

# Llanelli Town Centre Local Development Order

Annual Report 2019 - 2020

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## 1.0 Introduction

### Background and Purpose

1.1 A 'Town Centre Task Force' was established by Carmarthenshire County Council with a view to overseeing the regeneration of Llanelli Town Centre. A key issue that the Task Force has been seeking to address is the number of vacant retail units in the town centre. The potential contribution that a shift in planning policy could make to facilitating investment and helping in incentivising development is noted.

1.2 The Llanelli Town Centre Local Development Order (Llanelli TC LDO) acknowledges a shifting role for Llanelli Town Centre to that of a destination and living environment as well as a retail centre. It seeks to introduce a permissive planning regime that would allow specified changes of use to take place without the applicant having to apply for planning permission.

1.3 Having been through a public consultation, the Llanelli TC was approved (adopted) by Carmarthenshire County Council in September 2018. The Welsh Government's letter dated 19 November 2018 confirmed their support for the Llanelli TC LDO and explained that they would not be seeking to make a direction to formally consider the Llanelli TC LDO. The Llanelli TC LDO was launched in February 2019.

1.4 The Llanelli TC LDO is active for a period of three years from its adoption. This period will however be subject to ongoing review and may be extended or reduced in light of the success or failure of the Llanelli TC LDO. Development that commences while the Llanelli TC LDO is in effect may be completed and/or continued after this three-year period. Once the Llanelli TC LDO has expired, however, no new changes of use will be allowed under its terms without conventional planning permission. Towards the end of the three-year period, Carmarthenshire County Council will assess the impact of the Llanelli TC LDO and decide whether to (i) renew the Llanelli TC LDO with no revisions, (ii) renew the Llanelli TC

LDO with new terms and conditions or (iii) revoke the Llanelli TC LDO. It is considered that the ‘3 year period’ should be February 2019 to February 2022, albeit, the Llanelli TC LDO was ‘properly up and running’ in March / April 2019.

1.5 The Llanelli TC LDO grants *conditional* planning permission for specified uses in ground and upper-floor units. It is envisaged that the Llanelli TC LDO, in permitting a wide range of compatible uses, will help to increase occupancy levels and footfall in the town centre. The Llanelli TC LDO does not grant approval for external works.

1.6 The Llanelli TC LDO is subject to a two-stage process – mainly in recognition of the other regulatory regimes that may be relevant outside of planning permission – eg building regulations approval. Proposals cannot commence until a Commencement Notice Approval is issued by the Council, irrespective of whether a Certificate of Conformity has been issued. A Certificate of Conformity will last for 3 years and should the proposal not commence before the end of that period then it will lapse. In terms of policy alignment to the Llanelli TC LDO, it can be considered that the main measure of alignment and success of the Llanelli TC LDO in planning policy terms is at the Certificate of Conformity stage. The fee is £90.00, which is payable at Certificate of Conformity stage. [More information on the Llanelli TC LDO is on this webpage.](#)

#### Requirement to produce Annual Monitoring Reports

1.7 The Welsh Government doesn’t prescribe the format by which Local Authorities should prepare monitoring reports for Local Development Orders (LDOs). However, the circular ‘Local Development Orders: Guidance for Local Planning Authorities (circular 003/2012)’ does provide some general guidance on the content of such reports and where they should be published. The circular states that reports should be published in accordance with section 76 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and should form part of a Local Planning Authority’s (LPA)’s Annual Planning Performance Report.

1.8 Of note within the circular is this extract from paragraph 1.27 *“LPAs will also be obliged to report each year to the Welsh Government on the extent to which it is achieving its purpose as part of the Annual Monitoring Report. The form and content of the report as it relates to LDOs has not been prescribed but is left to the reasonable discretion of LPAs”*.

1.9 Also reference is given to paragraph 2.20 of the circular : *“LPAs will be required (Schedule 4A, para 5) to prepare an Annual Report on the extent to which any adopted LDO is achieving its purpose. This will form part of the annual monitoring report required to be published under section 76 of the 2004 Act. It is not intended to prescribe the form and content of the report, but it should consider how successful the LDO has been in securing improvements to development management in the context of the Statement of Reasons. In particular, the report could address benefits arising to stakeholders, the effects of development on the environment, and matters relating to developer performance under the LDO.”*

#### Monitoring Period for this Report

1.10 It had been intended to publish the Llanelli TC LDO Annual Report for the period February 2019 to 31 March 2020 as part of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) (2019-2020) of the Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan (LDP - Adopted 2014). However, in light of the position with Covid-19, this AMR was not required to be produced for the LDP.

1.11 Therefore, this ‘stand-alone’ Llanelli TC LDO Monitoring Report has been produced – however given the time period elapsed it will cover the period 1 February 2019 to 31 December 2020.

1.12 This Report will be sent to all of the recipients listed on the Llanelli TC LDO notification list and the Llanelli Town Centre Task Force secretariat, together with the Welsh Government’s Planning Department. This Report will also be available on the Llanelli TC LDO webpage.

1.13 Whilst not formally inviting comments on the content of this Report, the Council would be happy to receive any feedback and as such any comments should be sent to [forward.planning@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:forward.planning@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)

## 2.0. Monitoring Indicators and Results

2.1 The below is extracted from Paragraph 1.4 of the Llanelli TC LDO (and is also set out in paragraph 2.6 within the Statement of Reasons): “ *After three years, the LDO will be considered a success if two or more of the following changes have occurred in the LDO area:*

- *Five or more vacant ground-floor units have been issued with Certificates of Conformity;*
- *Annual footfall has increased within the LDO area;*
- *The number of vacant ground-floor units has decreased within the LDO area;*
- *Three or more upper floor vacant units have been issued with Certificates of Conformity– this includes flats and residential uses – use class C3”*

Ground floor units (Information Source: Planning Department).

2.2 In regards the number of **vacant ground-floor** units that have been issued with Certificates of Conformity, it should be noted that from the period February 1 2019 to 31 December 2020, a total of 7 Certificates of Conformity have been issued. It is understood that 5 of these 7 have a ground floor focus. It is understood that 4 of these 5 were vacant at the time the applications were made (source: Carmarthenshire Town Centre Retail Audits – Llanelli - March 2019 / March 2020 as appropriate). The application references are: S/38640, S/39104, S/39880, S/40606 and S/40694. Also, the Council has issued a total of 4 Commencement Notice Approvals within this same period (i.e. between February 1 2019 to 31 December 2020) for 4 of the 5 Certificates of Conformity discussed above.

Footfall figures (Information Source: Footfall Counters).

2.3 In regards **footfall**, it should be noted there are counters placed at Vaughan Street, Stepney Street West and Stepney Street East. The total footfall data is based on volume rather than numbers of individual persons visiting the town centre. Percentages comparisons are provided. Regard should be made to the clear impact that Covid-19 will have in 2020 on footfall. The 2018 data is used to provide a baseline.

2.4 The total annual footfall for the period starting January 2019 to the end of December 2019 was 0.75% lower than the period starting January 2018 to the end of December 2018. (Note the Llanelli TC LDO was only launched in February 2019 and did not truly 'bed in' until March/April 2019). The total annual footfall for the period starting January 2020 to end December 2020 was 32.92% lower than the period starting January 2019 to the end of December 2019 (note reference to Covid-19 impact in paragraph 2.3 above).

2.5 Given the issues arising with Covid-19 in 2020, perhaps a more comparable analysis – particularly from a retail point of view (Christmas period) – would be December 2019 (well into the Llanelli TC LDO period) and December 2018. It should be noted in this regard that the December 2019 footfall was 9.7% higher than the December 2018 footfall.

2.6 Also, perhaps of interest (pre lockdown 2020) is that the January 2020 footfall was 4.72% higher than the January 2019 footfall.

2.7 The above data is intended to provide a guide and should be read with the awareness of the wider work and efforts of the Town Centre Task Force and the Business Improvement District (BID) / Ymlaen Llanelli. The work done in terms of organising events etc in the Town Centre is noted and in this regard the Llanelli TC LDO should be seen as part of a wider package of interventions.



2.8 Unfortunately, due to the impact of Covid-19, the 2020 figures (post March 2020) are not going to provide much in the way of information that can be used for comparison.

Vacant Units (Information Source: Planning Department).

2.9 In regards **vacant units**, [reference is made to the Carmarthenshire Town Centre Retail Audits on this webpage](#). These represent the best available data for vacancy levels within Llanelli Town Centre, albeit the study area is a larger area than the Llanelli TC LDO Area itself (i.e. it is based on the Town Centre boundary as set out within the LDP). With regards, Llanelli – notable analysis is as follows. (Note - figures rounded).

- March 2018 : number of units in the study area: 390, 15 % vacant.
- March 2019 : number of units in the study area 389, 16% vacant.
- March 2020 number of units in the study area 391, 18% vacant.
- September 2020 (covid-19 impact assessment) : number of units in the study area 391, 22% vacant.
- December 2020 (covid-19 impact assessment - not yet published): number of units in study area 387, 22% vacant.

2.10 Further to the above, an officer analysis has been undertaken on the Llanelli TC LDO area itself. The results are set out below. (Note - figures rounded).

- March 2018 : number of units in the study area: 268, 16 % vacant.
- March 2019 : number of units in the study area 268, 17% vacant.
- March 2020 : number of units in the study area 268, 19% vacant.
- September 2020 (covid-19 impact assessment) : number of units in the study area 268, 26% vacant.
- December 2020 (covid-19 impact assessment): number of units in study area 264, 25% vacant.

Upper Floor Units (Information Source: Planning Department).

2.11 In regards upper floor vacant units that have been issued with Certificates of Conformity, (as stated in paragraph 2.2 previously) from the period February 1 2019 to 31 December 2020, a total of 7 Certificates of Conformity have been issued. 2 of these 7 had an upper floor residential focus – see below:

1 Application reference: S/39951 – The description was “*GROUND FLOOR TO REMAIN A1 - CHANGE OF USE FROM A1 TO 4 NO. (C3(A) DWELLINGS ON 1ST, 2ND AND 3RD FLOORS*”

2 Application reference: PL/00803 – The description was “*Change of use of the first floor from retail storage to 2 flats with 2 bedrooms each*”

## 3.0 Conclusions and lessons learned

### Marketing

3.1 One of the key elements that will require improvement is marketing/awareness raising of the Llanelli TC LDO. It is not considered that this should be done in isolation by the LPA. In noting the Council's wider commitment to seek to assist in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, and indeed the ongoing efforts to regenerate the Town Centre, this is considered very important.

### 'One team' approach

3.2 Internally for the Council, the development and rolling out of the Llanelli TC LDO has required a one-team approach in terms of Forward Planning, Information Management, Development Management and Regeneration. An area based approach (Llanelli) as opposed to a section / departmental based approach, has allowed for this to happen.

### Limitations

3.3 Limitations on the usage of the Llanelli TC LDO (particularly in terms of upper floor residential) can include financial viability and ownership of units. Furthermore, the Llanelli TC LDO only allows internal changes of use and does not waive the requirement to obtain 'non planning' related consents.

### Lessons Learned

3.4 Developing the Llanelli TC LDO has allowed for the Council to consider the introduction of LDOs in Carmarthen and Ammanford Town Centres also. The lessons learned are invaluable given the relatively limited number of LDOs in place across Wales.

## Recommendations

3.5 There is no justification at present for revoking the Llanelli TC LDO and it is considered that it should continue to be in place for the full 3 years.

3.6 The future form and function of the Llanelli TC LDO will be subject to review as part of the adoption of the Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan (the Revised Plan is scheduled for adoption in Summer 2022).