchment – 25% of shoppers
- Tertiary catchment – 15% of shoppers
- Quaternary catchment – 10% of shoppers

## Parking

Visitors arriving by car have the option to park for a 1 hour on-street or at Maes-y-Dre or Heol Eglwys car parks, with 70 parking spaces and 27 parking spaces respectively.

Parking charges in the Maes-y-Dre and Heol Eglwys car parks were raised as an issue by local residents and businesses, mainly because of the lack of consistency between the town and nearby towns in Neath Port Talbot. In Ystradgynlais, car parks are £1 for the first hour whereas in towns in the neighbouring Neath Port Talbot, the first hour is free.

## EV charging

Four electric vehicle charging points are available in Ystradgynlais, at Heol Eglwys car park. The charging points are operated by Dragon Charging and cost 35p per kwh. In addition, there is a Tesla Destination Charger in Cwmtwrch and charging facilities available at Asda Ystalyfera.

## Wayfinding

Linkages between the town's car parks and centre are poorly defined and are a concern for businesses and visitor to the town, as they have a negative impact on wayfinding. There are opportunities for improved signage.

## Digital infrastructure

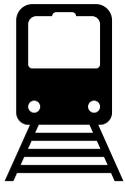
Ystradgynlais has good digital connectivity with fibre broadband, 4G and LoRa coverage through the digital infrastructure in place in the town centre. Openreach have published plans to upgrade the town's fibre broadband network in the medium term.

Unlike other towns in Powys, there is no town Wi-Fi scheme in place and limited evidence of the use of the 'smart' infrastructure and data to inform and shape place management and visitor strategies. This is a significant opportunity to tailor how the town is managed and target future investments to grow the local economy.



## 4 Priorities

From understanding Ystradgynlais as a place and listening to the views of its stakeholders we have come to a draft set of priorities and themes that will guide the Town Investment Plan.



### GCRE

Capturing the economic opportunities of the GCRE for living, working & visiting Ystradgynlais



### Employment & enterprise

Sites and premises that meet demand, encourage start-ups, economic diversification, and business expansion



### Culture & the visitor economy

Developing a stronger accommodation base and town centre offer that builds its heritage and culture

## 5 Proposed actions

This consultation draft Plan is an opportunity for the community and local stakeholder to comment on a series of proposals and improvements.

The feedback received will help establish the principles for many of the ideas, with some opportunities needing further designs, public consultation and in some cases statutory approval before implementation. It will also be necessary to identify new funds, income streams and responsibilities for ongoing management and maintenance of the improvements.

Many of the actions in this Plan are influenced by the GCRE, a nationally important investment with the potential to have a strong influence on the town's economy over the short, medium and long-term.

The significance of the investment cannot be underestimated:

- Rail industry facilities of UK and European importance
- Creation of new skilled jobs and training
- Technology Park and R&D facilities
- New hotel

The benefits of the GCRE will be felt throughout the local economy with new job opportunities, skills training and opportunities for established and new local businesses through supply chain growth and development.

There is potential for the town centre to benefit from capturing some of the growth through increased footfall and expenditure from new employees and visitors attracted by the retail, leisure and entertainment offer.

The wider visitor economy could also be boosted through a growth in business tourism (national and international users of the GCRE) with benefits for accommodation providers and longer term the potential of a new hotel attracting a greater number of visitors to the area.

## Employment & enterprise

The economic performance of the town and surrounding area is being impeded by the lack of sufficient choice and quality of employment space. Despite high levels of industrial stock and development at the Woodlands Business Park, there is the need for further investment particularly in light of the demand generated by the GCRE.

If Ystradgynlais is to grow its economy a proactive approach needs to be taken to address:

- Investment to regenerate existing stock and to bring commercial premises up to modern standards and energy efficiency levels;
- Commercial viability issues which have resulted in the lack of development of commercial properties by the private sector;
- Identifying a supply of new employment sites particularly for start-ups, small enterprises and the supply chain development of the GCRE

To tackle these challenges, the following proposals have been identified for Ystradgynlais:

**1 – Planning and site promotion** - there is the need to plan for additional employment land premises at the larger than town level and this is best achieved through the revision of the Local Development Plan and its strategic approach to employment land planning. As part of the process, there's also a need to work proactively with landowners and local businesses to assist in

identifying and encouraging sites to come forward for development in response to actual market demand.

This could be through streamlining and assisting with planning processes, exploring site opportunities/constraints and Powys CC could hold regular engagement with landholders.

There's an identified need for a **new tertiary business park** in response to expected medium to longer term demand created by the GCRE, supporting new supply chains linked to the rail industry and creating workspace for existing businesses to expand.

**2 – Viability funding and support** – because of the viability gap discouraging private sector investment, there's the potential for a more direct, public sector planning and delivery of advanced commercial property in Ystradgynlais. This is required to help attract new business occupiers and build confidence in the commercial development market with the longer- term objective to create a more sustainable commercial property market. In addition, Powys CC could provide a signposting role to funding and support that landowners and businesses could access to help sites to come forward.

**3 – Repurposing and modernising existing premises** – businesses are increasingly looking to repurpose surplus space and modernise premises to meet the needs of the local economy. Additionally, businesses are looking to reduce their carbon footprint, driven both through regulations/policies of governments, rising energy costs and consumer expectations.

With reports of some industrial units being considered for disposal and a commercial property market with low levels of availability, this is an issue of heightened importance in Ystradgynlais.

Businesses should be supported to bring underutilised and modernised property forward that is more energy efficient and to create small scale workspace opportunities. Properties, particularly in close proximity to the town centre that, can address the need for additional workspace and help diversify the centre should also be encouraged. Several buildings have been identified through the research and stakeholder discussion and there will be other that will need support and encouragement for investment and conversion to create new workspaces.

**4 – Local skills** – The GCRE is a crucial opportunity to tackle the shortage of skills and qualification in the local workforce as it will create new opportunities for employment and training in rail and associated industries. As such, it should be considered a priority for skills development in the Mid and South West Wales regions.

There is an opportunity for the Regional Skills Partnerships for Mid and South West Wales to work with FE and HE education providers to create local skills and training programmes. Options include comprehensive work experience programmes targeting those not pursuing further or higher education and industry led training courses at local educational institutions.

Ensuring that all options are fully explored and developed in conjunction with the GCRE is an important next step.

## Visitor Economy

Ystradgynlais sits on major transport routes in and out of the Brecon Beacons and needs to improve its assets and 'product' to capture a greater number of visitors, including the major attractions and activities located a short distance from the town.

There's a particular need to improve the appeal of the town centre that at the present time has a very limited visitor offer. The key to this is drawing on its arts, culture and heritage and the opportunities for indoor and year-round offers to encourage visits in the off-season and provide alternatives for visitors during poor weather.

**1 – Arts and Culture** – There is a need to develop the year-round cultural offer and create a standout indoor attraction in the town centre. This can be achieved through the development of a nationally significant gallery dedicated to exhibiting the collection of Josef Herman's art. Creating a new and compelling reason for visitors to the region to visit the town centre and a year-round attraction for visitors during poor weather, complimenting the existing tourism offer rooted in the surrounding countryside.

The next step in this process is to secure a permanent gallery space in the town centre with the old Sardis Chapel currently being considered. Ensuring that The Foundation have suitable support and guidance in this process is critical to the success of this project.

Plans for the modernisation and redevelopment of The Welfare Hall also represent an opportunity to grow the arts and culture sector in Ystradgynlais and strengthen the region as a whole.

Modernisation of The Welfare Hall will also ensure that it can continue its role as an arts hub, hosting theatre performances and cinema screenings which contribute to the visitor experience. Investment in the facility to ensure that it can invest in equipment and energy efficiency has direct implications for the vitality of the town centre and visitor experience.

### Case study – Oriel Kyffin Williams, Llangefni

The gallery, located on the edge of town, was established in 2008 to provide a permanent exhibition of the work of Kyffin Williams. The artist donated more than 400 original art works to Oriel Môn over his lifetime. The gallery is a popular visitor attraction, with Williams' art work depicting the local landscape, and attracted close to 80,000 visitors in 2019.



**2 – Events** – The town has an established event programme, primarily organised by Discover Ystradgynlais, which include an annual Town Festival in the summer and Christmas events.

There is scope to expand the event programme to increase the profile of Ystradgynlais as a visitor destination and animate the town centre. A small number of medium-scale events, complimenting the existing programme, will generate more opportunities for the wider visitor economy. Specifically through post and pre-event exploration of Ystradgynlais and the surrounding area. This could be co-ordinated as part of a region-wide event calendar.

New events should link and promote the town's heritage, art and culture, such as the history and legacy of mining in Ystradgynlais. Promoting the town's unique heritage and character has the potential to develop Ystradgynlais into a distinctive visitor destination, increasing the town's visitor profile and driving more visits and spend.

**3 – Accommodation** – There is a need to grow the local accommodation base to meet current peaks in demand as well as the future increase in demand driven by the GCRE both during the construction and operational phases. To achieve this, Powys CC could engage with local accommodation providers to raise awareness of the nature and scale of future opportunities and identify support available to encourage investment.

#### 4 – Aires

Identifying opportunities for a more diverse accommodation base includes roadside Aires for motor homes and camper vans. Aires traditionally help capture greater levels of travelling visitors and generate additional income in local shops and food and beverage establishments and reduce unwanted overnight parking. As part of this initiative, it would be necessary to identify potential sites capable of providing water, electricity and waste disposals alongside a suitable communication strategy that informs potential visitors of the presence and locations of these Aires.

**5 – Town centre public realm** – the town centre is compact and generally easy to navigate, however, visitor signage to the main car parks and the orientation between Maes-y-Dre and the centre could be improved:

- **Parking Signage** – there is a need for clearer and more consistent parking signage for visitors entering the town centre from all directions

There is also an opportunity to sign both car parks (including distances to emphasise their closeness) from the junction of Commercial Street and Heol Eglwys.

- **Wayfinding** – wayfinding to and from the town centre car parks can be challenging and undermine first impressions of the town.

The link between Maes-y-Dre car park is not clearly signposted and could be improved with clear signage to the town centre, additional planting, and lighting to create a clearly defined link.



**6 – Adopt a Smart Towns approach** – Through the installation of the missing building blocks of the town’s digital infrastructure there is potential to target future investments and place management initiatives. For example, the generation of local data (e.g. dwell time and first time visitors) can be used to evidence, in detail, the impact of investments in the redevelopment of The Welfare Hall and any future events held in the town.

In addition, the data provides insights into how different schemes and projects are performing, including whether they are having the intended impact. For example, the impact of a free parking scheme on town centre footfall can be measured.

This insight can help attract and plan future investments in the town, enabling Ystradgynlais to dynamically address issues and opportunities as they arise. To achieve this, the town needs the capacity to generate local data through the installation of missing building blocks of its digital infrastructure, namely Wi-Fi access points and sensors.

The data generated from these technologies can show who is using the town centre and how it is being used. For example, showing how long people stay in the town centre when they visit and the number of first-time visitors to the town.

This data can be shared between businesses, local organisations, the Town Council and County Council to target and build detailed business cases for future investment in the town.

## Case study – Cardigan, Ceredigion

Cardigan is considered the original ‘Smart Town’ having installed and exploited a range of low-cost pieces digital infrastructure. Working with local businesses, the town identified opportunities to use the data to grow the local economy and enhance the management of the town centre.

Using smart footfall data businesses have adjusted opening hours and staffing – opening later when there is a higher level of footfall in the evening, growing the evening economy. The town has successfully attracted an international music festival (Other Voices) and national funding using the same data.



The sensors can also be used to support the upkeep of the town centre, managing when bins need to be emptied, when plants need to be watered and the monitoring of important assets.

The use of sensors can support the work of the local community groups and the Town Council. For example highlighting levels of usage of the toilet block to inform the schedule of maintenance and upkeep, and reduce costs. As well as measuring soil conditions to inform when planting requires watering, to reduce water waste and the amount of volunteer time needed.

In addition, there is a clear opportunity for digital signage in the town centre that provides visitor information (e.g. local events, shopping and where to stay). This is an approach adopted elsewhere in the region and can be a focal point for efforts to grow the visitor economy.

## Case study – Rhayader digital interactive sign

The town centre digital totem creates a positive engagement with visitors, it helps engage visitors and encourage interaction using an interactive touchscreen with pages including Google maps, business, and accommodation directories and up to date; what's on' and information about nearby attractions. Touch screen digital signage grabs attention far better than printed signage and can be linked to individual business and event pages.



