Talgarth

Placemaking Plan Summary

Powys

Trawsnewid Trefi
Transforming Towns

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PREPARED BY OWEN DAVIES CONSULTING

OCTOBER 2023

Talgarth

Town Centre Placemaking Plan

Talgarth is a small, ancient market town that by the 19th century was a centre for trade and commerce and famous for its horse fairs. Talgarth continues to be vibrant working town with a livestock market providing a focus for agriculture and the wider rural community. The town also functions as the local service centre for neighbouring communities that use the primary school, doctors' surgery, pharmacy, library and range of important community facilities and numerous sports clubs.

Talgarth's town centre is small with a handful of shops and services that are mainly reliant on day-to-day shopping by the local community and a few specialist independent traders which help to attract visitors from further afield. Leisure and cultural facilities add to the variety of activities and the annual town centre events help to sustain an important seasonal visitor economy, strengthening the town as a destination for visitors exploring the Black Mountains.

Over recent decades the town has faced several regeneration challenges including the closure of the Mid Wales Hospital, the construction of a town relief road, and the restoration and opening of the town's historic Mill. The present day relocation of the Co-op to a new site on the edge of the town is the latest in a series of major tests for the vitality of the town centre.

This Placemaking Plan ('the Plan') is being prepared with the backing of the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme, Powys County Council, Bannau Brycheiniog NPA and Talgarth Town Council. The Plan has a focus on the town centre. Its purpose is to address the current challenges, build on existing initiatives and the work already undertaken to help regenerate Talgarth, to set out a vision for the future of the town centre and to provide an investment plan to help deliver this vision.

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Over recent decades the town has faced several **regeneration** challenges

The Draft Plan

We are consulting on this draft Plan following local research, stakeholder meetings and consultations with numerous local organisations including the Town Council and Powys County Councillors.

The local community, businesses and organisations are invited to comment on the following ideas. We want to understand your priorities and the level of support for changes and improvements before taking forward any proposals. The final Plan will be a blueprint for guiding investment and attracting funding for the next 5+ years.

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Making the Town Centre a Great Place

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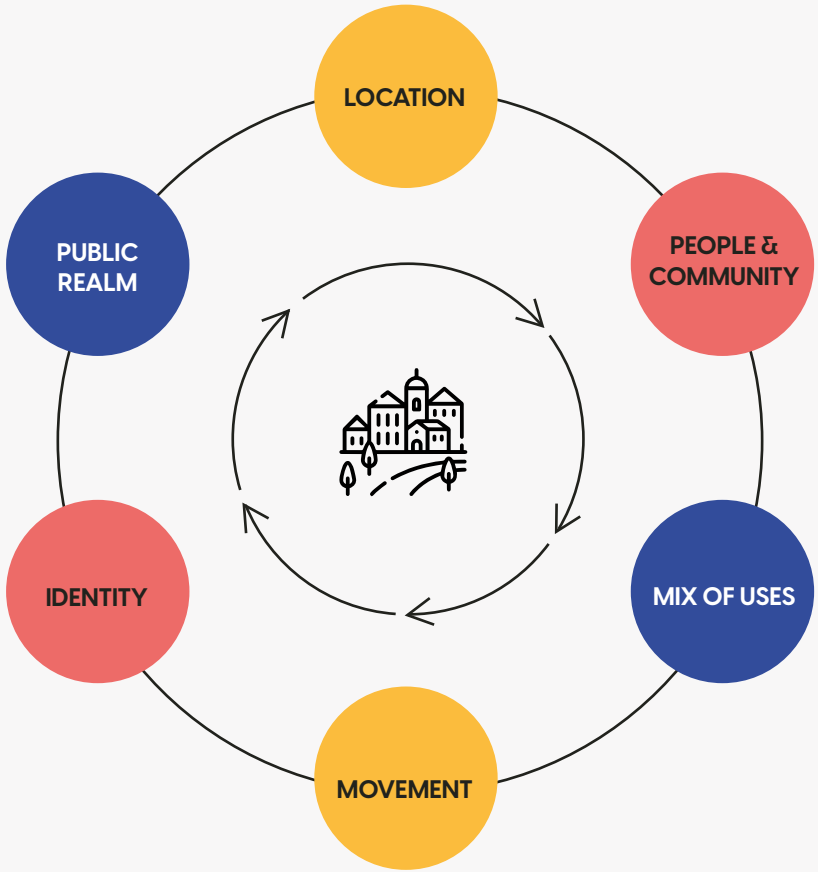
Historic places like Talgarth have been a focal point for communities for centuries, and this contributes to their individual identity and that of the wider area and its population.

Places shape us and we continue to shape them. This Plan provides the opportunity to help celebrate and grow the best features of Talgarth whilst reinvigorating the less-loved ones. And the town centre also has a local role to play in helping to address the interlinked challenges of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss.

A great place also needs to deliver on several fronts simultaneously. The Placemaking Wales Charter describes of these as six key themes which work together to make a great place.



Key Issues and Opportunities

Despite many challenges, Talgarth enjoys significant strengths many of which have reinforced its reputation as a visitor destination and gateway to the Black Mountains. In recent years the town has cultivated a distinctive 'town of gardens' character and there is clearly a passionate local community.

The numerous grassroots activities, a strong sense of environmentalism and a range of cultural and sporting institutions provide the foundation for activities across the year. However, the Co-op relocation will considerably alter the character of the town centre as well as the level of footfall and activity.

The strengths and weaknesses of the town centre include:

Uses & activity

- Small yet diverse, with a mix of essential shops, specialist independent businesses, cultural and community facilities.
- Very few vacant buildings, resulting in few opportunities for new business growth and expansion.
- Important vacant buildings such as the Old School require sustainable economic, and community uses.
- Impressive range of visitor facilities including free public toilets, Tourist Centre, Museum and historic mill.
- Inconsistent business opening hours – some weekdays there are more businesses closed than are open.
- Undeveloped evening economy.

Destination & identity

- Attractive and historic town centre with many eye-catching features.
- Recognised for access to the Black Mountains and a base for walking, cycling and gliding.
- Poorly signed and promoted from the strategic roads passing through the town.
- Well-known seasonal events and festivals that highlight the towns strengths (e.g. Walking Festival and Festival of the Black Mountains).
- Underdeveloped online presence and minimal marketing with the need for a unified Talgarth brand and identity.

Traffic & Movement

- A walkable town centre, however, most of the public spaces give priority to vehicles and parking.
- Historic streets with narrow pavements and poor accessibility for most users including people with mobility issues.
- The car park lacks clear intuitive wayfinding for the town centre.
- Livestock Market experiences shortage of on-site parking on market days.
- The need for centrally located public EV charging points.

Employment

- A 'working town' with important business and employment areas supporting the centre – these areas need protecting and growing to sustain the foundations of the town economy.

Living

- Prevent the unsustainable loss of homes to short term lets and help sustain a younger and economically active population.
- Opportunities exist to convert buildings and build new affordable homes close to the centre.
- Ensuring that the phosphate stripping 'headroom' is sufficient to allow new residential developments whilst meeting obligations to protect the River Wye catchment.

Learning

- The growth of the Black Mountains College has created a need for a range of facilities and student accommodation ideally situated close to and within the town.

Key Objectives

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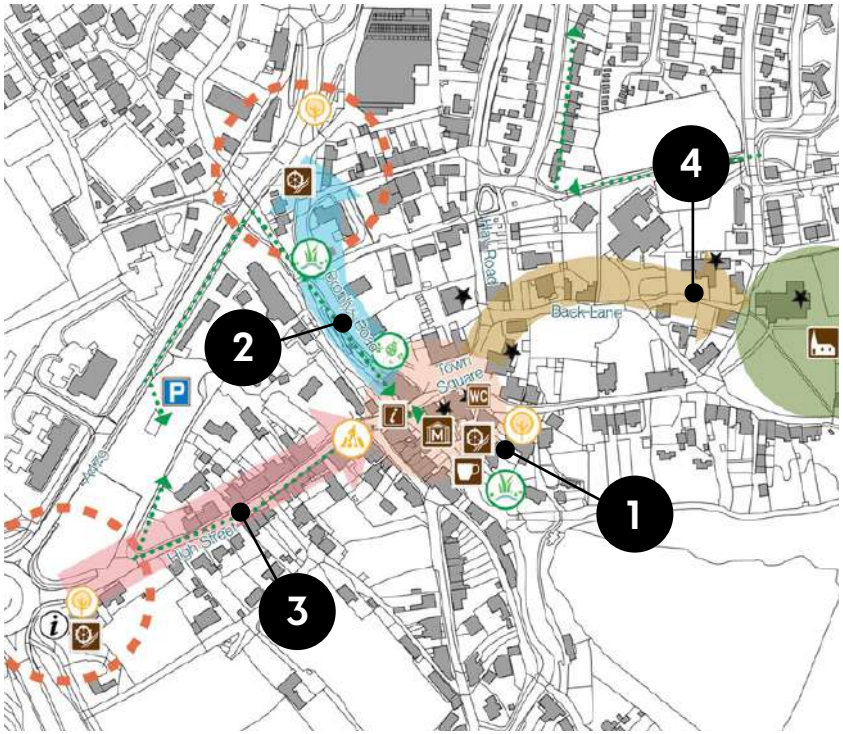
The relocation of the Co-op will change the appearance of the centre and reduce footfall, traffic, and activity in the centre. Whilst this is a concern, and an underpinning issue for this Plan, it is also an opportunity to re-examine what is currently working well and not so well in Talgarth, whilst identifying how the town might wish to attract new investment in the future. In response, the key objectives of the Plan are to make the town centre:

1. More attractive for new footfall-generating businesses, community and educational uses
2. Easier to discover, navigate, walk, and wheel through
3. Better-designed, greener and livelier during the day and at night
4. Forward looking with modern EV and digital infrastructure
5. Better promoted with a unified online presence

Project Delivery Areas

There are four project delivery areas which provide a focus for the Plan, each one combines several proposals with the potential to transform the centre. The Plan also identifies several crosscutting actions that apply to the whole town centre and help to deliver the vision and objectives.

1. The Square
2. Bronllys Road and gateway
3. High Street, car park and gateway
4. Back Lane and the Old School



Town centre traffic flow

Several proposals within the Plan identify opportunities to improve the public realm thereby allowing increased use of the outside spaces for business, visitors, community uses and greening initiatives.

Important improvements can be achieved whilst maintaining the current two-way traffic flows through the centre. However, it is also possible to take a more ambitious approach using a one-way traffic flow and narrowing roads to their minimum width for a single carriageway and widening pedestrian areas. The exact details and feasibility of an alternative one-way system have not been examined in detail and would need to be investigated and consulted upon. However, the Plan has identified an indicative one-way as option, with traffic incoming from the direction of the car park and High Street and outgoing via Bronllys Road.

The Square

This is the historic core of the centre and focal point for businesses, civic buildings, and community events. The relocation of the Co-op will change the appearance and character by creating a prominent vacant building, reducing the size of delivery vehicles, traffic volumes and demand for parking. The opportunity exists to reimagine The Square so it supports new and existing businesses, attracts new footfall and builds on its strengths as an attractive historic centre.

Actions

- Increase the amount of space available for pedestrians with wider pavements, more opportunities for seating, planting, business use and community activities.
- Widen area outside The Mill to provide opportunities for tables and chairs supporting the café and bakery and strengthening its overall visibility.
- Widen pavement outside the Tourist Centre for safer pedestrian access and use.
- Restore Liverpool House and London House using traditional shop frontage design, materials and use colours to link properties and brand the town.
- Repurpose Liverpool House, creating smaller more appealing business units and living accommodation above.
- Opportunity to relocate library back to the town centre.
- Options for either two, or one-way traffic.

Vision for The Square

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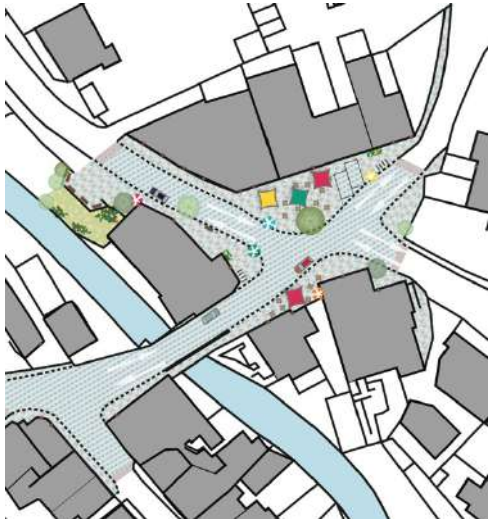

Existing traffic flow

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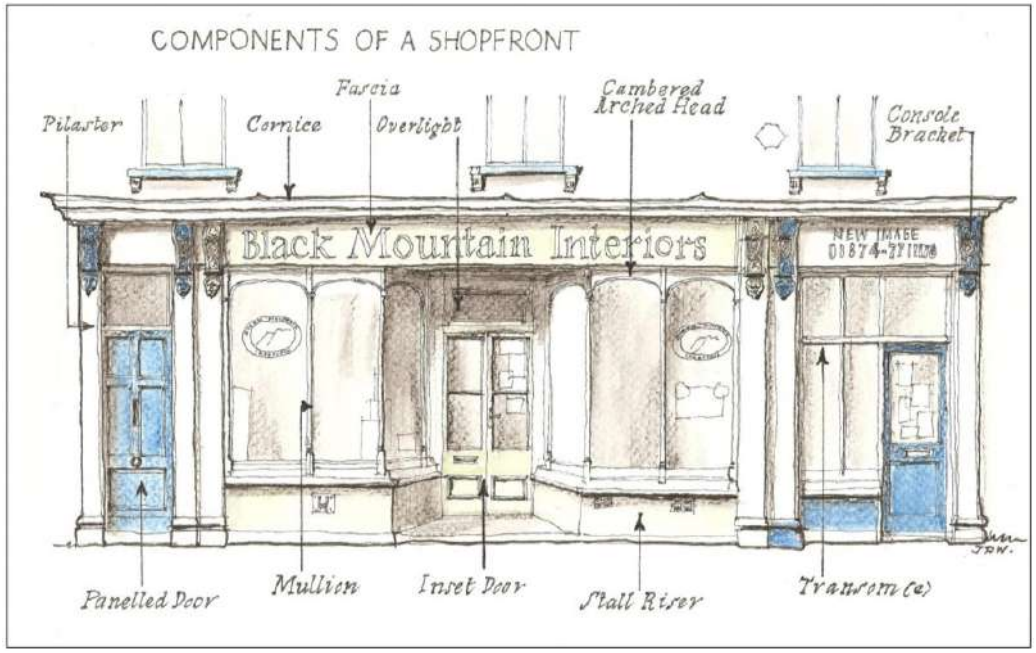
One-way traffic flow

Town Square Vision



Bronllys Road Riverside Park

This area is a naturally attractive gateway and favourably positioned to attract the attention of visitors travelling through Talgarth from Mid Wales and Herefordshire. The relocation of the Co-op to Hay Road increases the area's importance and the need to strengthen the connection between the centre, Hay Road, the school, library and doctors. The opportunity is to create a larger and more distinctive riverside parkland that plays to the strengths of a 'town of gardens' and Talgarth's associations with sustainability.

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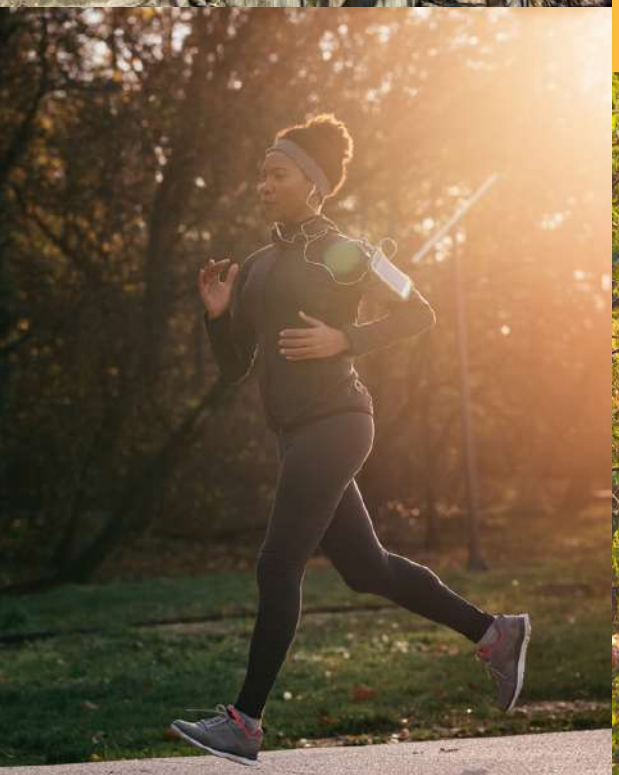
Actions

- Narrow the road to create an opportunity for a high-quality riverside park with widening green space – attract footfall, increase dwell time and encourage greater levels of community activities.
- Opportunity to introduce natural and playful features appealing to the young and families.
- Create a more respectful setting for the war memorial.
- Introduce sustainable drainage features, native planting, trees, and seating.

Riverside Park Vision

Riverside Park Vision



High Street

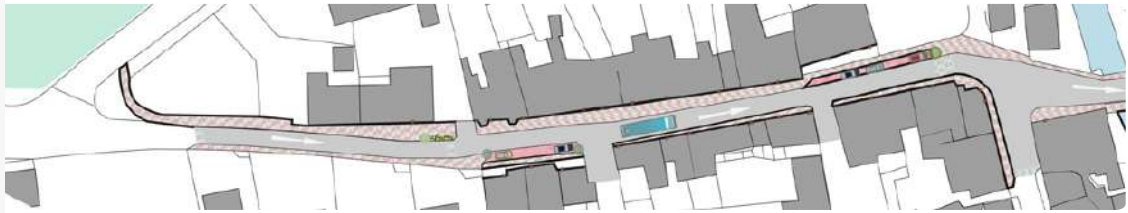
The traditional High Street continues to decline in importance as a shopping area however it has potential to capture additional footfall with an increase in visitor numbers walking from the car park in the direction of the centre.

The High Street is the most direct route between the main car park and The Square, although narrow pavements and two-way traffic make it less attractive and easy to move through. Whilst opportunities are limited, the introduction of one-way traffic would allow the importance and attractiveness of the area to be improved.

Current High Street

Actions

- Public realm improvements to encourage greater footfall from the direction of the car park with the benefit of supporting High Street businesses. Treating the area as a seamless high quality public space linking with The Square.
- One-way traffic flows allow for wider pavements, improved accessibility, for people with mobility issues and improvements to the Bell Street junction.
- One-way creates an option to include a small amount additional on street parking.



High Street Vision

High Street Car Park

There is a need for clearer and more consistent town wide 'gateway' signage that effectively directs visitors to the car park via the rugby club roundabout whilst avoiding through traffic in The Square.

Within the car park, signs and information lack clarity for visitors looking for the centre. Investment is also required in public EV charging points to encourage travellers to use Talgarth as a convenient staging post and place for refreshment. Centrally located EV would also help balance with the new charging facilities located at the Co-op.

Whilst the car park is currently free of charge, there is a possibility this could change in future to bring Talgarth in line with towns across Powys. Because the focus of the Plan is on managing the impacts of the Co-op relocation and long term regeneration, a grace period before parking charges are considered would allow the impacts of the Co-op relocation to be understood and addressed. The proposed improvements include:

Actions

- Clearer road signs on the town approach roads.
- More instinctive visitor signage directing visitors towards the centre via High Street.
- Install EV charging points to attract visitors and encourage longer visits.
- Discuss with Powys CC a grace period for regeneration improvements to take effect before considering parking charges.

Example of EV Charge point

Examples of visitor signs require near the entrance of the car park

Back Lane and Old School

The route from The Square and Back Lane towards the old school and St Gwendoline's Church connects several important buildings with the centre and has potential to be improved with heritage signs and visitor information. Furthermore, the old school building is one of the few opportunities of scale near the centre capable of delivering additional footfall generating economic and community uses.

Actions

- Explore opportunity to install heritage trail signs.
- Support further investigations into the repurposing of the old school building. Its use should ideally attract additional levels of economic and community activity, drive footfall to the town centre and support activity throughout the day/week.
- Options include office, education, and coworking spaces.

The Old School

Gateway Signs

Overall, roadside visitor signage and information for the town centre is low-key and confusing. To intercept a greater number of visitors there is a need for comprehensive brown tourism signs and information to be located near the main gateways at Bronllys Road and High Street. The signs need to carefully promote the town's main visitor facilities and attractions.

Example Bronllys Road gateway

Example High Street gateway

Place Management

There are several actions that can be taken to support the organisations and people committed to making Talgarth town centre a better and well-managed destination. Actions include the way in which the town is promoted and the investment in new and improved infrastructure and gathering data to support decision making.

→ Improve the promotion of the town with a clearer place brand that projects the best image and manages perceptions about Talgarth. In addition to a base for the Black Mountains, walking, cycling, gliding and heritage, the town has several additional characteristics e.g. town of gardens, community spirit and reputation for environmentalism that should be promoted.

→ In the absence of a town website, establish a unified online identity under the name 'Visit Talgarth', complemented by printed materials. This identity will serve as an umbrella for marketing and promoting all that the town has to offer, including local events and organisations.

→ Encourage businesses to work together to create a coherent and engaging pattern of seasonal opening hours that encourage more people to visit and lengthen their stay.

Smart Towns and Digital Infrastructure

As well as celebrating its history, Talgarth should look to the future and embrace the concept of a Smart Town: a place that uses technology to collect local data that is used to inform decision-making. Improving the town centre's digital infrastructure can make it an easier place to visit and a more attractive place to spend time.

There are existing programs that could help fund and deliver investment including the digital infrastructure, place planning and skills development programmes delivered by Powys County Council or the Smart Towns Cymru programme. Both programmes provide opportunities to learn from best practice and share resources with other places adopting the Smart Towns approach.

→ Generate near-real time and hyper-local data and use this to take data-driven decisions about place management using both new and existing digital infrastructure. For example:

- Sensors or a public Wi-Fi system could monitor footfall in the town centre, providing data to inform funding application or business plans.
- Sensors could be used to help monitor the soil and moisture condition of street planters and other green infrastructure. This data could inform watering schedules and therefore potentially save water and reduce costs.

→ Explore ways in which new digital infrastructure can be used to improve a visitor's experience of Talgarth. For example:

- Providing reliable and trustworthy free Wi-Fi in public spaces like The Square to encourage people to spend more time in them and using the network's splash page to promote upcoming events or local businesses.
- A digital noticeboard positioned in a prominent position can be used to promote upcoming events and local businesses or provide up-to-date local information.

Example digital noticeboard promoting a local event

Impact of Town Centre Holiday Lets

Stakeholder have raised concerns about the lack of control and loss of prominent town centre commercial and residential building to 'Airbnb' style holiday lets and impact it is having on town centre living and the availability of local homes. The Plan encourages the situation to be monitored and if necessary the Local Planning Authority (Bannau Brycheiniog NPA) to use its exiting powers to make it necessary to apply for planning permission to change from a dwelling to a holiday let.

How to comment and what happens next?

Comments on the draft Plan can be submitted online using the comment form or interactive map to post ideas.

powystowninvestmentplans.info/talgarth

SCAN ME

There will be a drop in event held in the town centre providing an opportunity to meet the team and discuss the Plan. Details will be advertised locally.

Following the consultations on the draft Plan, all comments received will be reviewed and discussed with the local stakeholders before agreeing a final Plan. The Plan will include an action plan describing how proposals with the wider community's support could be taken forward, funded and within what timescales.