Bwrw Ymlaen

TOWARDS AN ECONOMIC STRATEGY FOR THE LLANELLI CONSTITUENCY

By Lee Waters AM
The reason I put myself forward to stand for election as your representative in our National Assembly was because I wanted to be an agent for change, to do my bit to reject the notion that things always have to be this way.

One of the reasons so many people in the Llanelli constituency voted for Brexit was that they shared a sense of despair at the status quo. “It can’t get much worse” many people told me when I campaigned in that referendum, and they hoped Brexit would ‘shake things up’.

It is easier to point to the negative consequences of globalisation than the benefits we have simply pocketed and moved on from. An undeniable negative consequence of global free trade is the weakening power of governments to resist economic forces. We are at the whim of decisions made in boardrooms in faraway places. The cruel irony of Brexit is that we may become even more vulnerable.

The Swansea Bay area, including Llanelli, lost some 30,000 manufacturing jobs between 1990 and 2010. Sometimes this has been simple churn, and new roles appear elsewhere. But where these jobs have been replaced, too often they have been in fragile and low paid roles. This churn is simply the tip of the iceberg in the profound shift we’ve seen in our community since the late 1970s.

This is not a counsel of despair but a call to action. So what can be done?

I passionately and profoundly believe that we can turn things around. And that the key to our future is within us.

Nobody can deny the genius of the people of our area, or history books are full of examples of the innovation and industry. For too long we have accepted the inevitability that some of our brightest and best must leave, must get out in order to get on. Unless we halt this ‘brain drain’ we will never turn things around.

There are enormous strengths in our local economy - we host national and international expertise in manufacturing, construction, transport & logistics, and sport - expertise that can be harnessed to energise positive change. Despite the decline in the UK’s manufacturing sector we retain a strong residual base of companies in Llanelli that are good employers, loyal to the area, and who add to our innovation system.

The coming wave of disruptive change from developments in artificial intelligence offer opportunities as well as threats. The Fourth Industrial revolution promises rapid and exponential technological change, and we must seize on it and spread its benefits.
With our base of innovative local companies, our local FE college (Coleg Sir Gar), and the prospect of Swansea University (Wales’ leading University in artificial intelligence) opening a campus in Llanelli, we have an opportunity to be part of this global wave of innovation.

In the excitement of harnessing new developments we must also not lose sight of the needs of our everyday economy, what Llanelli born economist Professor Karel Williams has termed the ‘mundane economy’. The sectors that form the foundations of our local economy - things like food production, care provision, energy and housing: the less mobile parts of the economy that are there because the people are there. In fact employment in the so-called ‘Foundational Economy’ accounts for around 40% of all jobs. But we have not nurtured their potential to build local wealth, and have allowed business models to flourish which have sucked the value of these foundational sectors from the local economy.

For example, work undertaken by the think-tank the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) suggests that for every £1 spent in a locally owned firm, 63p recirculates into the local economy - whereas when £1 is spent with a multinational, just 40p re-enters the local economy.

We’ve also seen the supermarket chains use their purchasing power to drive down farmers profits, creating real problems for rural communities who are seeing farms close, and young people leave as a result of pressures from the large purchasers.

The city of Preston in the north west of England has shown how focusing on local wealth building can lift the economy. The borough council covers an area roughly the size of Swansea and has focused on harnessing the power of the public pound, by reforming the way public bodies buy goods and services to favour local firms they have pulled Preston up from the bottom of the poverty league table. I’d like Llanelli and our wider region to learn from Preston’s example to build resilience and create an economy that serves the needs of people and not just investors.

Similarly, an economy strategy for our area needs to value the things that people most appreciate. When I am knocking doors and I discuss the local economy with people the issue they most commonly cite is the state of the town centre. Experts report that a ‘sense of place’ is what people think is the most important to them. It’s important therefore that we look to find fresh purpose for our town and village centres, not just as retail spaces but as places in our communities where people come together.

Since being elected as your AM, I’ve spent time engaging with local employers and, through my work in the Assembly, particularly on the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee I’ve looked to explore the approaches that have worked elsewhere. In writing this I’ve also drawn in the expertise of academics, policy makers and practitioners from across the UK - people who are out on the ground doing great work. I’ve experimented with online ‘crowdsourcing’ techniques to try and reach beyond the bubble.

This document is my attempt to crystallise some of that knowledge and explore what I think could work for the Llanelli constituency.

Let me say at the outset, there is no magic wand.

This strategy is not an extensive prescription for things that will work, it is a series of suggestions for things that I feel are worth exploring - things which present an opportunity that Llanelli is well placed to grasp.

People looks for simple and quick answers, there are none. The decline of our economy has taken place over generations and it will not be quickly reversed. The actions required go far beyond the role of an Assembly Member, and I will use what influence I have to try and take forward positive change.

The Welsh Government’s “Economic Action Plan” is a step in the right direction at a national level and provides a useful overview of where resources will be directed in the coming few years. Llanelli now needs a local plan that reflects this, and offers a credible vision for the future.

I would like to thank those who took the time to attend and to share their views and first hand experiences. I’m ready to work with anyone to make the Llanelli constituency a thriving place.

I am submitting this report to the Welsh Government for consideration, as well as to Local Government and other local partners who have the powers to make these ideas a reality. I hope it can spark action.

Together, we CAN make the Llanelli constituency a better place.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Development
- Carmarthenshire County Council should set out a plan to promote the foundational economy. It should work with our largest institutions to increase the volume of procurement spending sourced locally and regionally.
- Where we invest in business, we should expect clear commitments to procurement, community investment, recruitment and training, and prompt payment of suppliers.
- The Development Bank for Wales needs to act as a source of patient capital, building a firm base of medium sized Welsh firms.
- Business Wales needs to move beyond job creation targets and look to creating stable, rooted business.
- Skills policy should focus on lifelong learning and ongoing training, and where apprenticeships are offered they should be available in all sizes of business.
- We should explore the potential for the building of co-operatives in agriculture and food production - offering opportunities for shared wealth building.

Energy
- Create a plan for the development of community energy infrastructure.
- Ensure new homes are built to the highest energy efficiency standards and develop the homes as power stations project, building on expertise at Swansea University
- Use local firms to bring older homes up to energy efficiency standards, creating warm and healthy homes.
- We should use public sector pension funds to invest in clean energy infrastructure.

Transport
- Welsh Government should re-regulate bus services.
- The Welsh Government should accelerate its Swansea Bay Metro project and trial using new technologies to leapfrog traditional models of public transport.
- Welsh Government and Carmarthenshire Council should develop a park & share scheme, and investigate the feasibility of a park & ride scheme, to ease congestion at the M4 junction at Hendy
- Carmarthenshire Council should support the creation of local car clubs to allow people to share ownership of electric cars.
- Carmarthenshire Council should work with all large employers and schools to develop and monitor robust travel plans to cut congestion and promote active lifestyles.
- We need to ensure a robust network of electric vehicle charging points throughout the constituency.
- Welsh Government should support our automotive sector to make the transition to supplying parts for electric vehicles.
- Carmarthenshire Council should consult widely with people who do not currently walk and cycle when renewing its long-term active travel plan for the Welsh Government.

Digital
- All public bodies should have a digital strategy to make sure their services are designed with the needs of their users in mind.
- We should ensure comprehensive 5G coverage for the entire area - ending not spots for broadband.
- Encourage public bodies to share their data openly to create opportunities for new business to develop new products and services.
- Encourage all public bodies and businesses to collaborate to make best use of Big Data to understand local trends and to redesign their services to meet demand.

Llanelli Town
- The Town Centre Strategy should move beyond property and explore how to create a sense of place - working with the Business Improvement District.
- The Town Centre Strategy for Llanelli should identify funding and provide a clear timetable of development.
- There should be a register of ownership for property in Llanelli Town Centre.
- The Town Centre Strategy should prioritise the development of small independent retail units and maker spaces.
- The Council should consider offering vacant space in the town centre to start ups at affordable rates.
- The Council should market empty shops to internet based traders to set pop-up showrooms

The Wider Constituency
- Welsh Government should create a community bank, with the facility to deliver face to face services in areas where banks have withdrawn.
- Activity Tourism is a real opportunity for the county, we need to develop a plan to ensure that we have facilities to meet the demands of these new visitors.
- Welsh Government should create an Institute for Precision Agriculture in Llanelli to improve farm productivity, reducing pollution and develop software and machinery for export.

Delta Lakes
- The Delta Lakes development has the potential to be a real opportunity. The Council must be open and transparent about the plans for Delta Lakes and the funding committed to it.
- We need to ensure that local firms are ready to build it, and supply the site into the future.
The growth of out of town and online shopping has hit Llanelli’s town centre hard. Developments in artificial intelligence promise to bring further disruption to retail and underlines the need to re-think the role of our town centre.

Organisations like the Federation of Small Business in Wales and the Institute of Welsh Affairs are both carrying out work on the future of towns in Wales that can provide valuable insights into how we create great places. Lessons from successful towns elsewhere suggest we need a greater mix - businesses, residential, leisure and cultural activities and cafes, restaurants and bars are all vital in encouraging more people to the middle of town.

Carmarthenshire Council’s forthcoming Llanelli Town Centre strategy will set out a continuation of the successful Welsh Government supported Opportunity Street project to regenerate older properties.

As Llanelli based consultants *The Means* have pointed out, the future of town centres depends on more than just property based regeneration and moving people in. We need to do more. Bringing life back to old buildings offers us a chance to try something new in the town centre. There has been some early success in attracting new traders into the town centre, and allowing existing ones to expand.

We should also trial new approaches. The nature of shopping has changed, shopping online is easy but people still like the chance to look at and touch products, particularly where these fill a specialist niche, for example smaller shops, serving highly specialised and personal needs. We should trial using these new spaces as pop-up showrooms for website-only stores to try and attract customers from far afield into our town centre.

There’s also the opportunity to create “maker spaces”, giving new start-up firms and artists the opportunity to rent small spaces to test their business model. This could help encourage students at the UK’s oldest art schools in Carmarthenshire and Swansea to consider building their careers in the area. This strategy also helps us to keep property in ownership for the public good.

Whilst enabling change of use on properties in the town may be beneficial in diversifying use in the town centre, it could also make Llanelli vulnerable to the whims of developers, who may seek to repurpose properties in undesirable fashion, so that we lose valuable commercial space in favour of residential units (or vice versa). We must have a strategy to ensure local ownership and good management - we will have to manage this process carefully, and a register of ownership would be very useful in helping identify problems.
We need to accompany this with a register of ownership to keep track of who controls the estate in our town centre.

We’ve seen the Business Improvement District put on events in the town centre over the last year, and these have been successful in drawing people into the town, adding to the sense of place. However the BIDs resources have been limited – we need to think about ways we could create and sustain a successful events programme for the town centre. We could leverage travel & tourism students at neighbouring universities and colleges to deliver an ongoing programme of events – encouraging them to build ties to the area, and perhaps start their own business in the process.

The council should also consider, in its estates management, how to site services and its own employment centres in the town centre. Conwy County Council has recently moved offices back into Conwy town centre, from an out of town development – and footfall and turnover in the town centre have improved markedly. Carmarthenshire Council’s Hub in the centre of Llanelli, and the offices at the Eastgate development, are good examples that we should look to build upon.

Llanelli town centre will continue to change, we must be ready to meet the challenges of the future.

The proposed Wellness and Life Sciences Village at Delta Lakes could be great news for the town. As well as building a new leisure centre and health centre the prospect of attracting a third campus of Swansea University to Llanelli is an exciting one.

While the project has hit difficulties I hope they can be overcome for the benefit of the area.

The new campus could extend Swansea’s expertise in Artificial Intelligence with the study of the innovative field of genomics to open up new opportunities for Llanelli. Genomics, the study of our “genetic code” offers us the chance to build world leading expertise in an exciting new field. Studying our genetic code will open a wealth of new, personalised treatments for diseases like cancer, and offers the potential to develop new treatments for neurological and mental health conditions.

For researchers in this field, Llanelli has some appealing features – our population is sufficiently large to offer good quality data. We are also a relatively static population with low levels of people moving into and out of the area – this allows researchers to easily study the population over a duration of many years.

The way the project has been handled has generated controversy which may see it unravel. That would be a great pity for Llanelli. I still hope that we can find a way through.
THE WIDER CONSTITUENCY

Of course, the town itself isn’t the whole of this constituency and our surrounding villages and rural areas will be affected by the changes to the town and wider changes in society that have shaped rural life across Wales and the UK.

We have already seen significant change to our communities, with many losing village post offices, banks, pubs and shops. Often these essential services have been centralised into Llanelli, Carmarthen or even further afield and people are increasingly having to travel. We need to revitalise our small communities.

Derbyshire Community Bank is providing the infrastructure that private banks have abandoned - our own offer could ensure that places like Pembrey, Burry Port and Kidwelly retain access to a bank as the high-street brands retreat. This would act to restore face-to-face services, and could also act as a shop window to the Development Bank for Wales - providing rural enterprise with access to lending that has been denied them by the high street banks.

For too long we have allowed new developments with no public transport access to go ahead. The decline of bus services have further isolated people without a car. We need to shift transport away from a roads focus. 25% of households don’t have a car and the poorest of household spend up to a quarter if the income running a car to access work. Welsh Government and Local Authorities must act to re-regulate bus services and ensure that bus services serve the needs of the wider community.

New digital technology is also reducing the need for people to travel to offices for work, allowing them to spend more time at home and in their community. To enable this we have to ensure access to high speed broadband or mobile internet at home, and commit to ending not-spots across the constituency. I will work to ensure that next generation connectivity, especially 5g mobile internet, is available to all homes and business premises.

We must also enhance our tourism offer, and develop a plan to ensure that we have facilities to meet the demands of new visitors. The emergence of Carmarthenshire as one of the UK’s premier destinations for cyclists is a real opportunity. Building on the investment at Pembrey, we need to ensure we have a network of high quality cycle routes and a co-ordinated offer of other outdoor activities. We should work with the tourism sector to ensure they are able to meet the demands of these new customers - providing secure bike storage and other facilities, and extend our offer into other active lifestyle areas.

Tourism is a significant opportunity for us, by developing a network of quality accommodation and focusing our attention on the quality of our local food production there's no reason this beautiful part of the world can’t become a destination for people from across the South West of the UK and further afield. We should identify opportunities to attract people on “weekend” breaks from the cities with which we have good transport links. Pembrey Forest is a potential gold mine that is currently under utilised, what could we do to build a sustainable tourism offer there?

Finally, as I will expand upon later, we must seize the opportunities offered by Precision Agriculture to reinvigorate farming and the rural communities that have been built around farming. The County Council and Public Service Board are already developing proposals to create local demand for a whole range of food products that could be grown by our farmers, and used in our schools, hospitals, care homes and colleges.
WEALTH BUILDING & THE FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY

The Llanelli born economist Karel Williams and others at Manchester Business School have explored the idea of the “foundational economy”. Up to 40% of people are employed in this overlooked part of the economy that supports the everyday fabric of life, beyond tradable goods and services. This economy provides universal “mundane” basics, required by all households and business to survive - water, energy, transport, food.

There is much to learn from the concrete, practical steps taken by those pursuing “community wealth building” and foundational economy approaches.

Preston was seen as being on the decline 10 years ago, recently it was rated as one of the most improved cities in the UK. Council Leader Matthew Brown has worked with 6 key institutions - including the FE college, sixth form college, the County Council, the local housing Association and the police force.

Each scrutinised their 300 most valuable contracts to look for opportunities to divert spending towards local firms. As a result 18% of their total spending went to firms within Preston, up from 5% at the outset. Almost 70% of their spend now falls within the wider Lancashire region.

Public Bodies in Wales can already use “social value clauses” to give contracts to companies who provide more than the lowest cost and replicate the Preston model. The Welsh Government’s groundbreaking Future Generations Act is an opportunity for us in Wales to go even further - requiring all organisations delivering services to and for the public sector to act responsibly, and with an eye to the needs of our children and grandchildren.

Elsewhere, in Islington in Central London, where affordable workspace is in short supply the council have invested in bringing buildings back into community ownership to let micro and small sized enterprises rent at below market rates.

In Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise have been a leader in the development of community energy. Providing much needed investment in an area often overlooked by traditional bank financing - and securing an clean energy future.

There are significant opportunities in Llanelli. Our aging population means we can become a test bed for new and innovative methods of providing social care, with the patient at it’s centre. Jobs in this sector needn’t be low wage and fragile either. New technology, and new methods of funding social care can make things better for the patient and the worker.

We could work with the housing associations and the council to improve the energy efficiency of our housing. A programme of home retrofit, provided by local business and employing local apprentices could be a real economic boost. The IWA has estimated that the value of housing retrofit could be billions of pounds, and that it would generate thousands of long term jobs.

There’s no reason why new homes, being built by the council and the Housing Associations can’t act as leaders in the deployment of new energy and heat technologies - some of which are being developed nearby in Swansea University, and offers potential for spin out and new businesses. There are opportunities to build new homes that will generate more electricity than the residents can use, electricity that can be sold to nearby business or neighbours at low cost through energy co-operatives.

I’m pleased that Carmarthenshire Council, with Welsh Government support, is taking forward an innovative new housing project in Burry Port that will test new home building methods - delivering better quality at more affordable prices. These homes will be delivered by local contractors - building expertise that can be exported elsewhere, and helping strengthen local firms.

We should also look at how we can use our pension funds to provide secure investment. We could deploy this money to help us invest in clean energy, and the infrastructure we need for the future deployment of electric vehicles and electric heating.

The private sector mustn’t be neglected in this, and we need to ensure that we build resilience and diversity of business. Part of the success of the German economy has been to have a large number of medium sized employers. These medium sized firms, often family owned, are locally rooted and support each other when times are tough.

The Development Bank of Wales already acts as a source of lending for Welsh firms, offering funds at durations not commonly available from the banks, or equity to firms that aren’t normally able to access investment.

The Development Bank might even think about stepping in when an owner retires or decides to sell, to ensure successful local firms aren’t swallowed up by international conglomerates who slowly wind down local operations. This might mean supporting management buyouts, or the development co-operative models of worker ownership.
Wales has a strong history of co-ops, and we need to think about how we can develop new workers owned business in the area. This could mean encouraging the self-employed to work together to support each other - providing services like accountancy and invoice factoring collectively. This can help make self-employment more stable, and generate a sense of community.

We also have the potential to create co-ops in other areas of activity. Wales’ strength in agriculture, forestry, water, electronics and steel offer the potential for us to build co-ops like the Mondragon Corporation in the Basque region of Spain - supporting sustainable growth, and offering the opportunity to build wealth on a shared basis.

Business Wales, Welsh Government’s business support service should also move away from focusing on job creation; instead focusing on improving job quality and the sustainability of business. This is harder to measure and offers fewer headlines, but would have a much stronger lasting impact in the long run.

I convened an event with leading industry experts looking at the potential impact of automation and AI on key employers across Llanelli.

Llanelli will continue to have large key employers - what Welsh Government has in the past called “anchor companies”. We have long established relationships with these companies - multinationals like TATA, Gestamp and Calsonic, but also more local firms such as Owens, Pontrilas, Dyfed Steels, WRW, Teddington’s, Amcanu amongst others. We must support these organisations to play a fully active role in supporting our community. These employers are a crucial asset, and should be seen as partners in a better future for Llanelli.

Key employers should endeavour to help smaller companies they are in partnership with become resilient and longstanding. It’s not enough to pay lip service to local sourcing, we must reach beyond that, so SMEs are supported to grow - accessing new markets and generating new skills.

The Local Authority and Welsh Government should include within their economic regeneration strategies plans to engage with our largest employers. With clear asks of them to collaborate in procurement, community investment, recruitment and training. There needs to be a “something for something” approach to assisting large institutions.

Using the levers available to us, for example through Welsh Government’s economic contract, must also ensure that larger firms pay their bills on time, and don’t pressurise their smaller suppliers into acting as unofficial lines of credit. Something particularly important for self-employed contractors, who can often face cash flow issues when invoices aren’t paid on time. Where large firms behave responsibly, we shouldn’t be afraid to step in to support them when necessary.

In return, we can ensure a supply of workers who receive top quality education, and the provision of Higher and Further education that allows anyone to retrain and learn new skills. And we shouldn’t be afraid to invest when firms meet our expectations.

We can help support productivity improvements across our business - supporting research and innovation where it happens, and helping valuable new technologies to be rooted in Wales. We can refocus our skills offering to support our small businesses to grow - offering apprenticeships that suit their needs.

There should also be a “scale-up” fund, to support growing firms to reach markets further afield and drawing on the expertise contained in Welsh Government’s international offices, which could be repurposed and given a new mission to sell Wales abroad using the widespread diaspora.
DIGITAL

The original Swansea Bay City Deal focussed on the potential to link to a transatlantic multi-terabit fibre spine, which would have placed Llanelli at the heart of cutting edge digital infrastructure – in turn attracting hi-tech firms. However, this connection has been lost. It’s crucial we look again at how digital connectivity is a key part of the City Region’s strategy and that it doesn’t revert to just traditional infrastructure and property projects.

The opportunities this digital infrastructure could offer are many. Not least for health – which is the focus of Llanelli’s flagship project - the Life Science ‘Wellness Village’ at Delta Lakes, worth £200 million to the local economy.

If we are to ensure the Wellness Village is at forefront of developing health-tech, we must ensure the supporting infrastructure is in place. The life sciences hub will require fast, and reliable internet access. So the Swansea Bay City Deal Team should reconsider how accessing a multi-terabit fibre spine, could be placed back at the heart of the scheme.

We should also look to emerging 5G technology – which underpins much of the emerging technology coming from the fourth industrial revolution. Most notably, it would facilitate the development and implementation of driverless technology. Whilst much of the UK is still tied to fixed telephone lines, in some parts of the world they have leapfrogged this old tech and are moving straight to high-speed mobile broadband, it’s time to follow this model.

Our public bodies already collect and manage huge amounts of data on our behalf. We need to ensure that this is used for the good of all Welsh citizens in future.

This explosion in data might create new models for services like social care, and better deliver services in hard to reach areas. Gone are the days of centralised “one size fits all” services, we are moving to models that are personalised and responsive. This is a significant change, that will have to be managed intelligently. We need our public sector to have a clear strategy for digital and data.

I’ve been leading a panel for Welsh Government looking at how we can better harness new technology to enhance public services. I think we’ve made some strong recommendations, that I now want to see progressed. We need to move quickly to meet consumers changing expectations and keep pace with the private sector.

Beyond this, business models in the private sector are fundamentally changing. Much of the accountancy and legal professions have not seen significant change for nearly 50 years. The advent of AI and machine learning might mean that routine work in these firms, like payroll and conveyancing will be done by machines, removing the need for the jobs that get people on to the ladder in these professions.

If we lose these firms we face a future that might look similar to the retreat of banking from our high streets - with the well paid jobs being centralised into cities, and local branches being left with just one or two employees overseeing machines.

I recently held a discussion on the future of the legal profession in Wales in Cardiff - asking what Welsh Government, the universities and legal firms are going to need to do in the future. I was encouraged that the Law School at Swansea University are taking a strong interest in the future of the profession, and trying to prepare their graduates for a future where the profession does very different things to what it does now - this approach is unique in Wales and right on our doorstep.

We need to work with our schools, universities and colleges to ensure that people of all ages are able to train to meet the challenges of the changing labour market. We can work with these institutions to support business start ups and spin offs too - seeding homegrown firms and creating a new generation of entrepreneurs.
Precision agriculture is at the vanguard of the data revolution. It is a rapidly developing area where information is being applied to food production and land cultivation, to dramatically improve productivity and reduce harm to the environment. In doing so, it has the opportunity to go to the heart of some of the most pressing challenges we face - like austerity, food security and climate change.

Not only do these precisely applied algorithms mean that less materials are going in - at a reduced cost to both our farmers, and the environment. But also that more is being produced - research has shown that precision agriculture could increase crop yields by as much as 67%.

Coleg Sir Gar is already reaping some of the benefits of this emerging technology. At their farm at Gelli Aur near Llandeilo they have enjoyed significant efficiencies in milk production - maximising the use of grass, and minimising the input of expensive feed. They use satellite imagery to measure field sizes and allocate grazing allowance to their herds.

I want to work with Coleg Sir Gar and academics in Swansea University, and to use my influence to persuade Welsh Government to support cutting edge research in this field - and crucially, to support deployment on our farms. This will secure our farming future, and improve the viability of crucial farming businesses.

Whilst there is interesting work happening on embedding precision agriculture techniques in farms across Wales, much more important is the missed potential on developing precision agriculture as an industry in Wales. The potential is enormous, as an industry precision agriculture is projected to more than double in size the next five/six years.

We need to develop projects that mobilise Wales’ domain expertise in farming, the knowledge that we have built up over generations - we have specific expertise that could be leveraged to provide significant competitive advantage in this field.

To do this, I will continue to press for Wales to establish an institute of precision agriculture - a doctoral training centre in Wales for precision agriculture, with the Welsh Government match-funding doctoral training contracts.

I will also push local farmers and food producers to think about the ways in which they can harness new and emerging technology. Working with colleges and universities to unlock the skills of our young people, and offering them opportunities to build careers in Llanelli.

Developing this technology in and around Llanelli and Carmarthenshire will also provide an opportunity for our manufacturing businesses to diversify and develop new products. We could once again lead the way in introducing new technology to food production, just as when Felinfoel first canned beer in the early 20th century - developed from our unique mix of farming and industrial heritage.
TRANSPORT

Congestion in Llanelli - particularly along the Sandy Road - is already a cause of stress to residents, as well as in Pembrey and Burry Port. This is only set to worsen if the Delta Lakes site is developed. But building more roads is not the answer, we need to address the problem at source and offer people a genuine alternative to jumping into their car.

To ease the problem we should work with large employers and schools to implement travel plans. I’ve also called for the implementation of a park and ride scheme to ease pressure on the M4 junction in Hendy, and we need to accelerate this development.

Emerging driverless technology not only might help us to achieve this, but could do this in a way that would position Llanelli at the forefront of this emerging technology.

The Swansea Bay Metro is an example of where we can innovate. In developing our blue-print for this idea, we should think how the embryonic public transport system serving the Swansea City Region might be able leapfrog existing models of mass transit.

Fast-approaching technological innovations will fundamentally shift how we travel - Uber only came to London six years ago, now almost half the population of London use the app. The UK government thinks that driverless cars will be on our road in three years. We could implement a local ride sharing scheme, and car clubs to help share ownership of modern electric vehicles.

So instead of being dependent on expensive and disruptive rail infrastructure, the Swansea region could employ fast-emerging technologies and become a test bed for driverless, low carbon bus transit systems, with smartphone-based real time journey information. Building a metro for the future.

We must prioritise delivering good quality, low carbon public transport infrastructure. Public transport that is attractive and well-priced reduces the need for short car journeys and lowers congestion for essential journeys.

Petrol and diesel car sales will be banned in the UK by 2040 at the latest, and with many other nations also abandoning the combustion engine we’re likely to see a significant increase in the volume of electric cars on the road as car manufacturers respond. We’ve got to ensure that we have a robust charging network for them - and that our key employers who supply the car industry are ready for the change.
Wales and Llanelli are not looking for a magic bullet, but it is looking for a new economic strategy which is based on an inspiring but realistic vision for Wales’ future, which is bold and based on credible, clear-sighted analysis. There is hard work to be done, across many actors and institutions in order to bring about positive change. But change is not impossible, especially for somewhere like Llanelli, which has so much to offer and so much potential and aspiration.

The aim should be clearly focused – to facilitate local solutions, to nurture indigenous businesses, to shore up the foundational economy, to support sectors making a major contribution at present to the economy where Wales has or can have a particular competitive advantage. I’ve outlined where I think Llanelli can do this above, and I hope we can work together to achieve real positive change.

Llanelli, like much of Wales needn’t be defined by its economic and social problems. As I have attempted to outline in this document, there are myriad opportunities available to us that extend and build upon our existing expertise and good practice.

Our constituency can build on its long history of industrial innovation to forge a new path - seizing opportunities that draw on the long standing relationship between the town and the farming communities that support it.

We can revitalise our high streets and town centres - moving beyond seeing these vital public spaces as simply retail centres and into the development of proper community hubs, serving a variety of needs.