Supporting Local Places and Local People:
Opportunities and Challenges for Welsh Towns
Rebekah Menzies
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Carnegie UK Trust is grateful for the support of Dave Cook, Anna Nicholl and Fiona Harris at WCVA for arranging and co-hosting the events, and Peter Davies at WCVA for expertly chairing the discussions on which this report is based.

The author would like to thank all those who participated in the two roundtable discussions, and provided comment and input into earlier versions of this report, including Dave Cook, Anna Nicholl and Russell Todd (WCVA), Kate Hamilton and Mike Palmer (Office of the Future Generations Commissioner), Ceri Cunnington (Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog), Wendy Jones (Community and Voluntary Support Conwy), Vanessa Naughton (Welsh Government), and Jennifer Wallace, Gina Wilson and Lauren Pennycook (Carnegie UK Trust).
Supporting Local Places and Local People

Through our research, policy and practice activities we are supporting the development of vibrant, innovative and empowered towns and town communities. One of Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)’s goals for 2022 is to contribute to the third sector and volunteering making a bigger impact on current and future wellbeing. As part of this, it is working with the voluntary sector to explore how the third sector and voluntary action can contribute to more empowered and resilient communities.

In 2016 the Trust commissioned international research to uncover innovative examples of towns from around the world that have experienced difficult times, but have made significant transformations, greatly improving the wellbeing of their citizens. The resulting ‘Turnaround Towns’ report drew out key lessons from eight case studies from across the USA, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe.

While the experience of towns overseas cannot be directly imported to the UK, where themes emerge in a range of places, they are worth paying attention to. Over the summer of 2017, we took our Turnaround Towns research to two Welsh towns – Merthyr Tydfil and Llandudno Junction – in partnership with WCVA. Over two roundtable events, we tested the resonance of the themes that emerged from the research, and discussed the key challenges and opportunities for Welsh towns with stakeholders from Welsh and local government, and the voluntary and business sectors.

As one of the largest policy and practice foundations in the UK to be based in a town, the Carnegie UK Trust is focusing on ‘Flourishing Towns’ as a strategic priority to 2020.

Foreword

As one of the largest policy and practice foundations in the UK to be based in a town, the Carnegie UK Trust is focusing on ‘Flourishing Towns’ as a strategic priority to 2020.
It is an opportune time to be focusing on towns in Wales. Policy shifts, most notably the world-leading Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, could create significant opportunities for Welsh towns and communities; but also present challenges that will require shifts away from traditional ways of working to overcome. These shifts are explored in the Trust’s literature on the Enabling State, which recognises that traditional ‘top down’ approaches to public service design and delivery are no longer working, and the state needs to develop a more facilitative and enabling role that empowers individuals and local communities, and draws on the experience of other sectors, to tackle contemporary challenges.

Based on our roundtable discussions, this report sets out recommendations for Welsh and local government, the voluntary and business sectors, and indeed individuals and communities themselves. Along with WCVA, we look forward to engaging with key towns stakeholders in Wales to support the recommendations identified in this report.

Martyn Evans  
Chief Executive  
Carnegie UK Trust

Peter Davies  
Chair  
WCVA
Introduction

The places where we live, work and play have a significant impact on our wellbeing.

Wellbeing and place are inextricably inter-connected. Our economic and educational opportunities, our social and political relationships, our environment, and our imaginative, cognitive and creative worlds are all profoundly impacted by where we live and who we live alongside.¹

Across the UK and Ireland, millions of people live in small and medium sized towns. They run and use local businesses, deliver and access local services, and build relationships and networks amongst family, friends and neighbours. Towns are critical to the wellbeing of many.

Towns and urban districts matter, offering distinct elements of urban life at a scale which is often rich in local identity and deep in terms of social interaction, and developing a local sense of place within a globalised society.²

Yet towns can often struggle to secure attention in public policy. Towns are rarely the geographical basis for policymaking, both at central and local government levels. Instead, overarching strategic policies and thematic policy issues (such as housing, physical regeneration, and community cohesion) apply to towns; or town communities are invited to apply to funding programmes which operate at a sub-town or supra-town level. Examples include town centre regeneration funding, or in the case of Wales specifically, clusters of towns have applied for funding under Communities First.

Powerful rural and city interests can crowd out the voices of towns in public policy debates, and the default position for conversations about towns often focuses on ‘preserving’ or ‘saving’ a town, rather than ‘progressing’ or ‘rethinking.’

In 2016, the Carnegie UK Trust published research by Carnegie Associate Jane-Frances Kelly setting out stories of towns from around the world who, despite experiencing difficult and challenging times, have made significant transformations, greatly improving the wellbeing of their citizens. The research drew out key learnings from eight case studies from across the USA, Australia and New Zealand, and Europe, highlighting themes of salience to town policy makers and practitioners in the UK.

Towns can fall on difficult times for a range of reasons, including economic depression, outward migration, natural disasters, or all of these put together. The results can be physical dilapidation, poverty and unemployment. ‘Turnaround towns’ refers to cases where a town had previously fallen on difficult times, but where improvement resulted from deliberate efforts to address local challenges across a number of dimensions. These include energising local economies, to encouraging a sense of local place, identity and social connections – and have succeeded in building towns that are lively and dynamic places to live, work and visit.

The international research demonstrated that profound economic and social change in towns can be achieved by clear action, directed and delivered at a local level. While each of the eight case studies featured in the report are very different, there are common factors across these diverse places which, to varying degrees, were vital to their transformation. These factors are:

- **Having a story that residents – and others – know**: Clarity of history and purpose allows residents to articulate their town’s raison d’être amongst each other, creating a shared positive narrative, and externally, developing the town’s appeal to visitors.

- **Addressing economic challenges**: Directly addressing economic challenges, and reinventing their economic bases if necessary, to improve local livelihoods, rather than skirting around such challenges. Successful turnaround towns recognise that while a secure local economy is essential, they

---

also needed to focus on tangibly improving the experience of living in the town for residents, including providing for residents’ material and psychological needs.

- **Local leaders driving change:** Many of the case studies involved ‘unlikely’ leaders, who do not necessarily conform to traditional notions of leadership. However, what is most important is local leaders who have the ability to develop meaningful relationships at a local level.

- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Developing cross-sectoral relationships brings together a host of ‘unusual friends’ across public, private, voluntary and community sectors, which encourages the emergence of innovative approaches for turnaround towns.

- **Being flexible and finding the right path to success:** Adopting flexible approaches to development, and experimenting with various paths to success on an ongoing basis, allowed the turnaround towns researched in the report to thrive.

- **Committing to the long-term:** Committing to development over the long-term – with many case studies working across a number of decades to realise their turnaround (and in many cases, still today).
Now is an opportune time to be focusing on towns in Wales, with opportunities and challenges for Welsh towns provided by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Valleys Taskforce, the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal, Enterprise Zones, and post-Communities First⁴ and Brexit policy landscapes. Like towns in other parts of the UK, over the coming decades Welsh towns will be confronted with challenges from increasing urbanisation, an ageing population, climate change, and the changing landscapes of technology and employment.

Both roundtable events were well attended by stakeholders from Welsh and local government, and voluntary and private sectors with an interest in Welsh towns and their socio-economic development. The purpose of the events was to:

- share the key themes that emerged from the international research on turnaround towns;
- test the extent to which the themes from the research resonated with Welsh stakeholders;
- identify policy enablers and barriers to towns in Wales achieving turnaround success; and
- identify specific policy levers and routes forward to support Welsh towns to thrive.

⁴ Communities First was a flagship Welsh Government programme aimed at boosting deprived communities in Wales. The programme is to be phased out by March 2018.
This paper sets out the policy context for Welsh towns, and reflects on the key points arising from the roundtable discussions that took place. It provides recommendations for Welsh and local governments, businesses and voluntary sector organisations operating in towns, and individuals and communities with an interest in the development of their town, and the wellbeing of people living and working there.

The policy context for Welsh towns

Towns in Wales sit within a broader policy framework including strategic Welsh Government policy, planning legislation, regeneration policy, and local authority statutory responsibilities. The diagram on the following page sets out the key policy settings in Wales of relevance to towns.
Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021, the Welsh Government’s Programme for Government, contains high-level ambitions for Wales including:

- Prosperous and Secure;
- Healthy and Active;
- Ambitious and Learning; and
- United and Connected.

Prosperity for All is the Welsh Government’s national strategy, which sets out a vision and actions covering each of the key themes in the Programme for Government.

The Well-being of FuturGenerations (Wales) Act 2015 is a world-leading approach to carrying out sustainable development in Wales. The Act places a statutory duty on public bodies, including local authorities and Local Health Boards, to improve social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing in Wales in pursuit of seven national goals:

- a prosperous Wales;
- a resilient Wales;
- a healthier Wales;
- a more equal Wales;
- a Wales of cohesive communities;
- a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; and
- a globally responsible Wales.

Each public body must set wellbeing objectives, publish a wellbeing statement which outlines why these objectives will help them to achieve the goals, and use the five ways of working set out in the Act, including involving people interested in achieving the goals.

The Welsh Spatial Plan is a 20-year plan that sets out a strategic framework to guide future development and policy interventions, guided by a key principle of sustainable development.

Welsh planning legislation gives communities input into local planning processes. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires Local Planning Authorities to prepare a Local Development Plan that includes policies and proposals on the development of the local area over the next 15 years. Reflecting local issues, Local Development Plans must also have regard to the Wales Spatial Plan.

The Planning (Wales) Act 2015 bestows further rights on residents to provide input into the development of their local area, as Local Planning Authorities in Wales are now required to work with communities to draft Place Plans as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

**Box 1: The policy context for Welsh towns**
Vibrant and Viable Places: New Regeneration Framework, the Welsh Government’s regeneration policy document, outlines a place and person-based approach to regeneration and sets national outcomes of prosperous communities, learning communities and healthier communities. The framework commits the Welsh Government to cross-sectoral cooperation and joined up working across government departments and policy areas.

The £100 million framework takes a targeted approach in which funding is provided to local authorities to fund regeneration schemes. In January 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced support for an additional 23 regeneration projects across twelve local authorities worth £3.7 million.

Local public services for towns and town communities in Wales are provided by 22 unitary authorities. There are also 735 community and town councils in Wales covering 70 percent of the population which provide very local services.

The Local Government (Wales) Act 2000 created “the well-being power” which enables local authorities to do anything that they consider is likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of their area. This power enables local authorities to have a wide discretionary power to further develop their community leadership role and the delivery of better and more responsive services. The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 conferred this power on community and town councils.

Consultation on further local government reform has recently closed (September 2017).

The Valley’s Taskforce was established in 2016 with a five-year work programme to spearhead the regeneration and sustainable growth of the valleys. The Taskforce has committed to ‘refocusing town centres,’ including ensuring that national and local government regeneration strategies challenge the traditional model of the town centre, based on what communities want and need.

The Cardiff Capital Region city deal involves 10 local authorities with an investment fund of £1.2 billion over 20 years. The Cardiff Capital Region Metro is a new transport system under development.

The Swansea Bay city deal is backed by £1.3 billion of investment and aims to boost the local economy by £1.8 billion over the next 15 years.
1) Opportunity (and challenge) provided by the Well-being of Future Generations Act

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was a focal point of both roundtable discussions. The Act challenges public bodies to think holistically and long-term about citizen wellbeing in Wales and, if fully embraced by public bodies, could provide huge opportunities for Welsh towns and people living and working in them. The Act requires public bodies, including Welsh Ministers, to carry out sustainable development, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems, and take a more joined-up approach. The Office of the Future Generations Commissioners for Wales has been established to challenge and help public bodies and those who make policy in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions.

“There is an opportunity provided by the Well-being of Future Generations Act to challenge business as usual and test different ways of working. And some of them may not work, but we need to be brave and try things, and learn from it if it doesn’t work.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction
Participants expressed concern that the Wellbeing Plans required by the Act would be viewed as ‘just another plan’ and become seen as another compliance exercise layered amongst other planning processes required of local authorities and their partners.

“You have wellbeing plans, but we’re all as councils expected to do corporate plans, improvement plans, and we have place plans, and then you have an LDP and a national development framework…."

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

“This is another plan we are supposed to do. We’re supposed to do this plan and that plan, and they’re not seeing them as being generated locally, they’re seen as external compliance.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

Culture change within public bodies was seen as crucial if the Well-being of Future Generations legislation is to be a success. Tackling issues that are generational in nature and planning for the long-term will require public bodies to work across traditional silos, and collaborate and engage across departments and sectors. The ‘Five Ways of Working’ serve to remind public bodies subject to the Act of the ways in which they must work to maximise their contribution to each of the Act’s seven wellbeing goals, including thinking long-term; integration; involvement; collaboration; and prevention.

The seven goals and the wellbeing duty of the Act establish in law a common purpose, a definition of sustainable development, and a framework for wellbeing.

“Legislation is one thing, but actually the culture change required around it is going to be something totally different, and that’s going to be where the focus needs to be; on enabling that and supporting that, and supporting people to do things differently.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

Participants noted a tension between the long-term thinking and planning for future generations required by the Act, and shorter term budgeting, funding and electoral cycles. Local authorities...
are required to prepare annual budgets and, in the face of public sector funding constrains, can often focus on more immediate priorities. Voluntary sector organisations in attendance expressed similar issues, noting that the demands of funders within short-term projects with place-blind outcomes often distracted them from longer-term place-based thinking and planning.

“Sometimes we fall into danger of working in our vision of 2-3 year funding slots. We need to stand back and be aware that we are going to be there longer than this. There are real challenges and real opportunities to think differently.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

“Every place is different. The problem is that funding structures measure by what they think is important, cutting across the ability to have a coherent place-specific plan.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

Working towards town socio-economic development over the long-term was identified as important across the international turnaround town case studies. Participants at both roundtables in Wales noted that the Well-being of Future Generations legislation provided the discipline to think about town regeneration in Wales over the long-term.

“Regeneration takes a generation.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

2) Going beyond community engagement to empowerment and ownership

Roundtable participants focused on the need for communities to have a real and meaningful role in the development and governance of their town over the long-term. While there were some examples of success, much of the discussion lamented flawed models of engagement where communities are ‘consulted’ on decisions that have already been made, and changes are ‘done to’ communities, rather than with and for, reinforcing existing barriers and pre-conceptions about who holds power in communities.
We need more than community engagement…. We need community ownership and empowerment.  
Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

Participants were clear that while the language and rhetoric of community empowerment was often strong, as reflected in the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, this was not coming through in community engagement practices. There was a sense that engagement is always done ‘the same old way,’ involving the same methodology and the same people.

There’s an implementation deficit. We’ve got good rhetoric, we’ve got good policies, around empowerment. We know how to do good empowerment, we’ve known for a while how to do good empowerment, but it’s not happening.  
Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

Spotlight on the North Wales Citizens Panel

The North Wales Citizens Panel is for people across North Wales to have their say on health and wellbeing services. Managed by Community and Voluntary Support Conwy, Panel members are contacted via a method of their choosing around four times a year with no more than four questions each time. Feedback is given so all Panel members can see how their answers and thoughts are being listened to and used.

What we were keen to do was speak with people who are not engaged at any level, and it was very difficult. However we now have over 100 people that we are engaging with across North Wales any way they like; and I mean any way; from Skype, Facebook Messenger; one to one…. These people have never been approached in the past, and I’m finding it really refreshing having these conversations.

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction
Participants recognised that community engagement should be done differently in different places, reflecting the individual circumstances and unique identifiers of place. Participants also reflected that the language of community engagement is important. Approaching engagement from a perspective of fixing problems undermines the process and damages narratives for local people, and re-enforces existing barriers to engagement and empowerment. Instead, taking an asset-based approach and focusing on building on a community’s strengths and positive attributes was identified as important for successful engagement and community empowerment.

While much of the discussion focused on the front end of the engagement process, participants did raise the point that just as important in the engagement process are proper feedback loops and timely, relatable feedback to the community.

Participants also discussed the importance of developing the skills and capabilities of communities to empower them to have a meaningful role in their community, for example, developing business and management skills to run community-owned assets.

Participants noted that up-skilling communities had positive impacts on community wellbeing, and also took pressure off local authorities and larger voluntary sector organisations to manage assets on behalf of communities.

“Empowerment improves the wellbeing of our communities, but it also improves the effectiveness of our services.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

3) Developing a positive identity and narrative for a town

Roundtable participants identified the importance of a strong, unifying identity of place for people living in a town as important for individual and community wellbeing. Participants expressed a sense that many Welsh towns have lost their sense of identity, often as a result of changes to traditional industries and subsequent local employment opportunities. People living in towns have an opportunity
and a challenge to re-define their town’s identity, questioning the role of their town, who it serves and its function. While local authorities and voluntary sector organisations have a role to play in supporting this process, it must be led and owned by the community to be truly authentic.

Participants discussed how identities and narratives built on the negative aspects of a place can be damaging to local people and communities, and re-inforce some of the existing barriers to community engagement and empowerment. Despite a strong rhetoric around asset-based approaches, the dominant culture is still largely deficit based. These negative narratives are often perpetuated by groups external to the town and community. Ranking towns according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation was seen as particularly damaging.

“Every 3 or 4 years you’re waiting to see what the new index of deprivation is going to throw up and who’s at the top this time…. Something quite simple can be done around changing and re-framing the language we use when talking about these things.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction
4) Cross-sectoral and cross-town working is important for town socio-economic development

There was unanimous agreement that cross-sectoral working is important for town socio-economic development, with public, voluntary and private sectors working together – with local communities – to make towns in Wales a success. Collaboration across sectors is a key part of the Well-being of Future Generations legislation. The roundtable discussions focused in particular on cross-sectoral working involving local authorities, the voluntary and business sectors, and local communities.

A local authority representative noted that turning around a town is not solely the job of the local authority. Instead, people and communities need to have pride in their towns, and take ownership for their town’s development – with support from the local authority.

“We struggle a bit in the voluntary sector to actually look at working with the private sector effectively.... An approach like this challenges the voluntary sector to take a step back from its comfort zone in delivering services.... If you look at the history of the voluntary sector it wasn’t about that (delivering services). It was about developing new responses and approaching new ways of....

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

Participants from the voluntary and business sectors reflected on how cross-sectoral engagement in towns could be more successful. In particular, voluntary sector representatives reflected on how the sector could do better at engaging with the business sector. Business representatives reminded participants that local business people had a mass of expertise at hand that could be leveraged to the benefit of a town, including vast local networks and knowledge.

“Turning around a town is not a local authority job. It needs to be organic, it needs to be local. People need to start having pride in their place, develop leadership and ideas, and as a local authority we need to have our ears open a bit more, to listen to that.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil
You’ve got to find ways of communicating with businesses, you’ve got to communicate with them the opportunities, the vision... but equally you’ve got to listen to businesses. Businesses who work locally have got an enormous amount of expertise to bring to the table. They’re often people who live locally, they may be running businesses in more than one area.... How you engage with that is really important.

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

While cross-sectoral working is important for towns, it can often get lost amongst ‘business as usual,’ and it becomes easy to revert to traditional siloed behaviours. A mechanism to bring diverse sectors within a town together on a regular basis to discuss common challenges and develop shared solutions is an effective method for ensuring cross-sectoral working becomes common practice.

Participants also recognised the importance of strong interrelationships and collaboration between towns within Wales, and across the porous border with England.
5) Distinction between leaders and leadership

Leaders and leadership was a focus of discussions in both Merthyr Tydfil and Llandudno Junction. Participants discussed the growing need to identify local leaders within a town, including those who do not traditionally get involved in their community, who can drive forward action. Discussions focused on the language of leadership used by government and local authorities, and how this language can be exclusionary to ‘unlikely leaders,’ as often the terminology used is not that which people are used to or comfortable with.

“Traditional leaders use words like ‘governance,’ while people use words like ‘participation.’”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

The type of leadership required was a focus of discussions. There was a distinction made between developing traditional town leaders and fostering dispersed leadership in a town. While the former is important, the latter is crucial for ensuring a town’s sustainability and sense of identity.

“We have focused on developing leaders at the expense of leadership. When people go, things fall down again, and you end up relying on a small number of people in the community.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil
While local leaders and leadership are vital, participants were clear that there is also a role for regional and national leadership from voluntary sector organisations, local government and Welsh Government, in terms of playing a coordinating role and having the oversight and ability to connect towns and communities across Wales to share experiences and learn from each other.

6) Moving town communities away from grant dependency

Voluntary sector organisations shared examples of the damage done to towns and communities by dependency on external funding, and a mentality of ‘chasing the grant.’ Participants called for more flexible funding arrangements, but still strong accountability to funders, and to the community.

“We were answerable to our community because we came from that community. We were answerable to the lady next door…. That’s real accountability.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

Participants discussed the need for a greater degree of trust between funders and funding recipients. Instead of a relationship of grant giver and grant receiver, a partnership approach is required to address complex issues in towns that are cross-sectoral and generational in nature.

Participants also discussed how towns are often excluded from opportunities to access funding, particularly from Welsh Government, as it is driven through the 22 unitary authorities in Wales. Communication between town councils and unitary authorities can be poor, meaning that towns often miss a chance to access funding.
7) Innovation and enterprise can unlock the potential of towns

Participants shared examples of where making space for innovation has allowed towns in Wales to flourish, creating jobs and attracting investment.

Participants discussed the need to put more value into social enterprise as a valid form of economic activity for towns in order to leverage the skills and assets within communities, and ensure local spending is re-invested in towns.

“We need to value social enterprise. We miss the potential and skills within communities…. Social and community enterprises are equally valid parts of our economy, but they’re seen as filling gaps in public services and volunteering, not seen as central drivers for economic regeneration.”

Roundtable participant, Merthyr Tydfil

Participants also discussed the need for physical spaces to allow social enterprises in towns to flourish, and reflected how vacant premises in town centres could support this. Welsh town centres have the highest vacancy rate in the UK (14.6 percent of retail premises in Welsh town centres are currently vacant, down from 15.1 percent in 2015).5

Spotlight on Blaenau Ffestiniog

The town of Blaenau Ffestiniog has had great success developing social enterprises in the wake of leaving the Communities First programme, and has created employment and attracted inward investment from tourism, all with a broad base of support from the community.

“Communities First came in in 2002, and from 2006… we realised early on we couldn’t become grant dependent…. We established social enterprises. There are about 6 or 7 in a town of 6,000 and employ over 150 people…. But we haven’t arrived yet; there’s a lot of work to be done. And we need that support, between the private sector, between local government, between Welsh Government. We can’t do it on our own.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

---

8) Robust data on towns and evidence about what works

Roundtable participants discussed the importance of robust data on towns for better understanding place. The Well-being of Future Generations legislation requires public bodies to have local data to develop wellbeing plans, and the skills and capabilities to use and analyse data about places effectively. Participants discussed the importance of ensuring this data is presented in a way that people in communities can access and understand the information, so they can become involved and engaged in their town.

“There is a lot of data out there, some of it we keep to ourselves, others we like to share…. It should be open source data that is available to anybody at any time.”

Roundtable participant, Llandudno Junction

The need for better sharing of experiences – good and bad – across Welsh towns, and learning from others, was also identified as a priority by participants, coupled with a culture change towards openness and honesty. Identifying what has worked in other towns, across Wales and elsewhere, provides useful insights for Welsh towns. Understanding what hasn’t worked and why is also useful to avoid replicating mistakes.

Participants recognised that all Welsh towns are unique with different economic, social, cultural and environmental assets. As a network, the diversity of Welsh towns helps to build resilience to system shocks, such as economic downturns and environmental events. Participants agreed that better data and evidence is needed to understand Welsh towns as a network, both within Wales and across the border with England.
Conclusion and Recommendations

A sense of ‘place’ is particularly important for people and communities in Wales.

Recent research from The Young Foundation reveals that people in Wales do not feel that policy and decision makers consider the importance of place when developing policies and programmes, and engaging with communities.

Our research shows that communities in particular feel that its significance has perhaps been more overlooked in terms of how it relates to the services they receive, the employment available and the development opportunities, as well as broader principles of community capability, capacity, activism and preferences for how places are supported.6

This was reflected at our two roundtable discussions in Wales.

The headline message was that all partners working across Welsh towns need to ensure that they put local places and local people at the centre of what they do, recognising the uniqueness of place and developing policies and programmes accordingly. Local people and their voices should be listened to, heard and included across town development in Wales, so that people recognise and relate to their town’s identity, and are empowered to have a role in and take ownership of their towns.

The following recommendations are based on our conversations with key stakeholders at two roundtable events in Merthyr Tydfil and Llandudno Junction.

6 Green H. and Hodgson M. Valuing Place: The importance of place for understanding inequality and taking action in Wales, London: The Young Foundation 2017
Individuals and communities should:

- **Have pride in their towns.** Individuals and communities should look to build up their towns by strengthening and growing a positive identity and narrative around their places. Local media channels, including community journalism, hyperlocal media, papurau bro, and local social media, have an important role to play in shaping positive local narratives and supporting local pride in place. Town communities should seek to attract and retain young people in their towns, to ensure local identities and narratives endure over the long-term.

- **Engage positively in efforts to turnaround their town.** Individuals and communities should seek to play an active role in the development of their towns, to support the wellbeing of their friends, family, neighbours and colleagues. Reflecting the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, people should be treated with respect when presented with the opportunity to engage, and have the power to decide if and how they are involved in their town’s development.
The voluntary sector should:

- Look for opportunities to proactively engage with ‘unusual friends.’
  Local voluntary sector organisations operate at the coal face of communities, and have significant knowledge of the needs and aspirations of communities. The voluntary sector should look to develop a model that brings together the needs of communities and voluntary organisations with specific skills and resources from other sectors, particularly the business sector, for the benefit of towns.

- Seek to change the narrative about towns through highlighting and sharing stories.
  The voluntary sector should highlight and share stories of town success and innovation to complement traditional qualitative data on towns. The Future Generations Commissioner has reinforced the value that qualitative place-based data and insights, often held by local voluntary organisations, add to local wellbeing planning.7

The business sector should:

- Look for opportunities to proactively engage with ‘unusual friends.’
  Local businesses hold a wealth of knowledge about local places and people, and have specific skills and resources at hand. Local businesses should look for opportunities to engage with partners and communities, and share their knowledge to the benefit of Welsh towns.

- Invest in the wellbeing of Welsh towns.
  Local businesses often contribute significantly to community wellbeing and should look for opportunities to support and invest in the towns they operate in, for the wellbeing of the wider community.

Local government should:

- Positively engage with local people about a vision for their towns.
  Local unitary authorities, and town and county councils, should work with local communities, voluntary sector organisations,
businesses, schools, youth groups, faith groups, sports clubs and others to draw out and strengthen the local stories and identities unique to towns in Wales, and create a vision for places. While local government should not own or control this process, it is well placed to play a convening and facilitating role and bring people together for a conversation, given its degree of democratic accountability to the community, and stronger financial position relative to voluntary and community sectors.

- **Empower local people to take a leading role in their town.** Local authorities should work to develop the understanding and skills required to facilitate meaningful public participation. Local authorities should work with their partners from the voluntary and business sectors with specific skill sets to develop programmes for community members to build the confidence, skills and capacity to engage with, create and own their solutions, and grow dispersed community leadership and collective action.

- **Open up vacant spaces in towns for innovation and enterprise.** Local authorities should work with commercial property...
owners to look for innovative ways to open up vacant town spaces to entrepreneurs and young people, to allow innovation and enterprise space to flourish.

**Welsh Government should:**

- **Lead the behaviour and culture change required by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.** The Future Generations commissioner has stated that “delivering the Act is a challenge that will require the strongest leadership to make the most of the opportunities for change it offers.” Welsh Government should lead by example and model the behaviours and culture change required by the Well-being of Future Generations legislation. Welsh Government should work with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner to ensure that public bodies are challenged and adequately supported to achieve the shift in behaviour and culture required by the

---

Act, and ultimately achieve improved wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities across Wales. Welsh Government should consider alternative models that allow for longer-term, flexible planning to help achieve the Act’s aims, including longer-term financial planning and budgeting.

- **Support and enable local-level democracy and decision-making.** Welsh Government should ensure town and community councils are fit for purpose to best support towns and town communities in Wales, through the ongoing Review of the Community and Town Council Sector. Any future reform of local government in Wales must ensure that local authorities and town councils are best supported to lead strong local democracies.

- **Take the lead in developing the data and evidence base for Welsh towns.** Welsh Government should share town-level data in an accessible format, allowing towns to better evidence their needs, determine their local priorities and keep up with changing economic and demographic shifts to ensure local services are fit for purpose. Welsh Government should also play a convening and coordinating role for best practice evidence exchange to allow towns across Wales to learn from one another.

The Carnegie UK Trust will continue to have a strategic focus on towns across the remainder of our 2016-2020 strategic plan. Along with WCVA, we welcome engagement with key towns stakeholders in Wales to support the recommendations identified in this report. If you would like further information, please contact Rebekah Menzies, Policy and Development Officer at rebekah@carnegieuk.org or Dave Cook, Policy Officer at dcook@WCVA.org.uk.
Supporting Local Places and Local People
The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
KY12 8AW

Tel: +44 (0)1383 721445
Fax: +44 (0)1383 749799
Email: info@carnegieuk.org
www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

This report was written by Rebekah Menzies, Policy and Development Officer, Carnegie UK Trust, with support from Dave Cook, Policy Officer, WCVA.

December 2017