



**Partneriaeth  
Tyfu Canolbarth Cymru /  
Growing Mid Wales  
Partnership**

**Dydd Gwener 12 Mai 2023**

**Friday 12 May 2023**

1.30 pm

Cyfarfod Rhith

Virtual Meeting

**In Attendance**

Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader, Ceredigion County Council **(Chair) (Cllr BD)**

Andrew Cornish, Coleg Ceredigion **(AC)**

Angharad Massow, Growing Mid Wales **(AM)**

Ann Elias, Ceredigion County Council **(AE)**

Ann Weedy **(AW)**

Barry Rees, Ceredigion County Council **(BR)**

Brett John, UK Government **(BJ)**

Cathy Martin, Growing Mid Wales **(CMn)**

Ceri Stephens, Mid Wales Manufacturing Group **(CS)**

Claire Miles, Growing Mid Wales **(CMs)**

Councillor Clive Davies, Ceredigion County Council **(Cllr CD)**

Councillor Jackie Charlton, Powys County Council **(JC)**

Councillor James Gibson-Watt, Leader of Powys County Council **(Cllr JG-W)**

Councillor Keith Henson, Ceredigion County Council **(Cllr KH)**

David Owen, Growing Mid Wales **(DO)**

Gavin Bowen, Natural Resources Wales **(GB)**

Hazel Lloyd Lubran, CAVO **(HLL)**

Louise Grove-White, Ceredigion County Council **(LGW)**

Nash, UK Government **(N)**

Nathan Richards, Visit Wales **(NR)**

Nia Williams, Mid Wales Joint Committee **(NiaW)**

Nick Venti, PAVO **(NV)**

Nicola Williams, Powys County Council **(NW)**

Nigel Brinn, Powys County Council **(NB)**

Patricia Jones, UWTSD **(PJ)**

Peter James, Welsh Government **(PJ)**

Rebecca Jeremy, Powys County Council **(RJ)**

Simon Jones, Global Centre of Rail Excellence **(SJ)**

Stacey-Jayne Oakham, Growing Mid Wales **(SJO)**

Val Hawkins, Mid Wales Tourism **(VH)**

Vanessa Naughton, Welsh Government **(VN)**

Simultaneous Translation of this meeting was provided by Sian Jones from Cyfaith.

The Chair, Councillor Bryan Davies, Leader, CCC welcomed everyone to the meeting and led the introductions to those present.

1.	<p><b>Apologies for absence</b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from: -  Ann Watkin, Welsh Government (AW)  Arwyn Davies, Ceredigion County Council (AD)  Caroline Turner, Powys County Council (CT)  Councillor Catrin MS Davies (CMSD)  Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Gwynedd County Council (Cllr DM)  Councillor David Selby, Powys County Council (DS)  Hywel Davies, University of Wales Trinity St David (HD)  Mark Dacey, NPTC Group of Colleges (MD)  Mark Williams, Regen Welsh Government (MW)  Peter Skitt, Hywel Dda Healthboard, NHS (PS)  Peter Howells, NFU Cymru (PH)  Rhian Haywood, Aber Innovation (RH)  Rhodri Morgan, Aberystwyth University (RM)  Rhys Morris, Welsh Government (RMO)  Russell Hughes-Pickering, Ceredigion County Council (RHP)</p>
2.	<p><b>Minutes</b></p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 were agreed as a correct record. Proposed by Clive Davies and seconded by Jackie Charlton.</p>
3.	<p><b>Transfer of Chair from Cllr James Gibson Watt to Cllr Bryan Davies</b></p> <p>Cllr JG-W handed over the Chair position to Cllr BD.</p> <p>Cllr BD thanked Cllr JG-W for the work he has done over the last year as Chair for the Partnership Board. Cllr BD expressed the importance of these meetings, which provides important feedback from all the organisations represented within it – thus he encouraged people to express their opinions.</p>
4.	<p><b>Update on activity relevant to Mid Wales</b></p> <p><b>4.1. Global Centre of Rail Excellence (GCRE) – Simon Jones, Chief Executive</b></p> <p>Simon Jones (SJ), Chief Executive of GCRE Limited was welcomed to the meeting and provided a verbal update, which highlighted the key points below.</p> <p>GCRE Limited was set up by WG to develop and then operate the GCRE project. Over the last 2 years GCRE has developed a detailed business plan, let several contracts, and started the next phase of the funding round.</p> <p>In the summer 2021 they achieved outline planning consent, which they have used to develop the GCRE project. They have been establishing the details of this project – the design works for the sites and the railway design. A master plan has been developed, which includes a big energy dimension to it – to accommodate the large amount of power trains use. There is a huge amount of work underway at the site and offices, as work is starting to materialise at the sites (e.g., drill rigs and material). They are currently carrying out ground investigations, ground clearance and demolishing old facilities, which were previously associated with the coal mine. GCRE aim on finishing the railway build by the end of 2025 and then open the railway elements in 2026 – the delay is due to National Grid connection availability, which they are monitoring closely.</p> <p>Over the last month or so GCRE have announced on their website/LinkedIn the deals they have organised with Hitachi, Transport for Wales, Talgo, Thales GTS and various other organisations to encourage potential investors/customers. They are working very hard to get these deals in place, as one of their main priorities is to raise private sector funding to ensure the GCRE project (a £400M project) happens. They have received £70M from WG/UKG, which has been committed to building this project. However, the</p>

remaining balance needs to be raised from the private sector, which GCRE are endeavouring to do. Though there is a risk that this will not be successful, even with the wishes of the industry behind them. The private sector will only put money into this project if they believe they can make a return on it – so they will need to provide the private sector with this confidence.

To raise investment, they are using the public procurement process to auction off the public funding already invested into the project. In January they ran a pre-qualification exercise, which shortlisted several strong/credible organisations that have now been invited to tender. They are using competitive dialogue process, so they going to sit down and have series of structured conversation with the bidders over the coming months. They will try to work together to address as many of the risks as they can identify where possible, while ensuring its fair with the other bidders. The deadline for final bids is in September. The organisation with the winning bid will become the owners of GCRE and take on its assets, liabilities, and commitments to build the GCRE railway facility.

They have been thinking about building a technology park on the site. They received this inspiration from the automotive sector test sites around the UK (e.g., Silverstone, Millbrook in Buckinghamshire). At these sites the automotive industry test and approve new products, while offering facilities for their clients to set up a base there. Tier one automotive manufactures (Ford, General Motors, Goodyear) have permanent bases at these test sites, as they have engineers who want to make use of the test facilities. They would like to make the equivalent for the railway industry, so big-name railway companies come and base themselves in Mid Wales. Though no one will come and base themselves there until the railway test facility has been built.

They will require people in place to serve businesses at this technology park and accommodation, so they have been pushing the skills agenda. They have appointed an GCRE Executive Director to lead on skills and innovation, who starts in a month's time. They will help build a pipeline of skills, which future tenants can make use of. Local universities, FE colleges and schools will be contacted to inspire young people to think about careers that complement this area of work – all sorts of roles will need to be filled to make this site successful (not just heavy mechanical engineering roles). Potential headcount for the core GCRE facility is about 200-250 permanent people: -

- 100-150 people from the GCRE team
- 50-60 people for the hotel on site
- 30-50 permanent R&D (Research and Development) types of people from a consortium of universities who have pledged them.

Along with GCRE's core people at the facility, potential tenants at the site might bring many their own staff to work at the site facility. It could potentially become quite a significant employment site if all of this happens – though it might take some time to reach this potential. To make this happen they need to work on the skills programme, ensuring this site is attractive enough to entice organisation to it.

GCRE Ltd are currently undertaking some community work – a series of road shows in local community halls. They inform the local community of their plans for the site (Strategic Master Plan) and giving them a chance to discuss how this might impact them. While also outlining the potential opportunities for them.

### Questions

CD queried whether GCRE Ltd would be doing any research into hydrogen and light rail, as it could be relevant to Mid Wales considering the current consultation out to renew the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth rail line. SJ confirmed there are three main options being considered by the railway industry:

1. Further electrification of overhead wires – very expensive option, which doesn't work for the Mid Wales branch railway lines (challenging cost benefit analysis)
2. Battery – some merit, but tricky
3. Hydrogen – One of main options being backed for decarbonising the railway, though technological development is required to increase its reliability.

This site would provide an opportunity for technological development to be refined and established. Plus, there is a lot of potential for hydrogen generation at this site – it's an exposed location and has quite a lot of renewable energy potential, which mitigates the sites risk. With the challenges around grid connectivity and generating green energy on site, this could be an attractive option for potential investors.

As for light rail they are in discussions with a company that has been developing a light rail system – trying to persuade them to bring this technology to the GCRE site and use it as a demonstration facility, which can then be expanded upon. Plus, light rail would be useful for rural areas.

**ACTION:** LGW will provide SJ with contact details, so he can provide these to the new skills and innovation person starting next month – as having skilled workforce in place to support this scheme is very important. Plus, LGW will organise a meeting with them as soon as possible – while keeping Cllr-JGW and Cllr-BD in the loop on the advances.

**ACTION:** SJ to get in touch with AC regarding Mid Wales FE colleges, to see what they offer (e.g., skills training, apprenticeships).

GCRE Ltd have been working closely with the Welsh universities. There is a consortium of UK universities, which have done research in the rail field called UKRRIN (UK Rail and Research Innovation Network) – they have worked with them to get Cardiff and Swansea University into this consortium, which Aber and USW are already associates of. Hopefully, they will have people from UK and Welsh Universities based at this site.

With the large amount of people coming onto the site, access to the strategic transport network is quite important. In light of this AE queried whether GCRE has had discussions about running passenger trains on the old coal line. SJ confirmed this is a hot topic, but it's challenging to open the branch line as the Business Case doesn't stack up currently – due to the population density in the valley. However, if this site became an employment site with 600 – 700 people it would increase the density, as a significant number of people would be moving in and out of the area every day. At which point they would be happy to work with NPT and others to lobby for this.

They have commissioned a transport study as part of their plan of obligations, which they are currently working on. GCRE Ltd are also interested in how they can contribute toward leisure journeys around the site. They have identified a series of public rights of way, which they will have to re-align into the middle of the site. Plus, they would like to make walking/cycling routes through the site and link up with the existing routes to the north of the site creating a route which circles the entire site – making a 12km cycle route around the site.

#### **4.2. Mid Wales Tourism (MWT) – Val Hawkins, Chief Executive**

Val Hawkins (VH) provided a presentation on MWT Cymru, which highlighted the following areas.

- MWT Tourism Community, Stakeholders & Partners
- The Importance of Tourism in Driving Economic Development
- MWT Cymru's Core Activities & Tourism Specialists
- Attracting Visitors (e.g., Publications, Mid Wales Media Hub, Social Channels, Website etc.)

- Internal website stats, including the most popular website pages
- Supporting Local Communities (able to leverage significant PR and media coverage, both national and international coverage)
- Challenges the Tourism Industry is facing (e.g., Skill shortages, cost of living crisis, staycations trend, supply chain shortages etc.)
- Fostering Collaboration and what they could potentially achieve

MWT's mission is to showcase Mid Wales as a must visit destination and working together they can create memorable experiences for visitors, which contributes to the growth and prosperity of the region. A healthy tourism sector in the region lays the foundations for inward investment – if it's a great place to visit, it will be a good place to live and work.

MWT doesn't receive any public funding to support their day-to-day activities, so imagine what they could achieve with a little bit more support. They have one Local Authority (LA) in the Mid Wales region which supports MWT – Gwyneth.

### Questions

BD queried the purpose of the LA's membership of MWT. VH – LA's and some of the national organisations (RSPB Cymru, NRW) come under the LA corporate type membership. This membership helps with some of the destination work MWT are doing are supported by these larger organisations, as well as some of the individual smaller businesses. It also means they can work collaboratively a bit better.

**ACTION:** Cllr-BD and Cllr-JGW happy to have a conversation with VH regarding the point above and below.

CM commented that the soft intelligence from MWT has been invaluable, as they can see what is actually happening to businesses on the ground in the region. This relates to the regional Tourism Study, which they undertook in the second part of last year – MWT was a part of this steering group. There have been discussions going on internally with LA officers about how best to resource this work going forward. They recognise there is a need to use the great resources they have in Mid Wales and work more closely together – making better use of the money and resources available.

Cllr JC commented that she would like to see green tourism extended/established a bit more across Mid Wales – keen to find out what more MWT can do to support and develop green tourism, as this brings other jobs and activity. However, they will struggle with transport and developing a green tourism strategy for this, so people don't have to bring their cars into Mid Wales – which is the only option unless they are a keen walker/cyclist. Cllr JC queried how much MWT could influence this and develop it, along with this group. VH confirmed MWT have done a significant amount of work over the years to try and join up information relating to greener transport/tourism in Mid Wales – for example highlighting the two national trails in MW, the coastal paths, and the scenic railways at the heart of Wales on the Cambrian line. They launched a Wales trails app, creating hubs where different modes of transport intersect – making it easier for visitors to think and plan days out, which don't involve them using the car. Cllr JC mentioned they could do a bit more for this, maybe lobby around this and come up with innovative ideas (e.g., bus passes).

Cllr KH commented on the importance of active travel to health, mental health and bring income into the region. They need to be lobbying government to improve this and expand upon the areas included in active travel in the county – for example in Ceredigion it is only Lampeter, Aberystwyth and Cardigan which are included as the main centres.

## 5. Business Updates

### 5.1. Regional Engagement Team Report/Landscape Review

The Landscape Review presentation was shared to the meeting and CM highlighted the following areas.

#### Mid Wales Growth Deal

They had a very positive Portfolio Assurance Review (PAR) by Welsh Government's commissioned external review team in Feb 2023. They received an AMBER/GREEN rating in this PAR.

The Strategic Portfolio Business Case and supporting documents were approved by GMW Board and submitted to Government (March 2023).

They are currently waiting for the outcome of Government review and the Grant Award Letter, which is due to be issued this summer (June 2023), followed by funding to the Region - another key milestone in delivering the Growth Deal.

Next steps – there is a lot of work to do this year, as activity is building/increasing. They are working on the Private Sector Investment Strategy and over the next couple of months they will be developing the Project and Programme Business Case further and reviewing the Portfolio. They'll receive emerging information from the Business Case development process, which aligns with the five-case business model. Therefore, as the projects become a bit clearer, this will allow the development of the overall Portfolio Commercial Case and allow them to progress.

#### Mid Wales RSP

The RSP Spring Event was held at The Metropole in Llandrindod Wells on 23<sup>rd</sup> March – where the RSP officially launched their 3-year Employment & Skills Plan (2022-2025) and Action Plan. The event was well attended, and it provided businesses in the region to network and explore opportunities that the RSP promoted.

Looking ahead activities are also increasing for the RSP. Building on the Spring Event, the RSP will be holding the first business cluster group meeting at the National Library in Aberystwyth on 15<sup>th</sup> May. There is also a RSP Optimised Retrofit Programme workshop event on 19<sup>th</sup> May at the Metropole in Llandrindod Wells, which is aimed at promoting and filling some of the skills gaps (e.g., skills relating to green technology etc.). Then in early June the first Young Person's Guarantee cluster group meeting will be held.

**ACTION:** Please let LGW/CM know if they would like to attend 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May Workshops, so they may send out invites.

The RSP's first Business Cluster Group in May, currently has twenty-two businesses planning on attending. This is the first of the series of Business Cluster Groups they are holding, which is held on a bi-monthly basis throughout the region.

#### UKSP Fund

The delivery timescales are still a moving picture for the UKSP fund. Local partnership meetings are being held this week and next week to assess what has come through the first round of calls held by both Ceredigion and Powys LAs. Therefore, they should be able to update everyone shortly on what has been approved/successful under the first funding calls.

They have received some clarity on 'Multiply' from UKG. The end of year monitoring reports has been submitted to UKG and they have requested that all the underspend from year one (22/23) are rolled forward into year two. They are looking at how best they can utilise the underspend based on the demand call from potential projects. They

have also started considering their valuation requirements for programme. They are still in the early stages, so the applications are currently being assessed and considered by each local partnership.

The information on the projects which have already been approved are available on both LA websites, which will be updated as further projects get approved.

### **Regional Engagement Update**

CM provided an update on the RET current activity and next steps.

The RET are mostly working on the ongoing activity mapping and delivery in the region. In terms of the EU funded activity, they are looking at - what is stopping, what is being picked up by other funding sources and what isn't being picked up. This information is being fed into other parts of GMW and shared with stakeholders. The RET have also been reviewing the vision document, which they hope to share at the next Partnership meeting.

Over the next couple of months, the RET will be working closely with Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) Another priority for them over the next couple of months to promote effective/prompt project closure. This is very important as this is the last round of European Structural Funding (ESIF), so there is a very strict deadline for claiming monies and closing projects.

**ACTION:** If anyone has queries regarding the ESIF project closure deadline, please let CM know.

Due to the current funding landscape, there are more projects than funding at the moment. Though this doesn't mean the volume of projects meet the identified needs/demands in the region. It's a moving piece with a lot of factors in play to consider – though projects are starting to come through the UKSP Fund pipeline, which has more funding calls to come.

In a few areas there are still strategic delivery gaps, especially around digital and decarbonisation. There are community-based projects coming through which align heavily with their local, region and national goals in these areas, but there are still quite a few gaps in activity. Another key gap emerging is skilled graduate employability – they do great work upskilling young people in the region, they have trouble retaining them. They are now seeing a gap in graduate employability/placement type schemes.

There has been quite a lot of policy movement in innovation over the past couple of months and a lot of questions raised about funding sources for research type activity in the future. There is currently a risk that a few strategic and nationally important projects, which were funded under the previous funded programmes, may have to cease, or be significantly scaled back due to this sensitivity. WG innovation policy has progressed since the last meeting, with UKR&I and WG signing a MOU to work jointly together. The RET are hoping to dialogue with WG and UKR&I a bit more about how this will work in practice going forward.

The following key policy developments that have occurred in UK and Welsh Government since the last meeting of the GMW Partnership: -

- Town Centres Position Statement
- Innovation MOU
- UK Gov Science and Technology Framework
- Net Zero Skills Action Plan
- Manufacturing Plan for Wales

**ACTION:** If anyone wishes to discuss the policy developments mentioned above any further, please let CM know.

	<p>As they are coming to the end of the ESF funding programme, the RET are starting to review what the funding has achieved in Mid Wales. WEFO kindly provided an update on what Mid Wales achieved regionally since the start of the programme in 2014 – 16,000 partners assisted from the ESF funding, 650 new businesses and 3,000 jobs created. These numbers will rise, as the output from the ESIF programme increases.</p> <p><u>Questions</u></p> <p>Cllr JC queried whether there was any information or update on the issue around citizen assemblies and collaborations. CM confirmed that the WG are considering the next stage of the innovation strategy - how they are going to actually deliver it. They are due to touch base shortly on how this is going to work in practice – maybe they should consider inviting them to a future partnership meeting to help them with this. Increasingly UKR&amp;I funding has provided opportunities for LAs to lead on the funding applications, asking LAs/regional consortiums to step up and lead on innovation activity. It would be useful to have a more detailed update on this, at future meetings.</p> <p>BJ queried whether decarbonisation and digital gaps mentioned earlier are being evidenced through the UKSP fund open call process. CM confirmed they have seen projects coming forward in these areas in the early stages – they are locally/community based and strategically aligned, but they do not cover all parts of Powys/Ceredigion. While they have identified a specific need for these local projects, they also need to consider the wider strategic piece – conversations regarding this identified gap are ongoing.</p> <p><b>ACTION:</b> CM will share the mapping document, which outlines the strategic gaps the RET have identified with BJ.</p> <p><b>5.2. Connectivity and Infrastructure Working Group</b></p> <p>a written report and on strategic transport issues affecting the region and the work of the Connectivity and Infrastructure Working Group had been provided by Ann Elias.</p> <p>The Road Review is currently paused so WG/Roads Review Panel can reconsider some of the front road projects, which are coming forward to assist Mid Wales in unblocking their strategic corridors and making in particular the flow of freight better. Hopefully WG will commence a logistics freight plan, which AE can feed into and highlight some the issues around the freight movements on Mid Wales corridors. AE is aware of some schemes which are going to proceed: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A489/A470 junction at Caersws; on the</li> <li>• A487 at Comins Coch on the outskirts of Aberystwyth;</li> <li>• on the A487 between Machynlleth and Dolgellau; and on the</li> <li>• A40 east of Brecon</li> </ul> <p>AE is waiting for further details from WG (Tom Crow) on what these modified schemes will look like.</p> <p>The published WG National Transport Delivery Plan highlights the Mid Wales Cross-Border scheme has been approved. The A483 Pant to Llanymynech project states the UKG and WG should work together, to identify what this project might look like going forward. There is a concern that Department of Transport isn't currently reviewing the Strategic Road Network (SRN) future programme and taking it forward into the Road Investment Strategy (RIS3). AE is working with Marches partnership on whether this programme can continue to come forward.</p>
6.	<p><b>Government Updates</b></p> <p><b>6.1 Welsh Government Update</b></p> <p>Peter James (PJ) provided verbal update.</p>



In February the WG innovation strategy was launched, which used cross government approach to set out how innovation could support programme delivery across a range of Portfolios. This strategy has four themes: -

- Education
- Economy
- Health and Wellbeing
- Climate and Nature

The strategy also emphasised throughout equality, inclusion and culture for innovation and collaboration. Colleagues are working on developing an action plan for this strategy – reviewing how the key themes can be taken forward and delivered against the strategy’s strategic ambitions.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May the Economy Minister released a refreshed Manufacturing Action Plan for Wales. This plan aims to ensure Wales is ready to erase the fourth industrial revolution and support the sectors with the changes of energy prices, labour shortages and supply chain difficulties.

Enterprise Cymru have secured the contract award for Business Wales (2023 – 2029) – supporting business entrepreneurs at business start ups and Business Wales established advisory support. Enterprise Cymru will be collaborating between the lead supplier (Business in Focus) and subcontractors. Inception planning is currently underway, with focus on service delivery commencing from 1<sup>st</sup> June. They don’t expect any breaks in service delivery, so client should continue to receive information, business support and advice which will hopefully encourage them to grow their businesses in Mid Wales.

Their regional office has been supporting the MWGD. They are working closely with the Portfolio Management Office (PoMO) and UKG to release of the first tranche of GD funding, following the submission of the Portfolio Business Case at the end of March. To unlock the GD funding, they are working through several internal steps/processes and liaising with several internal teams.

In December 2021 WG Regional Economic Framework was published across Wales. WG are now looking to refresh this framework, to see how they can operationalise it. They will work closely alongside both LAs to do this and ensure it aligns with the strategic regional planning in the refreshed Growing Mid Wales vision.

## **6.2 UK Government Update**

Brett John (BJ) provided a verbal update.

BJ welcomed the new deputy area lead – Nash Manounah (NM)

Since the last meeting they have been able to provide more clarity around the Multiplier spend in year one and how this can be carried into year two. Hopefully this will provide further flexibility for the LA in utilising any underspend.

They are having ongoing discussions regarding the Levelling Up Fund round three. BJ is aware that both LAs (Ceredigion and Powys) were unsuccessful in round two, which UKG would have provided feedback on. UKG will stay in touch with both LAs on how levelling up round three could work in the region, as more details emerge.

There will be further rounds of the community ownership fund – they are keen to engage to ensure more community/volunteer groups are aware of this opportunity.

The UKG are working closely with WG colleagues on investment zones, to see what these might look like in Wales. Hopefully as this discussion develops, they will be in position to engage further with LAs on this feasible prospect.

<b>7.</b>	<b>Any other business</b> There was no further business.
<b>8.</b>	<b>Dates of Future Meetings</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September</li><li>• Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November</li></ul>

