



CYMRU WLEDIG

**LPIP**

RURAL WALES

# Manifesto Briefing: Policies for Rural Wales



Rural areas occupy over 80% of the land area of Wales and are home to over a million people, or around one-third of the nation's population. Rural Wales is a varied territory, with a diverse population and broad economy, encompassing a large number of towns and villages that each have their own specific interests and needs. However, there are also shared challenges and policy needs that apply across Rural Wales, from upland farms in Eryri to commuter villages in the Vale of Glamorgan.

These are shaped by shared attributes of rurality, including lower population density and smaller communities; remoteness and peripherality; sparse transport and communications networks; limited local markets and labour markets; a 'missing middle' of businesses and high levels of self-employment; youth out-migration and demographic ageing; and competing visions for land currently dominated by farming and forestry.

This Manifesto Briefing outlines evidence-based, 'manifesto-ready' ideas for policies for adoption by parties contesting the 2026 Senedd elections. It has been prepared by [Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales](#) – the Local Policy and Innovation Partnership for Rural Wales, an independent, non-partisan consortium that is funded by [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) to enable knowledge transfer from research to support innovative policies for Rural Wales.

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales's activities focus on strengthening the evidence base for policy-making and delivery (including targeted research on specific evidence needs; data integration and analysis; surveys; and knowledge-brokering between existing research and policy-makers); finding solutions to policy challenges (including through participatory Innovation Labs with stakeholders); and empowering communities to understand and address local issues (through Community-led Action Research).

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is not a lobby group and has no vested interests. Unlike 'manifestos' produced by other organisations, the proposals contained here are not 'asks'. Rather the Manifesto Briefing presents a menu of ideas from which parties are able to select measures for inclusion in their manifestos.

All ideas outlined are based on robust research and analysis, drawn from Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales activities or recommendations from other recent research projects. More details about the work of Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales and about other studies that we have drawn on, can be found at the end of the document.

Communities in Rural Wales are affected by the full range of policy areas devolved to the Senedd, from agriculture to health to conservation. This Manifesto Briefing covers issues across this spectrum but only includes policy ideas that are based on research and supported by evidence.

As such, it is not a comprehensive policy blueprint for Rural Wales and some topics are not specifically addressed. We have organised the policy ideas around five key challenges that our research identifies as facing Rural Wales: Delivering economic growth that benefits rural communities; Future-proofing food production in Wales; Fair access to services for people in Rural Wales; Unlocking communities resilience; and Coherent, Integrated Policy for Rural Wales.

---

# Challenge 1: Delivering Economic Growth that Benefits Rural Communities



## The current situation

On most conventional indicators, the economy of Rural Wales lags behind the rest of Wales and the UK. Productivity, as measured by Gross Value Added per capita, is 86% the average for Wales, and 62% the UK average.<sup>1</sup> Median weekly earnings are below the Welsh average in 8 of the 10 largely rural local authority areas.<sup>2</sup> Business births relative to working age population are around a quarter lower than the rate across the UK as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Opportunities for growth are shaped and constrained by limited local markets, a small workforce and uneven skills base, patchy transport infrastructure, challenges of accessing affordable housing, and the structure of the business sector. There are comparatively few large employers in Rural Wales and a 'missing middle' of medium-sized businesses. Instead, microenterprises account for 44% of the workforce employed in Rural Wales,<sup>4</sup> and nearly 18% of the workforce are self-employed.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to 2020, Rural Wales received funding for economic development from the EU Convergence Fund and the Rural Development Programme of the Common Agricultural Policy. Businesses and communities in Rural Wales have had to adapt to the end of this funding and the different goals, criteria and mechanisms of post-Brexit programmes, including the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, 'Growth Deals', and the Local Growth Fund. Interviews and workshops conducted by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales and other projects have recorded concerns about the marginalisation of rural communities in city-focused programmes and emphases on urban-centred models for growth that do not translate into rural settings.

Research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has also documented scepticism among rural businesses and residents towards the concept of 'economic growth' and conventional mechanisms for stimulating regional development. Rural residents often do not want their communities to 'grow' significantly and are wary of inward investments that are perceived to create jobs for in-migrants and to extract profits from the locality. Many rural businesses are content with their size and do not want to expand. [Our report](#) identified seven different understandings of growth in rural small towns, which can be collectively summarised as an emphasis on growth as improvement not expansion, and an interest in growing opportunities for people to live, work, and stay in rural areas.

---

<sup>1</sup> Figures for 2023. Source: ONS Regional Accounts, via StatsWales.

<sup>2</sup> Figures for 2024. The eight areas are Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Vale of Glamorgan. Earnings are above the Welsh average in Isle of Anglesey and Monmouthshire. Source: StatsWales.

<sup>3</sup> Figures for 2024. Source: StatsWales.

<sup>4</sup> Microenterprises have fewer than 10 employees. The figure for Wales as a whole is 34%. Figures for 2023. Source: StatsWales.

<sup>5</sup> The figure for Wales as a whole is 12%. Figures for 2025. Source: Annual Population Survey.

## Policy Ideas

- 1.1 Use the Local Growth Fund to support initiatives in rural small towns and villages that aim to support the development of locally-owned or community-owned businesses; create jobs or provide training to help young people stay in or return to rural areas; or invest in the 'foundational economy' providing basic needs in communities.**

### Rationale

The current framing of the [Local Growth Fund](#) largely reflects conventional ideas of economic growth that do not necessarily align with the capacities and interests of rural communities. In order to ensure that the Local Growth Fund achieves benefits across Wales, including in rural areas, it should encompass initiatives that address the seven 'types' of growth articulated by small town residents in [Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales research](#): Growth as community-building; Bottom-up growth; Growth as maintenance and survival; Growth through opportunity; foundational growth; and sustainable growth, as well as traditional growth.

The broadening in scope can be achieved through relatively minor adjustments to the goals and requirements of the Local Growth Fund and eligibility criteria.

- 1.2 Commission new Local Economic Wellbeing Indicators that more accurately reflect the performance, capacity and ambition of rural areas.**

### Rationale

Economic development policies tend to be oriented around conventional measures of economic performance, including productivity, business births, and job creation. [Research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales](#) has shown that these indicators do not necessarily reflect perceptions of economic wellbeing and growth among both residents and businesses in rural areas.

As such, the economic condition of rural localities can be misdiagnosed and inappropriate investments supported. The development of new Local Economic Wellbeing Indicators that encompass a wider range of objectives, such as for example, creating opportunities for local young people, retaining income-generated within localities, improving wage levels, or adding value to local heritage, would allow for a more accurate representation of local economic wellbeing, help evidence business cases for public spending that are more focused on local need, and enable more meaningful evaluation of project outcomes. The Indicators should be co-produced with communities and aligned with the [Wellbeing Goals](#).

### 1.3 Introduce a package of measures to equip the building industry and allied trades in Rural Wales to meet the demands of the energy transition.

#### Rationale

Local Area Energy Plans developed by local authorities outline the substantial programme of work required to transition Wales to a post-carbon energy future, including retrofitting homes and buildings for energy efficiency and home energy generation, installing charging infrastructure for electric vehicle, and – in rural areas especially – converting homes from dependence on heating oil.

Meeting this demand will require the significant expansion and upskilling of the construction industry and allied trades in Rural Wales, however, the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Lab on the Regenerative Economy has identified a number of obstacles, including uncertainty for business planning, recruitment challenges, and piecemeal training. Participants in the Innovation Lab, drawn from the industry and other stakeholders, proposed several solutions that could be combined as a package of measures by Welsh Government.

These include compiling a ‘pipeline’ of forthcoming work to allow more efficient planning by businesses and enable individuals to enter the sector with confidence; strengthening recruitment by promoting the range of job opportunities; expanding training to upskill workers and professionals in the sector, including more systemic training beyond skills to install specific individual models; and targeting out-migrants from Rural Wales running businesses or working in the sector elsewhere to move back to the region.

### 1.4 Establish creative hubs in Rural Wales to stimulate growth in the creative sector and support business development, each focused on a different cultural industry and centred on an anchor institution or business.

#### Rationale

Rural Wales has a thriving creative economy, largely composed by freelancers and microenterprises, that is often overlooked in strategies for economic development. Existing strengths include businesses working in film, television, music, computer games and fashion among others. Expanding this sector could additionally help to retain young people in rural areas.

A survey of young people in Rural Wales conducted for the ROBUST project in 2021 found that a third of respondents were interested in working in creative industries, across a wide range of jobs. A network of creative hubs in small towns in Rural Wales might focus on different industries in different localities, potentially reflecting existing clusters of expertise, anchored by a larger company or institution but providing support for small businesses and freelancers through work spaces and resources and networking activities – broadly building on the model of Yr Egin in Carmarthen.

## 1.5 Introduce a scheme to support young entrepreneurs in Rural Wales to test ideas and set up businesses.

### Rationale

The [ROBUST survey of young people in Rural Wales](#) in 2021 found that 22% of respondents said that they would prefer to be self-employed or run their own business, when asked about their ideal working environment. Among young men, it was the most popular working environment, selected by nearly a third of respondents. However, research for ROBUST also reported views from stakeholders that entrepreneurship was not promoted as a career option in schools and colleges and that support for young entrepreneurs in Rural Wales was limited.

A notable exception cited was the [Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050](#) scheme run by Menter Môn with Welsh-speaking young people in Gwynedd and Anglesey under the ARFOR I programme. Participants received guidance and mentoring from experts to produce a business plan, a £1,000 start-up grant, and funding to work one day a week for six months to develop their business idea. This policy idea would roll out this model across all of Rural Wales, open to both Welsh- and English-speakers.

## 1.6 Promote a strategy for culturally- and environmentally-sensitive regenerative tourism that benefits local communities, working with Visit Wales and local authorities.

### Rationale

Tourism is a major part of the economy in Rural Wales, generating over £7500 million per year in income and employing over 80,000 people.<sup>6</sup> However, tourism visits, and their associated benefits and impacts, are disproportionately concentrated in certain parts of Wales, with around one in three tourists visits focused on Eryri and Pembrokeshire.<sup>7</sup> There has also been growing awareness of the social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism, especially in the most tourist-intensive areas. Increasing numbers of holiday lets, for example, not only remove properties from local housing and rental markets but also facilitate forms of tourism where spend in local economies may be limited.

[Regenerative tourism](#) is concept that has been popularised internationally, emphasising not only tourism that is sensitive to local cultures and environments, but which actively seeks to benefit local communities. For instance, regenerative tourism might involve prioritising local businesses and local food, immersive experiences to develop understanding of local culture, volunteering on environmental projects, and creating and supporting facilities and services not only for tourists but for year-round use by local communities.

The potential for regenerative tourism in Wales was tested and demonstrated by the [CUPHAT \(Coastal Uplands Heritage and Tourism\) project](#). This policy idea would commit to developing and implementing a Regenerative Tourism Strategy for Rural Wales, co-produced with community input. It would shift promotional activity by Visit Wales towards regenerative tourism and involve collaboration with local authorities to facilitate local policies and initiatives.

---

<sup>6</sup> STEAM estimates

<sup>7</sup> UK Tourism Consumer Tracker Survey: Wales Profile, Summer 2024.

## **1.7 Amend the 182 days minimum annual occupancy rule for commercially let accommodation providers to 145 days for farm-based accommodation in deep rural areas to enable and support more small family farms to diversify and contribute further to local economies throughout rural Wales.**

### **Rationale**

The 182 days minimum annual occupancy rule for commercially let accommodation enables holiday lets with occupancy above this threshold to be charged Business Rates as opposed to Council Tax surcharges levied on second homes. [Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales research on women and farm diversification](#) has found that many holiday lets on farms do not have a sufficiently long season to meet the 182 days threshold.

This is a source of frustration for farmers and farm women who have diversified into tourism, encouraged by previous rural development policies, but feel that they are penalised for their location, with profit returns for on-farm accommodation businesses reduced. Lowering the occupancy threshold (or alternative, exempting holiday lets located on farms), would remove this barrier, contribute to the financial sustainability of farms, and encourage further farm diversification into tourism, creating businesses and contributing to the rural economy.

## **1.8 Introduce a Rural Business Advice Service tailored to the specific needs of small businesses located in small towns and rural communities, including farm diversification businesses.**

### **Rationale**

Research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has underlined the value of advice services such as Business Wales and Farming Connect in supporting the business and agricultural communities in Rural Wales respectively. However, two separate studies by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales, on [perceptions of growth in the rural economy](#) and on [women and farm diversification](#), have both independently identified concerns that there are gaps in provision in relation to specifically rural business contexts.

The first study noted that small businesses established as an income source for lifestyle migrants into Rural Wales, who have no interest in 'growing' the business, consider that business advice services are not appropriately tailored to their need; and also observed that community enterprises require advice around specific issues linked to their ownership and business models that are not commonly covered by existing advice services.

The second study found that farm diversification businesses often felt that they fell between the advice offered by business support services such as Business Wales and farm advisory provision such as Farming Connect. A dedicated Rural Business Advice Service would combine elements from existing schemes in a service tailored to the specific needs of small rural businesses, community enterprises and farm diversification businesses.

## 1.9 Create a Rural Apprenticeship Scheme offering young people opportunities to work in key sectors in the rural economy, tailored to rural business environments.

### Rationale

Participants in Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Labs have argued that current apprenticeship schemes do not work adequately for sectors of the rural economy such as construction, horticulture and food production. Similar sentiments have been expressed in wider interviews by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales and in workshops in the previous ROBUST project.

Key challenges are considered to be the small size of many rural businesses and their capacity to afford to employ apprentices and to undertake necessary administration; the seasonality of some rural work; and issues of transport to access apprenticeship opportunities. At the same time, these same sectors also experience challenges recruiting new entrants.

The proposal for a bespoke Rural Apprenticeship Scheme has been made by the WLGA in its [Rural Manifesto](#). In addition to focusing on key industries in the rural economy including agriculture, food processing, tourism, construction and green technologies, the structure and conditions of a Rural Apprenticeship Scheme could address distinctive rural challenges by, for example, enabling apprenticeships to be shared between multiple employers and providing centralised administrative support – following the example of the Cyfle apprenticeship programme for the construction sector in South West Wales.

---

# Challenge 2: Future-proofing Food Production in Wales



## The current situation

The production of food through farming and food processing is core to the identity of rural Wales, but its significance for employment and the economy is shrinking. Around 90% of land in Wales is currently used for agricultural production<sup>8</sup> and the agriculture, food and forestry sector employs 2,500 people in the ten largely rural local authority areas, or around 6% of the workforce.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture alone contributes 0.7% of GVA in Wales, but when combined with food and drink processing, the agri-food sector's contribution is around 15% of GVA.<sup>10</sup>

The food system in Wales has numerous vulnerabilities. All types of farm in Wales except dairy farms make a loss on farming activities when public subsidies are excluded.<sup>11</sup> Food processing capacity in Wales has also contracted and in sectors such as dairy the majority of produce needs to leave Wales to be processed. At the same time, Wales is only partly self-sufficient in the food it needs.

While there are no statistics for the cross-border flow of food between Wales and other parts of the UK; food production in the UK is 60% of food consumption (and part of this is exported), and the UK imports 46% of the food it consumes. Not all foodstuffs can be produced in Wales, but Wales is reliant on imports for several crops that can be grown here.

The integrity of the Wales food system will be affected by project future trends, including the effects of changing climate on crop productivity, impacts of intensified extreme weather events, the consequences of UK trade agreements, and changes in consumption patterns including growth in plant-based diets and potential competition from lab-produced protein.

More positively, research has recorded steady interest in entering farming from young people in rural Wales, as well as wider community interest in growing food, yet both groups face notable obstacles to participating in food production.

---

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture, June 2024

<sup>9</sup> ONS Business Register Employment Survey 2024.

<sup>10</sup> House of Commons Welsh Affairs Select Committee, November 2025; Welsh Food and Drink Economic Appraisal 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Farm Business Survey 2024.

## Policy Ideas

### 2.1 Make it easier for public-owned land to be made available for community farms and growing projects.

#### Rationale

There is significant interest in community growing projects in Wales, but groups often encounter challenges in securing suitable land. Most require relatively small pieces of land but also have limited funds available to buy or rent land. Existing public schemes such as allotments tend to be over-subscribed or not suited to collective community-based projects.

This policy would aim to enable community growing and farming projects to use some of the considerable public land holdings in Wales, including land owned by local authorities and other public bodies. Actions might include identifying and mapping suitable land to be offered for community growing; simplifying procedures for short-term leases and for asset transfers; leasing land at subsidised rates; creating templates for management plans; and promoting joint management and partnerships between public bodies and community groups; and repurposing the use of council-owned farms. Model examples include the [Future Farms Partnership](#) in Powys, which has piloted the creation of new small farms on council-owned land, including transferring 38 acres of county farmland into community ownership; and [Bremenda Isaf](#) in Carmarthenshire, where part of a council-owned farm has been set aside to grow fresh, high quality and affordable fruit and vegetables for schools and care facilities.

### 2.2 Support new entrants to farming by promoting shared farming tenancies and cooperatives, including changing tenancy arrangements for public-owned farms to encourage these models.

Farm succession is a concern in the agricultural sector in Wales, despite indications that there is no lack of interest from young people in entering farming. The [Rural Wales Youth Survey](#) in 2021 found that around 10% of young people surveyed, from both farming and non-farming backgrounds, were interested in farming as a career. However, traditional inheritance models and the capital cost of purchasing and developing a farm are obstacles. Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales research on [women and farm diversification](#) found that young women from farm families frequently have more limited opportunities to inherit farms and continue farming, leading to many leaving farming, or working as a farm labourer or family member with limited managerial involvement in the business.

Aspiring farmers from non-farming backgrounds face different challenges of finding land and raising the capital to purchase or lease property and develop farm businesses. Shared farming tenancies and farming cooperatives offer alternative models that enable shared ownership and management of farms – including creating more opportunities for women farmers – and spread the burden of capital costs. Public-owned farms, including local authority farm estates, could provide a platform for promoting these models by revising tenancy arrangements to expressly advertise and encourage options for shared or cooperative tenancies when leases become available.

### **2.3 Revise Planning Policy Guidance to enable the new small-scale mixed farm developments that may include work buildings and infrastructure for farming and horticulture, on-farm shops, cafes and community spaces, training facilities and homes for agricultural and horticultural workers.**

#### **Rationale**

The Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Lab on the Net Zero Transition identified a key obstacle to developing the horticulture sector in Wales is not only the availability of farmland, but also the nearby availability of facilities for processing and retailing, and of homes for the workers required by new horticulture enterprises.

The co-development of such facilities is often hindered by interpretation of planning rules. This policy would build on the example of the [Future Farms Partnership](#) in Powys, which has successfully revised planning guidelines to permit the development of three new farms including homes, work buildings and infrastructure.

### **2.4 Promote the development of horticulture in Wales to increase food security, access growing consumer markets, and strengthen the financial sustainability of Welsh agriculture – including through the restoration of former orchards and the reintroduction of mixed farming practices. Encourage use of locally-grown fruit and vegetables by hotels, pubs and restaurants, and establish pubs as networking and information hubs for local horticulture.**

#### **Rationale**

Research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales and others has identified considerable potential to expand the horticulture sector in Wales. This could increase Wales's food security by reducing dependency on imports of fruit and vegetables; create new income streams for farms; help promote healthier eating; and contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Author Carwyn Graves in his book *Tir* documented that horticulture was once a significant part of the Welsh rural landscape and that most farms were traditionally mixed farms with livestock, vegetables and fruit.

As such, developing horticulture, if done in the right way, can serve to restore Welsh rural heritage. The Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Labs have identified several initiatives for promoting horticulture, including developing Welsh plant-based convenience foods, and a scheme to encourage the use of locally-grown fruit and vegetables by hotels, pubs and restaurants, which will be tested through a pilot project in 2026. This would build on current marketing schemes such as Hybu Cig Cymru, which promotes Welsh meat, and other initiatives which support and promote Welsh cheeses, drinks and other products.

## **2.5 Equip a new generation of farmers and land managers with skills for environmentally resilient practices, including nature-friendly farming, agroforestry, digital agriculture and low-carbon horticulture, through flexibly-delivered training accessible to participants in settings across Rural Wales.**

### **Rationale**

Future-proofing the food and farming system in Wales involves the development of new and different skills among farmers, land managers, horticulturalists and others engaged in growing and food production. Some of these skills respond to new technologies, such as digital agriculture and AI; others are about relearning old practices of nature-friendly farming and sustainable land management.

For example, participants in the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Net Zero Innovation Lab emphasised a need to expand opportunities for training in horticulture as a condition for the development of a low-carbon horticulture sector; similarly, studies have highlighted that the potential for new technologies, including AI, to benefit Welsh agriculture is contingent on upskilling farmers and training new entrants.

Training in some of these skill areas is offered by providers such as Black Mountain College and Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor Glynllifon, and horticulture is one of the key areas to be covered by the [new vocational campus at Lampeter](#) proposed by Ceredigion Council. This policy would adopt a more strategic approach, identifying needs and gaps in provision, joining up existing provision, and supporting mechanisms for making opportunities accessible across rural Wales.

## **2.6 Embed awareness of food production and consumption in education through a whole-school approach that incorporates food literacy into the curriculum, develops cooking skills, builds partnerships with local farmers and food producers, and prioritises local procurement for school meals.**

### **Rationale**

Schools have a central role to play in promoting healthy eating, supporting local food systems, and raising awareness of food production, as recognised in [recent guidance](#) from the Future Generations Commissioner and Food Sense Wales, and reports from initiatives such as the [Wales Net Zero 2035 Challenge Group](#).

This policy idea, proposed by the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Wellbeing Innovation Lab, moves beyond targeted initiatives for example around procurement to adopt a whole school approach: incorporating 'food literacy' into the curriculum and through cooking with children and families; training teachers in 'food leadership'; changing school menus and using local produce and suppliers; and growing food in school yards. It would build on pilot work by [Cegin y Bobl](#) in Llanelli, and takes inspiration from the [Copenhagen Food Schools](#) initiative in Denmark and the [Edible Schoolyard Project](#).

Exemplar work has also been carried out by Monmouthshire County Council and Size of Wales, who have co-designed a [deforestation-free menu](#) with students.

## 2.7 Support the introduction of local kitemark schemes, run by local authorities or community groups, to promote locally produced food and recognise shops, hotels and eating places using local produce.

### Rationale

Branding of food products as 'Welsh' has been significant in increasing awareness of Welsh food, changing consumer habits, and adding value to the Welsh agri-food sector. Research by [Business Wales](#) has found that 78% of shoppers in Wales would buy Welsh produce if the price was right, and 44% would pay more for Welsh products. However, there is increasing interest in branding that can allow consumers to make similar decisions about products from their more local area.

A Community-led Research Project facilitated by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales on the St David's Peninsula, for instance, has explored the feasibility of a 'Made on the Peninsula' kitemark for local food and other products and services; inspired by existing initiatives such as [Genuine Jersey, Made in Northamptonshire](#) and [Colne-U-Copia](#). This policy would support the development of local kitemark schemes by local authorities, business associations, or community groups. These would identify food originating within a defined area, such as a county or a 30-mile radius. Different colour kitemarks could potentially apply to food produced on farms in the area, processed in the area, and both produced and processed in the area ([research in Monmouthshire](#) has highlighted complexities in delimiting what counts as 'local food').

In addition to food products, kitemarks might also be awarded to shops, restaurants, pubs and cafes sourcing a defined proportion of food sold from local suppliers.

## 2.8 Establish a network of trained Food System Mentors to build understanding of the food system, tackle food poverty, promote healthy eating, and connect consumers with local food suppliers.

### Rationale

This idea has been proposed by participants in the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Lab on Wellbeing, who identified a lack of public understanding of the food system as an obstacle to reducing food poverty in Rural Wales and developing a more sustainable food culture.

Food System Mentors would work with food banks, warm spaces, schools, GP surgeries, and community groups to help individuals gain a better understanding of the food that they eat and how to access and prepare nutritious and affordable food, leading to better choices around diet and food shopping.

By developing awareness of where food comes from, engaging with local food producers and suppliers, and providing advice on local food sources, Food System Mentors can also help to provide new opportunities for Welsh food and contribute to future-proofing the Welsh food system.

---

# Challenge 3: Fair Access to Services for Rural Communities



## The current situation

The lower population density of rural area reduces the potential pool of users or customers for public and commercial services and increases the costs of delivery. As such, many services are not considered to be viable in smaller rural communities and the number and distribution of several key services has decreased over time. The provision of public services in rural communities has been affected by reductions in public spending.

Adjusted for inflation, Revenue Support Grant (RSG) payments to the ten rural local authorities in Wales fell by an average of 8.6% between 2010–11 and 2023–24, compared with an average of 5.0% across Wales as a whole.<sup>12</sup> The combination of fiscal pressures, pedagogic strategy and the need to address out-dated buildings has contributed to a 21% reduction in the number of primary schools in the rural counties of Wales since 2009–10, with many school closures in smaller rural communities with limited pupil enrolments.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, difficulties of succession planning for GP surgeries have been reported in a number of small towns and rural communities.

Commercially-operated services have also decreased in many small towns and rural communities, notably banking services. Over 200 bank branches have closed in Wales since 2015, more than half in rural counties.<sup>14</sup> A survey by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales in 2025 found that childcare provision was available in only 55% of the 161 participating communities.

The necessity for residents in many rural communities to travel in order to access key services is reflected in higher than average car ownership, which in turn increases living costs for households. Residents without access to private transport are reliant on public transport, which substantially increases travel times.

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that average travel time for residents of villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings in sparse areas of Wales to a food shop is 1 hour 20 minutes longer by public transport than by car, 1 hour 13 minutes longer to a primary school, and 1 hour 29 minutes longer to a GP surgery.<sup>15</sup>

More positively, there has been growing interest from community in groups in taking over services and facilities that have been threatened with closure. The Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales communities survey, for instance, found examples of community ownership of shops, post offices, cafes, pubs and libraries.

---

<sup>12</sup> Source: StatsWales

<sup>13</sup> Source: StatsWales

<sup>14</sup> Rural Vision Evidence Report 2021

<sup>15</sup> 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Source: StatsWales.

## Policy Ideas

### **3.1 Legislate to define and enforce a level of Universal Basic Infrastructure in Wales, expressed as the ratio of key services or facilities to residents by local authority area below which provision cannot fall or maximum travel time to key services, covering healthcare, education, police, libraries, leisure and recreational facilities.**

#### **Rationale**

The concept of Universal Basic Infrastructure (UBI) has been developed by economist Diane Coyle in the Bennett Institute at Cambridge University. Their proposal would set a per capita formula below which public services may not fall: core local services and facilities could not be closed or reduced below minimum standards.

Private companies providing utility-type services such as transport or broadband similarly should be required by their regulators to deliver minimum universal standards as part of their social licence to operate. The Cambridge report does not propose thresholds – these would need to be established for Wales through a consultative process; but it outlines seven principles for UBI and examines how a UBI guarantee might work with respect to healthcare, schools, policing, banking and post offices.

It proposes that funding to support a UBI guarantee should involve adjusting local government grant funding formulae, retargeting programmes aimed at addressing territorial inequalities, and potentially supplementary business rates charges.

### **3.2 Empower local authorities to charge a supplementary business rate to raise funds to maintain registered community assets if owners fail to meet required standards and, as a last resort, to make a compulsory purchase at the declared rateable value.**

#### **Rationale**

The report on Universal Basic Infrastructure by Diane Coyle and colleagues at Cambridge University notes the importance of community assets that form part of the social infrastructure of place, contributing to local wellbeing and people's identity and pride in place. Some of these are part of local government facilities and infrastructure, but many are owned by managed by national public agencies or by the private sector and at risk of being closed, run-down or left in a state of disrepair, especially as the social value may not be part of businesses' calculations of viability.

Coyle's examples are urban-focused, but examples in small towns and villages might include pubs, markets, village shops, theatres and cinemas, sports clubs, cafes, entertainment venues and tourist attractions. Examples of vulnerable assets managed by national public agencies include the controversial decision by Natural Resources Wales to close visitor centres at three sites in Mid Wales.

Churches and chapels might also be included. A specific proposal in the UBI report suggests introducing powers to permit local authorities to charge a supplementary business rate applied to premises where required standards have not been met to fund maintenance, and in the last resort, compulsory purchase at the declared rateable value. *See also proposal for a Community Right to Buy below.*

### **3.3 Require franchising arrangements for public bus services to model and consult on impacts of service changes on access to healthcare, employment and training from rural communities.**

#### **Rationale**

The Bus Services (Wales) Bill, going through the Senedd at the time of writing, introduces new franchising arrangements that will allow public authorities to exert influence over the routing and timetabling of bus services. These powers will be particularly pertinent in rural Wales, where the coverage of bus services has been substantially eroded. Engagement by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales with various stakeholders has indicated that changes to bus services can have significant unintended impacts on access to employment, training, healthcare and other services.

One cited example described apprentices no longer able to attend an FE course on day release due to alterations to a bus service. These impacts have come about because services have been withdrawn, routes altered, or timetables amended without modelling of consequences or consultation with affected stakeholders.

This policy would ensure that the impacts of changes to services must be fully considered in franchising decisions, including mandatory consultation of local authorities, community councils, health boards, schools, colleges and major employers.

### **3.4 Provide set-up funding for rural community service hubs, located in community halls, post offices, pubs, chapels, libraries, shops, or other appropriate buildings, to provide access to public services and selected private sector services (e.g. banking) that are not viable as stand-alone facilities.**

#### **Rationale**

Community service hubs provide a potential answer to maintaining access to services that are not viable as stand-alone facilities in small rural communities. There are different models but service hubs ideally involve the co-location of two or more services on the same site, acting as a focal point for a wider catchment area with access facilitated by associated infrastructure such as bus services or high-speed broadband.

Some consolidate services in an existing facility such as a community hall or a pub; others may involve purpose-built premises. Some incorporate a commercial activity, such as a café, that can provide a revenue stream; others are non-profit and include no trading activity.

Once established, community service hubs can be relatively low cost to maintain and/or may be subsidised by co-located commercial activities; but start-up costs can be an obstacle to establishing hubs.

This policy would create a funding scheme to help create new rural community service hubs, including capital costs. Consideration might also be given to amending planning policy guidance to ease conversion of premises to mixed use as service hubs.

### **3.5 Expand rural childcare provision through a package of measures including start-up grants for childcare businesses, investment in training, support for innovative and flexible models, and top-up payments to the Childcare Offer for Wales for small providers in designated shortage areas.**

Despite recent initiatives such as the Childcare Offer for Wales, access to childcare continues to be a major challenge for families in many parts of Rural Wales. The [Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales](#) survey of communities in early 2025 found that of the 161 communities responding, only 55% had someone providing childcare.

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales research has additionally reported that difficulties of accessing childcare were a significant obstacle for women running farm diversification businesses. Engagement by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales with stakeholders in Wales supports evidence from a [Scottish Government study](#) that the major challenges for rural childcare provision are the costs of running small-scale units with limited paying customers, recruiting trained staff or accessing training, finding appropriate accommodation, and customer access to transport.

Actions that might be included as part of a policy package to expand rural childcare include providing ring-fenced start-up grants to new childcare businesses, support for the expansion of childcare training opportunities in colleges serving rural areas and through distance learning, promoting innovative and flexible models including intergenerational care and outdoor nurseries, and support for making community spaces available for use by childcare providers.

Additionally, the policy proposal includes supplementing funding through the Childcare Offer for Wales with a small top-up payment for each funded place to small-scale childcare providers in designated rural areas with a shortage of providers in recognition of higher staffing and transport costs.

---

# Challenge 4: Unlocking Community Resilience



## The current situation

Community action has been an important part of social and economic resilience in rural Wales for over forty years. Community-based initiatives have strengthened local identity and wellbeing, protected heritage, promoted tourism, supported small businesses, and addressed rural poverty and social inequalities. Increasingly, community organisations have taken over businesses, services and facilities that local authorities, public agencies or private sector companies consider not to be viable.

Community energy projects and community transport schemes have proliferated, and community land trusts have become engaged in solutions to problems of access to housing in rural areas. In at least half of the 161 communities surveyed by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales in early 2025, the community council or another community organisation had taken over ownership or management of a key community asset in the previous five years – ranging from playgrounds and public toilets to shops, cafes, pubs and libraries.

A quarter of communities had a community minibuss or dial-a-ride scheme and 18% had a wholly-owned community energy scheme. In 43% of the communities there was a volunteer-run community food bank. Work carried out by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales highlights how these community projects can deliver multiple benefits, including decarbonisation, tackling fuel poverty and food insecurity, increasing community resilience, and strengthening rural economies. Yet, the capacity for community action in Wales is constrained by less favourable legislation than in England or Scotland.

Resources for rural community projects have also been depleted by the end of the EU-funded Rural Development Programme (RDP) and especially the LEADER initiative for community-led local development, which had supported significant elements of the 'soft' social infrastructure in rural Wales.

Although some local authorities have used the Shared Prosperity Fund to reintroduce support for community projects, these are not at the same magnitude as the approximately £50 million in funding for rural community development provided under the RDP between 2014 and 2020.

## Policy Ideas

### 4.1 Introduce a 'Community Right to Buy' as first option for community groups to buy registered community assets, including services, building and land, if they are put up for sale.

#### Rationale

The 'Community Right to Buy' is a legal framework that allows community groups to register an interest in buildings or land that are important assets to the community and to have the opportunity to purchase such assets if they are put up for sale by their owners. Such frameworks operate in England and Scotland, but not currently in Wales.

A Community Right to Buy was introduced in [Scotland](#) by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 as part of a wider package of land reforms, giving communities first refusal on registered assets that are put up for sale. A more modest [Community Right to Bid](#) was introduced in England by the Localism Act (2011), which enables the sale of registered 'assets of community value' to be delayed by six months to give the community an opportunity to raise funds and bid to buy the asset (but no preference to communities).

The current [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) will strengthen the provision in England to a Community Right to Buy following the Scottish model. Research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales and others indicates that the absence of a Community Right to Buy in Wales constrains not only efforts to protect key assets but also new community energy and community growing initiatives.

The Building Communities Trust (BCT) advocates the introduction of a Community Right to Buy in Wales similar to the Scottish framework, with a first right of refusal for assets coming to market. The [BCT proposal](#) includes a Register of Assets of Community Value, a 12 month moratorium period, and capital and revenue funding to maximise potential.

## **4.2 Reintroduce funding for Community-led Local Development in Rural Wales, replacing the former EU-funded LEADER programme, to support small scale projects aimed at maintaining community infrastructure, enhancing community pride and cohesion, improving the local environment, and creating economic opportunities based on local culture, nature and heritage.**

### **Rationale**

Community-led Local Development (CLLD) was part of the rural development landscape in Wales for nearly 30 years through the EU-funded LEADER programme. The LEADER approach emphasised engaging local people and organisations as drivers of local development, coordinated through Local Action Groups (LAGs). Initially LAGs in Wales were independent organisations competitively awarded funding, but after 2007 they were led from local authorities.

In the final programming period, 2014–2020, 18 LAGs in Wales supported over 700 projects, distributing a combined budget of over £47 million. Examples of projects supported by the Cynnal y Cardi LAG in Ceredigion include village play and recreation schemes, intergenerational rural resilience projects, mental health projects, heritage projects, a cycle path, a woodland community engagement initiative, and a community leadership academy.

Following Brexit, Wales opted not to continue a national rural CLLD programme (in contrast to Scotland). Engagement with community groups and stakeholders by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales indicates that the absence of a national rural CLLD scheme has been experienced through the discontinuation of existing initiatives and a greater challenge to find funding for new projects. This policy would reintroduce a national rural CLLD programme in Wales to support community-driven rural development.

This need not necessarily replicate the LEADER model directions and recommendations on structure and governance in the [Evaluation of LEADER in Wales](#) by Wavehill Research should be taken into account.

### **4.3 Introduce an Enhancing Community Spaces programme, providing a mix of capital and revenue funding, plus advice and online resources, to support the modernisation and retrofitting of community buildings and spaces, and their use for activities that enhance community cohesion, provide wellbeing services such as warm spaces and food banks, showcase local businesses, and facilitate energy transition (e.g. renewable energy generation, charging for electric vehicles).**

#### **Rationale**

Village halls and similar spaces in rural communities, including pubs, have traditionally supported community cohesion by providing a venue for communal events, entertainment, and meetings of clubs and societies, but are increasingly also contributing to wider social wellbeing and local development.

Research in the [Rural Futures project](#), for example, highlights a new model of community hubs that as multi-use, community-led spaces differ from conventional village halls by contributing to the prosperity of rural places with roles in fostering economic activity and tackling poverty. The Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales community survey similarly recorded a wide range of uses of community spaces, including as food banks and warm spaces.

Follow-up research has identified potential for community spaces to host community energy projects, host community physical and mental health promotion initiatives, showcase environmental initiatives, and provide facilities for microenterprises and remote workers. Yet, it has also documented variability in the capacity and expertise of bodies responsible for managing community spaces and financial precarity linked to piecemeal grant funding.

This policy would respond to the identified challenges by introducing a unified programme to support the enhancement and upgrading of community spaces, including both capital and revenue funding and access to training and advice.

### **4.4 Create a network to support community kitchens and community meal projects that use food to address rural poverty and social isolation and to enhance community cohesion, through expert advice, shared resources and toolkits.**

#### **Rationale**

There are volunteer initiatives in many small towns and rural communities that provide free or low-cost meals. However, these tend to operate in isolation and without much external support. This proposal from the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Wellbeing Innovation Lab would link initiatives in a national network of 'community kitchens', giving access to expert advice and shared resources, as well as toolkits for establishing new projects.

In addition to helping to address issues of rural poverty and social isolation, the network could also support community kitchen projects that bring together the whole community for occasional communal meals, strengthening community cohesion and aiming to avoid or alleviate polarisation in rural communities.

#### 4.5 Introduce legislation to adopt a strategic approach to community wealth-building in Wales, enabling measures to ensure that economic wealth is generated, circulated and retained in local communities.

##### Rationale

Community wealth-building is an approach that aims to increase local prosperity by reducing the out-flow of income from local economies and maximising the retention of wealth generated in a place within the local economy. It responds to concerns about leakage from local economies that have deepened in rural Wales with the increased presence of supermarkets and chain stores in small towns, growth of online shopping, and expansion of self-catering tourism (including absentee ownership of holiday lets and AirBnBs).

A range of actions can contribute to community wealth-building including local-first procurement policies, place kitemarks, regenerative tourism, local currency schemes, supporting locally-owned businesses, and community-owned enterprises. For example, Participants in the Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales Innovation Lab on horticulture noted that the highly successful Welsh Veg in Schools project is attracting many more growers, but there are challenges to utilising produce during school holidays. Local authority actions that linked producers with holiday lets and tourism sites would support growers, and the local economy.

This policy would create a national strategy for community wealth-building, facilitating local wealth-building plans, on the model of the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, currently going through the Scottish Parliament.

#### 4.6 Establish a network of place coordinators to provide rural communities with advice and support on how to develop community-led anti-poverty initiatives in rural places.

##### Rationale

Research has shown that the capacity of individual communities to bid for external funding and manage community-led projects varies considerably. Frequently, successful community ventures are driven by individual volunteers, but in the absence of such leadership mobilisation of communities can be difficult.

The National Lottery Community Fund supported Rural Futures project has demonstrated the difference that can be made by employing paid 'place coordinators' to work with small town and rural communities as animateurs who can catalyse and support community action.

Following a recommendation from the Rural Futures project, this policy would establish a network of place coordinators across rural Wales to assist communities with developing ideas, applying for funding and implementing projects, targeted at communities with high needs and limited records of securing grant funding.

#### **4.7 Expand training for community development and leadership to enhance the capacity of rural communities to take action to address local issues, including a New Community Leaders Academy for young people.**

##### **Rationale**

Community development in rural Wales has been facilitated by a professional cohort, many of whom entered the sector and gained experience by working for LEADER Local Action Groups under previous European funding. The discontinuation of LEADER in Wales has not only dispersed the expertise held by LEADER employees but has cut a key route for recruiting and nurturing new community development practitioners.

The withdrawal of the MSc in Community Development at Bangor University has further contributed to a narrowing of opportunities for training to enter the profession. Additionally, the discontinuation of LEADER removed funding from initiatives aimed at capacity building for volunteer community leaders, such as the [Community Leadership Academy](#) for 18-30 year olds sponsored by Cynnal y Cardi in Ceredigion in the final LEADER programming period.

This policy would, first, restore opportunities for training in community development by requiring Medr to review current provision (including by Agored Cymru) and work with HE and FE providers to expand courses; and second, establish a national New Community Leaders Academy scheme for young people, delivered through a mix of online and in-person content.

---

# Challenge 5: Coherent, Integrated Policy for Rural Wales



## The current situation

A recurrent finding in research by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales is the dense interconnection of issues. Economic development relies on education and training, but also on appropriate transport networks and housing for workers. Healthcare provision is shaped by public funding and demographic factors, but also by transport accessibility, digital infrastructure, training, and housing and lifestyle opportunities to attract and retain staff.

Farm diversification is affected by fluctuations in agricultural markets, but also by tourism trends, taxation policies, and childcare availability. And so on. Yet, coordinated action taking account of diverse factors is hindered by the segmentation of policy areas.

Following Brexit, efforts were made to integrate agriculture and policies for the natural environment in the Sustainable Farming Scheme; but the discontinuation of the Rural Development Plan disconnected these policies from rural economic development and policies for rural communities. Instead, the subjugation of rural development under a new regional economic framework has led to concerns that rural needs have been marginalised, as recorded by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales research on perceptions of 'growth' in the rural economy.

The fragmented structure of local governance in rural Wales, between 10 local authorities, four 'growth deals', four regional skills partnerships, and multiple health boards, police and crime commissioners, and other public bodies, without a common forum and without an overarching strategic vision, further contributes to the perception of a lack of coherence in rural policy in Wales.

## Policy Ideas

### 5.1 Publish a 'Rural White Paper' outlining a coherent vision for Rural Wales and measures to be adopted across all policy areas.

#### Rationale

The last holistic and integrated rural policy statement in Wales was published nearly thirty years ago, before devolution, in *A Working Countryside for Wales*, the 'Rural White Paper' produced by the then Welsh Office in 1996.

Although 'white papers' are not part of the formal vocabulary of devolved government in Wales, the phrase is used here as shorthand to indicate a document that would set out a coherent policy programme for rural Wales, covering all areas of competence devolved to the Welsh Government – economy, education, health, transport, housing, environment, agriculture, social care, planning, local government, culture, language, and so on.

The [Rural Vision for Wales](#), produced by the WLGA Rural Forum with Aberystwyth University as part of the ROBUST project in 2021, might provide a model for the scope and ambition of such a document.

### 5.2 Legislate to make rural proofing a statutory requirement, requiring the impacts of policy decisions on rural communities to be assessed consistently and the needs of rural areas to be factored into the allocation of funding and resources by the Welsh Government.

#### Rationale

Rural proofing – or the screening of proposed legislation and government programmes to assess their impact on rural communities – is an established part of Welsh Government practice.

However, it is not a statutory requirement and engagement by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has identified concerns from stakeholders over the extent to which it is being consistently and rigorously applied across all areas of government.

This proposal would put rural proofing in Wales on a statutory footing, with a consistent and rigorous framework for implementation, on the model of the [Rural Needs Act \(2016\)](#) in Northern Ireland, and/or the consolidation of 'Islands Proofing' through Island Communities Impact Assessments as a statutory duty in Scotland by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

### **5.3 Establish a Wales Rural Parliament to bring together representatives of community organisations in Rural Wales to discuss issues of common interest and make recommendations to Welsh Government, and a parallel Wales Rural Youth Parliament, comprising participants selected by schools, colleges, young farmers' clubs and other youth organisations.**

#### **Rationale**

Unlike many European countries, Wales does not have a national forum or association representing rural communities or rural community organisations. Rural interests are partially represented by the WLGA Rural Forum of local authorities with rural areas and by organisations such as the farming unions, yet these do not directly represent rural communities and may have different, more specific core concerns. The absence of a national forum for rural communities means that the interests of rural communities are less clearly heard in policy debates and are not actively lobbied for. This proposal draws on the European model of Rural Parliaments to give rural communities a voice.

Rural Parliaments are not elected law-making bodies, but rather are forums in which representatives of rural community organisations come together to discuss issues of shared concern and agree 'asks' to government. The [Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament](#), for example, has met every 2 to 3 years since 2014, involving around 500 individuals in a participative democratic process to discuss key issues and share experiences and ideas through in-person and online events curated by rural community organisations.

In 2023 the first [Scottish Rural and Island Youth Parliament](#) met, with participants elected from schools, colleges and youth organisations. This proposal would establish a similar Rural Parliament and Rural Youth Parliament in Wales, with core funding and support from the Welsh Government.

### **5.4 Twin rural and urban schools in Wales to facilitate exchange activities and encourage children to learn about life in different communities and develop understanding of rural and urban perspectives.**

#### **Rationale**

Opinions expressed that the interests of rural Wales are not sufficiently reflected in policies tend to be accompanied by perceptions that rural and urban cultures have become disconnected, even in a small country such as Wales. This policy aims to address perceived lack of understanding between rural and urban communities by focusing on young people through a scheme to twin schools in rural parts of Wales with schools in urban areas.

It is inspired by a similar scheme in the Carinthia region of Austria, highlighted in the ROBUST project, but also builds on existing more local school twinning initiatives in Wales, for example in [Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen](#). School twinning would aim to encourage pupils to learn about life in different communities and develop understanding of rural and urban perspectives, with potential activities including online discussions, exchange visits, letter- or email-writing and pen pal pairings, and joint classes.

## **5.5 Provide funding for an independent body for rural evidence and monitoring to collect, analyse and publish rural data through a public dashboard; undertake research to provide evidence for rural policy-making; and monitor the impact of policies on social, economic and cultural wellbeing in rural communities.**

### **Rationale**

Over the last 18 months, Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has aimed to strengthen the evidence base for policy-making for rural Wales and to engage communities and stakeholders in finding innovative solutions to rural challenges. Feedback from partners and participants has indicated that Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has filled a gap that had existed since the end of the Welsh Government-funded Wales Rural Observatory in 2013, producing new, expanded and updated evidence and analysis on a range of issues.

This contribution has especially helped to fill gaps in analytical capacity in local authorities and other public agencies, resulting from budget constraints; as well as supplementing the work of Senedd Research to provide independent evidence to support monitoring and scrutiny of policies relating to rural Wales.

However, as a primarily experimental initiative, grant funding for Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales from UKRI (the UK Government research funding body) is due to end in December 2026. This policy advocates the commissioning of an independent body, funded or (co-)funded by Welsh Government but operationally autonomous, to continue work initiated by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales in providing a robust evidence base to support the development and scrutiny of policies for rural Wales.

---

## About the supporting research

The policy ideas outlined in this Manifesto Briefing are based on research and innovation activities undertaken by Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales, or on other related recent research projects.

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales – the Rural Wales Local Policy and Innovation Partnership – is a three-year initiative funded by UKRI (the UK Government research and innovation funding body) to strengthen the evidence base for policy-making for Rural Wales and to find innovative solutions for policy challenges facing the region.

The consortium involves researchers from Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff universities and the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire, and experts from the Centre for Alternative Technology, Together for Change Cymru, Antur Cymru, Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig, Pontio, Represent Us Rural, Rural Health and Care Wales, and Sgema.

The specific Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales projects drawn on in this Manifesto Briefing include:

- **Perceptions of Growth in Two Welsh Market Towns** – Study led by Dr Sophie Bennett-Gillison (Aberystwyth University) examining understanding and attitudes towards ‘growth’ in the rural economy, through interviews with businesses, community leaders, residents in two case studies, Llangefni (Anglesey) and Llanidloes (Powys), as well as a stakeholder workshop.  
[Full Report.](#)  
[Policy Brief.](#)

- **Women in Farm Diversification**  
– Study led by Professor Sara MacBride-Stewart (Cardiff University) on challenges faced by women entrepreneurs with farm diversification businesses, involving 30 interviews with women entrepreneurs and farming organisations.  
[Policy Brief.](#)
- **Multi-solving through Net Zero Initiatives** – Study led by Dr Sophie Wynne-Jones (Bangor University) investigating how Net Zero projects can also address social, economic and cultural challenges, based on interviews and case studies. Report and Policy Brief will be available at [www.lpip.cymru](http://www.lpip.cymru) in early 2026.
- **Food and Community Wellbeing**  
– Study led by Professor Paul Milbourne (Cardiff University) on policy initiatives to address food poverty and promote wellbeing and community cohesion in rural communities, involving interviews with stakeholders and case studies. Report and Policy Brief will be available at [www.lpip.cymru](http://www.lpip.cymru) in early 2026.
- **The Use, Management and Potential of Community Spaces**  
– Study led by Professor Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University) examining how rural community spaces are used and managed and the potential for expanding their functions, based on case study analysis and interviews. Report and Policy Brief will be available at [www.lpip.cymru](http://www.lpip.cymru) in early 2026.

- **Community Resilience Survey** – Online survey of 161 Community and Town Councils in Wales conducted between December 2024 and February 2025 in collaboration with One Voice Wales, with questions covering community assets, businesses, events, access to local food, energy projects, equalities, Welsh language, and council structure and activities. A summary report will be available at [www.lpip.cymru](http://www.lpip.cymru) shortly.
- **Innovation Labs** – Work stream coordinated by the Centre for Alternative Technology, aimed at finding innovative solutions to policy challenges. The participatory Innovation Lab methodology has involved invited stakeholders in a series of three workshops to discuss obstacles to achieving a stated aim or vision and identify interventions to overcome obstacles.

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales has run four Innovation Labs, each focused on an issue related to one of the LPIP themes: the Regenerative Economy Innovation Lab on labour recruitment in the rural construction industry; the Net Zero Innovation Lab on developing a low-carbon horticulture sector; the Wellbeing in Place Innovation Lab on using food to promote community cohesion and address social exclusion; and the Cultural Resilience Innovation Lab on promoting the use of Welsh in grassroots sports.

One proposed intervention from each Innovation Lab have been selected for proof-of-concept testing during 2026. Policy Briefs from the workshops will be available at [www.lpip.cymru](http://www.lpip.cymru) shortly.

- **Community-led Action Research** – Programme coordinated by Together for Change facilitating communities to undertake their own research on a locally-identified priority, supported by an academic mentor. Five pilot projects were run in 2025 in Corwen, Dyfi Biosphere, Newtown, St David’s peninsula, and Trawsfynydd. A further six projects have been selected through an open competition and currently underway.

Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales also has a knowledge brokering role, connecting researchers, policy-makers and stakeholders through four thematic groups to facilitate knowledge transfer from previous research.

As part of the knowledge brokering function, this Manifesto Briefing has also drawn on the following research projects completed prior to Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales:

- **Rural-Urban Outlook – Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)** – A collaboration between Aberystwyth University and the Welsh Local Government Association as part of a larger EU project, 2017-21. In Wales, the project involved compilation and analysis of evidence and facilitation of stakeholder workshops to support the development of a Rural Vision for Wales, and an online survey of young people in Rural Wales with over 1,000 responses. [Evidence Report.](#) [Rural Youth Survey Report.](#)

- 
- **Coastal Uplands, Heritage and Tourism (CUPHAT)** – Collaborative Ireland-Wales project led by Aberystwyth University to increase sustainable tourism in coastal upland areas of Ireland and Wales through showcasing the natural and cultural heritage, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, 2022-24. CUPHAT involved participatory action research with 12 communities in Ireland and Wales, focused in Wales in Preseli and the Cambrian Mountains.

[Website.](#)

- **Rural Futures Project** – Action research project led by Severn Wye Energy and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, 2017-2024, which worked with 14 rural communities across Wales devising and running home-grown projects to address rural poverty, create opportunities, and make their places more resilient.

[Website.](#)

## Contact us

If you would like to collaborate or receive more information, please contact Professor Michael Woods, Director, Cymru Wledig LPIP Rural Wales

[lpip@aber.ac.uk](mailto:lpip@aber.ac.uk)

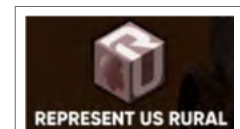
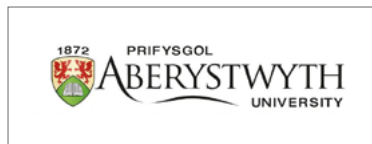
Interim website: [www.arsyllfa.cymru/category/lpipruralwales/](http://www.arsyllfa.cymru/category/lpipruralwales/)

LinkedIn: [www.linkedin.com/company/cymru-wledig-lpip-rural-wales](http://www.linkedin.com/company/cymru-wledig-lpip-rural-wales)

## Funded by



## Core Partners



## Hosted by

