

Ystradgynlais

Digital Place Plan

Consultation Draft
July 2023



Contents

- 1 Introduction 4
- 2 Strategic and local review 7
- 3 Digital place assessment 13
- 4 Digital priorities for Ystradgynlais 19
- 5 Digital Action Plan 20



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The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government’s Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. For more information, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

Glossary

Augmented reality – Interactive experience with a real-world environment using a smart device. Augmented reality experiences often include visual elements overlaid on the surrounding environment.

Broadband – A high-speed internet connection.

Cisco Meraki unit – A brand of Wi-Fi access points used across Wales.

Digital champion – Someone who is digitally experienced and can help and support others to improve their digital skillset.

Digital strategy – A plan of action that focuses on digital technology as a way of achieving a set of goals.

Internet of Things (IoT) – A network of devices and sensors.

LoRa – A way of sending small pieces of information frequently from sensors to a cloud where people can access it. A long-range and low-power wireless communication systems.

LoRaWAN – A set of rules that determine how information is sent across the LoRa network (the network protocol).

LoRaWAN gateway – A device that collects the information sent from a sensor and sends it on to the cloud, where it can be accessed.

Superfast broadband – Broadband that provides download speeds of 30 Mbps or more. The connection is typically provided by a fibre cable to the street cabinet and then a copper cable to the premises ('Fibre to the Cabinet').

Third-party data – Datasets (that can be bought) which are produced by organisations that do not directly interact with the source of the data, such as the customer or a business.

Town Wi-Fi – Public Wi-Fi which covers a town or town centre.

Ultrafast broadband – Broadband that provides download speeds of 300 Mbps or more. The connection is typically provided by a fibre cable the entire way from the local exchange to the premises ('Fibre to the Premises').

Wi-Fi access point – A unit that provides Wi-Fi and location and mobility analytics.

1 Introduction

A Digital Place Plan is a strategic document for a community which sets out how technology and data can be used to help achieve its goals and address its challenges. Every town's goals and challenges are unique and they can include a wide range of topic, such as increasing footfall, growing the town centre economy, improving traffic management, cleaner safer streets, or increasing public involvement & engagement.

The idea of towns having their own Digital Place Plan ('the Plan') is a recent idea. For most towns it is likely to be something new and unfamiliar. However, for towns that wish to become smarter and more digitally confident, there are a range of resources available – from Powys CC to UK Government. A Digital Place Plan is designed to boost interest, understanding and support for digital technologies and the use of sensors to improve the performance of a town centre. And the process of preparing a Plan will encourage new action in support of existing town centre regeneration plans.

A Digital Place Plan also sets a course for a town to become a **Smart Town**. A Smart Town actively embraces new technologies to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits. This involves local stakeholders designing solutions and projects with digital in mind. Smart Towns adopt the same technology and data that national brands have been using for decades to enable small businesses and town centres to compete on an equal footing. Ensuring that every business and organisation within a town has access to the same information they need to grow their businesses and the town as a whole.

This Digital Place Plan for Ystradgynlais was published in July 2023, following a period of research and community engagement between April and June 2023.

1.1 The Plan making process

1

Review of strategic and local digital priorities

This identifies relevant local authority, regional and national digital priorities as found in strategies, investments in infrastructure and available funding streams. The review ensures that actions proposed in the Plan align with wider developments.

2

Review of local plans and partnerships

This identifies relevant existing local plans and town partnerships/working groups. This review ensure that actions align with a town's wider priorities and are proportionate to the local capacity for change.

3

Digital place assessment

The assessment reviews what digital infrastructure in currently in place, how it is being used, and what changes are planned. The assessment identifies where a town is on its Smart Town 'journey' by identifying what the town is already doing well and areas in which it could improve.

4

Engagement with local stakeholders

Engagement with local businesses, community organisations and other local stakeholders to reflect on the findings of the reviews and digital place assessment and discuss the actions proposed to be included in the Action Plan.

5

Production of the Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies the most impactful and feasible actions that can be taken to become a digitally smarter town, based on the learning from the previous stages and examples of good practice from elsewhere.

1.2 About Ystradgynlais

Ystradgynlais has a population of around 10,000 people, making it the second largest town in Powys.

Located on the border of the Mid and South West Wales regions, Ystradgynlais is 1km from the southern boundary of the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park. Swansea is the nearest large centre to Ystradgynlais (25km to the south) and a large proportion of residents travel to Swansea for work, leisure, and shopping; whilst Brecon is 40km north.

The town centre

Ystradgynlais town centre (see Figure 1) is identified as a District Retail Centre, the lowest level of the retail hierarchy set out in the Powys Local Development Plan (LDP). The town centre largely functions as a local centre, primarily serving the population of the town, the neighbouring town of Ystalyfera, and a number of villages in the surrounding hinterland.

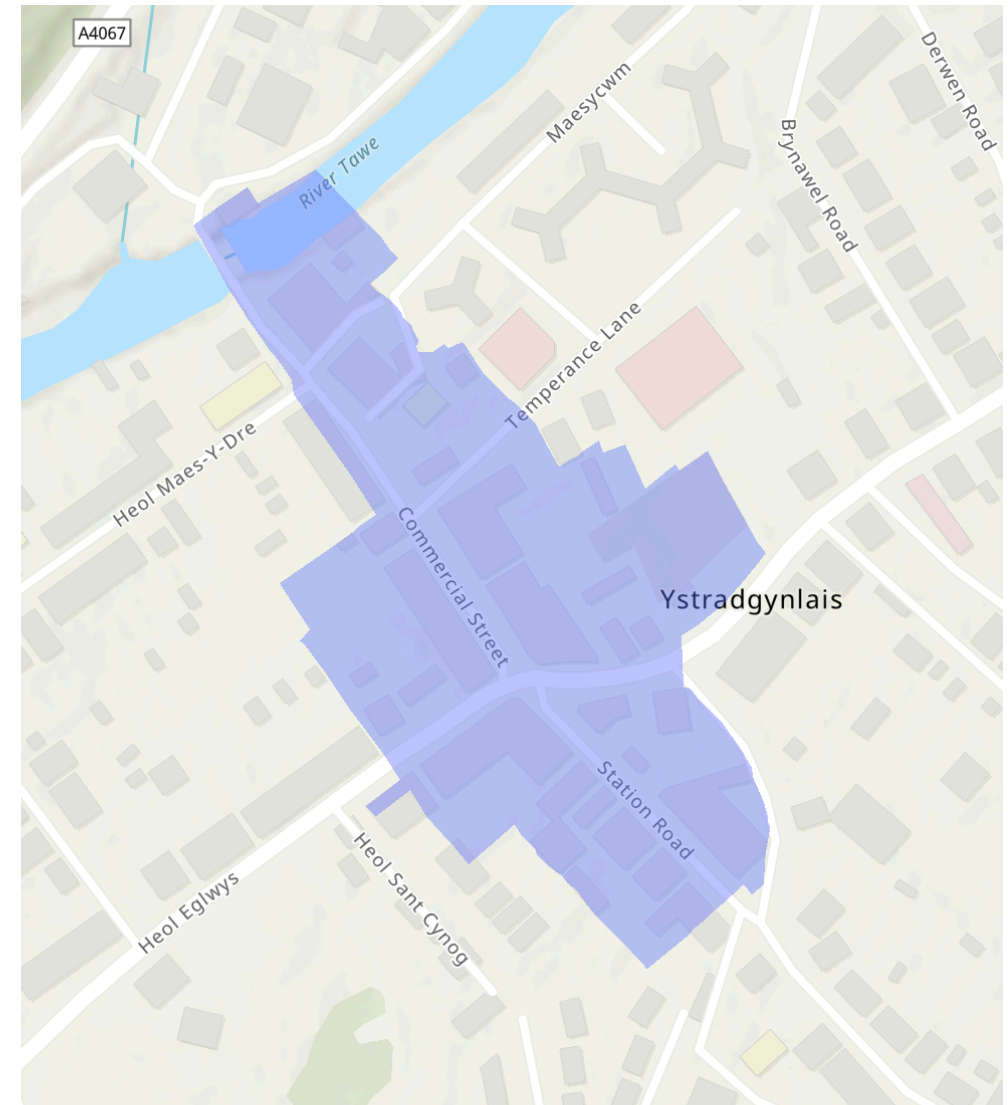
The town centre is compact with the majority of retail units clustered around the crossroads of Heol Eglwys, Commercial Street, Station Road, and Brecon Road. Whilst the town centre has a low vacancy rate, a small number of shops have closed since the beginning of 2023 and Lloyds, the town's last remaining bank, has announced it will close in September 2023. These recent closures have raised concerns amongst some local stakeholders about the future viability and vibrancy of the town centre.

Tourism

Tourism is currently a relatively small component of the town centre economy but there are significant efforts locally to grow this, focusing on developing the town as a southern gateway to the National Park.

Figure 1: Ystradgynlais town centre, as defined in the Local Development Plan

Source: Powys Adopted Local Development Plan



At present, the visitor economy is largely driven by attractions and activities taking place near the town, such as the National Showcaves Centre for Wales (10km north) and Call of the Wild (5km north, in Abercrave). As a result, there is a focus on attracting visitors who are already in the surrounding area to the town centre.

Events, activities, and festivals

Events and festivals are an important part of the town and held throughout the year. Discover Ystradgynlais, a local voluntary organisation focused on organising events and promoting the town, organises two main events each year– one in the summer and one at Christmastime. In addition, markets are held at Gorsedd Park, south of the town centre, with support from Discover Ystradgynlais and the Town Council.

Ystradgynlais RFC has also previously hosted a range of events, including an annual music festival and a Christmas market.

Blodau Ystradgynlais, a voluntary group which sits within Discover Ystradgynlais, maintain and decorate the town centre. The group decorates street furniture, such as post boxes, with knitting – often linked to specific events or celebrations.

The Welfare Hall is a multi-use community and arts facility with a cinema screen and a theatre auditorium. The Welfare Hall hosts an extensive programme of live events including music, theatre, and wrestling in addition to live broadcasts of major events. Events at The Welfare Hall often draw a significant number of people to the town centre and as such, it plays an important role in attracting people to the town and activating the town centre.

Whilst events are a highly valued part of the town, there is minimal data currently collected on how many people they attract or the wider impact they have on the town centre (e.g. how they influence footfall, dwell time of visitors, or town centre spending).



2 Strategic and local digital review

This section identifies relevant digital programmes, planned investments in infrastructure and funding for digital at a strategic (national, regional, and local authority) and local level. This ensures that the actions contained in the Action Plan align with strategic priorities.

2.1 National and regional digital strategies

- Welsh Government's **Digital Strategy for Wales**
- Mid Wales Growth Deal's **Vision for Growing Mid Wales**
- Powys County Council's **Digital Powys 2019 – 2025: A digital transformation strategy**

There is strong support for the use of digital infrastructure and data from the national to the county level. At the regional level, high-quality digital infrastructure has been identified as a strategic growth priority area in the Growth Deal and is a focus for investment.

All of the strategies emphasise the importance of digital technologies and enabling digital change at all levels of governance. They also recognise the transformative potential of digital technology and data for small businesses, local governance, and community groups.

With the national, regional, and county level strategies in place, there is a well-defined and supportive framework for implementing a Digital Place Plan in Ystradgynlais and strong support for the adoption of a 'data-driven decision making' approach.

2.2 Digital funding streams

There are a range of funding streams available for local digital initiatives and there have been significant investment in Ystradgynlais' digital infrastructure, with more planned in the near future.

- **UK Government** – The Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda and is a major funding stream for investment in local digital infrastructure and skills development. In Powys, funding is being allocated in alignment with the 'Mid Wales Regional Investment Plan', jointly produced by Powys and Ceredigion County Councils. The Regional Investment Plan identifies both digital connectivity and skills as key opportunities for the region and a focus for investment. Powys has been allocated £22.7 million Shared Prosperity Funding between 2022 and 2025.
- **Welsh Government** – Transforming Towns is a funding programme to redevelop and improve town centres. Within the Placemaking Grant stream of the programme, the 'Digital Towns' strand can support interventions that 'support baseline digital infrastructure capabilities such as Wi-Fi analytics and LoRaWAN and IoT'.

The Welsh Government founded and are funding the Smart Towns Cymru programme. Funding is in place until 2025 and the programme is being delivered by Menter Môn.

- **Mid Wales Growth Deal** – Digital was identified as one of the Deal's eight 'Strategic Growth Priorities' and focus is placed on investing in digital infrastructure across the region, focusing on

high-quality broadband, 4G, and other forms of digital connectivity.

- Projects led by community groups or centred on community facilities can access a wide range of funds, such as the **National Lottery's** People and Places Grant or the **Coalfields Regeneration Trust's** Community Grant Programme.

2.3 Digital infrastructure investments in Ystradgynlais



Town Wi-Fi – Working with Ystradgynlais Town Council, Powys CC have installed a town Wi-Fi network in the town centre. The network covers the area around the crossroads as well as Gorsedd Park (see Section 3 for further information).



LoRaWAN gateways (IoT) – Powys CC have installed three LoRaWAN gateways in Ystradgynlais and Abercrave (see Figure 2), providing good LoRaWAN signal coverage across the area (see Section 3 for further information).



Ystradgynlais Library – Powys CC Library Service is currently making significant investments into the digitalisation of its services and premises. Ystradgynlais Library has secured £268,682 through Welsh Government's Cultural Transformation Capital Programme to upgrade the Library's digital provision. The funding is being used to provide facilities for remote working, conference meetings, and to improve the energy efficiency and accessibility of the library building.

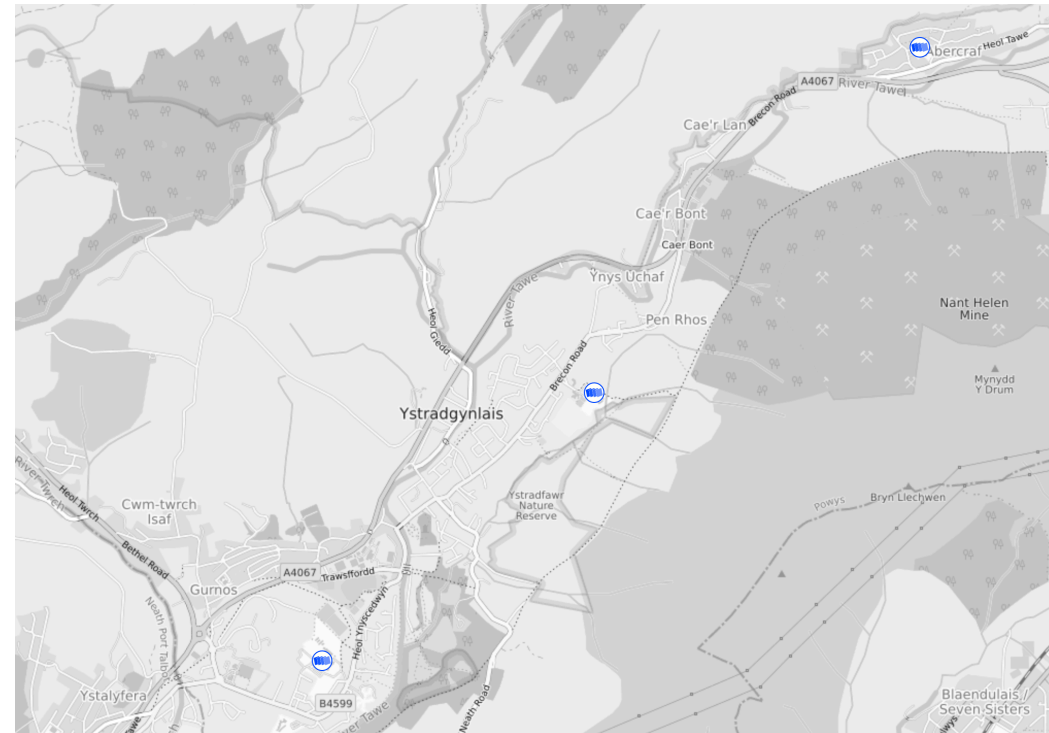
This investment reflects the Library Service's aim to take on a more active role in supporting local businesses and transform libraries, such as Ystradgynlais Library, into Digital Hubs which provide a wider range of services. The vision and roadmap for this transition is set out in the Powys Cultural Services Digital Strategy (2021).



Fibre broadband – Openreach plan to upgrade the fibre broadband network in Ystradgynlais from fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) to fibre to the premises (FTTP). No timeline has been announced for the upgrade but Openreach are currently upgrading networks in nearby Pontardawe and Brynamman. More information on broadband in Ystradgynlais can be found in Section 3.

Figure 2: Location of LoRaWAN gateways in and around Ystradgynlais

Source: TTN Mapper



2.4 Digital support for businesses

This Plan is being accompanied by a **digital skills programme** delivered by **Cwmpas** on behalf of Powys CC. The programme is open to businesses (as well as residents and local organisations) who can receive training tailored to their needs and support to gain relevant qualifications.

The programme provides free training and has been funded through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund. To learn more and sign up, visit: <https://powysdigitaltowns.info/>

The previous phase of the **Powys Digital Towns** project, delivered by the Focus Newtown Enterprise Hub on behalf of Powys CC, provided skills and training to participating Town and Community Councils.

In addition, **Business Wales** provides business support which covers a wide range of areas, such as marketing, and this includes digital-specific support for businesses (such as using new software or technology). Business Wales provides general resources covering a wide range of topics, personalised 1-to-1 training, and signposting to other relevant Welsh Government resources and services, such as: **Superfast Cymru** and **Social Business Wales**.

Summary of strategic review findings

Strategic plans supporting digital	Strong support for digital across all sectors and at all levels of governance, as reflected in the strategies of Powys County Council, the Mid Wales Growth Deal, and Welsh Government.	✓
Funding opportunities	The Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund are available to support place-based digital initiatives. In addition, for projects led by community groups or centred on community facilities there are a wide range of funds available (e.g. National Lottery and Coalfields Regeneration Trust).	✓
Investment in infrastructure	There has been significant investment in local digital infrastructure and more is planned in the medium-term.	✓
Business support	Tailored digital skills programme being delivered alongside this Plan by Cwmpas and Business Wales provides digital support and resources.	✓

2.5 Local plans and strategies

Ystradgynlais Town Investment Plan (2023)

The Town Investment Plan, prepared on behalf of Powys CC, sets out a vision and priorities for the future of the Ystradgynlais area, with the aim of attracting and shaping inward investment. The Town Investment Plan is oriented around local development and identifies the opportunity to adopt a Smart Towns approach to drive local inclusive growth, promote the town, and support town centre management.

The importance of town Wi-Fi and the smart footfall data generated by the system is strongly emphasised. This is developed further within this Plan (in Section 5) where specific opportunities and applications of the data for Ystradgynlais are identified. These include leveraging the data to secure additional funding for events and opportunities for businesses to use the data to tailor their marketing and opening hours based on the busyness of the town at different times.

Areas identified within the Town Investment Plan where digital could play an important role include supporting the management of the town centre, specifically through the use of sensors to monitor usage of key amenities and community buildings. The quality of the area's community infrastructure is noted and there is clear scope for solutions which can reduce the time and effort required to monitor and manage them as many of these facilities and amenities are run by volunteers.

Growing the visitor economy and cultural offer is identified as one of three priorities for Ystradgynlais' development. Additionally, the Mid Wales Regional Tourism Study and Action Plan (2022) identifies event-based tourism as a key area to grow and develop. The Study and Action Plan's key recommendation is to grow the size of events and diversify the

range of events to drive longer stays and higher spend in 'hubs' (i.e. towns and villages close to clusters of visitor attractions).

There is a clear role for digital in this area. Actively using social media and developing a visitor oriented website for the town in tandem with physical marketing materials would increase the reach and impact of the marketing of Ystradgynlais as a destination and of local events. This has been identified as a priority area by a number of town centre businesses during the plan-making process.

A digital noticeboard in the town centre would complement other digital and physical promotions whilst also improving wayfinding in the town centre, which is identified as an area with scope for improvement in the Town Investment Plan. A digital noticeboard provides a focal point for local digital initiatives whilst helping to develop a more accessible town centre and enhancing the visitor experience.

Ystradgynlais Town Council Annual & Well-being Report (2023)

The Council Annual & Well-being Report is designed in alignment with the Well-being of Future Generations Act and Powys Public Service Board Plan, and highlights the priorities of the Town Council. Total estimated expenditure in 2022 /23 was £475,000 on a range of areas, including parks, open spaces, and path maintenance and grants for community and welfare halls.

The maintenance of high quality green and open spaces is a clear priority for the Town Council, with £93,700 spent on parks, planning, and open spaces and a further £45,000 spent on ward budgets and path maintenance. Many local authorities have installed people counting sensors to measure the use of green spaces and trails in order to demonstrate their value and justify investments as well as target maintenance work to the most used areas. In addition, the town Wi-Fi

system will provide data on the footfall and dwell time at the Gorsedd Park in the town, which can be used for similar purposes.

Grants to welfare and community halls totalled £71,000, accounting for 15% of the Town Council's total estimated expenditure in that period. During the plan-making process, organisations responsible for operating local community buildings reported that utilities were one of the main management expenses and threatening the sustainability of the buildings. There is an opportunity for the use of innovative smart utility sensors in community buildings to reduce costs and voluntary hours required to maintain and manage these buildings whilst also reducing energy and water use. The technology is used extensively in the private sector and there is a strong opportunity within the context of this Plan and wider investment in the Smart Town agenda to pilot its use in community buildings.

The Town Council also contributes financial support to the maintenance of public toilets in the town centre, which are maintained by a local voluntary group. There is scope for using people counting sensors to measure usage levels of the toilets to measure their usage – an approach which has been adopted in Newtown. The data collected by people counting sensors can show overall footfall as well as the busiest times of the day/week, and this can be used to inform cleaning schedules and when maintenance work should be conducted.

Improvements to the Town Council website are also identified as an action within the Report. Discussions with Town Councillors indicates that there is interest in a website that promotes the town as well as showcases local heritage and meets the Town Council's statutory duties.

Balancing the duties of the Town Council alongside ambitions to develop a visitor-oriented website may be a challenge, however the option of

developing a separate visitor website could be considered. There is a clear need for a visitor-oriented website for Ystradgynlais and there may be an opportunity for the Town Council to support or drive its development in partnership with the local business community, Discover Ystradgynlais, and other local groups.

2.6 Local capacity for change

The capacity for digital to help drive forward placemaking, regeneration, and place management is influenced by the level of cross organisation partnership working and how a town centre already involves a range of stakeholders.

Main representative groups and organisations

- Ystradgynlais Town Council
- Discover Ystradgynlais
- Powys County Council
- Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations – Community connector coordinate third sector initiatives in the town

During engagement with stakeholders, local capacity to undertake larger projects was raised as a concern, especially in the absence of a dedicated business group (including a Chamber of Commerce or Business Improvement District). Powys CC has recently secured funding to hire more officers responsible for the coordination and delivery of local projects, and this may address some concerns regarding capacity. To further develop local capacity will likely require a greater level of organisation and coordination on the town level, as well as expanding the local volunteer base.

Meetings, partnerships or forums focused on the town centre

There are currently no formal partnerships in place that focus on the town centre. As a smaller town, however, groups often naturally work together closely. As a consequence, partnership working often happens on an ad hoc and informal basis (in the absence of any formalised arrangements), and this appears to be the case in Ystradgynlais.

2.7 Key findings

- National, regional and local authority-level strategies support the production of a Digital Place Plan and investment in digital interventions in Ystradgynlais.
- Public funding is available to enable these interventions, in particular the Welsh Government's **Transforming Towns** programme and the UK Government's **Shared Prosperity Fund**.
- The **Ystradgynlais Town Investment Plan** advocates using digital technology and data to catalyse positive social, economic, and environmental change in Ystradgynlais.
- The Town Council's **Annual & Well-being Report** highlights a number of areas where digital technology and data could improve local service delivery and reduce costs.
- There has been significant recent investment in underpinning digital infrastructure in the town, including the installation of **LoRaWAN gateways** and a **town centre public Wi-Fi system**.

- There are several active voluntary groups and organisations in the town but no dedicated business group, and so whether there is enough **local capacity to drive change** is a cause for concern amongst stakeholders. As such, the next steps for the town should include increasing local capacity and potentially formalising current partnership-working approaches.



3 Digital place assessment

The digital place assessment identifies where a town is located on the Smart Town journey based on what infrastructure is already in place and how it is currently being used, and identifies the next steps it should take to move forward. At the beginning of this process, towns should be aiming for a minimum basic level of physical infrastructure and online presence: Stage 1 (Getting Started).

3.1 Basic building blocks

1 - Physical infrastructure:

- **Superfast or ultrafast broadband**
Faster and more reliable broadband for homes and businesses is key for enabling people to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the internet and to provide a solid base of connectivity for other Smart Towns infrastructure.
- **Mobile data**
Reliable and fast mobile data is key for enabling businesses and other stakeholders to get the most out of tech solutions, particularly when they are on the go.
- **Smart footfall sensors**
Smart footfall counting units provide clear and usable information about how many people visit the town, how frequently and how long they stay. These pieces of information are vital for understanding how the town is currently functioning as well as the impact of any events and other changes on how people use the town.

- **LoRaWAN gateway**

A LoRaWAN gateway is a critical piece of equipment as it provides a means for Internet of Things sensors to upload data to the internet. This data could range from the number of parking spaces available to remotely identifying when a bin needs emptying.

For an introduction to LoRaWAN and IoT, see:

<https://digitalanddata.blog.gov.wales/2022/02/23/from-bees-to-trees-and-everything-in-between-wales-harnesses-the-internet-of-things/>

2 - Online presence:

- **Unified website**
A single website functioning as an online visitor destination for the town and providing a platform for promoting businesses, launching local campaigns, promoting events and activities.
- **Social media**
An active use of social media (such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) for promoting activity in the town centre.

3 - Business support and skills development:

- Opportunities for businesses to receive digital skills training to better utilise digital, data and tools to acquire and retain more customers

3.2 The journey

There are three key milestones on the smart town journey shown in Figure 3. For most towns the journey will begin somewhere between Stages 0 and 1 with the need to get started on putting in place some or all the essential components of a Smart Town.

As a town progresses across its journey, it is able to take on larger initiatives unique to the town, its infrastructure, plans, and partnerships. Smart Towns that have been working with digital technology for some time have often only reached Stage 2 (Using).

Figure 3: Journey tracker

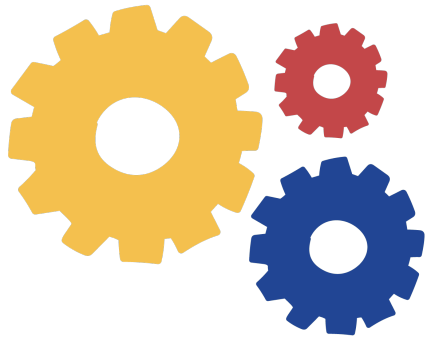
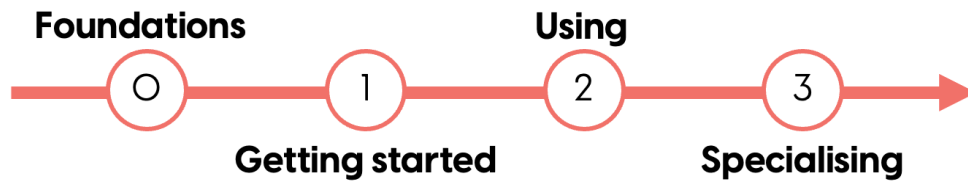
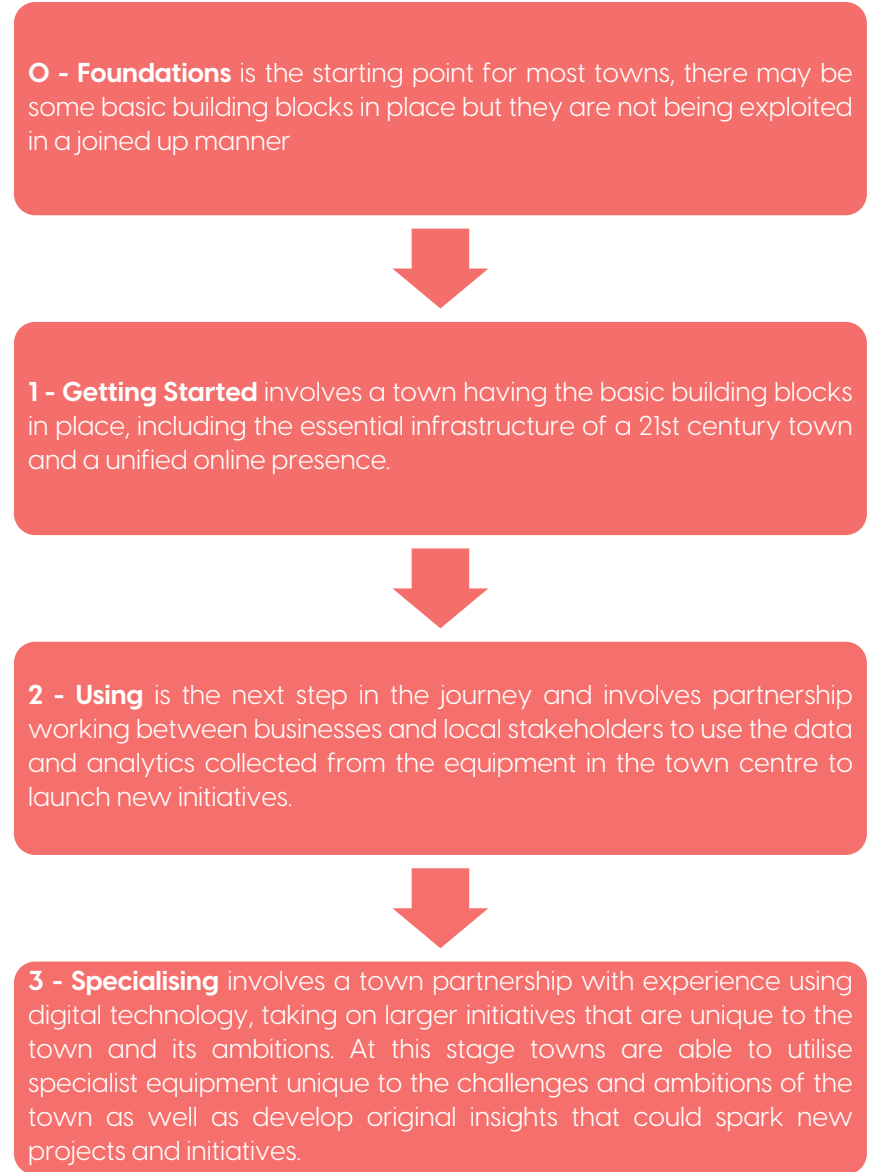


Figure 4: Smart Town journey



3.3 Digital infrastructure and technology in Ystradgynlais

Broadband

Most premises in the town and surrounding villages are currently covered by Openreach's Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) broadband network and so have access to 'superfast' broadband with download speeds of **up to 80** Mbps. Welsh Government's 2022 Public Review of broadband provision shows that in rural areas outside of Ystradgynlais and surrounding villages, coverage is patchy and there are a number of premises without superfast fibre broadband.

Currently, there is no 'ultrafast' full-fibre broadband (Fibre to the Premises, which supports download speeds of up to 900 Mbps) available in Ystradgynlais or the surrounding villages. Openreach have begun upgrading their network to full-fibre in Pontardawe to the south and have plans to upgrade the network in Ystradgynlais and Ystalyfera before the end of 2026.

Although data from the Welsh Government Public Review suggests that there are also plans to upgrade broadband networks in Coelbren and Cwm-twrch Uchaf, the majority of the planned upgrades were classified as 'Under Review', meaning that there is a risk that the upgrade will not be completed within the next 3 years. The Public Review also shows that neither Openreach nor any other provider has plans to provide full-fibre broadband in Abercrave, Caehopkin or Cwm-twrch Isaf within the next three years.

Mobile data (4G and 5G)

4G coverage is available in Ystradgynlais across all four of the main mobile network providers (O2, Vodafone, Three, and EE). Coverage mapping shows that the nearby villages of Abercrave and Cwm-Twrch

have similar levels of 4G coverage. There is no mapped 5G coverage in Ystradgynlais or the surrounding villages on any network.

Town Wi-Fi

As part of Powys CC's Town Wi-Fi Programme, a town Wi-Fi network was installed in the town centre in the spring of 2023. The network comprises seven Wi-Fi access points (installed on Heol Eglwys, Commercial Street, Station Road, Brecon Road, and in Gorsedd Park) and provides coverage of the area surrounding the crossroads and in parts of Gorsedd Park.

As well as providing a reliable and free means for the public to get online, the system also collects 'smart footfall data', including:

- Number of visitors to the town centre (i.e. footfall)
- Frequency of visits (i.e. how often people visit, which can be used to measure the number of tourists visiting)
- Dwell time of visitors (i.e. how long visitors stays in the centre)
- Busyness of different areas of the town centre

This data can be utilised by local businesses and stakeholders for a wide range of uses, including informing their opening hours, staffing, and marketing. The data and functionality of the town Wi-Fi system represent a major opportunity with the potential to grow the local economy, attract more visitors, and create a more inclusive and accessible town centre.

Powys CC are exploring funding opportunities for the footfall data to be shared through a public online platform. The importance of accessible data which can be used by local stakeholders to take action and make decisions is discussed further in the following section.

LoRaWAN (IoT)

Powys CC has invested in LoRaWAN, a Low-Power, Wide-Area Network technology that enables the use of low-cost sensors for monitoring and managing buildings, green infrastructure, and a wide variety of other applications.

LoRaWAN gateways are located at Maesydderwen High School, Ysgol Golwyg Y Cwm, and Ysgol Cribarth (see Figure 2). The gateway receives data from sensors and uploads it to the internet, where it can be analysed. Each gateway can support hundreds of sensors.

Section 5 of this Plan identifies a number of applications for these sensors, including supporting the management of green spaces, monitoring high street parking, and reducing running costs of community buildings.

Digital heritage and culture

There are a number of digital heritage and culture initiatives in Ystradgynlais. The Josef Herman Art Foundation has developed the Josef Herman Heritage Trail, which celebrates the life and work of Josef Herman, an artist who lived in the town. Accompanying the heritage trail is an app that guides users along the trail through the town centre and provides related stories, images, artworks and other media at each location.

The Welfare Hall has actively adopted digital technology and data and hosts a regular programme of live broadcasts of music and theatre alongside in-person events and cinema. Additionally, The Welfare Hall uses an audience insights platform to promote future events based on data from ticket sales, enabling it to understand the popularity of different events among different audience groups.

Powys CC Library Service have developed a comprehensive digital transformation strategy and utilisation of digital tools and methods to

access its services and archives is a key part of it. This includes an iPad lending scheme launched in 2022, which provides loans of iPads free of charge to Powys residents via local libraries.

In addition, StoriPowys (<https://www.storipowys.org.uk>), an online hub for Powys CC's libraries, museums, and archives, has been established as part of the digitalisation programme. The website sits separately from the Council's main website and enables residents to learn about and access a range of digital and cultural services online.

In addition, as part of the Powys War Memorials Project 2014-19, WW1 Tour HistoryPoints have been installed across the town at locations including the war memorial, St Cynog's Church, former railway station, Diamond Park, police station, Sardis Chapel, Ynyscedwyn Arms and Gough Arms. HistoryPoints is a Wales-wide initiative to place at historical sites QR codes that when scanned take the user to a web page containing further information.

3.4 Online presence

A number of local businesses have a strong online presence, with the most popular social media platforms amongst local businesses being Facebook and Instagram. Businesses with a strong online presence include **Kindle House**, which has more than 15,000 followers across its social media accounts and an online shop which complements the business' town centre presence. Similarly, **The Loaf Kitchen Bar** (combined total of 4,000 followers across social media), **Cofion Cynnes** (combined total of nearly 6,000 followers), and a number of others actively use social media and other online platforms to enhance their physical offering.

Ystradgynlais' overall online presence, however, is relatively low-key, with top search results including its Wikipedia page and Ystradgynlais

History and Heritage. There are no active, locally run websites with the purpose of promoting the town. Instead, the town is primarily marketed by third party websites, such as Visit Mid Wales, Mid Wales My Way, and TripAdvisor. The websites promote a mixture of businesses, local history, and attractions – some of which are located outside of the local area. Some of the information on these websites is not up to date or incomplete with attractions featured that appear to be no longer open and missing images.

In the absence of a dedicated visitor website, there is arguably no clear online destination through which prospective visitors to Ystradgynlais can find relevant and up to date content about the town. The best of what the town has to offer – its boutique independent shops, food & drink offer, cultural offer, and heritage trails – is not fully promoted online. Similarly, there is no online platform with listings and profiles of businesses in the town.

Developing Ystradgynlais' online presence (including on social media platforms) with a dedicated online hub, clear messaging, and defined brand will raise awareness of the breadth and quality of what the town has to offer visitors. This in turn this has potential to drive footfall and spend.

3.5 Digital skills gaps

Cwmpas is delivering a **digital skills programme** for businesses, community groups and other local stakeholders in conjunction with this Plan. It is designed to address the town-specific skills gaps identified through the plan-making process, including:

- **Businesses** – Interest in digital platforms and skills varies business-by-business with those interested reporting interest in training and support for digital marketing, particularly using social media. The

overview of the town's online presence suggests that there are a number of businesses which may benefit from support to promote online and strengthen their search engine optimisation (i.e. improve their rankings in online searches).

- **Community organisations** – Skills levels within and between organisations varies and similarly the needs of organisations can vary significantly. Some stakeholders from community organisations have reported the need for support and suitable tools for digital marketing and managing websites.
- **Town Council** – The Town Council has been central to the installation of town Wi-Fi. There are a wide range of digital skills and experiences within the Town Council and as the organisation managing the town Wi-Fi system, it is key that there is capacity to understand, interpret, and, if necessary, distribute the data.
- **Digital literacy** – Feedback from Powys CC Library Service and Accessibility Powys indicates that there is a comprehensive support in place for residents to gain foundational digital skills. The frequency and operating hours of public transport, however, are a barrier for some residents to access these services, as they are delivered in-person at libraries and other community buildings.
- **Online banking** – The town's last remaining bank will close in September 2023. During engagement the need to support residents with the transition to online and mobile banking was raised. Lloyds are in contact with Powys CC Library Service to explore ways in which they can support customers in this transition.

3.6 Where is Ystradgynlais now?

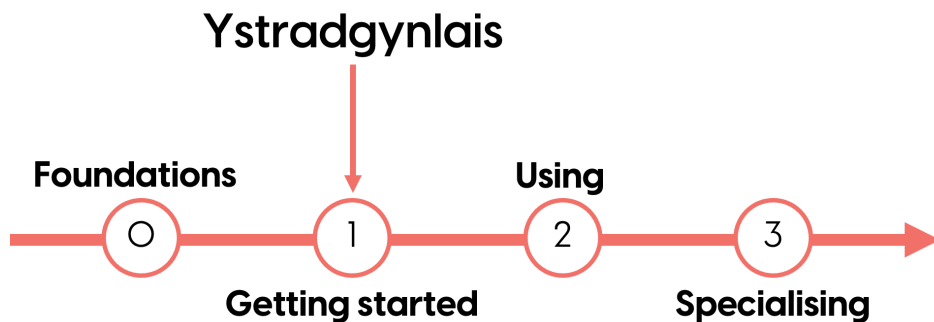
With most of the basic building blocks in place, Ystradgynlais is line with or ahead of many Welsh towns in terms of its physical digital infrastructure. The next steps for the town should therefore focus on leveraging this infrastructure at the town level to maximise the benefits for the local community, economy, and environment.

Whilst the physical infrastructure is largely in place, there is scope to further develop local partnerships and the town's online presence, which currently does not fully reflect its appeal or promote the amenities and services available. Developing greater organisation at the town level between local stakeholders and the town's online presence could occur in tandem with the exploitation of physical infrastructure.

Finally, establishing the best means by which footfall data from the town Wi-Fi system and data from any other sensors is critical for ensuring businesses and stakeholders have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions about how to improve business performance and manage the town centre.

The assessment suggests that Ystradgynlais is positioned at Stage 1 of its Smart Town journey.

Figure 5: Ystradgynlais' position on its Smart Towns journey



Summary of digital place assessment findings

Plan	The Ystradgynlais Town Investment Plan has set a clear vision with accompanying actions for the town centre.	✓
Partnership	No formal town centre partnership or business group, but businesses and community groups work together on some initiatives.	–
Physical infrastructure	Most of the building blocks are in place, with decent mobile coverage, town Wi-Fi, and LoRaWAN gateways in place. The lack of current availability of full-fibre broadband and uncertainty about future upgrades is a cause for concern.	–
Online presence	A number of businesses have an active online presence that complements their physical presence. The town does not have a strong identity online and there is minimal organised promotion of it as a visitor destination.	–
Business support and skills	Cwmpas are delivering bespoke digital business support and skills as part of the Powys Digital Towns programme. Business Wales provides a wide range of support for businesses looking to utilise digital tools and platforms.	✓

4 Digital priorities for Ystradgynlais

The digital priorities are the key areas where digital, technology and data could have the greatest positive impact in Ystradgynlais. The priorities align with the current work and priorities of local organisations, and existing plans and visions for the town. The issues and opportunities raised by businesses and stakeholders during the plan-making process have been central in the formulation of the priorities.



Sharing and understanding the data

The use of data at the local level to inform how the town is managed and planned, improve business performance and support businesses is reliant on stakeholders having access to the data and the confidence and skills to understand and use it.

As such, ensuring businesses, local organisations, and Powys CC officers have easy and secure access to footfall data from the town Wi-Fi system along with local skills training is a priority. This will require establishing channels for distributing the data and local stakeholders accessing training and support.



Maintaining a green and accessible town

Parks, trails, and parking are all highly valued parts of the local area, and quality maintenance and management of these assets is key to ensuring that Ystradgynlais remains a green and accessible town. There is an opportunity to support their maintenance and management using sensors, with the underlying infrastructure (LoRaWAN gateways) already in place. Generating data on the usage of parks and other green spaces and the real-time availability of high street parking bays are both impactful initiatives which could be led by local stakeholders and delivered quickly.



Supporting community organisations and facilities

Ystradgynlais has a rich industrial heritage and a key part of this heritage is the community and welfare halls found throughout the local area. Many of these halls have significant operating costs linked to low energy efficiency and the age and design of the buildings. The organisations running the halls have reported significant ongoing costs related to utilities and management as major issues which threaten the long-term viability of the buildings. The Town Council (alongside other organisations) invest a significant proportion of its expenditure in supporting the running of these halls.

There is a unique opportunity to pilot the use of sensors to reduce running costs and maintenance requirements whilst supporting the management of these halls. This is due to the concentration of community and welfare halls in the area and the digital infrastructure available.



Promoting the town and events

Many businesses and stakeholders are eager to coordinate and increase the promotion of Ystradgynlais (as a retail centre and visitor destination) and its events. This is likely key to attracting more visitors from nearby popular attractions to the town. Developing the promotion and marketing of Ystradgynlais has potential to raise the area's profile, expand the town's visitor economy and grow the events calendar.

To achieve this will require Ystradgynlais to have an organised and active presence across social media and an up to date website that highlights the range and quality of what is on offer (brought together via a strong brand). In addition to supporting businesses and event organisers to use footfall data to secure funding, manage events and plan future events as well as explore the use of town Wi-Fi for marketing.

5 Digital Action Plan

This Digital Action Plan provides a clear pathway with project ideas categorised based on deliverability (estimated cost and time required). The package of project ideas for Ystradgynlais are listed opposite and fully detailed on a project-by-project basis.

Ystradgynlais project ideas

Short-term – Actioning of quick-win for a permanent or temporary scheme

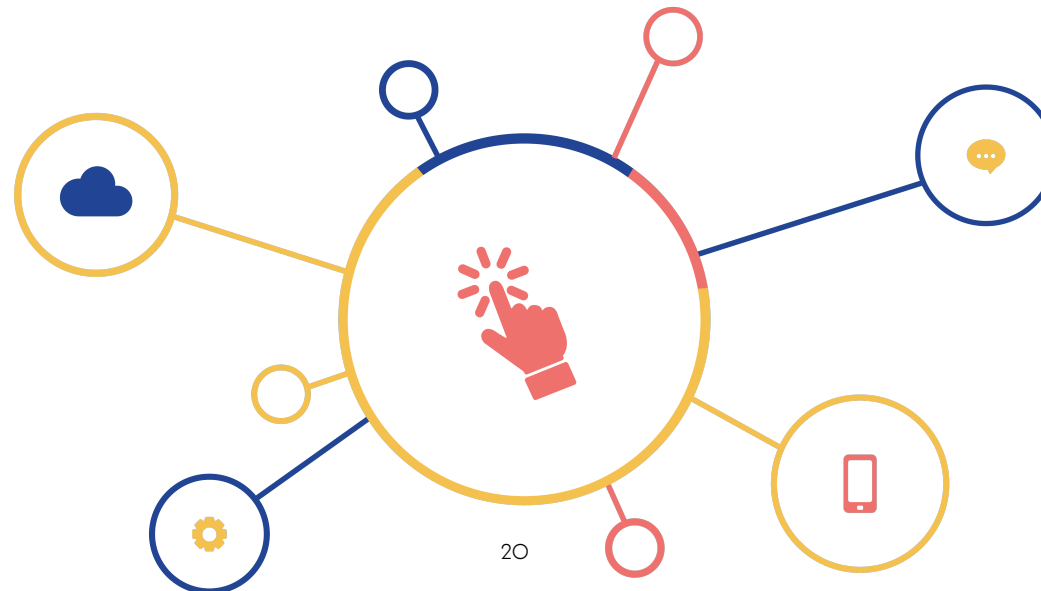
- 1 Set up channels to share data and insights from the town Wi-Fi system
- 2 Digital skills programme
- 3 Expand Ystradgynlais' digital place and event marketing

Medium-term – Delivery feasible within the next 12 to 18 months but will require further planning, funding, and statutory approvals.

- 4 Town centre digital noticeboard
- 5 Smart green space management
- 6 High street parking sensors

Strategic – Significant intervention that requires the involvement of organisations above town level and additional planning and funding.

- 7 Smart utilities pilot for community buildings



Project 1: Set up channels to share data and insights from the town Wi-Fi system

Priority: Sharing and understanding the data

Vision: 'Businesses, community organisations, and other stakeholders utilise footfall data to support their activities and decision-making with easy access to it in near real time.'

Lead organisations: Ystradgynlais TC and Powys CC

Description: The town Wi-Fi system collects anonymous aggregate footfall data, showing the number of visitors to the town centre, frequency of visits, dwell time, and the busyness of different areas. Currently, the data is visualised as interactive graphs and maps, which are accessible via the system's secure administrative dashboard.

A variety of different channels could be used to share the data with stakeholder groups based on their different needs, and it likely that more than one will be required. Channels to consider include:

- Online platforms that process and visualise the data, such as Patrwm.io (used in Gwynedd)
- Town apps that process and visualise the data such as Vzta (used in Rhondda Cynon Taf).
- Regular email newsletters that feature graphs and stats from the system (used in Cardigan).

Consultation with town centre businesses indicates that for the data to be used to make significant operational decisions (e.g. opening times, staffing, promotions), it needs to be accessible on demand.

Cost: Depends on channel.

Case study: Gwynedd and Anglesey

Through the 'Smart Gwynedd a Môn' initiative, Gwynedd and Anglesey CCs and Menter Môn worked with town and community councils across both counties to install town Wi-Fi systems and display the data on Patrwm.io.

Outcome: Data generated by the Wi-Fi systems is publicly accessible (on [Patrwm](#)) and is used to inform business decisions, to measure the effect of interventions and events in the towns, and to compare trends across towns.

Further information

Cisco Meraki Guidebook – The document explains the types of data generated by the Wi-Fi system in greater depth and highlights best practice for managing and sharing the data. Available at smarttowns.cymru/en/cisco-meraki.html

Detailed example of a Welsh high street using the system – The document shows step-by-step how an anonymous Welsh high street collaborated to utilise data from a Cisco Meraki system (hosted on Patrwm.io) to compare high street footfall with footfall to specific shops: Available at smarttowns.cymru/en/case-studies/using-cisco-meraki-mr20-to-monitor-building-footfall-and-compare-with-the-high-street

Project 2: Digital skills programme

Priority: Sharing and understanding the data

Vision: 'Local stakeholders have the skills and confidence to interpret data and use digital tools to achieve their organisation's or business's goals.'

Lead organisations: All local stakeholder groups

Description: Stakeholders from all local groups are eligible for bespoke help to improve their digital skills with the programme delivered by Cwmpas. The training programme has been funded by Powys CC through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund and is being delivered in Ystradgynlais alongside the development of this Plan.

For residents and stakeholders interested in improving their digital literacy and foundational digital skills, there is also a programme of support delivered by Powys CC Library Service at Ystradgynlais Library. Please contact the Library directly for more information.

Cost: Free.

Further information

Sign up for training – The website contains more information about the skills training and a form to sign up: powysdigitaltowns.info/

Digital Toolkit for Business – Business Wales provide comprehensive business support and have produced a guide: businesswales.gov.wales/superfastbusinesswales/

Case study: Mold, Flintshire

As part of the 'Mold Smart Town' initiative, Flintshire CC installed a town Wi-Fi system and LoRaWAN gateways in the town centre. Footfall data from the Wi-Fi system is shared and utilised by businesses, the Town Council, and across the County Council.

Outcome: Businesses have the ability to see daily footfall trends which has provided evidence on whether to open at times traditionally considered 'too quiet' (e.g. Mondays). This insight has given businesses reassurance to open for longer and for more days of the week.

The Town Council is using the data to measure the performance of Mold Castle and Bailey Hill, a local visitor attraction located close to the high street. The Town Council is able to make changes to how Bailey Hill is managed and promoted by measuring the proportion of visitors to the town who are visiting Bailey Hill (by comparing footfall recorded on the high street and at Bailey Hill).

Flintshire CC Streetscene Team is using the data to plan maintenance and repair work on the high street for the quietest times of the week, reducing potential disruption to visitors and businesses.

Video: youtube.com/watch?v=Dd7mP86bRII

Project 3: Expand Ystradgynlais' digital place and event marketing

Priority: Promoting the town and its events

Vision: 'Awareness of Ystradgynlais as a visitor destination grows through digital marketing efforts by local groups that showcase the best of what the town has to offer. Marketing and promotion of the town creates a strong and distinctive brand for the town that highlights its independent shops, local events, and connections with nearby attractions, such as the National Park.'

Lead organisation: Discover Ystradgynlais

Description: The characteristics of Ystradgynlais, including its independent town centre, heritage, events, and proximity to major tourist attractions, make it an appealing place to visit. These characteristics, however, are not actively marketed, and there is a lack of coordinated promotional activity of the town and its businesses, both online and using physical marketing materials.

There is significant potential to develop a town brand that can be used to bring together the efforts of individual businesses and organisations to promote, and maximise their impact.

Key initial steps that can be taken include:

- Develop a marketing plan for the town which defines the goals and key messages for promoting the local area and begins to outline a brand for marketing Ystradgynlais
- Increase the use of the Discover Ystradgynlais social media channels to promote local events, activities, and businesses
- Update the Discover Ystradgynlais website and utilise it as a hub for promoting local events throughout the year
- Explore opportunities to develop a website oriented around visitors and regular posts across social media platforms will increase the reach of the town's promotional activity.

Case study: Rhayader, Powys

Local voluntary community group Rhayader 2000 worked closely with Rhayader Town Council, Powys CC, and the local business community to develop a strategy for growing the town's visitor economy. A core part of the strategy was the development of a brand and strapline for the town, and promoting the town online via a modern website and social media presence.

Outcome: Rhayader promotes itself as 'The Outdoor Capital of Wales' via the town's visitor website (www.rhayader.co.uk), social media platforms, and physical advertising. The website showcases the new brand and local events, businesses and activities, attracting visitors to the area and ensuring they are aware of the town's retail, food & drink, accommodation and events offer. The town's online presence is actively managed and kept fresh with regular updates of the website and posts on social media.

Further information

Cardigan, Ceredigion – Presentation covering how the town successfully "sells" itself as a visitor destination using social media campaigns and newsletters (slides 19-26): iwa.wales/wp-content/media/cardigan-town.pdf

Place branding – An overview of place branding from the Institute of Place Management as part of a High Street Taskforce series on vital and viable high streets: highstreettaskforce.org.uk/resources/details/?id=47cOd19b-af67-428f-9ab7-8c6bc5f7b9f7

Project 4: Digital noticeboard for town centre

Priority: Promoting the town and its events

Vision: 'Businesses and local groups regularly use the town centre digital noticeboard to publicise local events, activities and other promotions to a wider audience. This content is managed by the local community and is updated in real-time, ensuring that promotions are relevant and engaging.'

Lead organisations: Ystradgynlais Town Council and Discover Ystradgynlais

Description: The Town Council, businesses, and other local organisations would benefit from the increased visibility provided by promotions and notifications displayed on a digital noticeboard in Ystradgynlais town centre. A noticeboard would be complementary to existing Facebook groups and newsletters, providing a new way to promote activities and events as well as share important local news.

Local stakeholders have stated that there has been historic interest in a digital noticeboard in the town centre. There is also an opportunity to use the footfall heatmap from the town Wi-Fi system to help identify the best location to install a noticeboard. Options suggested by local stakeholders include at a gateway to the town (e.g. Maes-y-Dre Car Park) or near the crossroads.

Cost: £10,000 to £20,000 for an outdoor freestanding noticeboard depending on the model and specification; options include single-sided or double-sided.

Case study: Rhayader, Powys

Rhayader 2000 have installed an interactive digital noticeboard on the footway adjacent to the crossroads in the town centre. The noticeboard has an interactive touchscreen and can be used to find out about upcoming local events as well as accommodation, food & drink, and activities in the local area.

The signage links with the town's websites and utilises the same branding, tying the two together to create a cohesive visitor experience. In addition, the touch screen digital signage grabs attention far better than printed signage.

Figure 6: Image of the Rhayader digital noticeboard



Project 5: Smart green space management

Priority: Maintaining a green and accessible town

Vision: 'More people use the town's parks and footpath as maintenance and management decisions are informed and supported and enhanced by sensor data.'

Lead organisation: Ystradgynlais Town Council

Description: Install people counting sensors in Coronation Park, Diamond Park, and select footpaths to:

- Generate an evidence base showing the number of people using the parks and paths, at what times, and how they use them.
- Inform the cost and scheduling of maintenance.
- Determine the need for additional amenities.
- Collect the evidence needed to support future grant applications and investments.

Data from the sensors will show the number of people visiting and at what times as well as the usage of different trails and areas in each Park. By using a battery powered system, the sensors can be moved in future to measure other locations in future.

Cost: Outdoor people counting sensors costs between £400 and £600 each in addition to set up costs.

Case study: Three Castles Walk, Monmouthshire

MonLife (a part of Monmouthshire County Council) has installed people counting sensors in parks, footpaths, and green spaces across the county. As part of this programme, sensors have been installed along the Three Castles Walk, a 19 mile circular route linking the medieval castles of Grosmont, Skenfrith & White Castle.

Outcome: The sensors show how many people are walking different parts of the trail and the busyness of different sections of the Walk throughout the day, week, and season. This data is used to demonstrate its usage and justify investment, as an evidence base for funding applications, to meet statutory reporting duties, and to target maintenance work along the Walk.

Figure 7: White Castle, Monmouthshire



Project 6: High Street parking sensors

Priority: Maintaining a green and accessible town

Vision: 'The availability of disabled and loading bays on the high street is shown in real time, improving the accessibility of the town centre. Parking data is used to support enforcement, reducing problem parking in these bays.'

Lead organisation: Ystradgynlais Town Council

Description: Whilst the accessibility of the high street is a priority for a number of local businesses and the Town Council, there is minimal data currently collected on high street parking.

Parking sensors can be installed in select bays to fill this gap. The sensors show which bays are occupied and how long a bay has been occupied for. This can be used to:

- Display in real time which bays are available on the high street, including the number of available disabled parking bays.
- Record when parking on the high street reaches capacity (i.e. all monitored spaces occupied).
- Evaluate whether there is a problem with vehicles overstaying on the high street and, if so, focus enforcement efforts on specific times or spaces.

There are concerns that improper use of parking bays is having a negative impact on the ability of different groups to easily access the high street. This can be addressed in part through the installation of sensors

Cost: Parking sensors cost around £250 each in addition to install and set up costs.

Case study: Cardiff

Cardiff Council, working with Smart Parking, installed 3,000 in-ground parking sensors in parking bays across the city centre. The sensors show in real-time which parking bays are available via a website or app, generate usage data for the Council, and provide directions for users to navigate to each parking bay.

Outcome: The sensors are producing accurate data on when and how for long people are parking in each bay and real-time occupancy data reduces the time it takes for drivers to find a parking space. This in turn has a positive impact on city centre congestion and air quality. Link to the full case study: smarttowns.cymru/en/case-studies/cardiff-council-launches-smartpark-system-and-parking-app

Further information

Crickhowell, Powys – The case study covers the design of a Smart Town scheme which is being implemented in town centre. The scheme includes the installation of parking sensors on the high street and provides detail on costs, installation, and using the data (pages 8-10): smarttowns.cymru/en/case-studies/crickhowell-generating-local-data-to-plan-for-the-future

Project 7: Smart utilities pilot for community buildings

Priority: Supporting community organisations and facilities

Vision: 'Community and Welfare Halls serve as high-quality spaces for local communities, with their long-term sustainability ensured through the implementation of smart sensors. The sensors have successfully reduced running costs, by enhancing energy efficiency, and reducing the unnecessary consumption of electricity, gas, and water.'

Lead organisation: Powys CC in partnership with the Town Council and Community and Welfare Halls

Description: Community organisations have reported the cost of running community buildings in the local area to be very high, especially since the increase in energy costs of 2022. A smart building solution would enable real-time monitoring of energy and water use, enabling proactive monitoring of usage to prevent wastage and reduce costs.

A smart building solution utilising the LoRaWAN network would be customised to the design of each building, ensuring that it does not duplicate any existing systems and addresses the specific challenges faced by each building.

The solution would typically involve the following sensors:

- Room occupancy
- Smart radiator valve
- Electric meter
- Water meter
- Gas meter

Structuring the programme as a 3-year pilot would build in a clear evaluation framework, enabling the cost savings to be measured and efficacy of the approach to be evaluated. In addition to an opportunity to assess if the solution is suitable to be scaled up to other community buildings across the county.

As noted earlier in the Plan, the technology is used across the private sector as well as the public sector (e.g. schools and colleges). With a Digital Place Plan in place and wider investment in the Smart Town agenda, there is a strong opportunity to pilot its use in community buildings in Ystradgynlais.

Cost: £20,000 to £30,000



Delivery guidance

Delivering a digital project like those proposed above can be a daunting prospect, but there are many resources available to help.

One of these is the **Smart Towns Delivery Manual** – a guide for how stakeholders can design, plan, deliver and evaluate place-specific Smart Towns projects. The Delivery Manual breaks down the process into six manageable stages, as well as providing technology-specific advice, information on risk management, and a directory of providers of Smart Towns consultancy, training, hardware and software solutions.

You can read the Delivery Manual in full on the Smart Towns Cymru website: [Smart Towns Delivery Manual](#)

Figure 8: Delivery approach



Summary of delivery approach in Smart Towns Delivery Manual

1. Identify the problem or opportunity

Identify and thoroughly explore the problem or opportunity you have identified and consider at a high-level what sort of action you might take to address it.

2. Explore possible solutions

Scope out possible solutions to the problem or opportunity you identified and tested in the previous stage.

3. Plan and procure

Work out how to deliver the preferred option identified in the previous delivery stage and procure the necessary goods and services.

4. Install and maintain

Install, test, and maintain any necessary new hardware and software as planned.

5. Share and use the data

Share the data being collected with stakeholders and then support them to analyse and draw insights from it.

6. Monitor and evaluate

Monitor how the new scheme performs and evaluate the effect it has had on the problem or opportunity you sought to address.