

1 Cardigan Bay

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The event was held on the 11th November 2003 at the University of Aberystwyth. Twenty participants attended representing a range of national and local organisations, as listed in the Appendix.

The discussions were lively and diverse, assisted by the breadth of participants from different organisations and roles.

1.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Following the Plan presentation, the morning discussion about the attributes of the area produced some consensus on the need to diversify the economic base beyond the public and education sectors; recognition of the high quality of the environment; and the potential for more 'quality tourism'; and importantly, maintaining and strengthening Welsh culture.

The current pink zoning in the Plan was however considered to be too simplistic, with insufficient distinction between north and south areas in the western part of the zone and considerable differences from the East Powys area, particularly concerning accessibility, which suggested they should not have the same typology.

Discussion around the Plan cards, and their prioritisation, produced ideas for the afternoon's discussion about taking action forward on: public services, cultural development, maintaining a supply of affordable housing, economic development, the knowledge economy, infrastructure and connectivity. Further action was also needed to strengthen the role and position of Aberystwyth in Wales as a whole, given its significance to this part of Wales. In each instance Overall the event produced a broad agenda for action, while revealing – as might be expected - tensions between objectives, and the need for a complex network of collaborations to take things forward.

Natalie presents the Plan



1.3 THE EVENT DETAILS

Following an explanation of the purpose of the day and a presentation of the key concepts and elements of the Plan, the audience split into four groups to consider

- The zone characteristics
- The sustainability matrix

1.4 ZONE ISSUES

Groups first considered the validity of the Pink Zone, the attributes assigned to it and the “Now” sustainability matrix. Comments were as follows:

- Participants decided there are clear distinctions between the Cardigan Bay area and East Powys - together designated as the Pink Zones. East Powys is considered to have good transport accessibility while in Cardigan Bay accessibility is relatively poor. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of East Powys is its connection across the border to England, which influences not only its population and migration patterns but also its economy and some functional service catchments. This is very different from Cardigan Bay.
- It was also questioned whether the Pink Zone actually connects the North and South of Wales in a functional sense, as opposed to falling between the two geographically.
- Nevertheless, the characteristics of the Pink Zone typology were seen to be largely valid for Cardigan Bay but less so for East Powys.
- The zone may also give too simplistic a representation of the area; the southern part of Cardigan Bay has stronger linkages with Swansea Bay than with the northern part of Cardigan Bay. Especially in terms of service provision (for instance, electricity supply) and postcodes. While Cardigan may be considered the old centre of Cardigan Bay, Aberystwyth is seen as the new centre.
- There was a debate about whether population growth coincides with a strengthening housing market. It was argued that population growth does not necessarily lead to increased house building. Rather it results in pressures in the market, which precipitate more expensive properties and a lack of affordable housing, a major concern for parts of the area, with fears that it may get worse.

1.5 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (1)

1

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				

"NOW"

The diagrams show:

1. The "Now" Matrix adjusted after group discussion (average of all groups)

3. The Matrix adjusted to show the affects of the implementation of the Plan (average of all groups)

The group discussed the four-column sustainability matrix, which relates to the four themes of the Plan, in

Environment

In comparison to the national level, Cardigan Bay can be seen as generally of a higher quality, although some elements of the environment are robust and others are less so. For example the sewage infrastructure in Ceredigion is poor. It was felt that this was a very subjective measure. For example, the environment in Cardigan Bay is more robust than that in London.

On balance, groups generally felt that the level for the and **robust**.

Community

Traditional culture is very much interwoven with the agricultural sector. The decline of its importance, however, makes the wider community vulnerable. Communities are therefore changing and there is some fear about what the future holds.

On balance, the groups assessed the level for Community to be towards **fragile**

Prosperity

Prosperity was considered to depend on what is being assessed – quality of life or GDP. The area is prosperous when considering quality of life. However, because the economy is very much based on the public sector and education, the overall prosperity of the zone could be considered fragile – susceptible to shocks.

In considering that diversification is needed to secure a stable economy – and the area is limited in this respect - the level for Prosperity combined to be around the top end of **fragile**.

Accessibility

The area has generally poor accessibility to services and transport (arguably with the exception of Aberystwyth itself). However, this is not necessarily seen as a disadvantage but adds to the attractiveness of the area. Inaccessibility can also lead to the local retention of capital. The fact that Aberystwyth is remote can also be seen as a bonus. The area is difficult to get to but it is not at risk. The strength of these issues very much depends on the direction in which change takes place. Some policies will make them better but some will make them worse.

Groups set the Accessibility level around the upper end of **fragile**.

1.6 PRIORITIES AND TIMESCALES

Groups considered the range of cards listed in the table below. Full descriptions of the Objectives can be found in the PDF of the cards that accompanies this report.

The placement of the cards in the Timescale / Priority matrix is shown in the table below, with darker tones representing greater consensus.

Figure 1 - Group Card Placements

Objective	Timescale			Priority			Weighted Priority
	Short	Medium	Long	High	Medium	Low	
Economic/Environmental Opps	3	1		4			12
Economic Development	4			4			12
Infrastructure	3	1		3	1		11
Cultural Opps	2	1	1	2	2		10
Services	2	1	1	2	2		10
Aberystwyth	1	2	1	3		1	10
Tourism	2	2		1	3		9
Travel Times		3	1	2	1	1	9
Transport Hubs	1	2	1	1	3		9
Transport Services	1	2	1	1	3		9
The Knowledge Economy	3	1			4		8
Added Value	3	1		2		2	8
Skilled People	3	1			4		8
Growth*	1		2	2	1		8
Linkages*	1	1	1	1	2		7
Development*	1	1	1	1	2		7
Knowledge Economy*	2	1			3		6
Competing Demands*	1	1	1		2	1	5
Rural / Urban Links*	1	1			2		4
Towns*		1	1		1	1	3

Note: Actions with an asterisk indicate that one or more groups dropped them from the selection. Weighted Priority is determined by multiplying High priority scores by 3 and Medium by 2 and then adding across all priorities
Dark cells indicate the degree of consensus light shading indicates little consensus.

Summary

- The placement chart shows agreement across all groups that Economic / Environmental Opportunities and Economic Development are high priority objectives. As indicated in the discussions the improvement of local Infrastructure is a key adjunct to this.
- A strong role for Aberystwyth was also generally supported. Cultural Opportunities and Tourism also achieved high priorities. The improvement of local Services was also supported, as was a range of Transport issues and initiatives.
- Low priority was generally given to the establishment of Rural-Urban links and the role of Towns. These last two were discarded by two groups as being not relevant.

Added cards

1. Providing affordable housing- urban and rural
2. Rural poverty and social deprivation
3. Information and communications technology

These additions indicated what were felt to be a number of important omissions from the current Plan zone attributes, with affordable housing also having strong links to Welsh identity and sustainable communities.

Comments drawn from the groups and noted by the facilitators are also shown below. It should be noted that these might reflect disagreement both within and between groups. Also, the notes are taken from comments made during discussion and the group consensus achieved in card placement may be different.

Environment

- Key environmental assets are the forests and rivers (which should not be overlooked). They also have economic and social significance.
- Health is an important – and quite probably underplayed dimension. Healthy People directly equate to a Healthy Environment, it was alleged.

Community

- Cultural opportunities are a strength already but have to be maintained. Without appreciating what is here now and historically, it is difficult to move forward with a proper cultural frame of reference.
- The lack of affordable housing is a major problem in the area (added card, see above). People leave the area because they can't afford to buy locally.
- Access to some services is limited by high demand.
- The issue of social justice is neglected in the Plan, it was argued: issues of rural deprivation and deprivation of communities (added card). There was a recognition that it is difficult to prioritise when there is a need to do everything concurrently.
- Some expressed a desire to create opportunities for people to stay in the area, although it depends on stage

Prosperity

- Economic development: identifying indigenous potential alone is potentially a very narrow perspective. There is a need to include other opportunities, especially externally derived investment opportunities.

Considering the cards



Putting the cards in the Planning Sheet



A finished Planning Sheet



- Tourism: this role has to be strengthened, not only regionally, but also nationally.
- Some cards are contributory building blocks towards future prosperity but not actually drivers – Environmental assets, knowledge economy and cultural opportunities are seen as the building blocks.
- The Knowledge economy could help add value to other priorities. Without contemporary economic development the area will not be able to make enough of the knowledge economy or to attract and retain skilled people.

Accessibility

- Linkages: transport service provision is very uneven and would benefit from strengthened links
- Transport hubs: the view was presented that little more can be done because of rural character of the area
- Infrastructure was felt to be key – it can be a blockage so there is a need to improve the infrastructure to enable other development and investment to take place.
- Transport hubs/Infrastructure were therefore considered An overall integrated approach is essential.
- Getting the philosophy right is as important as the practicalities – so getting the infrastructure right is important. If the philosophy is wrong then the infrastructure will continue to be wrong.
- A concern was expressed as to how elected members take to this Plan and its thinking? What would their priorities be? Would they be the same?

1.7 SUSTAINABILITY MATRIX (2)

- All groups agreed that the actions which they had identified as priorities using the cards would not have much affect on the Environment of the area.
- However the Community and Prosperity measures were considered to rise well up to **stable**.
- There was a range of views expressed about the affect on Accessibility, with some groups feeling it would become more stable and others that it would stay as fragile. On average there was a small movement towards **stable**.

	Environment	Community	Prosperity	Accessibility
2				
Robust				
Stable				
Fragile				
	"THEN"			

1.8 IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION THEMES

From the morning's worksheets the following key priorities were selected for examination around delivery.

1. Public services
2. Culture
3. Affordable housing
4. Economic development (added value, the physical environment)
5. Economic development (the knowledge economy, ICT)
6. Infrastructure/Connectivity
7. Strong Aberystwyth

Each group was asked start with a different theme and to go through this list discussing as many topics as they wished.

The following comments are derived from the sheets produced by a combination of the various groups and facilitators' notes. It should be noted that these reflect varying group views and some comments may be in conflict with others.

Public Services

There were different views with regard to the role of the already strong public sector in the area. While some groups thought that strengthening the public sector's employment role would benefit the area, others felt that over-reliance on public sector jobs was a long term threat and that a more diverse employment base needs to be developed.

There is the need to maintain existing higher education services and to target pockets of ill health (e.g. check the impact of the mining pollution, research into causes of health inequalities). Need to get dentists and retain doctors in the area.

This may mean assessing the pros and cons of Cardigan Bay's geographical isolation and promoting the positive quality of life elements.

In terms of environmental management, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding National Beauty need to be considered.

Culture

This is a very complex sector and there are different dimensions, such as language and cultural assets. The Welsh language, heritage and arts/crafts are potential resources that need to be explored, alongside tourism "branding", attracting and retaining people to live and

Getting to grips with a Theme



work in Cardigan Bay, and the positive use of culture as an identity within the EU and worldwide.

The cultural aspect needs to be linked to community strategies, economic prosperity, affordable housing and education. There is scope to extend the Cultural Arts Centre (such as Theatr Mwldan Cardigan). Ideally, facilities need to be brought to rural areas.

The problem is seen by some to be that Welsh is rarely given appropriate consideration, so that there is a loss in confidence in the Welsh culture. Furthermore, immigration is not appropriately integrated. It was argued that there needs to be an ongoing support to keep the Welsh language alive (workplace and business Welsh, promotion outside Wales). The Welsh Language Board has to sell the Welsh language to Welsh communities. Culture has to be seen as a commodity and linked to tourism and media. There is a lack of entrepreneurship in this field!

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing needs to be more rigorously defined. What does “housing need” mean? Without a clear definition we cannot prioritise. Who is affected? Policies and funding need to be available to secure affordable housing.

The problems are alleged to be the conflict between local need and externally generated demand, and the existing inequalities in wealth and income. The problem consists of the fact that most affordable housing is far away from the centres which poses problems of accessibility to services. Locally appropriate solutions are needed. Council-owned housing needs to be replaced and home-buy schemes need to be extended.

Actors:

- Local authorities, developers, community (as enablers), Registered Social Landlords.

Timescale: now

Economic Development

Opportunities need to be explored to see the rural economy as more than just agriculture. Other assets need to be explored: such as traditional buildings, beautiful land- and seascape, heritage landscape, forestry (e.g. for bio fuels), renewable energy, recreational landscape and agriculture. A greater development and prominence of the environment needs to be achieved, e.g. with the extension of cycle paths. There is a need to develop and diversify food production. Policy areas need to be linked to give consistent support to rural areas.

There was a query as to whether funding regimes and indicators (i.e. Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation) are effective in improving rural areas (especially in tackling travel/lower population issues)?

Local markets need to be explored to estimate the success of a diversified and further developed food production regime. In terms of the physical environment, other assets could be identified to diversify the economy. New forms of environmental tourism need to be explored (such as eco tourism, sustainable tourism and “niche sports”).

As noted earlier there was a view that the physical infrastructure needs to be provided to stimulate the economy.

Actors:

- Welsh Development Agency, Local Authorities, Environment Agency, Countryside Commission for Wales, , Wales Tourist Board, National Parks, NWA, Welsh Assembly Government, ASPBs, CAP

Timescale: now

The Knowledge Economy / ICT

It was claimed the Assembly has to make commitments towards the rolling out of actions regarding ICT and the knowledge economy. Policies have to be established and funding secured. The latter, however may be problematic through the restricted budget available and the dispersed population patterns.

Rural communities need to be connected to broadband services from both an economic and social perspective.

Actors:

- BT, University, research centres, North Wales Association, Welsh Assembly Government, broadband providers

Timescale: long-term commitment that should start now.

Infrastructure / Connectivity

- Key constraints are to growth are the water supply and the sewage system. However, electricity, transport and IT are also seen as problematic.
- There was a suggested need to invest in utilities and trunk roads as well as air transport that would open up new markets. Roads to key points need to be improved, e.g. Glanyrafon, Synod Inn - Llandysul, Glandyfi.
- Better public transport provision is also essential, this is particularly true in terms of rail services which should ideally run more frequently.

- Bus and rail services also need to be better integrated.
- it was suggested there should be a strategic consideration of the infrastructure needs of the area and appropriate investment to meet future demand.
- Flood defence systems also have to be established.
- In general there is a lot of infrastructure upgrade to be undertaken – and effectively co-ordinated

Actors:

- Strategic Rail Authority, NAW, Arriva, Water Authorities, developers, Welsh Development Agency, Local Authorities

Timescale: long-term commitment that should start now

Strong Aberystwyth

- There was a general discussion about what a strong Aberystwyth means. Is it about the ability to compete with other centres? Strengths and weaknesses of Aberystwyth have to be gauged, to identify the strengths on which to build.
- The university can be seen as an asset and linkages with, for instance, environmental issues can be established.
- Disadvantages were considered to include the shortage of sites and premises, as well as the dependency on the public sector economy.
- The marketing of Aberystwyth needs to be strengthened, particularly regarding Aberystwyth's role as a regional or even national centre.
- Aberystwyth needs to attract national institutions (particularly centres of excellence) and provide the right conditions and the right marketing while also maintaining funding from existing bodies.

Actors:

- Local Authority, Tourist Board, private sector, Welsh Development Agency, University College Wales, National Library, Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments

Timescale: short-term, ongoing

Appendix

LIST OF ATTENDEES

- Gerwyn Jones Ceredigion County Council
- Sarah Richards Welsh Consumer Council
- Mark Jones Mid & West Wales Fire Service
- Justin Lewis Mid & West Wales Fire Service
- Helen Woodbury Welsh Assembly Government
- David Lewis Snowdonia Society
- Eleri Ebenezer Ceredigion / Mid-Wales NHS Trust
- Tim Ball Ceredigion County Council
- Keith Morgan Ceredigion County Council
- Rachel Jowitt Welsh Local Government Association
- Paul Varallo Environment Agency Wales
- Adrian Leonard Welsh Development Agency
- Marc Welsh Wales Environment Link
- Russell Hughes-Pickering Ceredigion County Council
- Keith Davies Countryside Council for Wales
- Steve Fletcher ELWa
- Ellen Jones Menter a Busnes
- Mike Shaw Ceredigion County Council
- Steffan Roberts Welsh Development Agency
- Stephen Hurr Pembrokeshire County Council