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Welsh Government Response to the Powys Local Growth Zones Report

November 2012

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Preface

In March this year, I established the Powys Local Growth Zones Task and Finish Group, chaired by Justin Baird-Murray, owner and Managing Director of the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells.

I set up the group to explore the suitability of Local Growth Zones as an alternative approach to Enterprise Zones in Powys. We know that as far as Enterprise Zones are concerned, the model does not fit all areas. So I asked the Group to explore a model with a focus on smaller business and specific issues relating to the retail sector.

I published the Group's Report on 17 July and made a Statement that same day. I was pleased that the Report and its findings received broad support across the Chamber.

The Group are to be commended on their detailed and measured report, which gave us at the Welsh Government and our partners much to consider. The report contained 40 recommendations, which I needed to explore with the Chair of the Group, Ministerial colleagues and my officials over the summer in order to give them their due consideration.

Many of the recommendations were for Powys County Council to take forward and I have provided a copy of the report to the Leader of the Council for his consideration.

I am pleased to be responding positively to the recommendations and can advise that a great deal of progress has already been made. This report provides an update on how these various ideas and projects are being progressed.

In responding to the Powys Local Growth Zone report I want to reaffirm that Wales is open for business and the Welsh Government is committed to doing what it can to improve the competitive environment for businesses. Our response to this review will create a stimulus to better support business and to encourage jobs and growth.

Finally, I would like to thank Justin Baird-Murray and the members of the Task and Finish Group for preparing such a thorough report, which gave us much to consider and which received broad support from all Assembly Members.

**Edwina Hart MBE OStJ AM
Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science**

November 2012

Introduction

- 1 An independent Task and Finish Group was established by the Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science to consider policy options to encourage and support economic growth, and offer the opportunity of testing different types of interventions which are sensitive to Powys' local economic circumstances and growth challenges.
- 2 The membership of the Task and Finish Group was determined to reflect and demonstrate expertise in the specific areas of private sector business, rural economic development and regeneration, and businesses in key sectors such as manufacturing, tourism and retail. Members of the group included:
 - Justin Baird-Murray
 - Janet Jones
 - Hannah Barrett
 - James Gibson-Watt
 - John Gallagher
 - Wynne Jones
 - Sue Balsom (adviser)
- 3 The Task and Finish Group, which was independent of Welsh Government, was tasked with:
 - Exploring the suitability of Powys Local Growth Zones as an alternative approach to Enterprise Zones, by further developing the proposal submitted by Powys County Council, and
 - Looking at the specific issues affecting the key market towns of Brecon, Llandrindod Wells and Newtown.
- 4 The Group presented their report to Welsh Government in July of this year. The report was founded on meaningful and genuine engagement, facilitated through a Call for Evidence, which generated 51 responses. These responses came from businesses, community representatives, public sector partners, and individuals. The Group also received input from a number of expert speakers who attended meetings, answered detailed questions, and offered advice and support where required. In this way, the Group engaged with stakeholders throughout the production of the report.
- 5 A full copy of the report is available at:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/businessandeconomy/policy/powyslgz;/jsessionid=54453F1B8D5E80574B439554976DD2D6?lang=en>
- 6 The report contains 40 recommendations in total, including two overarching recommendations as follows:
 - Recommendation One: the Task and Finish Group believes that the concept of Local Growth Zones is relevant to Powys as an alternative model to Enterprise Zones to help encourage and support jobs and growth within the county. The Group therefore recommends that the Welsh Government takes forward the proposals for Local Growth Zones as outlined within this report.

- Recommendation Two: the Task and Finish Group recognises that many town centres are facing significant threat and are perceived to be in decline. The Group recommends that the Welsh Government supports the development of business-led initiatives, including the appointment of champions, in each of the three towns of Newtown, Llandrindod Wells, and Brecon to work up and implement action plans, working closely with Welsh Government, Powys County Council and other partners.

Welsh Government Response

- 7 The Welsh Government welcomes the Powys Local Growth Zones report, which contains wide ranging recommendations. It has given the Government and our partners much to consider.
- 8 Many of the recommendations targeted at the Welsh Government reflect a cross-government agenda that include issues that cut across many Ministerial portfolios.
- 9 A number of the recommendations are also directed at Powys County Council and are for the local authority to consider and take forward as appropriate. A copy of the report has been provided to the Leader of the Council for his consideration.
- 10 The Welsh Government has already addressed some of the recommendations of the report, and will be taking action on others immediately. A few of the recommendations will require longer term work. The following section provides further detail on the Welsh Government's response to the report from the Powys Local Growth Zones Task and Finish Group report. It sets out how the various ideas and projects are being progressed. The responses have been grouped by theme to aid presentation.

First Overarching Recommendation

Recommendation One: the Task and Finish Group believes that the concept of Local Growth Zones is relevant to Powys as an alternative model to Enterprise Zones to help encourage and support jobs and growth within the county. The Group therefore recommends that the Welsh Government takes forward the proposals for Local Growth Zones as outlined within this report.

The Welsh Government positively welcomes the report and its conclusions and will be taking forward actions to support Local Growth Zones in Powys.

This recommendation is overarching in nature, and is covered in more detail in the breakdown of actions detailed under recommendations 1A to 1Z on the following pages.

Location of Local Growth Zones

1A: That Powys's LGZs be established in the following locations:

- ◆ The Severn Valley (Welshpool / Newtown / Llanidloes)
- ◆ Rhayader / Llandrindod Wells / Builth Wells
- ◆ Brecon / Bronllys / Talgarth
- ◆ Ystradgynlais

The selected locations are areas where LGZ designation is deemed to be most appropriate and will have most impact – i.e. within the population, employment, and service centres of the county. Locating LGZs here will support economic development and growth in a sustainable manner, and ensure benefit to the wider rural hinterlands that surround them. They also accord with the central growth corridor which is set out in the work being taken forward by Powys to inform development of its Local Development Plan.

Broadband / WiFi / Mobile Coverage

- 1B:** That Welsh Government ensures that LGZs receive comprehensive broadband coverage as a priority as part of the first phase of roll out of the Next Generation Broadband project
- 1C:** That provision of broadband should also be linked to provision of WiFi across all of the LGZ towns
- 1D:** That Welsh Government works with the telecoms industry to explore options for providing better infrastructure for mobile telephony in the county

The Next Generation Broadband for Wales project seeks to ensure that 96% of homes and businesses across Wales will have access to high speed broadband by 2015. The project will intervene in areas where the private sector is not investing, which is likely to include LGZ areas, as commercial roll-out in these areas is currently extremely limited.

The Welsh Government announced in July that the contract is to be awarded to BT, and plans for roll out of provision are now being developed. Welsh Government is currently awaiting State Aid clearance, but would like to see the Powys Local Growth Zones given priority in the roll out, following Enterprise Zones. Officials will factor in this new priority into the detailed planning process and will work with BT to provide fibre broadband to the area as soon as possible. The precise detail will be made available in due course.

The key technologies to be deployed through the project are Fibre-to-the-Cabinet and Fibre-to-the-Premise. There are still a few percent of very hard to reach areas across Wales which are not currently planned to be served by the project, and we are currently exploring options for addressing high speed broadband availability for these areas.

The provision of WiFi is not part of the Next Generation Broadband for Wales project and will need to be addressed by other means. However the wide-spread availability of fibre-based broadband will support any additional WiFi provision that is made. Elements of this specific recommendation therefore fall to more locally focussed organisations, such as the County Council and town and community councils.

In addition to the above, Welsh Government is also working with the Powys Health Board and others to explore the significant opportunities that improved digital technologies will bring in the field of healthcare provision. These proposals - being taken forward via the Powys Digital Partnership - are at an early stage but have the potential to offer real benefits to the people and communities in Powys. Further, the Welsh Government is also working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the £150 million Mobile Infrastructure Project. This project is key to improving mobile voice coverage in Wales where existing mobile voice coverage is poor or non-existent. The UK Government anticipate that the procurement process for this project will conclude in early Summer 2013. Ofcom has also recently announced the timetable for the 4G spectrum auction which is also expected to be completed by Summer 2013. Ofcom has placed a specific rural obligation on one of the five spectrum licences which is expected to result in outdoor 4G coverage of around 98% across Wales by 2017.

Transport Infrastructure

1E: That Welsh Government ensures that key infrastructure projects, as recognised within the National Transport Plan (including the proposed Newtown bypass, the hourly service on the Cambrian Line, and road improvements on the A458 between Buttington Cross and Wollaston Cross) are taken forward as a matter of priority

The prioritised National Transport Plan sets out our transport priorities for Powys.

The Newtown bypass scheme was confirmed in the prioritised National Transport Plan announcement by the Minister for Local Government and Communities in December 2011, and Welsh Government is committed to taking forward its delivery. Preparatory work is continuing on the scheme and construction is currently scheduled to start late 2014/early 2015 subject to the satisfactory completion of the statutory consent process and the availability of finance.

Daytime hourly rail services on the Cambrian main line between Aberystwyth and Shrewsbury are a commitment in the prioritised NTP. Welsh Government need to undertake further assessment of value for money and affordability and subject to this would expect new services to commence in 2014/15.

Finally, the Buttington Cross and Wollaston Cross scheme was also included within the prioritised National Transport Plan announcement by the Minister for Local Government and Communities in December 2011. This scheme will be delivered some time after 2015, dependent on further negotiations with English Highways Authorities.

Business Premises

1F: That the public sector facilitates, fast-tracks, and supports existing businesses in Powys who wish to relocate to more appropriate premises, whilst also supporting incoming businesses that are in need of premises

Welsh Government is already actively engaged in providing support to individual companies in the development of solutions to meet specific property needs. Our existing property portfolio offers a choice of both land and buildings across Powys and steps are being taken to ensure that this is offered on competitive terms.

Land and property is currently available in many of the LGZ locations, both through the private sector or public sector. The Wales Property Database operated by Welsh Government contains details of land and property available to support potential inward investors and indigenous businesses looking to relocate.

Work undertaken by Powys County Council as part of the development of their Local Development Plan has highlighted that the stock of business accommodation is outdated and in need of investment. Where the existing property offer does not meet the needs of a business, companies can be supported through new direct development of buildings, investment in land and infrastructure or through the provision of grants. Welsh Government will continue to monitor this situation.

Planning

1G: That Powys County Council examines the secondary legislation for Local Development Orders, in order to determine their appropriateness for selected towns, sites, and areas within the LGZs

1H: That Powys County Council takes due account of the recommendations of this Group, and uses this report to inform the emerging Local Development Plan

1I: That, in light of current reviews of planning processes that are currently underway, the Minister looks to liaise with other departments regarding the way in which planning operates across the county, paying particular regard to how the planning process encourages and enables economic growth and job creation, and wherever possible looking to simplify processes and support appropriate development

Welsh Government has introduced the necessary powers to allow Local Development Orders to proceed (April 2012) and support is available via the Planning Improvement Fund to facilitate this.

The use of the powers is a matter for Powys County Council and the Minister has indicated that she would encourage them to explore further this issue in the context of the Local Growth Zones.

Powys County Council has commenced work on its Local Development Plan and, like all local planning authorities, it is required to prepare a sound plan that is based on robust evidence.

In terms of reform of the planning system, there is already significant work in progress. Welsh Government's Planning Division already consults widely on policy and legislative development, and the upcoming Planning Bill provides an opportunity to introduce primary legislation which takes forward the reform agenda. An Independent Advisory Group (IAG) was set up to consider options around how best to deliver the planning services in the future. The report produced by the IAG and its recommendations are now being considered by Welsh Government.

Town Centre Physical Regeneration Works

1J: That Powys County Council looks at the appropriateness of putting in place a Townscape Heritage Initiative programme and a shop front grant scheme for some or all of the principal towns in LGZs

This recommendation falls to Powys County Council to implement.

However, as part of the Severn Valley Strategic Regeneration Programme, with funding via the EU Competitiveness Programme, resource has been made available to support significant town centre regeneration works. This includes a Built Heritage Scheme to improve buildings across the Severn Valley area, as well as Environmental Enhancement projects in Newtown, Welshpool, and Llanidloes.

Skills and Training

1K: That Welsh Government gives the necessary support to Further Education providers in the county in order to ensure that appropriate courses, including apprenticeships, which link to the needs of local businesses, can be provided for Powys students, taking account of the rural nature of the county and often small numbers on courses

1L: That Welsh Government ensures that prioritisation of training and support is given to businesses within LGZ locations

The BETS Minister and the Minister for Education and Skills are jointly looking at these recommendations and Welsh Government intend to explore these issues further.

Business Rates

1N: That Welsh Government ensures that any proposal or plan for a rate rebate scheme (as identified in recommendation 10 of the Business Rates Task and Finish Group report) is expanded to cover the proposed LGZs within Powys

1O: That Welsh Government reassesses business rates / rateable value within the LGZs, based on current economic circumstances

The Welsh Government responded to the Business Rates report on 23 October, and proposed a Business Rates Scheme for Enterprise Zones. The BETS Minister intends to review the effectiveness of the new scheme after 12 months and then take a decision on a targeted scheme in Powys Local Growth Zones.

As part of the response on 23 October, the BETS Minister also announced funding for the start-up costs for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). These will encourage businesses to come together and support themselves to improve their offer. The BETS Minister is working with the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage to jointly provide a £200,000 fund to encourage the development of BIDs in Wales over the next three years. Local growth zones should consider this model as an appropriate tool to bring improvements for town centres and Powys towns are encouraged to examine the benefits of Business Improvement Districts.

In addition, the BETS Minister will be supporting a pilot business-led project in Llandrindod Wells (see recommendation 2G) which will explore the applicability of a BID to the town.

Devolving business rates would provide flexibility to enable business rates to support economic development and growth in Wales. The Silk Commission will consider business rates as part of the whole funding settlement for Wales. Welsh Government's aim is to secure a comprehensive set of financial reforms for Wales that would include fairer funding and effective borrowing arrangements. However, the UK Government has postponed the revaluation exercise due to come into force in England in 2015 until 2017. The BETS Minister has asked Professor Morgan, who led on the production of the Business Rates report, to look at the issues and provide advice on this particular issue.

At present rate payers have the right to appeal for a reduction in the rateable value where they believe the assessment is incorrect. Appeals can also be made where there has been a material change in circumstances affecting an individual property or a given area. The Welsh Government has written to the Valuation Office Agency to ask them to produce specific guidance on material changes in circumstances.

Business Support / Funding / Marketing

1M: That FE providers and Welsh Government give urgent attention to ensuring greater clarity of communication on support available to businesses within LGZs.

1P: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that any business support proposals take account of the importance of mentoring, succession planning, marketing, promotion and – in particular – ICT upskilling for small businesses in the county

1Q: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that support that specifically meets the needs of micro and small businesses is provided, as these are the dominant business types throughout Powys

1R: That Welsh Government needs to be satisfied that the rurality of the region and its diverse micro businesses are considered as part of the delivery of the business support service from January 2013 onwards

1S: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council undertake further work to examine options for attracting other lenders into the market in order to facilitate access to funds, particularly for micro and small businesses in the county

1T: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that any lending through existing public sector mechanisms should be prioritised for (although not exclusively restricted to) LGZs.

1U: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that there is aggressive marketing of the region as a location for new and indigenous business growth

The recent review and re-launch of the *business.wales.gov.uk* website (November 2012) will help to progress these recommendations as will the establishment of the One Stop Shop and Mentoring Service which will become operational from January 2013.

The tendering and contract award process for the One Stop Shop and Mentoring Service was explicit that providers must take account of the differing needs of different parts of Wales, and evidence their understanding in the tender.

Welsh Government will ensure that its revamped websites will improve the accessibility of information on key business issues. The key tool for promotion of Wales to businesses is the business.wales.gov.uk website, and Welsh Government is keen to market the whole of Wales, including Powys, as a place to do business.

Welsh Government has already taken steps to address the issue of access to funding and lenders, for example by setting up the new £40 million Wales SME Fund and the £million micro-loan fund.

Welsh Government also has a range of other support options available to businesses, details of which can be found at business.wales.gov.uk. This support is available to businesses in Powys as it is to businesses across Wales..

Renewable Energy

1V: That Welsh Government continues to work with energy suppliers to deliver the appropriate upgrades to the power infrastructure in the county, whilst also continuing to support the development of a range of appropriate renewable technologies which are sympathetic to the natural environment of the county

Welsh Government is working with energy suppliers to ensure appropriate upgrades to the power infrastructure in the county. This is part of our support to the development of a range of appropriate renewable technologies across Wales.

An Energy and Environment team has been set up within Welsh Government in order to ensure that this important sector is given the necessary support. The First Minister will continue to work with energy suppliers to ensure that all of Wales has fit for purpose energy supply and infrastructure.

In addition, when the Welsh Government responded to the Business Rates Review on 23 October, it announced a scheme aimed at renewable energy producers. Businesses that are solely concerned with the generation of heat and/or power from renewable sources, and are new-starts or are increasing the size of their permanent workforce, could qualify for a share of the £1.5 million per annum funding under the scheme. Applications for the scheme will open in January 2013, and details of the criteria will be available through our normal business channels prior to the launch.

In addition, the Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development has written to the UK Government to propose improving the relief that is available for businesses that invest in renewable energy.

EU Funding and Designation

1W: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council look at how the next round of EU funding (2014 to 2020) can best be used to help deliver the recommendations of this Task and Finish Group report

1X: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that the future EU designation of Powys beyond 2020 be explored, taking account of current needs and low GDP.

1Y: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that special consideration be given to the county in the forthcoming review of the assisted area map

The Welsh Government's strategic direction was set out by the Deputy Minister for European Programmes in May 2012. This set out the principles and priority areas that will form the basis of EU programmes in Wales.

Programme development is now underway, and a wide range of stakeholders are involved, including Local Government representatives. Current programme development includes the future focus of the Rural Development Plan, which has brought significant benefits to Powys during the current programme period. A consultation on programme development is expected to take place some time in early 2013.

The Welsh Government will continue to participate in reviews of the designation of geographical areas undertaken by the UK's Office for National Statistics, and will seek to ensure that the current configuration of regions in Wales best serves the needs of the people of Wales.

The Welsh Government will continue its close and active involvement in the review of the assisted area Guidelines throughout the process, in seeking to produce an outcome that is favourable to Wales (including Powys) post -2013..

Welsh Government will explore all avenues, under the criteria in the new Guidelines and in negotiations with BIS, for assisted areas and economic development in Wales..

Tourism

1Z: That Welsh Government and Powys County Council ensure that the opportunity to build on the quality of the area and further develop the tourism sector is exploited

Tourism is a key sector within the Powys economy, and is already recognised as one of the key sectors for Welsh Government support.

As such, a Tourism Sector Panel has already been established to provide advice on the overall direction of tourism support across Wales. The Panel is undertaking a review of Wales' national tourism strategy, and Powys's position will be considered as part of that review. It is anticipated that the revised strategy will be launched in Spring 2013.

Dr Manon Williams has been appointed to the Welsh Government to take the lead in driving forward the implementation of this tourism strategy.

Second Overarching Recommendation

Recommendation Two: the Task and Finish Group recognises that many town centres are facing significant threat and are perceived to be in decline. The Group recommends that the Welsh Government supports the development of business-led initiatives, including the appointment of champions, in each of the three towns of Newtown, Llandrindod Wells, and Brecon to work up and implement action plans, working closely with Welsh Government, Powys County Council, and other partners.

This recommendation is overarching in nature, and is covered in more detail in the breakdown of actions outlined under recommendations 2A to 2L on the following pages.

Newtown

2A: That Welsh Government supports and funds the establishment of a business-led initiative, including a champion / facilitator, which seeks to more fully develop Newtown town centre's role as a service centre

2B: That the members of such an initiative, along with the champion, look in particular at Ernesto Sirolli's Enterprise Facilitation model and its applicability to Newtown, taking into account the work being undertaken by Powys County Council as part of its town centre retail pilot

2C: That the business-led initiative looks to ensure that stronger alliances are forged between businesses and Further Education providers, in order to establish Newtown as a centre for business-focussed learning and a centre of excellence

2D: That Welsh Government ensures that the proposed Newtown bypass is delivered on schedule, with work to start as planned in 2014

2E: That the regeneration of the Market Hall is an important catalyst for Newtown, and opportunities to exploit this need to be examined by Powys County Council and Welsh Government, including funding options

2F: That Powys County Council examines the suitability of a Townscape Heritage Initiative programme and a shop front grant scheme for Newtown

Welsh Government can confirm that discussions are underway between Officials and the Sirolli Institute to establish a model of community based economic development in and around Newtown. The Sirolli model aims to support the creation of new businesses by nurturing the talent of local people through mentoring and Enterprise Facilitation. It builds on work currently underway in Blaenau Gwent.

In addition, Welsh Government will assess the outcome of pilot activities in Llandrindod Wells (see recommendation 2G), which will provide best practice for Newtown and other towns to build on as appropriate. In the meantime Welsh Government is providing a £200,000 fund to encourage the development of business improvement districts in Wales over the next three years. Local Growth Zones, including Newtown, should consider and examine the potential benefits of Business Improvement Districts..

In terms of transport, Welsh Government is aware of concerns from local businesses in Newtown and across the region regarding the traffic issue on the A483/A489 and has received various representations on this. Welsh Government has agreed to undertake further study work to identify a solution. The Newtown bypass scheme was confirmed in the prioritised National Transport Plan announcement by the Minister for Local Government and Communities in December 2011, and Welsh Government is committed to taking forward its delivery. Preparatory work is continuing and construction is scheduled to start late 2014/early 2015 subject to completion of the statutory consent process and the availability of finance.

Welsh Government officials together with representatives of the Council have met with representatives from the Market Hall project in order to consider options for taking forward the project. This process is still underway, and Welsh Government remains engaged in discussions.

Powys County Council, as part of its regeneration programme, is progressing a number of projects in Newtown, partly funded through European funding sources, administered by Welsh Government.

Finally, regarding a Townscape Heritage Initiative, this is a recommendation for Powys County Council to take forward if it chooses to do so, and the BETS Minister has written to the Leader of Powys County Council in this regard..

Llandrindod Wells

2G: That Welsh Government supports and funds the establishment of a business-led initiative, including a champion / facilitator, which seeks to more fully develop Llandrindod Wells' role as an event and conference centre

2H: That the business-led initiative also seeks to enhance Llandrindod Wells' role as a heritage tourism centre, building upon the traditional tourism legacy and the outstanding natural environment nearby

2I: That Powys County Council considers the suitability of a Townscape Heritage Initiative programme and a shop front grant scheme for Llandrindod Wells

Welsh Government will immediately be supporting a pilot business-led project in Llandrindod Wells in line with the recommendation contained in the report, testing its suitability for rolling out to Newtown, Brecon and other places as appropriate.. The Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science has met with Justin Baird-Murray to discuss this, and has asked him to take forward this work.

The project will be led by local businesses, who will work together to develop an action plan to address the economic sustainability of the town. Support will be made available from Welsh Government to facilitate this work, which will also explore the possibility of developing a Business Improvement District in the town.

The Landrindod Wells pilot project is vitally important, as it will give us a valuable insight into what we can achieve in our rural market towns.

As part of the response on 23 October, the BETS Minister also announced funding for the start-up costs for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). These will encourage businesses to come together and support themselves to improve their offer. The BETS Minister will work with the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage to jointly provide a £200,000 fund to encourage the development of BIDs in Wales over the next three years. Local growth zones should consider and explore the benefits of Business Improvement Districts. .

Tourism is a key sector within the Powys economy, and is already recognised as one of the key sectors for Welsh Government support. A Tourism Sector Panel chaired by Dan Clayton Jones has been established in order to provide advice on the overall direction of tourism support across Wales. The Panel is undertaking a review of Wales' national tourism strategy, and Powys's position will be considered as part of that review. It is anticipated that the revised strategy will be launched in Spring 2013. Dr Manon Williams has been appointed to the Welsh Government to take the lead in driving forward the implementation of this tourism strategy.

Finally, regarding a Townscape Heritage Initiative, this is a recommendation for Powys County Council to take forward if it chooses to do so, and the BETS Minister has written to the Leader of Powys County Council.

Brecon

2J: That Welsh Government supports and funds the establishment of a business-led initiative, including a champion / facilitator, which seeks to more fully develop Brecon's role as a tourist centre, specifically building on outdoor tourism opportunities, the heritage offer (e.g. museums), and the arts and culture offer (e.g. Brecon Jazz)

2K: That the business-led initiative explores the options to more fully develop Brecon's role as a shopping location, specifically building on the niche / boutique shopping offer

2L: That Powys County Council examines the suitability of a Townscape Heritage Initiative programme and a shop front grant scheme for Brecon

In Brecon, Welsh Government will be supporting the development of a local website network, intended to enhance the town centre economy. This will be achieved by increasing trade for local businesses and to secure jobs in those businesses.

This town-scale digital network will enable local traders to communicate and interact with their customers and offer initiatives such as couponed special offers, shared delivery services and council parking. It will also enable communities and individual businesses to promote and market themselves to the world outside that community. This initiative will also provide a platform for the growing hyperlocal media services in the Powys area such as those awarded funding earlier this year from the NESTA Destination Local project, backed by Welsh Government.

This exciting new technology approach is an important contribution to the work of the Welsh Government in supporting our town centres.

Welsh Government will assess the outcome of pilot activities in Llandrindod Wells (see recommendation 2G), which will provide best practice for Brecon and other towns to build on, as appropriate. In the meantime Welsh Government is providing a £200,000 fund to encourage the development of BIDs in Wales over the next three years. Local Growth Zones, including Brecon should consider this model and examine the benefits of Business Improvement Districts.

Tourism is a key sector within the Powys economy, and is already recognised as one of the key sectors for Welsh Government support. A Tourism Sector Panel, chaired by Dan Clayton Jones, has already been set up advise on the overall direction of tourism support across Wales. The Panel is undertaking a review of Wales' national tourism strategy, and Powys's position will be considered as part of that review. It is anticipated that the revised strategy will be launched in March 2013. Dr Manon Williams has been appointed to the Welsh Government to take the lead in driving forward the implementation of this tourism strategy.

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