

Confluence Creative Leads and PLANED response to:

‘Go West... HAVERFORDWEST

A Vision for the Future’

Overview:

The Creative Leads within the Confluence partnership and PLANED have considered the masterplan for Haverfordwest. We present our views, which are drawn from the research, engagement, activity and the underpinning philosophy of this three year arts and regeneration initiative, which sets out to change perceptions of Haverfordwest, engage people in the arts, increase understanding of what art can be and develop support for the role of arts in regeneration.

Business as usual is no longer an option ... ‘Art makes change. It accompanies, communicates and documents it and thereby creates more change’. Our view is that ‘during this transitional time, art is not a luxury, or an ‘add on’, it is a necessity. It has a crucial role in imagining the kind of world we want to live in and helping bring it into being’. ¹

We are pleased that the emerging ideas within the masterplan proposal are recognisable from the engagement work that was facilitated through the Big Map and we welcome acknowledgement of the role that the arts can play in regeneration.

The master plan is aspirational and there is a crucial process ahead so that not only the use of space can be addressed, but the sense of place that needs to be informed by community engagement and will, in turn, inform the identity that is marketable to the outside world. Only by engaging the communities of Haverfordwest in this process, will we successfully achieve ownership, identity, momentum, vibrancy and a sustainable place.

Vision:

The aspirations contained within the vision note the shape of how the space in Haverfordwest should appear. The vision uses the verb to ‘encourage’ which we feel could be replaced with a word that reflects the bold, brave and radical activity that needs to happen to put Haverfordwest back on the map.

We need activity which will ‘encourage’ the community to ‘shape’ the future town, and that activity will need to ‘inspire’, ‘catalyse’ and ‘animate’. In doing this, we believe that local ownership and care for the town will develop, communities will make things happen and Haverfordwest will have a vibrant future which is in the hands of the business, residential, social and visitor communities. A bottom-up momentum will gain energy and require lessening levels of state support.

In other areas in Pembrokeshire, this has been successfully achieved in a partnership approach through the community association or forum approach. As an example in other areas, PLANED has assisted the development of community forums and associations to fulfil this role. Working to bring together local democratic representation from the town or community council alongside other key group representatives such as the WI, Ffrindiau, churches, chamber of trade and others, the association or forum develops an evidenced

¹ Fern Smith, from the introduction to the 2016 publication ‘Culture Shifters: Artists making change.’

based collective vision for the area, which can then be used in a confident way by the town or community council in the use of local resources and assets.

The process of reaching consensus takes time to address local relationships and communications flow. Needless to say, the community led local development approach can take a long time (25 years in Narberth) but it has been successful in identifying key drivers and using support from the public, third and private sector to drive developments forward. The vision created in documents such as the Tavistock Institute's report on Narberth town centre have been focused but radical and have included substantial reference to the people and nature of the town, including the use of space.

A key issue for Haverfordwest are the number of diverse groups in the town. All groups have a positive interest and work separately for the good of the area. By drawing these interests together the sum action can have an impact far multiplied than the individual parts.

Key themes:

We recognise and welcome the four key themes. For example, our initial naming of the partnership as Confluence recognised the role of the river corridor and the need to draw attention to it. We have also recognised the underused assets within the town and the difficulty of signposting. Whilst we fully agree with 'enhancing the town centre offer', we feel that the masterplan could go further to suggest the next stage, such as:

- Who co-ordinates activity in the public realm?
- What is the town centre for in the future? What kind of businesses and activity will take place here, based on the overall Economic Development Strategy for Pembrokeshire?
- How will residents and groups remain involved with the process beyond the masterplan?
- What is the mechanism for the wealth of social capital in the town to be fully engaged and driving the future of Haverfordwest?

This next stage is a crucial step in that it not only recognises the continuing need for a questioning and experimental development of the vision that combines a top-down and bottom-up approach, but also finds ways to **implement** the vision, and to enable positive change to occur in ways that are incremental and at all levels. People need to see and experience the change and this will build momentum and will at some point tip the balance in favour of Haverfordwest as a 'place to be'.

Flagship Projects:

Again, we recognise and welcome the projects identified but there are some further questions that are relevant to these:

- We are supportive of the Library/Visitor Centre/Gallery project through our commissioning of an artist for that realm. Given the vision's commitment to 'strong cultural, arts and creative influences', the only reference to arts activity is in the Gallery within this project. The current level of public involvement is low and this needs to be turned into an engaging process.

- The river and riverside are key areas of interest to us and our interim findings note similar opportunities; however, for a better connection to the environment and to promote civic pride, a clear connected route along the river leading to the recreational space in green parks and countryside, and to the outstanding areas of diverse natural wildlife habitats within walking distance of the town centre is needed. There is potential to link these via a linear park and to draw them together by greening the ‘canalised’ section of river in the town centre as part of the Eastern Riverside redevelopment.
- The Eastern riverside re-development would again require community involvement in shaping a distinctive and place-specific solution. To be sustainable, spaces like these need to be bold, different and multi-layered in terms of their use and amenity. A one-dimensional approach where design has been driven purely by commercial development has resulted in the inoffensive but banal architectural backdrop that currently exists. Rather than risk ‘receiving’ a new version of the old from commercial developers, we first need to scope out what is required from the buildings in the development - how can this re-development excite communities to come into Haverfordwest and spend their time in the evenings, for instance? This means that we need engagement, which is fundamentally different to consultation.
- The Heritage Centre attraction has involved a wide group of interested parties and we have been included in the information circulated. However, to be unique and successful, it requires community involvement. We also are unsure how it relates to the wider existing and proposed heritage initiatives at Scolton, Picton, Bluestone, Carew Cheriton and PLANED’s eco-museum approach.

Overall, the model of delivering flagship projects needs to change approach and the opportunity exists to test new ideas that will invite the community to engage, with social enterprise models, use of the Big Lottery’s CAT2 programme for example. With the correct public sector support, whether financial or purely ensuring a responsible asset or service transfer process is in place, this will complete a positive circular relationship whereby the community becomes engaged, has the opportunity to drive key developments, enhances its skills and confidence, takes ownership and pride, sustains its community assets and further shapes the future of Haverfordwest through the investment that is driven by the confidence that the community develops.

Re-use of vacant properties:

We recognise all of these properties as being buildings of significance and also having a direct connection to many people’s lives - a foundation for their sense of place and the identity of Haverfordwest. There are opportunities, as noted above, to utilise a range of ownership and development models to create new uses that are diverse, multi-layered, sustainable and vibrant, reflecting the range of demographics within Haverfordwest and the surrounding communities it serves. Pembrokeshire is a cool and attractive place for young people; how can Haverfordwest maximise the opportunities that emerge from this? We need to be thinking of how to create work and living spaces that embrace the strong

creative, entrepreneurial culture and attract people to come and make it what they want it to be. This approach would reduce the drain of young people, and professionals with entrepreneurial skills from the County and assist with local recruitment to key public and private sector organisations that currently struggle with these challenges.

Our work has engaged people who have passion for place from the bottom up. In doing this we have identified similar empty buildings through our community-led EPOCH project. EPOCH (Empty property-owners club) has emerged from a seed funded project in the Ideas Lab and has begun to address key issues in empty property use. A key finding of the work of Confluence has been that meanwhile uses and ‘pop up’ activities can keep buildings active, reduce deterioration and help maintain a positive sense of place for local people. These activities also help people to envisage the potential uses for spaces, and to pilot them. Carnegie have recently published their findings regarding the ‘enabling state’. The first step they suggest is that the state should ‘step back’. This can be caveated with the role of the state being to help responsible use of these spaces.

Our ‘Vibrant Places’ seminar speakers noted from examples across the UK that by investing trust in people, civic ownership and pride emerges and subsequently commerce is drawn to the increased confidence in the area. This focuses on the quality of the offer in a town. In Haverfordwest we have a high quantity (low quality) offer, which does not attract visitors and local residents who want to spend more on being in a nicer environment. A creative risk can start this process. The majority of high level earners Pembrokeshire will not visit Haverfordwest for a meal or drink during an evening out, although their business or employer may be based here, because presently, there is very little of on offer, especially in the evening. By stimulating creative processes through vacant properties in Haverfordwest, we open up possibilities for the realisation of entrepreneurial opportunities, which might provide a quality offer that, in time, will attract higher-level earners to spend time here.

Public Realm Enhancement:

We were very pleased to see the proposals within this section, some of which have emerged from our Big Map and Shared Space activities. The objective to encourage visitors to explore the town is laudable but the existing configuration of car parking, ring-road and one way systems, combined with the use of the High Street as a short-cut to other outlying destinations all presently mitigate against this.

Whilst our focus lies upon the river corridor we are aware that the commercial/retail and subsequent footfall has not only migrated out of the town centre but also ‘downhill’ away from the High Street, Tower Hill and Market Street. The historic centre of Haverfordwest has a difficult topography with steep inclines that make exploration of these parts on foot physically exerting.

Ironically some of the best spaces, views and architectural settings can be found here. The views across the ‘topographical grain’ from Goat Street toward the castle, and vice versa from the Town Museum on Castle Green are stunningly picturesque.

Further thought should be given to improving town centre car parking serving the upper central district, such as on the former library site (‘development site g’ on the key framework plan). This would mean visitors are able to arrive via the ring road in a central location, near to historic features such as the Castle, and with walking routes from the car from which the whole town can be reached and explored much more easily. Currently the

visitor is not encouraged to walk from riverside parking to the upper town, and is instead presented with a steep climb up along a busy traffic-route.

Better strategic parking combined with a 'shared space' approach that limits vehicular access to the High Street, would improve and enhance the existing environment and encourage visitors to walk down the hill to the river, as well as to explore the surrounding historic streets and squares. More activity would help to encourage new uses of the many vacant properties there.

Whilst we are very aware of the issue of travel and traffic in Haverfordwest, we recognise that there are challenges such as the cost in modelling highways-use and making major changes to the road traffic system. There are however, potential emerging scenarios for events, such as the food festival- Haverfoodfest, where it could be of benefit to 'reclaim the streets' in ways that have been done here before. Frome in Somerset benefits from a huge influx of visitors to its Sunday street market, held monthly, which fills the town requiring roads to be closed. We visited the market to see for ourselves as part of a 'Go and see visit' in December 2015.

We would like to see the community given the opportunity through a process of engagement to trial and pilot ways of addressing these challenges e.g. close the road through Haverfordwest for a day with a programme of similar street activity that animates and enthuses the business and residential community by giving them the space to explore what is possible. This kind of approach requires an enabling intention for local events, and this point is applicable to the wider points made throughout our response.

Through our activity and that of others we have witnessed the challenges that have made some community-led events difficult or impossible to run. The events are often developed with the intention of drawing communities together for a positive experience and to attract visitors and give them a good quality, authentic destination to visit. However, they are often thwarted by insurances, licenses and other paperwork. We don't deny the need for these to be in place, but to create a vibrant place we recommend a project along the lines of PLANED's previously successful training programme which provided support and training on key issues of running community events. The public realm is enlivened by events. Events such as Festivals create a sense of occasion and of place and have additional economic benefit to the surrounding businesses located in the town centre.

Riverside Corridor:

In our 'Big Map' engagement events, stakeholder groups focussed on the riverside by mapping the areas, drawing on overlays and writing feedback with their thoughts and ideas about Haverfordwest's riverside now and in the future. Key themes emerged that were subsequently included in the Big Map report and exhibition guide.

The river was seen as a major asset with a number of key buildings, sites and recreational spaces, but these are poorly connected and this mitigates against waterfront development. As previously mentioned, the notion of a linear park could provide the greening that many people asked for along the town reach with walking and cycle routes that link the separate places in one continuous scheme.

Distinct green spaces to better connect with are

- Fortune's Frolic, where a newly improved path follows the river estuary to Uzmaston,

- The woodlands and meadows to the north of Bridge Meadow.
- the green open space downstream from the Priory to Haroldston/ Clay lanes

We have found that a new footbridge is not necessary and would be restrictive to potential future development on the water that retains the original function of Haverfordwest as a port. This might include for example a tidal lock (proposed in the Big Map: 'Back to the future')) to accommodate river traffic and leisure boats with moorings in the Quays.

A more immediate and achievable investment at this stage would be to restore the lower Gas Quay and create the path link leading directly to the Frolic. Similarly a new riverside cycle/footpath on the opposite bank would connect the town with the historic sites at the Priory and Haroldston Hall ruins, through the 're-wilded' green space overlooking the estuary on the site of a former rubbish tip. There is equal potential to forge similar links upstream to nearby meadows and wooded areas above Bridge Meadow.

A comprehensive linear riverside park planned in the longer term, could be implemented sooner in the development of small scale 'pocket parks' that would 'seed' the idea as fragments of a bigger unified proposal. A 'pocket parks' concept brought initially to Confluence's 'Ideas lab' has been taken a step further through one of the Confluence partners, Transition Haverfordwest, and a pilot scheme is being developed on a plot of ground situated along the river in County Hall's car park and grounds.

Development proposals in the flood plain are subject to NRA consultee approval at planning stage and will be subject to producing a Flood consequence assessment³

Movement and Legibility

The Shared Space concept explores this area and we would repeat that we need our communities to be able to experiment with space. There are many ways this can be done. For example, a relatively simple and potential 'easy gain' with far reaching benefits would be to explore different ways of paying for parking which doesn't restrict people's time but encourages them to continue shopping, drinking coffee or enjoying an art installation, knowing that they can pay on their return.

We need people to be able to stop and enter Haverfordwest rather than being encouraged to circulate around the town. A contemporary urban planning approach would be to implement a democratic 'shared space' in the town centre where differentiation between vehicles and pedestrians is minimised, with signage and kerbing removed so that the driver is made much more aware of his or her surroundings and becomes more responsive to them. This approach has been successful in towns and cities on the Continent and more recently elsewhere in the UK.

Currently the road system is given the highest priority, and has been planned to take people to their destinations quickly, but again this mitigates against the sense of arrival and seeing what Haverfordwest has to offer - how do we give visitors and local residents a 'taste' so they come into the town, whilst ensuring a safe space for all users of the town centre?

Reducing vehicular traffic in the centre to 'access only', altering directions of flow and/or reverting to two-way with chicaned parking where appropriate: these combined with designated areas of shared space could have significant benefits for Haverfordwest,

environmentally as well as economically. Piloting temporary traffic measures for one-off events in the town, already mentioned, would enable some practical trialling of these to be carried out.

Conclusion:

We welcome the masterplan proposals as a significant step forward toward what could be a shared vision for Haverfordwest that the community can take part in, and feel they have ownership of. We also believe this is a continuing process, and that the masterplanning exercise is just the beginning of a long-term plan to be implemented over the next decade

It's a continuing experiment. One that explores the need to be open and know when to step back: to engage but still take responsibility for and to support community growth. If we want to sustain regeneration we must invest resources in the civic body, and it's ability to engender real 'ownership' that will grow at a deeper level and from the bottom up.

To achieve this there needs to be more than plans and policies: people need to see and feel themselves to be genuinely involved in change, whether this is in the way community engagement takes place, through methods such as the examples alluded to here, and in the development of new ways of doing 'regeneration' that are enabling, involving partnerships across the public, private and third sectors.

The meeting of top-down and bottom-up is very important in this process. At points within this response we have noted the need for the community to take forward key projects. We need a balance between enabling and accountability, with key decision makers working alongside those who can make events, activities and engagement happen.

In the past too much reliance and trust has been placed in the hands of commercial developers to provide the vision and this has resulted in ordinary and ultimately unsatisfactory new development that lacks the authentic sense of place and architectural quality of the historic town.

With so much change in recent years, we must now address the basic questions of who and what town centres are for? Asking ourselves such questions could in turn offer an opportunity for reinventing our town centre. Haverfordwest could lead and contribute to a national body of research as an example in exploring new ways of living in and utilising a place-specific but also in many ways the typical market town.

'It's an interesting moment in time. The economic downturn provides us with opportunities as well as challenges. But we do have to be careful that we are not 'doing

social engineering'. Participation is vital. We are not doing it to people. People are equal in this process, it's about empowering people and their communities²

For and on behalf of the creative leads and PLANED: Confluence

26.05.16

² Nathalie Camus, Portfolio Manager at the Arts Council of Wales with responsibility for Regeneration, Sustainability, and Art in the Public Realm.

³ Proposals for development within flood plains are subject to flood consequence assessment. Refer to NRW Natural Resources Wales Flood risk map site and to the document produced on behalf of Pembrokeshire County Council: Haverfordwest Town Centre Strategic Flood Consequence Assessment