

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	14th July 2026
TITLE	Town Centre Regeneration
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Follow-up report / Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 – A Prosperous Gwynedd
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor R. Medwyn Hughes

1. Why does it need to be scrutinised?

- 1.1 One of the priority plans of the Council's Plan 2023-28 is 'Regenerating Communities and Town Centres'. A component of the plan is the preparation of town/city centre action plans for individual towns.
- 1.2 During the Committee's meeting on [8th June 2023](#) the initial steps to prepare a project plan, the arrangements for the preparation of Town Centre Plans and the basis for prioritising the regeneration of Gwynedd's town centres were scrutinised. The previous report also sets context and highlights challenges and changes facing town centres and is included as Appendix 1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work that has been carried out since then.
- 1.3 Progress scrutiny will be an opportunity for the Committee to receive an update on the work and consider its impact.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

2.1. The Scrutiny Committee is specifically asked to scrutinise the following:

- What has been achieved?
- Who has been involved in the development of the plans?
- What is the impact of the plans?
- What has been learnt from the implementation of the plans?

3. Overview of town centre regeneration activity

- 3.1 Town centres and high street areas have faced challenges and a period of change over the past few years. These changes are due to reasons such as online shopping, changes in social patterns, the development of shopping centres on the outskirts of towns, business rates and high rents. The situation has intensified since the Covid period, and this has meant that we have to look closely at how to regenerate our town centres.

- 3.2 With all the change underway it is a real challenge to repurpose town centres and to develop and implement interventions with the intention of trying to make them vibrant, attractive centres and nice places to live, work and spend time in.
- 3.3 For this report, a wide range of activities have been incorporated into the central regeneration work, including:
- Preparing and developing town centre schemes / local regeneration schemes
 - Develop and implement Gwynedd Council's town centre projects supporting and providing grants to external organisations and groups that contribute to the regeneration of a town centre or local community
 - Co-ordinating empty property interventions in town centres
- 3.4 An outline of these will be given in the next parts of the report.
- 3.5 The report focuses on activities being carried out by the Regeneration Programmes Service within the Economy and Community Department. The Service consists of a small team, including a manager and three permanent regeneration officers. The Service is highly dependent on securing grants for the development and implementation of projects, including temporary project officers.

4. Preparing and developing town centre plans ('Placemaking Plans')

- 4.1 As the second largest county in Wales, Gwynedd inevitably has many towns of different nature, function and size. The definition of a town can be interpreted in several ways. The Gwynedd and Anglesey Joint Local Development Plan 2011-2026 and the Snowdonia Local Development Plan 2016 - 2031 offer the following framework:

Sub-Regional Retail Centre	Bangor
Urban Retail Centre	Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Pwllheli
Local Retail Centre	Abersoch, Barmouth, Bethesda, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Criccieth, Llanberis, Nefyn, Penrhyndeudraeth, Penygroes, Tywyn
<i>Local Service Centre *</i>	<i>Dolgellau, Y Bala</i>
<i>Service Settlement *</i>	<i>Aberdyfi, Harlech</i>

** Snowdonia Local Development Plan 2016 - 2031*

- 4.2 Based on the above classification, a programme of work was developed for the development of Town Centre Plans (or 'Placemaking Plans') for the main towns. Copies of these plans can be found on the Council's website : [Town Centre Placemaking Plans](#) and include:
- Bangor Placemaking Plan (August 2023)
 - Caernarfon Town Centre : Placemaking Plan (August 2023)
 - Porthmadog Placemaking Plan (February 2024)
 - Pwllheli Placemaking Plan (June 2024)
 - Bala Town Centre Placemaking Plan (June 2024)
 - Dolgellau Placemaking Plan

- 4.3 The main purpose of these plans is to create a vision for how a place should develop, improve and function for the people who live, work and visit there. It helps ensure that future development is focused on creating high-quality, sustainable, attractive and inclusive places rather than just providing buildings or infrastructure.
- 4.4 In preparing the Placemaking Plans, it is worth noting :
- Financial support was received from Welsh Government through its Transforming Towns programme
 - The Design Commission for Wales guidelines were followed in drawing up the plans
 - The process of drawing up the Town Centre Plans was inclusive – including a series of engagement and consultation sessions with stakeholders, Members and Council Departments.
- 4.5 In addition, as part of the Gwynedd Regeneration Framework, local regeneration plans have been developed for each of the 13 local regeneration areas throughout the County. The Town Centre Plans focus on specific areas and are incorporated into the area regeneration plans.
- 4.6 Consistent with one of the key principles of the Regeneration Framework, the town centre plans also recognise the role, importance and participation of local businesses, groups, and organisations in the regeneration of town centres.
- 4.7 The approach to collaboration varies from town to town but the Regeneration Programme Service role includes co-ordinating and supporting a conduit for the regeneration of the town. Multi-agency regeneration partnerships exist in Bangor and Caernarfon, and there are regular meetings to develop and report on the progress of regeneration plans, to identify new opportunities and to reflect on the impact of schemes.
- 4.8 The development of regeneration organisations in Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Dolgellau and Bala are currently being developed and supported, with positive progress being made across all towns.
- 4.9 The Action Plans associated with the Placemaking Plans are central to the discussions of the regeneration organisations. They are living documents that are owned by the local organisations and are regularly reviewed. They are also a strategic basis for applying for funding opportunities to realise schemes where there is evidence that they are a local priority.
- 4.10 Following the completion of a Placemaking Plan for individual towns there is then an emphasis on developing and implementing programmes or projects that have been identified within the plans.

5. Development and Implementation of Town Centre Regeneration Projects

- 5.1 Normally, the Service’s ability to implement town centre regeneration projects will be dependent on securing external grants. The Service may also use external grants to establish funds and offer third-party grants.
- 5.2 Since 2022/3, the Service has secured grants worth £31.8m for the development and implementation of town centre regeneration projects. A list of projects is included in Appendix 2.
- 5.3 During this period, the main grant programmes are:
- Transforming Towns Programme, Welsh Government
 - Levelling Up Fund, UK Government
 - Shared Prosperity Fund Programme, UK Government
 - Pride in Place Impact Fund, UK Government
- 5.4 Individual funding programmes with have specific objectives, guidelines, and requirements, and therefore it is necessary to ensure that proposals and applications comply with these. Also, there has been a tendency over recent years for financial programs to be implemented for a relatively short period of time, and as a result, the implementation period is limited, and the emphasis is very often on schemes with the ability to implement them within a short period of time.
- 5.5 It should also be noted that these grant investments are above the core work of different Services/Departments and that there is an opportunity to do more in the future.
- 5.6 During the 2026/7 period, arrangements are also in place to implement funding earmarked through the Pride in Place Impact Fund and the Local Growth Fund.
- 5.7 At its meeting on 10th February 2026, Cabinet decided to allocate £1.5m from the Pride in Place Impact Fund as follows :

Schemes	Leading	Pride in Place Fund	Total Cost
County Plans			
Town and Community Councils Fund	Local Councils	£400,000	£400,000
Infrastructure and urban routes	Highways, Municipal & YGC	£240,000	£258,000
Bangor City Centre Regeneration Programme			
Bangor Health and Wellbeing Centre	Economy and Community	£50,000	£850,000
Bangor Property Improvement Scheme	Economy and Community	£75,000	£75,000
College Road Improvements	Highways, Municipal & YGC	£76,500	£76,500
Storiell site improvements	Economy and Community	£125,000	£300,000
Town Centre Improvement Schemes			
Pwllheli Property Improvement Grant	Economy and Community	£75,000	£75,000
Pwllheli Signage Scheme	Economy and Community	£50,000	£200,000

Eldon Square Improvement, Dolgellau	Highways, Municipal & YGC	£50,000	£84,000
Barmouth public facilities	Highways, Municipal & YGC	£75,000	£98,000
Library Improvements			
Caernarfon Library	Economy and Community	£100,000	£650,000
Tywyn Library Upgrade	Economy and Community	£125,000	£450,000
Co-ordination costs	Economy and Community	£58,500	£58,500
	Total Amount	£1,500,000	£3,575,000

5.8 In preparing this report, it is intended to report on the Local Growth Fund - Plans 2026/27 to Cabinet on 7th July : [Cabinet 07/07/14](#) .

5.9 Whilst the Local Growth Fund prioritises the development of the economy and ensuring growth with an emphasis on activity of regional importance, it will also be seen that the proposed package includes a programme of support and support from Menter Gwynedd; Bangor City Centre programme, and the Culture for Growth Scheme programme with projects included within the Pwllheli, Bala and Porthmadog placemaking plans.

6. Empty Properties

6.1 Dealing with empty properties has been identified as a priority by the Council and is part of the 'Regenerating Communities and Town Centres' work stream within the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28. The Service co-ordinates a cross-departmental Empty Property Group established to coordinate issues related to vacant properties.

6.2 The Group is made up of officers from the Departments of Environment (Planning Services and Building Control), Economy and Community (Regeneration); Housing and Property (Housing and Empty Housing Enforcement), Finance (Rates) and Legal.

6.3 Different Council Services/Departments implement different interventions relating to vacant properties such as:

- providing information and advice (general)
- Technical provision / support
- provide financial support (grants or loans)
- threat of enforcement action
- Recover financial debts
- formal enforcement (last option)

6.4 Generally, the resource and time requirement is intensified when working down this list.

7. Town Centre Performance Indicators and Data

7.1 As part of the Regeneration Programme Service's performance management arrangements, core indicators over the last 3 years are as follows.

Performance Indicators	2023/4	2024/5	2025/6
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Total investment secured for town centre projects	£8,336,970	£8,495,308	£8,173,692
Empty units coming into use	3	10	15
Properties improved	34	26	13

7.2 The Service will also report on individual project outputs for relevant funding programmes.

7.3 More recently, work is being done to evaluate specific plans. For example, during 2024/5, £1.8m was invested through the first round of the Shared Prosperity Fund on the Town Centre: Laying the Foundations for Investment, Pride and Vibrancy, a package that included projects across the county. This package comprised cross-departmental projects including improvements to the North Quay in Pwllheli, signage for the city of Bangor, public art schemes for the slate towns of Bala, Bangor and Harlech, the upgrading of Maes Criccieth along with a smart street furniture scheme, community safety schemes and a buy local promotion scheme.

7.4 This link provides a summary of the successes and impact of this scheme - '[Laying the Foundations for Town Centre Investment, Pride and Bustle](#)' programme projects. The main outputs of these programmes were upgrades to buildings and public spaces, creative and heritage developments, developments to a public path network along with pre-preparation and feasibility work completed. A copy of an evaluation report on this scheme has been included as Appendix 3.

7.5 During 2025/6 a further £1.4m of funding was secured through the Shared Prosperity Fund and saw the scheme evolve into Gwynedd Ni where there was a wider, cross-departmental package of investments. A copy of a valuation report for the scheme is included in Appendix 4.

7.6 In recognising the role and contribution of local organisations a Town and Community Councils Fund was established across the county. A list of projects supported through the Fund during 2025/6 is included as Appendix 5. Following the success of the Fund in 2025/6, a further Town and Community Council Fund has been established during 2026/7 funded by the Pride in Place Impact Fund.

Empty Properties and Town Centre Data

7.7 In May 2024, a mapping exercise was carried out in Gwynedd town centres by the Service and the Research Unit, as part of the activity of the Vacant Property Group. The aim of the work was to provide an up-to-date and consistent picture of the vacancy situation across the towns of the county.

7.8 To ensure a consistent approach to data collection and comparison, the Local Development Plan's town centre boundaries were used as the analytical basis. It can be argued that this approach can influence percentages in some areas – for example, by including buildings that are not integral to the high street – but was essential for ensuring consistency across locations and allowing comparisons over time.

7.9 The table shows the number of empty properties as well as the percentage in May 2024, 2025, and 2026 (draft), arranged by Local Development Plan (LDP) categories and individual towns:

LDP Category	Town	Number of Vacant Properties [2024]	Number of Vacant Properties [2025]	Number of Vacant Properties [2026]
Sub-Regional Retail Centre	Bangor	48	43	50
Urban Retail Centre	Caernarfon	34	21	28
	Porthmadog	14	10	11
	Pwllheli	25	23	29
Skip to content _ Skip to footer	Dolgellau	16	7	15
	Bala Town	9	8	7
Local Retail Centre	Blaenau Ffestiniog	6	6	8
	Bethesda	5	5	9
	Llandudno	4	4	6
	Penrhyndeudraeth	3	3	1
	Penygroes	4	2	2
	Barmouth	12	8	11
	Tywyn	6	6	5
	Criccieth	1	3	0
	Abersoch	1	0	0
	Nefyn	2	2	3
Service Settlement	Harlech	5	5	3
	Aberdyfi	0	0	4
Total		195	156	192

Source : Gwynedd Council Survey

7.10 The number of vacant properties within individual towns will be constantly changing, and so the results of the survey above offer a snapshot at a given time, based on specific areas. Nevertheless, the figures suggest that the number of vacant properties within town centres decreased between 2024 and 2025 and increased again in 2026. It is also found that the largest number of empty properties in Bangor city centre and Pwllheli town centre are priorities for 2026/7.

7.11 We are also developing an annual data profile for Gwynedd's town centres. These profiles offer a picture of the current situation of Gwynedd's towns – including data on population, building occupancy and empty properties. Copies of the 2025 data profile are included as Appendix 6 and can be viewed via the link below (the 2026 data will be available in the coming weeks) : [Town Centre Profiles](#).

Measuring the Impact of Regeneration Projects

7.12 The Service's efforts to target and secure external grants for the development and implementation of regeneration projects have been very successful. However, it is very

difficult to prove associated the impacts on town centre areas. The Service measures direct outputs for projects (often to meet funders requirements) that do not measure wider impact. Similarly, the Service will commission evaluation reports on specific projects which are valuable in considering which aspects were successful, as well as any lessons to be learned. It should also be notes that the vibrancy of town centres will be influenced and affected by a very wide range of factors rather than a project output.

- 7.13 As a result, it is an aspect that the Service has sought to respond to – through the recently adopted [Economy Strategy](#).
- 7.14 The Strategy's vision is an innovative, productive, and low carbon economy that strengthens the Welsh language, creates new opportunities and contributes to the well-being of all – including the main themes of Enterprise, People and Place. One of the priorities of the Place theme is to ensure the best possible connectivity and infrastructure – including supporting town centre regeneration.
- 7.15 The Strategy provides for a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, a copy of which is included as Appendix 7. The table below summarises the outputs and indicators relevant to town centre regeneration activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	Relevant elements of town centre regeneration
<p>OUTPUTS The direct product of a project or activity in the short term</p>	<p>A14 : Public sector investment in capital projects A29 : Number of jobs created A30 : Towns invested A31 : Empty buildings returned to use A32 : Improved public spaces</p>
<p>RESULTS Medium-term indicators derived from plans and activity, and reflecting change in behaviour</p>	<p>Q22 : Residents living/visiting towns have received investment Q24 : Increase in the number of visitors to town centres</p>
<p>EFFECT Indicators of long-term, strategic change over a period of years</p>	<p>E19 : Town centres that are more resilient and sustainable, with fewer dilapidated or vacant buildings</p>

- 7.16 By having a consistent selection of indicators, it will be possible to evaluate the impact of activities and review progress against the priorities of the Strategy.
- 7.17 With the framework now in place, there will be further work to be done this year specifically for town centre regeneration – seeking to harmonise data and indicators for the Service's activities.

8. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- 8.1 The report seeks to summarise the main activities of the Regeneration Programmes Service which have sought to support and regenerate town centres. Of course, the town centre agenda overlaps with a number of services within the Department of Economy, including Business Support, Community Support Service, Maritime, Museums and Arts, and Libraries.
- 8.2 Similarly, town centre issues also apply to a number of Council Departments operating in areas such as planning, transport, car parks, highways, street care etc.
- 8.3 In addressing the change and challenges facing our town centres, the following issues have emerged in the implementation of recent town centre programmes and projects:
- Town centres continue to go through a period of change and uncertainty. Such changes are influenced by factors that are much wider than the Gwynedd or Wales area
 - Efforts over the past few years have focused on targeting external grants to develop and implement projects aimed at improving or revitalising town centres
 - Fundamental issues such as business rates levels, parking fees and image are issues that are being raised as barriers to increasing the vitality of town centres. It is suggested that further attention needs to be paid to such issues as well as attracting investment to town centres.
 - Over the past few years an effort has been made to distribute benefit across the county. When regeneration investment is spread too widely across multiple areas, the impact can weaken and the consequences and impact are not as obvious. In contrast, an alternative approach would be to target and focus investment on fewer schemes with the potential to create a more pronounced impact.
 - In the last three years, there has been uncertainty regarding key regeneration programs often with a short timescale. This means that there is an emphasis on short-term plans where they can be implemented within the available timeframes.
 - Locally, coordination between partners (local authorities, businesses, landowners, organisations, the community) can be complex and challenging due to different priorities. The investment in developing the Placemaking Plans and supporting the local partnerships is an effort to alleviate these challenges.
 - Practical and technical issues are also often challenging in the implementation of regeneration projects. This includes the issues such as infrastructure maintenance, resolving land ownership issues, and ensuring that someone takes clear long-term responsibility for the development. These responsibilities are often associated with a cost that may not be included as part of a plan.
 - Continuing to strengthen and support the local partnerships is an important step in looking ahead to future priorities. The partnerships are important collaborative vehicles that enable communities, businesses and authorities to share knowledge, coordinate projects and build confidence. Maintaining this will ensure that the regeneration remains centralised and reflects local needs.
 - In terms of empty properties, the Service's efforts over the past few years have aimed to support developers and owners of vacant properties through various grants and financial loans. During 2026/7 we will also explore potential opportunities for developing more proactive interventions that could include

purchasing and renovating empty properties directly or supporting local partners to do so.

- Further work is required (as part of the new Economy Strategy) to develop a monitoring and evaluation structure for the town centre regeneration work stream so that we can measure what the plans and activities deliver individually, and their composite impact.

8.4 Following the establishment of the new Government in Parliament in May, we will also consider any changes in town centre regeneration policies or programmes.

9. Consultation

9.1 Consultation has been at the heart of the preparation of the 13 Gwynedd Ni Area Plans and the Placemaking Plans. It provided an opportunity for the communities, businesses, local stakeholders and Council departments to identify opportunities and shape the priorities for their areas. The same principle has also been important in establishing and supporting town centre partnerships, where negotiation has and continues to be essential to the formation of successful collaboration arrangements.

9.2 Going forward, when developing any new plans and reviewing existing ones, ongoing consultation is going to be key to respond to changing needs over time.

10. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

10.1 Much of Cyngor Gwynedd's regeneration work reflects the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act by working together broadly to create strong and sustainable communities. Strategic regeneration projects are being developed to improve the economy, communities, environment and culture of Gwynedd in the long term.

10.2 Regeneration work seeks to be integrated and inclusive as it means collaboration in across departments (including Departments of Housing and Property, Environment and Highways, Municipal and YGC), as well as working with a range of partners, organisations and organisations and the community to identify priorities and vision.

11. Impact on Characteristics of Equality, Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty

11.1 Equality and language issues are at the heart of all regeneration plans, and an Impact Assessment will be developed and implemented into Regeneration Programmes.

12. Recommendation

12.1 The views of the Scrutiny Committee are invited on the contents of the report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 : Report presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 8th June 2023

Appendix 2 : Summary of Regeneration Grants 2022-2026

Appendix 3 : Evaluation of Gwynedd Town Centres SPF Project

Appendix 4 : Evaluation of Gwynedd Ni Project 2026

Appendix 5 : Gwynedd Local Council Fund 2025/6

Appendix 6 : Town centre data profile 2025

Appendix 7 : Economy Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework