

Arsyllfa - filtering ideas

2019-2020

Background

- Over Phase One of the project the Arsyllfa Project Advisory Group (PAG), coming out of their feasibility assessment exercise and wider stakeholder engagement, discussed and researched a number of ideas before reaching the Strand Two recommendation of an ‘innovation prize’ (detailed paper already submitted to the LAG).
- Following confirmation from WEFO that they did not feel such an approach could be progressed the following paper outlines other prominent ideas discussed during the process as well as a concluding section on next steps.
- A number of ideas were disregarded at the time, others added into other project activity, with a few kept as possible plan b work in the event that the ‘innovation prize’ could not be progressed with.

Topline summary of ideas

Concept - Sir Gâr dros Sir Gâr

Summary of idea - This draws on the Be Nesa Llŷn activity which aimed at drawing together 11 local business people in the Llŷn area who felt very strongly that local people should be able to live and work in the area. They decided to create a loans fund from their own private funds, to provide loans for individuals and groups, who intend to start a new business, community enterprise or wish to grow their existing business.

Research source - The Brechfa Forest West Wind Farm Fund would be a good source of funding for this concept with Arsyllfa PAG members being able to draw from their existing business links to encourage initial investment:

- Arloesi Gwynedd - Be Nesa Llyn

Arsyllfa next steps - Felt by PAG that to kick-start activity within the project timeline a fund could be created under an ‘innovation prize’ approach. If such an approach was rejected by LAG / WEFO then work should be carried out to develop a possible scheme for implementation 2021-22.

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Concept - Sponsor a bespoke postgraduate business masters

Summary of idea - The idea here is to fully fund a one year post graduate research master's in business and management, with a focus on fostering entrepreneurialism in Carmarthenshire. The research would need to consider existing strengths and weaknesses in Carmarthenshire and the dissertation would look at existing and new methods of nurturing entrepreneurial talent. The opportunity would be provided by Swansea University or UWTSD and funded by Arsyllfa, with wider mentoring support provided by Arsyllfa. Such activity has been trialled and is working successfully in the area by companies such as RWE Innogy (discussions held with RWE consultant).

Research source - A number of possible institutions can be partnered with for such work be they direct costs eligible under LEADER or additional private sector partnership required:

- **Swansea University**
- **University of Wales Trinity St David**

Arsyllfa next steps - Felt by PAG that there may be issues to this approach as far as EU funding although there is merit in developing the idea with wider private sector partners if practicable.

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Concept - Innovation communities network

Summary of idea - Online community, co-ordinated by Arsyllfa, of individuals and companies from across Carmarthenshire (and wider rural Wales) who come together once a month (perhaps initially, for a trial period of six months) to hear inspirational speakers or/and share ideas. The aim of the community would be to network, provide peer-to-peer mentoring, sharing ideas, and finding opportunities to collaborate. There could be a number of communities (a bit like the food and drink clusters) based on different sectors: hair and beauty, food and hospitality, farming and horticulture, building and construction, comms and PR, clothing - retail and manufacturing (etc). Numbers in the 'community' may need to be limited to 10 or fewer, so that everyone gets a chance to contribute. Alternatively the group is open to a larger pool and is not broken down by sector type.

Research source - Worthy of note sectors such as 'hair and beauty' have a number of global networks of this type with the sector itself worth more than aviation and car manufacturing combined:

- **British Beauty Council - The Value of Beauty**
- **Rural Wales - time to meet the challenge**

Arsyllfa next steps - Building on the findings by OB3 that what was needed was increased networks such an approach became complex in 2020 to progress with due to Covid-19 and the project end date. However a digital way forward could be found building on the e-hub since developed as well as wider social media platforms.

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Concept - Supporting postgraduate study

Summary of idea - Sponsor a student, whose home is in Carmarthenshire, but who might be studying elsewhere in Wales or the UK, to undertake postgraduate study in business management and related courses. Funding could be provided to help with study and/or maintenance costs, on the basis that the student’s dissertation was focused on fostering entrepreneurialism in Carmarthenshire. The opportunity could be advertised locally in readiness for students beginning postgrad study in 2021. As part of their application, students would have to provide evidence from their place of study that the dissertation topic was acceptable to the academic institution.

Research source - It is worthy of note that the Rural Innovation (NESTA) research the team reviewed identified that areas with close links to the university sector tend to fare better, so it’s important to establish these links with UWTSD and Swansea (which has an excellent business school). Additional research could include the Santander scheme

- **Santandar Universities Emerging Entrepreneurs Programme**
- **Santandar Univeristies Entrepreneurship Awards**

Arsyllfa next steps - Felt by PAG that there may be issues to this approach as far as EU funding although there is merit in developing the idea with wider private sector partners if practicable.

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Concept - Enterprise and Employability Challenge - Welsh Baccaulaureate

Summary of idea - Schools are given funding to enable groups of students to develop a business idea and put it into practice. The exercise could be linked to students’ Baccaulaureate study and may be better confined to sixth formers (although the Baccaulaureate is now also studied by younger year groups). Funding could be around £100/group, up to a maximum of 10 groups per sixth form in Carmarthenshire schools. Any profits could be donated to the groups’ chosen local charities.

Research source - A simple way to start getting local Carmarthenshire school children interested in business and entrepreneurial activity

- **Welsh Baccaulaureate - Skills Challenge Certificate**

Arsyllfa next steps - Felt by PAG such an idea would be a way to inspire a younger audience in entrepreneurialism however there was concern by some that it could potentially duplicate existing provision (be that provision done effectively or not could not be ascertained).

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Concept - Targeting specific groups of potential entrepreneurs

Summary of idea - The idea here is to identify specific demographic groups and target funding/support at them. This could be in the form of a mini-innovation prize - say £1,000 - and the groups could be reached through existing organisations focussed on them. So, for example, if we chose to target women, we could partner with Merched y Wawr and the WI. A large barrier identified for woman entrepreneurs is childcare provision and so some dedicated childcare support to enable women with children to pursue their business ideas might be worth looking at.

Research source - Worthy of note here is the Rural Innovation (NESTA) research the team reviewed that identified that: *'The authors draw some interesting conclusions when identifying the way forward for rural innovation, not least the need to focus efforts on encouraging female entrepreneurs, and even nurturing the entrepreneurial skills and talents of older people.'*

Arsyllfa next steps - Felt by PAG that an 'innovation prize' would reach all such groups if marketed correctly. Further promotional activity or outreach could be carried out however any widespread targeting might threaten to duplicate existing provision as outlined in the OB3 scoping study.

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Concept - Specific support for a business idea, born from the Covid-19 crisis and developed during the pandemic, that has the potential to be relevant over the medium to long term.

Summary of idea - During Covid-19, individuals, workers, employers and companies did things differently. They changed their personal or business practices in order to adapt to the 'new normal'. This idea is around finding examples of changed behaviour and new ideas that came about as a result of Covid-19, were developed (and monetised), but have resonance beyond a Covid-19 world, or in the 'new normal'.

This might include restaurants that changed from eat-in to take-away - what did they do differently that they might like to embed into their normal practice, post-pandemic (moving services online, onto apps, putting together recipe boxes instead of cooked meals etc). Or, it might include organisations reaching out to vulnerable people, who volunteered their services to deliver food parcels, or keep the lonely company (in a socially distanced way) - is there a means to now grow this into a business?

Research source - This concept is directly linked to Covid-19 and its aftermath and follows on from recent work by the Arsyllfa team:

- **Covid-19 rural policy response**
- **Innovation at a time of crisis**

Arsyllfa next steps - While the 'innovation prize' would have facilitated this next steps around this agenda could be a scoping study follow-up conducted by a research company pinpointing such innovation to be case studied on the Arsyllfa e-hub as well as possibly to feed into Carmarthenshire County Council's wider post-Covid-19 economic development strategy.

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Concept - Deep Place studies leading to town ‘Coalitions for Change’

Summary of idea - Capitalising on the deep-place work done in Llandovery, Arsyllfa could offer seed money and advice to other towns to undertake similar research, with a view to establishing a baseline of existing economic activity and public sector provision, an assessment of ‘where the town would like to be’, and practical steps to begin achieving the aspired goals. Perhaps local businesses, or the community council, could be asked to contribute financially or in-kind (e.g. by offering to project manage).

Research source - This follows on from the feasibility assessment work:

- Llandovery Deep Place Study
- Carmarthenshire towns

Arsyllfa next steps - Additional research / feasibility study work to be carried out with FSB Wales leading on from constructive discussions with them.

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Concept - Creation of a rural think tank to foster long-term change

Summary of idea - The short-term nature of any LEADER project inevitably means it is unable to stimulate change to the degree required for long-term impact. The project therefore needs to think beyond merely a timeline of a few years and instead build the foundations for a longer-term project/body that will stand the test of time and be able to follow through on its activity.

Research source - A number of the stakeholder discussions held with the PAG, as well as research reports analysed, highlighted how success is ultimately achieved through medium to long-term buy-in from partners in both the public and private sector. A think tank model such as the Institute of Welsh Affairs is an excellent example of how this approach has meant impact over the long-term.

Arsyllfa next steps - The project to look at how Arsyllfa can evolve into a long-term self sustained think tank for rural Wales which either will provide a mechanism to (a) generate change itself through policy ideas and bringing new partners together (b) encouraging other organisations to mobilise around the agenda of rural development and entrepreneurship in fear of being left behind in the public discourse around these issues.

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Concept - Tech entrepreneurialism - linking the savvy social to the socially shy

Summary of idea - Technology has come to the rescue during the Covid-19 crisis, helping accelerate new ways of working and enabling behaviour change. Innovative technology cuts across all businesses and cannot be put into a neat box of its own, however there is scope to directly encourage tech entrepreneurialism, linked to the wider Arsyllfa call for innovation. In most cases,

businesses need help to take advantage of digital innovation, whether that is using social media, developing a web presence, or adopting AI in manufacturing or service delivery. As a rule, younger people tend to be more tech savvy, and so this concept would link them up with new or established businesses to encourage them to get online and exploit the efficiencies and advantages that digital innovation offers. Perhaps this could be done through schools, universities, or local youth groups.

Research source - Based on a number of research papers and articles, including:

- Smarter rural business support
- Rural workshop ideas
- Digital innovation

Arsyllfa next steps - Work with partners such as YFC and the Urdd to create a tie-up in the area between these membership based organisations and innovative employers.

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Concept - The older people market

Summary of idea - In common with rural areas generally, Carmarthenshire's population is grappling with the challenges of supporting a growing older population. This needn't all be about 'challenge' and entrepreneurs should be encouraged to view this through the opportunity lens, instead. Services currently offered voluntarily could be monetised (many older people have far more disposable income than younger people), but more importantly, entrepreneurs should be encouraged to think about goods and services that fulfil the needs of a growing elderly population - from innovative medical aids, to day-to-day services, to methods of tackling isolation and loneliness, fitness and exercise, hair and beauty, house maintenance, meals on wheels, etc. Arsyllfa could commission a study reviewing all sectors from which older people obtain goods and services and identify the gaps. Alternatively, Arsyllfa could incentivise existing and new entrepreneurs to come up with practical ideas.

Research source - Looking specifically at the elderly and the opportunities that exist in fostering entrepreneurship to capitalise on the 'grey pound':

- Consumer trends - grey pound
- Lessons from a global rural policy framework

Arsyllfa next steps - Further scoping work or feasibility study with groups dealing with the 'grey pound' as well as elderly groups.

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Concept - Creation of an e-hub for rural Carmarthenshire

Summary of idea - Creation of an e-hub to foster the agenda of rural economic development as well as wider entrepreneurship across rural Wales (bringing in best practice both from other parts

of Wales as well as internationally). Such an approach would be an ongoing process starting with the creation of the e-hub prior to hosting guest blogs and wider research information. There is also scope to build on this work with social media platforms such as a Twitter account and LinkedIn/Facebook page. One possibility would be replicating the 'Yr Awr Gymraeg' concept for Carmarthenshire businesses, freelancers, contractors to share their offers, business details etc. at a dedicated time, each week.

Research source - A number of rural areas have developed e-hubs over the years to circulate relevant research and to share best practice.

Arsyllfa next steps - Develop an enhanced online presence that would include a focus on a number of key themes to focus on - suggestions by the PAG include automation; Welsh language; innovation and entrepreneurship.

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Concept - Establish a rural network

Summary idea - Look to develop one rural network to focus on issues facing rural economic development across Wales. This will assist both key partners (e.g. Antur Teifi) in a more long-term strategic approach to collaboration and moving the agenda forward.

Research source - Number of recent consultations and discussions have of late circulated around how economic development and wider fostering of productivity and entrepreneurship can happen post EU funding.

- **Rural Wales: Time to Meet the Challenge 2025**
- **Entrepreneurship in Carmarthenshire**

Arsyllfa next steps - Develop a rural network for key partners. While this will look at rural Wales in its entirety it will draw best practice from other areas. It also will facilitate certain elements of the OB3 scoping study findings.

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Concept - Innovation leave

Summary of idea - Working with the local authority, the 'innovation leave' concept will look to develop exciting new opportunities for public sector workers to develop their own business plan during working hours. Exact methodology and timescales is tbc, but the innovation leave concept will allow individuals specific time during their work schedule to develop the innovative business idea over a space of 16 months while still working mostly for the public sector. This approach will give entrepreneurs an opportunity to start testing there ideas while still working. Long term this concept has the opportunity to strengthen the county's economy by giving entrepreneurs that much needed time to develop there innovative new business idea.

Research source - Idea discussed as part of the Arsyllfa working group. Possible other examples of public sector bodies setting a similar programme, could be developed wider across different sector also

Arsyllfa next steps - Develop a programme that would work for both individual and the public sector bodies. Further research required.

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Concept - Click and Collect App

Summary of idea - Similar to Cardigan Towns Partnership's App but also let people order local products from independent shops the app would create an easier way to support local businesses in rural towns by using one location to collect the shopping. In order for the app to be effective, it would need to be versatile and open for every High Street in Carmarthenshire (possibly wider Wales) to use. It is only then consumers would see the full benefit of this approach.

Research source - Such a concept has been discussed in the past and some towns across Wales have already started to develop programmes.

- **Rural Workshop discussions**
- **4CG**
- **Cadwyn Ogwen**

Arsyllfa next steps - Discussion with Town Councils and research into similar programmes. In order for such an app to succeed it would need wider pan-Wales support and funding.

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Concept - Sustainable Social Care for the elderly

Summary of idea - Social Care within Carmarthenshire needs to be readdressed, as it is currently unsustainable for local rural communities. The work carried out by Solva Care is a potential model that could be used in communities in Carmarthenshire as an innovative new service for elderly care. By putting care services first and engaging closely with all partners the local authority has the potential of being world leading in sustainable rural social care with multiple spin-off entrepreneurial opportunities coming out of this focus.

Research source - Solva Care in Pembrokeshire run a social enterprise care home that uses local procurement for services and products.

- **Solva Care**

Arsyllfa next steps - Enhanced research into current social care in rural Carmarthenshire looking also at potential other possible models and methods.

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Conclusion

Below outlines key next steps for the Arsyllfa team following guidance from the Project Advisory Group and in light of the fact that WEFO has confirmed that in their view the 'innovation prize' would not be eligible to progress with:

1. Look to develop the innovation prize for post-project launch in 2021-22 with wider partners/funders once EU restrictions are not in place.
 2. Set-up up and foster a rural network for partners in order to move the agenda forward in partnership and avoid duplication of provision. Use the project to deliver the first phase of this work with the aim of post-project sustainability.
 3. Creation of an e-hub to promote wider activity and ideas aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.
 4. Once developed deliver an initial first stage of the e-hub to showcase best-practice case studies; blogs; content.
 5. Look at further third-party commissioned specialist research / feasibility studies to inform partners as well as the future Carmarthenshire County Council post-Covid-19 economic strategy. To include:
 - **Research paper 1** - Scoping study on post-Covid-19 new business entrepreneurial models that developed during Covid-19 and might increase further over 2020-21.
 - **Research 2** - Future of Carmarthenshire towns. Likely impact of Covid-19 and possible opportunities.
 - **Research 3** - Wider research where project resource available, complementing the recently issued ITT 'Economic Development Recover Plan for Carmarthenshire County Council'.
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