

Powys

KNIGHTON TOWN INVESTMENT PLAN

Action Plan

June 2023

Trawsnewid Trefi
Transforming Towns

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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The five Sections of the Action Plan

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Section 1:

Introduction & Purpose of the Knighton Town Investment Plan

This executive summary focusses on the vision, strategic objectives and actions required to implement the Knighton Town Investment Plan (KTIP). This is a crucial element of a County-wide regeneration strategy for Powys County Council and provides supporting evidence and an economic rationale for a range of current and future investment opportunities.



The Plan:

- Is structured in 4 sections taking the reader step by step through the process of developing the Regeneration Action Plan
- Identifies and assesses the likely impacts of a range of potential investments and initiatives targeting:
  - Tourism and the visitor economy,
  - Town centre improvements to respond to changing consumer, visitor and local community and business needs,
  - More economically and socially effective use of public sector assets,
  - Greater exploitation of natural, leisure and historic assets through improved co-ordination and communication,
  - More responsive co-ordination of public transport.
  - Appropriate governance and delivery arrangements that harness local capabilities and acknowledge the constraints on the availability of public sector support.
- Has been informed through extensive stakeholder engagement and articulates a vision and defines priorities for the future of Knighton to help attract and shape investments from a variety of both public and private sector sources.
- Provides a Regeneration Action Plan, a route map for the economic sustainability of the town and includes detailed evidence and feedback from a range of statutory, non-statutory and local stakeholders as well as a dedicated residents survey.
- Is framed within the wider policy context to ensure that there is a direct read across from proposed interventions to strategic outcomes contained in:
  - The 6 Principles of Placemaking Charter;
  - Powys County Council policy focus on Economy: Health and care: Learning and skills: Residents and Communities including the Powys Joint Health and Care Strategy;
  - The 2015 ‘Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act’ (WFGA), with a wider set of social and environmental wellbeing goals moving away from a sole focus on material economic prosperity.
  - Powys County Council Strategy for Climate change - Net Positive Powys 2021-2030

Section 2: Background & Context

Evidence gathering & Stakeholder Engagement

The Plan has been informed through:

- A comprehensive desk-based review of local, regional and national policies and plans.
- An analysis & comparison of data sets from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the economy, jobs and broader socio-economic conditions.
- A use survey that examines the dynamics of the retail core of Knighton.
- A local Project Steering group comprising Town and County Councillors representatives and engagement with Powys County Council representatives to identify issues and opportunities for the town.
- One to one engagement with key local stakeholders in the business sector including in tourism and hospitality, high street retailers, property, commercial operators together with education, the arts and third sector representatives.
- Physical visits to the Town Centre and related facilities/features
- Wider community consultation via a dedicated paper and on-line residents survey and relevant social media promotion.
- Direct discussion with individuals and businesses within Knighton who have historically invested in the town or in local community assets for the benefit of the town

The plan presents this data in a comprehensive series of appendices.

Section 3: Knighton Today

Headline findings and recommendations

Knighton is an attractive Welsh market town that sits on the border between England and Wales, often referred to as the gateway to mid-Wales. A market town since 1230 Knighton is situated at the mid-point of the Offa's Dyke National Trail. Nestled in a rising valley between beautiful sloping countryside of grassed and forested hillsides the Town offers spectacular views of the surrounding landscape with the surrounding countryside offering wonderful walking trails and cycling routes alongside clear views of the night sky.

Knighton's architecture, at first glance, appears largely Victorian, however, there are a number of buildings dating from around the 15th century and a number of circa 17th century houses. These buildings serve to highlight the more ancient history of the town evidenced by 2 sites where former castles once stood. The town centre retains a number of small independent retailers and a large Co-Operative store. It continues its historic role as a livestock market town with well-supported sales held every Thursday and boasts a number of tourism sites to attract visitors including the Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre. The town has a railway station with train services to Shrewsbury to the north and Swansea to the south. Knighton presents a strong sense of community with an annual arts festival and a thriving community centre supporting many activities.

Harnessing private sector investment potential

Stakeholder engagement has revealed a strong sense of community and connection to the town. It also indicates positive attitudes from the private sector towards investment in the town although this is hampered by the lack of suitable industrial buildings or allocated commercial sites.





Developing community facilities

Knighton has a number of community facilities that have the potential to provide additional support to the local community both in terms of supporting further development of the town's vibrant local arts and cultural offer but also in supporting adult education, training and employment initiatives. Whilst a major opportunity exists for improvements to the Knighton and District Community Centre, under-utilised hard pitches adjacent to the centre could provide local sports teams with floodlit practice/training facilities for e.g. football and hockey.

Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre

Limited funding has led to challenges in the operation and maintenance of the Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre. This important tourism asset forms the gateway to the Offa's Dyke from Knighton Town and there are potential routes to maintaining and improving its facilities, enhancing the role of the Centre in supporting local tourism and promoting educational experiences around heritage, history and the Welsh Language.

Knighton – Well-Being of Future Generations

Knighton is well placed to address the policy objectives of the 2015 'Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act' (WFGA) which proposes a wider set of social and environmental wellbeing goals – moving away from a sole focus on material economic prosperity.

Heritage and Tourism

Opportunities exist to further develop land adjacent Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre to support heritage tourism and the arts through the creation of a heritage park and trail including pathways and interpretative displays focussed around visible and accessible areas of Offa's Dyke. Improvements to the town centre tourism appeal including improved signage/information and the enhancement of historical/heritage trail arrangements are important elements in presenting a welcoming appearance to residents and visitors. Knighton is also ideally situated to participate in the Dark Skies initiative developing across parts of the county.

Public Realm

Improvements to the visual amenity of the town including through planting and the enhancement of key historical buildings and pedestrian areas would improve the visitor experience. This could include focussed improvements to buildings and public realm surrounding The Narrows. A review of land comprising Bowling Green Lane Car Park could consider opportunities to improve the visual amenity of the area as well as providing potential opportunities to support motorhome tourism and alternative uses including affordable housing.

Vacant Shops Academy and E-Commerce

Alongside improvements to shop fronts facilitated by improvement grants there is an opportunity to use the approach promoted by the Shop Fronts Academy to audit occupation rates in Knighton and link local retail and commercial vacant premises to prospective occupiers. There are also examples in Knighton where local retailers are successfully sustaining retail shop premises in the town through successful use of e-commerce to develop and support retail sales. This provides an opportunity for supporting other local retailers to take up this model and the vacant shops academy could support retailers to establish themselves in retail premises and utilising e-commerce.

Opportunities for hybrid and remote working

There could be positive implications for Knighton and other towns across Wales in supporting 'hybrid working'. The Centre for Towns recently reported that its research indicates "big potential for places to market themselves as online working destinations" and whilst not identified as a specific project the rates of home working in Knighton indicate the potential for further development.

Flooding

Parts of Knighton are subject to seasonal flooding affecting transport routes and residential properties. Resolving such flooding risks could have the added benefit of unlocking land for appropriate development or seasonal tourism uses.



Local business and industry

Employment in some industries in Knighton is comparatively low skill and low wage, however, there are some notable high value engineering and design businesses providing high value employment opportunities. There is a shortage of suitable land and/or industrial premises which could support local business expansion or new business development, leading to a risk of businesses moving to alternative locations.

Harnessing the potential of walking and cycling tourism

Knighton is ideally placed to develop itself as a hub for outdoors recreation tourism due to its location close to cycling and walking trails and its beautiful natural environment. Learning form existing examples nationally this would necessitate developing new and marketing existing trail opportunities but could include opportunities for cycle-hire businesses and linkages to other towns in Powys.

Addressing housing constraints

There is currently a shortage of affordable housing in Knighton. This has been exacerbated by a lack of development of new housing as well as inward migration from households from outside the area and the associated impact on house prices within a relatively low wage economy. Working with land-owners and developers, including local Registered Social Landlords a review of stalled sites and potential housing sites should be undertaken alongside engagement with the development of the emerging Local Development Plan 2022-36 to identify housing sites and policies to support the delivery of new affordable housing to meet local need.

Powys visitor economy

The development of these Investment Plans has confirmed that Powys has huge potential to market itself as a world-class tourist destination of choice, both for national and for international visitors.



Gateway development

The delivery of plans for the enhancement and re-modelling of the Co-Operative Store would improve the visual amenity of this significant site situated at the gateway to Knighton Town Centre. An important and valued retail outlet serving the town the delivery of improvements will require significant investment by the retailer and considered engagement and co-operation with local planners.

Festivals and events

Knighton has a very active culture, arts and crafts community and also hosts annual Arts Festival together with an annual Knighton Show and Carnival popular with residents and visitors. There is an opportunity to build upon this potential utilising local talent and skills to expand the role of the Arts in attracting tourism visits to the town and supporting the development of accommodation and related businesses within Knighton.

Transport and connectivity

Knighton railway station is on the Heart of Wales line running from Shrewsbury to Swansea and links to major and urban routes across the UK Network via Crewe, Shrewsbury, Craven Arms, Llanelli, Swansea and Cardiff. However, few services run each day and local bus services are limited. A review of bus services and routes into Knighton Town and the location of the town terminus should seek to ensure it is easy for local residents and visitors to access the town centre and local attractions.

Opportunities for Collaborative Action

- In the context of the wider economy in the County it is also important to consider the opportunities for the towns to collaborate on funding bids and tourism initiatives.
- It is important for Knighton to actively engage with key stakeholders in a process of ‘Place Branding’ which will support sustainable economic development including in support of the tourism economy.
- Opportunities exist to collaborate with neighbouring towns, landowners and businesses in the development of walking and cycling tourism including through the marketing of existing routes and the development of new trails and associated tourism related facilities.
- Stakeholder engagement has revealed a strong sense of place within the town. It also indicates positive attitudes from the private sector towards investment in the town although that is currently constrained by the lack of development land. Engagement on the delivery of the Investment Plan themes between public-sector and private stakeholders could unlock opportunities for business expansion and investment.
- Knighton would benefit from increasing the proportion of inward migrating households who are economically active. This will require investment in supportive infrastructure including e-connectivity, local services and the identification of land for inward business investment.
- By working collaboratively, local stakeholders including existing retailers, landowners and community leaders, can support and connect potential retailers to sustainable business models in retail premises within the town centre. Similarly, they can ensure the emerging Local Development Plan contains adequate allocations of land to support the development of affordable housing and industrial/commercial premises to meet current and emerging needs.

Key messages from Residents Surveys

- A great affection for the town and a strong community spirit.
- Strong support for the Knighton and District Community Centre
- A strong recognition and identification with the beauty and importance of the local environment and its role in supporting tourism and associated activities including walking and cycling.
- Importance of the Offa's Dyke to local tourism and an affection for the Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre
- A sense that Knighton had a reasonable selection of local independent shops but a desire for increased choice in the town centre and a strong desire to secure the redevelopment and improvement of the local supermarket.
- Support for the improvement of facilities to support tourism including addressing the public realm, signage and key local buildings.
- A sense of decline in the availability of local services, especially in terms of healthcare and transportation.
- A desire for improved access to all-weather sporting facilities within the town and more play areas.
- A lack of industrial land/buildings affecting local job prospects within the town and poor wage levels
- A significant need for affordable housing development to meet local needs



Knighton in statistics

Data has been considered for the immediate town and surrounding area to provide an understanding of the issues faced using Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) as the immediate building blocks. The Investment Plan also examines the dynamics of the retail core of Knighton.

Economy

- The retail overview suggests a relatively resilient High Street with a good number of independent local retailers.
- The town's commercial centre comprises mainly small independent retailers or businesses which accounts for 86% of the offer whilst the multiples account for 14%
- The vacancy rate for retail units is around 5% which is significantly lower than the Welsh average.
- There are no banking outlets in the town in line with many other primary towns which have seen a decline.
- The town centre has a limited number of hospitality outlets to support the visitor economy including short stay accommodation.

Employment

- A decline in the number of jobs in Knighton over the Period 2015 – 2020 with manufacturing and water services as the main employment sectors.
- The economy is generally low wage and low skilled in nature although there are some highly specialised industries including across aerospace and marine
- In Knighton the status of the town as a main service centre is clearly borne out by the retail, real estate and other service category strengths in the town which service the surrounding communities.
- In line with a number of modest sized market towns in Wales the town also has a significant manufacturing base but it has a significant proportion of the population employed in the water supply industries.

Knighton’s Strengths & Weaknesses

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The Plan provides a comprehensive analysis of Knighton’s Strengths & Weaknesses with an assessment of Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) which reflects the statistical data, available information as well as local feedback from a range of stakeholders. The analysis summarises the characteristics of Knighton that are successful and set it apart from others, things that are not successful or put Knighton at a disadvantage, areas where there is chance for change or external factors that offer a chance to make improvements, and conditions that are harmful to the success or character of Knighton or that could damage its chances to improve.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunites	Threats
Beautiful countryside with access to walking routes and wildlife	Low wage economy with declining local employment opportunities	Significant potential to grow visitor economy including increasing access and signposting to/through existing attractions	Lack of available sites for development of commercial/industrial units
Strategic location at a gateway position between Wales and England	Lack of affordable housing	Museum, The Narrows and other heritage attractions present within town	No current plans/sites being delivered or in pipeline for the development of housing, including affordable housing
Important historically and on the line of the Offa’s Dyke	Lack of industrial and/or commercial units for start-up and/or business expansion	Only Town located on line of Offa’s Dyke Path and purpose-built visitor centre	Limited values in commercial floorspace to support/encourage speculative development
Offa’s Dyke Centre valued by locals and visitors	Limited access to health and related services including Dentistry	Presence of Spaceguard Centre in Knighton	Impact of energy price increases and cost of living crisis on visitor numbers and on poverty levels within local population
Presence of Spaceguard Centre	Town’s retail centre and public realm in poor condition	Potential to tap into growing staycation holiday market including Motorhomes	Energy price increases and related inflationary impacts on local businesses recovering post-Covid.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunites
Friendly community with strong community spirit	Limited supply of tourist accommodation and related services including restaurants and public conveniences	Potential access to walking and cycling routes (Cambrian Way, Glyndwr's Way, Radnor Ring Cycle Route, Kinsley Wood, Heart of Wales Way, Jack Mitton Way (Bridleway) Elan Valley Way, links to International Freedom Trails)
Community Centre is well-used and valued by local residents	Limited supermarket choice/competition	Offa's Dyke Centre and park could be developed to provide additional attractions
Railway line with connectivity to Shrewsbury (north) and Swansea (south)	Poor condition of significant gateway properties to the town	Space for potential alternative uses for areas of Bowling Green Lane Car Park (subject to negotiation/agreement with PCC)
Strong community spirit with good voluntary sector supporting e.g. Youth Work	Limited public transport timetable for travel to neighbouring communities	Bids being developed for funding to extend and improve facilities at Knighton Community Centre
Some specialised industries operating locally	Poor educational attainment locally	Planning permission in place for redevelopment of Co-Operative Store
Livestock Market operating in Town	Growing older population vs younger working age population	Potential for growing sustainable energy creation including solar/wind power
Appealing character to local retail centre	Frequency of train services for people to access local employment centres	
Good Local Primary School		

Section 4: Regeneration Strategy

Vision of Knighton Tomorrow

Following an analysis of key local, regional and national policies and available data sets as well as comprehensive consultation with the local community the SWOT analysis informed the development of a shared Vision and a set of Regeneration Objectives for the Town. This has in turn informed the development of a package of projects which are consistent with the six principles of placemaking in the Welsh Government's transforming towns.

A vision for Knighton

- **A thriving, attractive and friendly market town**
  - A wide choice of good quality, busy local shops
  - Abundant choice of locally produced goods
  - Lots of community-based activities for all to enjoy
  - Attractive and well maintained buildings and public spaces
  - Everybody made to feel welcome

- **A great place to visit and stay with good facilities, a wealth of history and heritage to explore and opportunities for a healthy and active lifestyle**
  - Visitors enjoy a good choice of places to eat, drink and stay
  - Accessible and well-described local history and heritage
  - The place to visit to explore Offa's Dyke
  - A hub for walking, cycling and enjoying the outdoor lifestyle

- **A wonderful place to start and grow sustainable businesses**
  - Access to a good range of employment sites and premises
  - Accessible location at the gateway between England and Mid-Wales
  - Well trained and educated local workforce
  - High quality and specialized local businesses
  - Access to good Broadband and other essential services

- **A great place to live**
  - Good range of quality local services
  - Excellent local employment opportunities
  - Good quality affordable housing available
  - Access to affordable, healthy and locally produced food
  - including a good local supermarket
  - Good access to sporting, cultural and educational activities for everyone to enjoy
  - Beautiful and sustainable natural environment

The Plan includes a series of 4 tables covering:

- Priorities for Knighton as illustrated on page 14
- A ‘theory of change’ to illustrate how the proposed interventions are expected to lead to specific changes,
- An evaluation of the Six Principles of Placemaking against Powys County Council strategic objectives to provide a ‘read-across’ to the 3 Knighton Priorities;
- A high-level summary of project requirements including an estimate of costs where appropriate or available, an assessment of delivery timescales, delivery lead and any governance arrangements and potential next steps in moving forward.



Section 5: Regeneration Action Plan

Regeneration Priorities

The Plan includes a series of 4 tables covering:

- Priorities for Knighton as illustrated above;
- A ‘theory of change’ to illustrate how the proposed interventions are expected to lead to specific changes;
- An evaluation of the Six Principles of Placemaking against Powys County Council’s strategic objectives to provide a ‘read-across’ to the Knighton objectives;
- A high-level summary of project requirements including an estimate of costs where appropriate or available;
- An assessment of delivery timescales, delivery lead and any governance arrangements and potential next steps in moving forward.



Mapdata@2023Google

Key

- Knighton and District Community Centre
- Offa's Dyke Centre Public Facilities
- Pinners Hole Heritage Park
- Knighton Town Tourism Trail and Improved Public Signage
- Shop Front Improvements
- Public Realm Improvements
- Bowling Green Lane Car Park
- Bowling Green Lane Courts
- Increase the supply of land & industrial premises to meet demand from indigenous business & inward investors
- Cambrian Way Walking & Cycling Club
- Stalled sites and Affordable Housing
- Co-operative Store Redvelopment
- Knighton Festival
- Dark Skies Project
- Flood Alleviation
- Tourist Information Drop-In Knighton Civic Centre
- Vacant Shops Academy - Empty Shops

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Investment Projects

The Following table is representative of the full analysis undertaken for each potential investment or intervention.

Project/initiative	Cost £000	Link to the 6 Principles of Placemaking	Timescale Short 2yrs Med. 2-5yrs Long 5+yrs	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Establish an effective regeneration partnership	100 (20pa)	People and Community Identity	6-12 months	PCC/KTC	Identify Board Members, Draft Terms of Reference, Confirm support arrangements, Prioritise Projects
Knighton and District Community Centre	500	People & Community Location Public realm Mix of uses Identity	2 years	KDCC Management Committee, PCC.	Engagement with Regeneration Partnership. Identify bidding routes with PCC.
Offa's Dyke Centre Public Facilities	150	People & Community Location Identity	2 years	PCC/KTC/ODA	Engagement meetings between partners to agree lease and funding options including revenue options to support ongoing costs
Pinners Hole Heritage Park	200	People & Community Public Realm Mix of Uses Identity	2 years	PCC/KTC/ODA	Undertake review of titles to land, develop feasibility study
Knighton Town Tourism Trail and Improved Public Signage	100	People & Community Movement Public Realm Location Mix of Uses Identity	2 years	KTC/PCC/ Knighton and District Tourism Group	Identify stakeholders and appoint project group. Survey current position. Define issues and identify opportunities including historical and heritage content.
Shop Front Improvement	200	People & Community Public Realm Identity	2 years	PCC/KTC	Scope grant conditions, application for funding, secure funding and design application process and eligibility/area.

Project/initiative	Cost £000	Link to the 6 Principles of Placemaking	Timescale Short 2yrs Med. 2-5yrs Long 5+yrs	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Public Realm Improvements	500	People & Community Public Realm Identity	2 years	PCC/Welsh Government/KTC	Feasibility study, consultation, design, funding
Bowling Green Lane Car Park	350	People & Community Public Realm Location Mix of Uses	2 years	PCC/Welsh Government/KTC/Private Sector Partners	Feasibility study, consultation, design, funding
Bowling Green Lane Courts	80	People & Community Public Realm Location Mix of Uses	6 – 12 months	PCC/Welsh Government/KTC/KDCC Management Committee/ Private Sector	Feasibility study, consultation, secure funding/fundraising
Increase in employment land/premises	500-2000	People & Community Location Mix of Uses	3 – 5 years	PCC	Undertake scoping and demand study, develop feasibility study, identify land/locations and develop business case to secure funding
Cambrian Way Walking and Cycling Hub	100 (£25k pa for 3 years plus £25k	People & Community Movement Location Mix of Uses Identity	3 – 5 years	PCC/KTC/Cambrian Way Trust and other agencies to be engaged	Undertake scoping study to identify all routes and opportunities, develop business case, secure funding.
Stalled Sites and Affordable Housing	500 for land assembly	People & Community Location Mix of Uses	2 years	PCC/Housing Association Partners	PCVC and HA to engage on site identification and feasibility studies.
Co-operative Store Development	Private Sector funding	People & Community Public Realm Location Mix of Uses	3 – 5 years	Mid-Counties Co-op/PCC Planning and Building Conservation	MCC to engage with PCC on scheme revisions and planning obligations
Knighton Festival	50	People & Community Identity	2 years	KTC/Knighton Festival Organisers	Scope the opportunity and aspirations, identify resources to support and develop festival ambitions, business planning.

Project/initiative	Cost £000	Link to the 6 Principles of Placemaking	Timescale Short 2yrs Med. 2-5yrs Long 5+yrs	Delivery Lead & Governance	Next Steps
Dark Skies Project	75	People & Community Location Mix of Uses Identity	2 years	PCC/KTC	Engage with prior implementors to develop plan/proposals for Knighton and identify stakeholders
Flood Alleviation	100*	People & Community Location Mix of Uses	3 – 5 years	PCC/Natural Resources Wales, KTC, Welsh Government	Identify key stakeholders and issues, develop business case with outline proposals
Town Centre Bus Stop and Route Review	70	People and Community Movement Public Realm	2 years	PCC/KTC	Survey of routes, stakeholder consultation, develop business case
Tourist Information Drop-In Knighton Civic Centre	10	People & Community Mix of Uses Identity	6 – 12 months	KTC, PCC	Develop design proposals with business case
Vacant Shops Academy – Empty Shops	20	People & Community Public Realm Identity	2 years	KTC, PCC	Identify project group, review case studies and engage with Vacant Shops Academy.
Health and Wellbeing Hub	TBC	People & Community	2 years	Health Board, PCC and Third Sector	Confirm location and range of services to be provided

Conclusion & Next steps

Knighton has some distinctive advantages and opportunities notwithstanding the challenges faced nationally and locally.

The nationally challenging economic backdrop has had a significant impact on the high street, accelerated the move towards online shopping and resulting in significant pressures on the viability of many high street businesses. Within this context there is an accelerated need for revitalisation, regeneration, re-purposing of town centres and the importance of the proposals set out in this Plan should not be underestimated. While the strong independent shopping scene in the County's retail centres means they are well placed to weather the current storm, the town centres will still need to adapt to survive.

The projects identified provide an investment proposition and work programme for the public, private and voluntary sector players who have a stake in the towns future success. The County Council will need to work with stakeholders in Knighton to establish appropriate governance arrangements and to secure the funding required to implement the projects identified and deliver the Plans in a co-ordinated way.

In the context of the wider economy in the County it is also important to consider the opportunities for the towns to collaborate on funding bids and tourism initiatives.



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