
BRIEFING NOTE: LLANBEDR TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS

1. PURPOSE OF THIS NOTE

The purpose of this note is to set out Ambition North Wales' position regarding the Llanbedr Transport Improvements scheme in Gwynedd. It reflects the current position in September 2026.

It is intended to inform work of the Welsh Government's Task and Finish Group that has been set up to identify if there is a possible funding source, or mixture of funding sources, suitable for progressing the scheme.

2. LLANBEDR AND SCHEME HISTORY

Llanbedr is a small village of around 650, on the A496 between Barmouth and Harlech. The village has faced significant traffic problems for decades.

Key issues include:

- A narrow, listed stone bridge over the Afon Artro which creates a pinch point on the A496 through the village.
- On-road parking reducing road width and creating conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.
- Heavy seasonal tourism traffic can cause significant traffic delays on the A496.
- Traffic along Mochras Road to Shell Island campsite, rises from around 150 vehicles per day in November to 2,000 per day during peak times.
- Inadequate active travel provision with discontinuous footways on both the A496 and Mochras Road, with no safe provision for cyclists despite National Cycle Network Route 8 passing through the village.

Crucially from a funding perspective, access to Llanbedr Airfield is located approximately 1.5km west of the village.

Aspirations for transport improvements are longstanding:

- 1950s – Bypass proposals first discussed
- 1992 – Cyngor Gwynedd proposed single carriageway bypass. Scheme not progressed
- 2015 – WelTAG study proposes 1.5km bypass with design speed of 100km/h, including grade separated access to airfield. Cost £15m.
- 2019 – Funding package assembled, including £4m from EU for road and airfield development
- 2020 – Planning consent granted
- 2021 – Roads Review Panel recommend scheme should not be progressed.
- 2021 – EU funding lost, resulting in Snowdonia Aerospace's withdrawal of investment
- 2022-23 – Welsh Government provide funding for early WelTAG work using 2024 guidance

- 2025 – WelTAG 2 completed, recommending a low speed relief road combined with a package of sustainable transport improvements
- 2025-26 – CJC recommends that £400k Regional Transport Fund awarded to the project for WelTAG3 work.

3. WELTAG PROPOSALS

The Case for Change that was undertaken at the start of the most recent WelTAG business case development process identified the problems, constraints and opportunities shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Problems	
• Safety (high collision rate) • Reliance on private car (80% mode share, long distance trips) • Access to services (in 10% most deprived in Wales for Access to services)	• Community severance and sense of place • Visitor economy (more than double traffic demand in summer) • Resilience (no alternative route)
Constraints	Opportunities
• National Park • Flooding (river and coastal) • Historic environment • Road alignment (no space for widening or reallocation of road space)	• Active travel improvement opportunity • Rail station, with opportunity to improve rail and bus services • Employment – potential development of airfield • Sense of place (public realm)

The study area for the WelTAG work is shown in Figure 1.

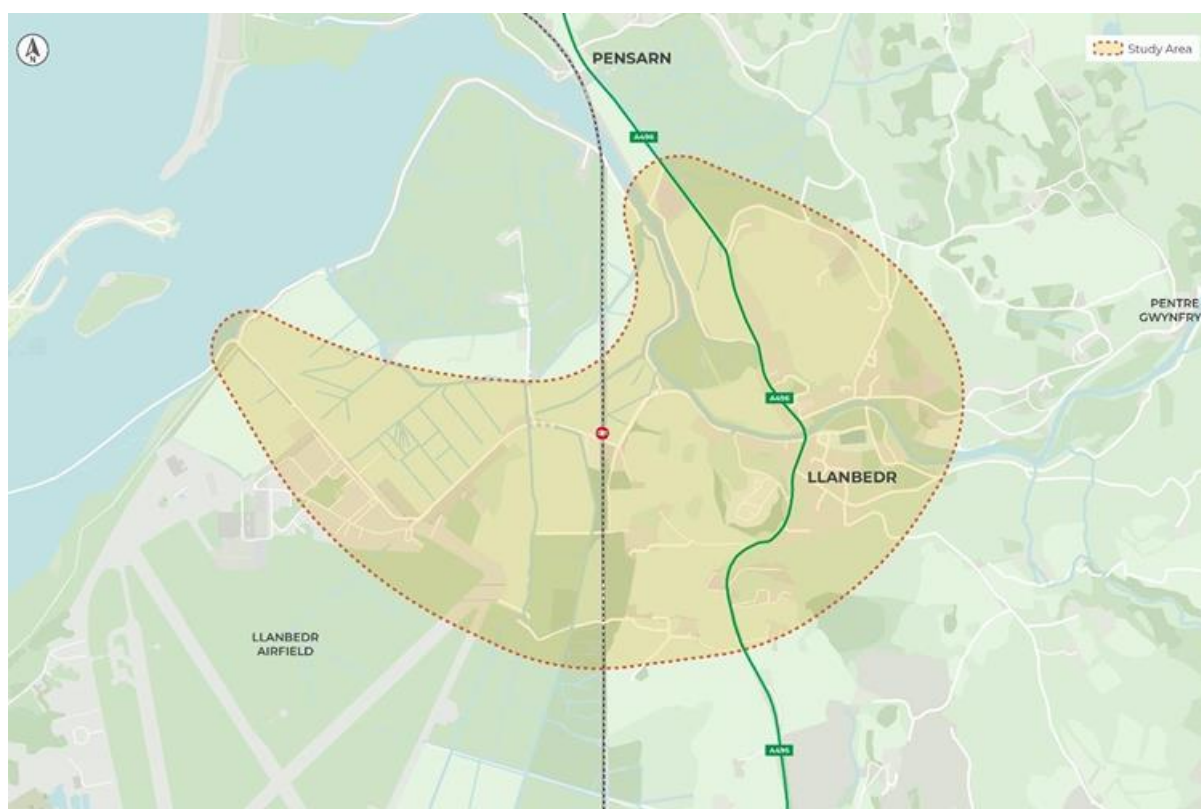


Figure 1: WelTAG Study Area (WSP, Cyngor Gwynedd)

A wide range of transport enhancements were considered through the WelTAG stages 1 and 2.

The best performing options are those that combine a low-speed relief road with measures that enhance sustainable transport. The recommendations include:

- A 40mph relief road.
- In the village
 - speed management (speed limit reduction and signage),
 - shared space over Afon Artro Bridge,
 - parking restrictions,
 - cycle parking,
 - delivery lockers,
 - bus stop,
 - improved street lighting,
 - welcome signage and public realm improvements,
 - public transport services departure boards,
 - raised table and pedestrian crossing,
 - restriction of HGVs through the village
 - active travel route improvements along the A496, to the Mill Caravan Park (footway with on road cycling), and footway improvements to Public Footpath 41 and through Bryn Deiliog.
- Along Mochras Road:
 - speed management (speed limit reduction and signage),
 - closure of Mochras Road to motor vehicles,
 - traffic calming measures and an active travel route through Maes Artro, from the village to the Railway Station (reallocation of road space), and from the Railway Station to Shell Island (footway with on-road cycling)

4. LLANBEDR AIRFIELD AS A STRATEGIC NATIONAL ASSET

The Llanbedr Airfield site is considered to have the potential to be a strategic national asset in the aerospace sector.

The space economy is valuable, and growing, part of the UK economy:

- UK space economy £18.6 billion annual income and 55,000 jobs in 2025¹.
- Estimated to grow to £25.8 billion by end of the decade with another 28-55,000 jobs²

Similarly, the drones sector is becoming increasingly important to the UK economy: :

- UK market £600-700 million in 2025, growing to £1.1-1.2 billion by 2030³.
- Commercial drone adoption alone could be worth up to £45 billion to the UK economy by 2030⁴

Llanbedr airfield has huge potential to support those sectors in Wales:

¹ [Factsheet: The UK Space Sector - GOV.UK](#)

² [The PSC - Space for Growth report.pdf](#)

³ [UK UAV \(Drone\) Market Report 2025-2030 \[150 Pages & 200 Tables\]](#)

⁴ [Advancing airborne autonomy: commercial drones saving money and saving lives in the UK](#)

- Former Ministry of Defence (MoD) site until 2004.
- Sold to the Welsh Development Agency and currently on long lease to Snowdonia Aerospace LLP (SAC)
- Three runways (2.2km main runway plus 1.4km and 1.3km runways)
- Segregated airspace immediately around Llanbedr Airfield for testing of future air vehicles, including Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) Drones and Electric Air Mobility Vehicles (UK's first commercial 'Danger Area')
- Air corridor from the airfield to the existing MOD Danger Area in Cardigan Bay to enable further extended range, altitude and endurance testing including potentially near space operations

The site is referenced in the UK National Space Strategy, as having the potential to play a role in developing a whole UK Space Ecosystem, particularly in terms of orbital launch capability. It is also formally recognised by the UK Space Agency as one of four potential horizontal launch sites in the UK, and the only one in Wales.

Welsh Government's 2022 publication "Wales, a Space Nation" also details the important role Llanbedr can play.

Over the past 5 years, Snowdonia Aerospace Centre has developed a series of new Infrastructure and facilities which allows them to offer three main services:

1. Provision of flight test services to UK drone sector, including:
 - Airfield facilities
 - Permanent Danger Area
 - CAA pre-assessed test site (Summer 2025)
 - Long-term tenants
 - Anduril
 - Windracers
2. Collaborative "drones-for good" research and Development, including:
 - Project "Dragon's Eye" exploring low-cost radar for future UK air traffic management.
 - Project "Dragon's Heart" developing medical drone delivery for NHS Wales- Phase 2 to be bid in 2026 for prototype blood service delivery 2028
3. Provision of RDT&E services to UK space sector, including:
 - Phase 1 – work to enhance security, resilience
 - Project "Dragon's Nest" delivered space engineering training & STEM engagement
 - Links to M-SParc, Bangor, Wrexham & Swansea Universities
 - Phase 2 to be bid in 2026 for Space Domain Awareness capability by 2029/30
 - Phase 3,- plans to move into astro-tourism, for example the development of a planetarium

The Space Centre continues to grow and attract business and is acting as a positive, physical focus for the space industry in Wales and a focus for STEM outreach and academic engagement with Welsh universities. SAC anticipates embarking on a second phase of investment in the Space Centre from March 2027.

5. LLANBEDER AIRFIELD STRATEGIC CASE

The Snowdonia Enterprise Zone Strategic Plan was developed in 2018. It included the following objectives for the Llanbedr Airfield site:

- To continue working with the site owners and other strategic partners to develop the site as a highly competitive centre of excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), emerging technologies and aerospace and space sectors;
- Within this context to promote the site as an extension of the unique Wales UAS environment and a prime location for test, evaluation and demonstration. To continue to engage with the UK Space Agency and wider stakeholders to better understand how the site can support UK aspirations for a low cost launch facility which can also provide a strategic test and evaluation location to support the UK space sector;
- To firmly position Snowdonia Aerospace Centre as part of the wider Wales aerospace sector offer;
- To support and de-risk commercially led investment and development at the site for the benefit of all users, including small locally based enterprises;
- To ensure that the Snowdonia Aerospace Centre site/SEZ is captured as a strategic opportunity of national significance as part of Wales' emerging National Development Framework.

In March 2020, Snowdonia Aerospace LLP produced their Horizontal Spaceport Development Fund Project Spaceport Snowdonia Development Plan Final Report.

This includes the stated aim to develop Spaceport Snowdonia as a major research, development, test and evaluation centre to support UK-focussed, space-related RDT&E, training and orbital satellite launch delivery.

The report predicted that to accommodate the predicted business growth within the Spaceport Snowdonia hub, Snowdonia Aerospace would be creating a range of flexible use office, laboratory, engineering workshop and hangar space in two new technology parks situated within the airfield boundary, totalling 42,000m².

These units would be of varying size and capabilities and will be able to be rented on a weekly, monthly or annual basis (or in certain circumstances available to purchase outright). The configuration and facilities offered within the units occupied by the anchor tenants will be tailored in accordance with their respective business needs.

The Economic Impact Assessment identified the total additional contribution of the Masterplan to be up to 515 jobs from a baseline of 46, which would be expected to break down as follows:

- Additional aerodrome jobs to support Snowdonia Aerospace core business;
- Additional Technology Park jobs to support anchor tenants and visiting customers;
- New tourism-related and ancillary jobs to support the hotel, visitor centre etc.

The majority of additional jobs would be associated with the Technology Park and the business

generated by anchor tenants and visiting customers. Jobs in this category are anticipated to be a mix of temporary and existing permanent staff moving into the Snowdonia area and local recruits.

For local recruits, Snowdonia Spaceport will work in partnership with the Welsh Government/Business Wales and Cyngor Gwynedd to identify an appropriate pool of potential candidates with suitable qualifications and training. This will also be augmented by an ongoing Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) engagement with local schools and colleges and links with Aberystwyth, Bangor and Glyndwr Universities

The report concluded that they believe that Spaceport Snowdonia will be a commercially viable and profitable business, one that is a unique and national asset at the heart of the UK Space R&D programme, helping companies innovate and accelerate their development from proof-of concept through to full-scale prototype and large-scale market exploitation. Spaceport Snowdonia will also be an internationally recognised flagship for Wales offering high-tech employment, supporting tourism and helping to regenerate the regional economy.

There has been an investment of £1.5m at the site since it was designated part of the Snowdonia Enterprise Zone. This funding was used to upgrade the infrastructure at the site and create an Initial Operating Capability. In addition, £7.5m of Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) funding was awarded in 2019, £3.5m of which was to help fund £5.4m of further developments at the site with the residual amount going towards the first section of a new access road..

According to an economic appraisal report of the proposed transport improvements scheme that has been undertaken by WSP, the proposed Llanbedr low-speed relief road remains critical with respect to both the future development and security of the airfield.

Without the road scheme, it is highly unlikely that planning permission for further development will be obtained. This will mean that Snowdonia Aerospace will be unable to progress the proposed Masterplan. In its current configuration, the present access road makes it extremely difficult and unsafe to load equipment on and off the site (as well as being difficult for vehicles, including HGVs, to access the site). In addition, the Masterplan will not only expand economic activity at the airfield but will also help sustain existing levels of activity. The economic appraisal report notes that airfield has already lost three tenants because of access issues and the broader deterioration of facilities. Given the specialist nature of the facility, the relocation of tenants from the airfield also represents a direct loss of economic activity to Wales.

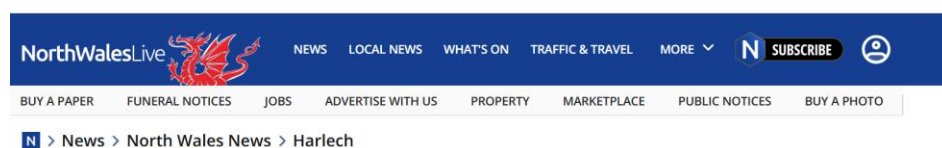
That economic appraisal report estimates that the total net additional Full Time Equivalents generated by the airfield development will be equivalent to 311 direct jobs and 199 indirect jobs. This equates to approximately £12.1 million in GVA per year to the local economy. After accounting for the reference case and estimating the Present Value of Benefits (PVB) over a 10-year period, this equates to £50,877,609 (2023 prices).

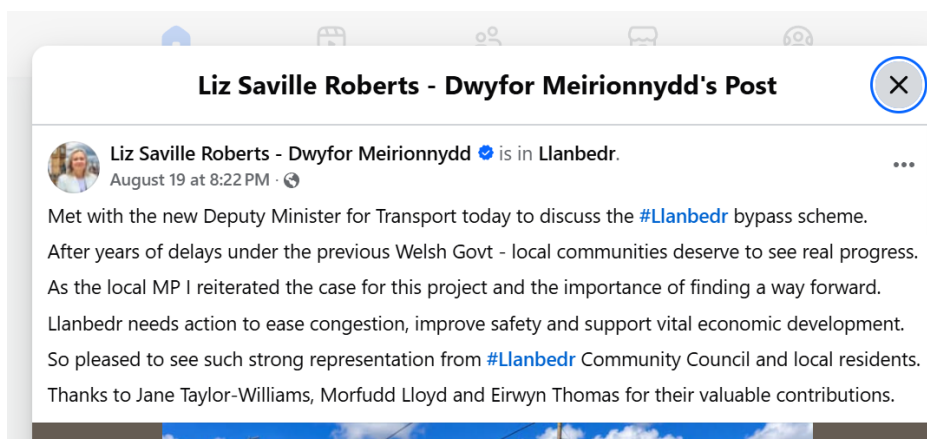
Many of the new, additional jobs will be in higher value trades where salaries will also be higher compared to some of the more traditional jobs in the area. This would mean that local workers will benefit from the skills associated with these higher value jobs. The skills associated with these trades

will be 'portable' and transferrable to other sectors, thus benefitting the local labour market and local economy substantially.

6. PUBLIC OPINION

Locally there is a lot of public support for a relief road and the associated transport improvements. A Facebook page dedicated to the topic has over 10,000 followers, and the screenshots below are from some of the headlines during summer 2026.





The public support is not without good reason. The narrow and constrained highway infrastructure in the village creates a bottle neck for traffic that has a severe impact on the local environment and community:

- Unreliable journey times
- Unsafe environment for and pedestrian cyclists
- Air quality
- Carbon emissions

The impact of these is felt more in the summer period, with the area's natural beauty, coastal location, and the proximity of one of Europe's largest campsites attracting large numbers of visitors.

7. RTP AND REGIONAL TRANSPORT FUND

Currently, one of the most important sources of funding for local transport schemes is the Regional Transport Fund, with the CJC acting as the organisation that prioritises schemes for funding from this pot.

Llanbedr Transport Improvements is an important scheme in the region, and one of the few schemes that is specifically named in our RTP. In the RTDP it is listed as a high priority scheme, and development work has been funded through RTF in the 2026/7 financial year.

However, the latest cost estimates for the scheme are shown in the Table 2 (taken from a Cyngor Gwynedd briefing note).

	Description	Expected dates	Costs
Phase 1	Low Speed Relief Road	2026 – 2030	£40m
Phase 2	In village traffic and environmental improvement	2030	£4m
Phase 3	Additional Active Travel improvement including connections along the A496 to Harlech and active travel	2031 – 2033	£8m

	improvement along Mochras Road		
Additional improvement	Car park at Llanbedr Train Station		£1.5m

Table 2

As can be seen in Table 2, the cost of the relief road alone is £40 million. The total RTF budget for North Wales for 2026/7 is c.£28m, and we have been advised by Welsh Government to assume a flat budget (with no inflation related increase) for future years.

If a large portion of RTF allocation is used for the construction of a new highway project, we would not be delivering on the sustainable transport aspirations of our RTP.

This means that the Llanbedr Transport Improvement scheme cannot be delivered through Regional Transport Fund alone. However, RTF may be an important source of match funding that could be used for development work or delivering some of the active travel or environmental improvements.

8. GROWTH-RELATED FUNDING SOURCES

It is apparent that the highway improvements in Llanbedr should not be considered in isolation, and that partners should be seeking to bring it forward as part of a wider development of the Airfield site.

The airfield has the potential to transform the employment offer in this part of Gwynedd. For that to happen, the access to the site needs significant improvement.

In turn, a scheme to improve access to the employment site will also provide the opportunity to enhance the environment and quality of life for the local community by relieving the traffic problems.

When looked at from this perspective, the Transport Improvements are a Growth or Regeneration scheme rather than a specific transport scheme. In the current funding environment, it appears that the funding sources that focus on growth and jobs creation would be a more appropriate solution to provide the majority of the funding required for this project. This could potentially be supported by an appropriate and proportionate amount of Regional Transport Fund contribution.

Therefore, Ambition North Wales, Cyngor Gwynedd, Welsh Government, and other partners should be looking at working with the developers to deliver growth and jobs on the airfield. There is currently a lack of work that considers the benefits and deliverability of the two aspects of Llanbedr development (the transport improvements and the jobs creation) as one combined project and how this could be supported via funding such as Local Growth Fund or Growth Deal in the future.