

ARUP

Final Report March 2020

# Usk (& Woodside) Improvement Master Plan

USK TOWN COUNCIL | MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



# ARUP

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Prepared by Arup on behalf of Monmouthshire County Council  
and Usk Town Council

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Please note, this report is intended to be viewed and printed as an A4 double-sided document with cover page.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

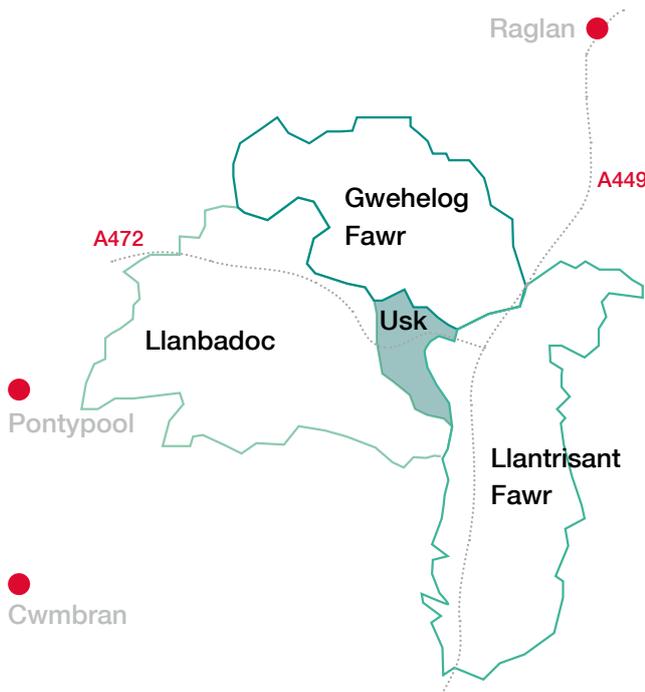
## 1.1 The plan for change

### PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

In June 2019 Arup was appointed to produce a 'Town Improvement Master Plan' for Usk and the adjoining communities of Woodside and Llanbadoc. This document contains a strategic framework and action plan which collectively form the masterplan.

The strategic framework directs change over the next five years and beyond. It is based on extensive engagement with key stakeholders and the wider community.

It should be noted that this report has no planning status and that any necessary approvals and decisions would need to be made to progress the proposals outlined in the report.



### 1. COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

Usk and its adjoining communities

# 28%

Of the total land mass of the Cardiff Capital Region (Monmouthshire)

# 2nd

Most successful economy in Wales.  
Best placed for growth (Monmouthshire)

UK Competitiveness Index 2019

# 2,800

Usk population

2011 Census data

# 8,000

Catchment population for Usk Town Centre

MCC 2017 Retail Background Paper



## 2. LOCATION

Usk and its rural setting

## 1.2 Executive summary

Our towns, cities and rural communities currently face unprecedented global challenges. Climate change, ageing populations, the exponential growth in digital technologies and national political uncertainty in the form of Brexit pose generational issues for all of us. These global and national challenges are already being felt in Usk or will be present in the near horizon.

The town has struggled to cope with ever growing levels of car usage, a problem that now consumes one of the town's most finite resources – its streets and spaces. This has led to a gradual degradation of Bridge Street at a time when the pressure on local businesses grows. Despite the small scale of the town, air quality has deteriorated to the extent that a designated Air Quality Management Zone has been created along Bridge Street.

Usk's once thriving community of local businesses has suffered from the dual challenge posed by the relative ease of travelling to nearby towns by car for a broader range of shops and the continual rise of online retail and service provision. The town faces a fundamental decision - what is the future of local businesses and what type of town will Usk be?

As the population ages, pressure on local support services will grow whilst the working age population is likely to reduce further adding to the need to increase the productivity of the workforce. Ever increasing house prices threaten to displace younger people, removing the opportunities for families to continue to live near each other.

The agricultural community and town are intrinsically linked. Farming throughout the UK faces an uncertain future as decades of European Union subsidies are reviewed potentially resulting in profound changes to the way land is managed. Changing attitudes to animal produce may be a short-lived trend or a sign of wider, shifting sentiment. Net-Zero Carbon targets will force us to think differently about how we manage our countryside and the role it can play in decarbonising our society. Whilst these challenges are not defined, it reinforces the urgent need for greater partnerships and collaboration between Usk and its rural hinterland.

Despite these challenges, Usk benefits from substantial advantages. The historic character, beautiful natural setting, access to the wider landscape, a growing population within the wider region and crucially, an engaged local community and public sector provide the raw ingredients to positively embrace the scale of the challenge. The people of Usk and its surroundings can enact meaningful change and lead the way by demonstrating how a local community can take charge of its own future.

Achieving this will mean fronting up to contentious issues such as traffic, developing new partnerships, accepting trial and error and building on the existing natural assets. It will require investment in a way that delivers far reaching benefits to our health, our environment, our local communities and our local economies.

The town's leaders have shown they are not afraid to acknowledge the scale and complexity of the problem or to test new ideas to remedy them. This is a plan that has been made with local people and for local people yet the outcomes will respond to global challenges. This report is not the end of a process, it provides a roadmap to make Usk a model of sustainable development. To direct this, the recommendations of this report have been created under four cross cutting themes:

**Action for Future Generations - Drawing upon global and national agendas for change, The Well-being of Future Generations Act and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to direct change.**

This overarching theme forms the basis for the plan. It sets out the need to rethink and evolve our thinking around localised energy production, food production, the local environment and the way we travel. It reinforces the need for community inclusion to ensure the plan is formed by and backed by the local community.

**Business: Proudly Independent - Recasting Usk as a specialist independent town by celebrating and supporting local businesses.**

A series of initiatives to deal with vacant buildings have been recommended including the potential role of the public sector to take charge of properties to support emerging businesses and social enterprises. Opportunities for modern co-working spaces

have also been explored to attract new entrepreneurs and to allow local people to work close to home. The outcomes of these strategies are proposed to offer greater linkages to the wider tourism offer of Monmouthshire.

**Reclaiming Usk's streets and spaces - Reversing decades of car orientated practices and returning Usk to a place for people not cars.**

Twyn Square is proposed to become a public space once again to provide a place to meet, gather and showcase Usk. Whilst further study will be required for Bridge Street, initial ideas around innovative street designs will be trialled to make it safer, more walkable, more attractive and to help improve air quality. Existing initiatives to create new walking and cycling connections to Coleg Gwent and the MCC offices are supported.

**Environment and botanics - Capitalising on Usk's rural setting and identity as the 'Town of Flowers' to provide wider benefits.**

Understanding and thinking longer term about the relationship between the town and the countryside and building a stronger relationship between the town's independents businesses, Coleg Gwent and the agricultural community by focusing on local food production and supply chains. Expanding the theme of flowers and botanics by ensuring proposals to improve the towns streets and spaces include ample space for new trees and planting to support wildlife, improve our health, our happiness and continue to shape the character of Usk.

## 2. THE WIDER PICTURE

### 2.1 ‘Cathedral thinking’ and a Climate Emergency

In 2019 both the Welsh Government and Monmouthshire County Council declared a climate emergency recognising the need for urgent action to combat the effects of global climate change. The impact of human interaction on the world's natural systems is now beyond doubt. This is increasingly being referred to as the Anthropocene age, a period of the earth's history where damage to the environmental and geological systems is occurring at an unprecedented pace.

At a global and national level, the guidance, policy and legislation to direct decisions makes clear the need for sustainability in its broadest sense. This plan provides the opportunity to respond to global challenges through meaningful change within a rural, Welsh community.

Through grass-roots, localised action, Usk can demonstrate how major challenges can be met with carefully considered and tailored actions. This fundamental approach forms the basis for all recommendations and strategies included within this plan.

#### *Global*

In response to the Paris Accord on Climate Change, The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a blueprint at the highest level to direct decision-making towards environmental, political, social and economic sustainability. The 17 goals represent the diversity of countries that form the UN. For Usk, eight of the goals have been identified by Arup to steer the project.

#### *National*

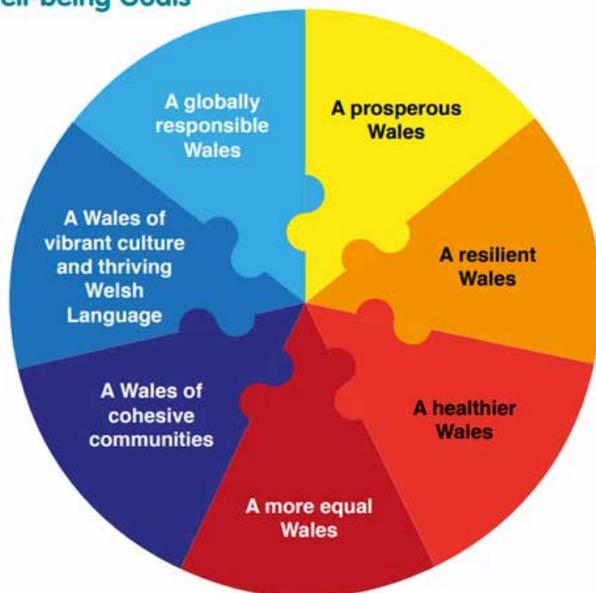
The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) offers a radically different way of approaching development and change. The Act enshrines in law the need to consider the impact of our decisions on future generations. This can be thought of as ‘**Cathedral thinking**’ a reference to the altruism shown by the medieval craftsmen who dedicated their lives working on buildings they knew would not be completed within their life times.

Central to the act are the **seven goals** and of equal importance, the **five ways of working** which set out the means for public bodies to achieve the goals. This is a unique piece of legislation that provides us with an unprecedented means of working differently toward a common goal.

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## Well-being Goals



## 5 Ways of working

**Long-term** Balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.

**Integration** Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies

**Involvement** The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves

**Collaboration** Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives

**Prevention** How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives

## 2.2 Drivers of Change

Drivers of change are wider societal, economic and environmental issues and challenges.

These will have both direct and indirect impacts on the future of Usk and its community. It is essential to understand these to ensure that we are shaping a place that will be future proofed against tomorrow's challenges.

### Demographics

1.5 million

People living in the Cardiff Capital Region

[www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk](http://www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk)

20%

Population growth forecast 2017-2037

[www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk](http://www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk)

30%

Increase in over 65 year olds 2019-2039 (Monmouthshire)

Experian data

-14%

Decrease in state working age population 2019-2039 (Monmouthshire)

Experian data

This poses a profound challenge as to how we manage growth in a sustainable way. It is going to add pressure to public services as the working age population decreases and the ageing population increases. The challenge is significant and requires us to look at ways at increasing the productivity of working age groups and rethinking physical infrastructure to account for growing numbers of the elderly.

## Climate change

### Net Zero

Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 in Wales

<https://gov.wales/wales-accepts-committee-climate-change-95-emissions-reduction-target>

### 2019

Welsh Government and MCC declare a climate emergency

Climate change will fundamentally change the way we live, move around, manage waste, produce energy and source food as part of a new de-carbonisation era. It will require us to adapt and manage our natural environments to respond to changes already occurring and those that will follow.

**The Environment Act Wales 2016** requires at least an 80% reduction in green house gas emissions by 2050. This will be reviewed in 2020 to reflect the Net Zero Carbon target. Wales has advanced its sustainability agenda further by embedding sustainability at the heart of decision-making through the **Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)**.

This will be further underpinned by the Welsh Government's (WG) emerging de-carbonisation programme (under development).

Usk should aim to become a resilient, low carbon model that encourages behavioural change. The model will open up new avenues for technology, smart systems and sustainable enterprises.

## Health & well-being

### 60%

Welsh population overweight or obese

National Survey Wales 2018

### 50%

Population gaining the advised level of exercise

National Survey Wales 2018

There is an increasing appreciation and understanding of how the natural and man-made world impacts upon our health and well-being. Non-communicable diseases associated with sedentary lifestyles, poor diet and environmental stresses such as air quality place a significant burden on the health system.

Health and well-being is likely to become more closely integrated into planning, design and development. This will mean placing it at the forefront of our thinking around 'place' - based concerns such as spaces, streets and buildings. We will need to encourage people outside and to become more active, both formally and informally. It will also mean that access to healthy food, active travel and localised health care form central tenets of the strategy for change.

## The High Street & the digital challenge

17%

Growth in internet sales as a percentage of total retail sales

Office of National Statistics Nov 2006-May 2019

-10%

Change in number of high street business in Wales

Office of National Statistics Nov 2006-May 2019 'High Streets in Great Britain'

## Tourism

10%

Increase in tourist visits (2007-2018) in Monmouthshire

STEAM trend report 2007-2018

'The heritage county of Wales'

MCC LDP

£219 million

Generated within the local economy through visitor and tourism business expenditure (2018)

STEAM Tourism Economic Impacts 2018 Year in Review (Monmouthshire)

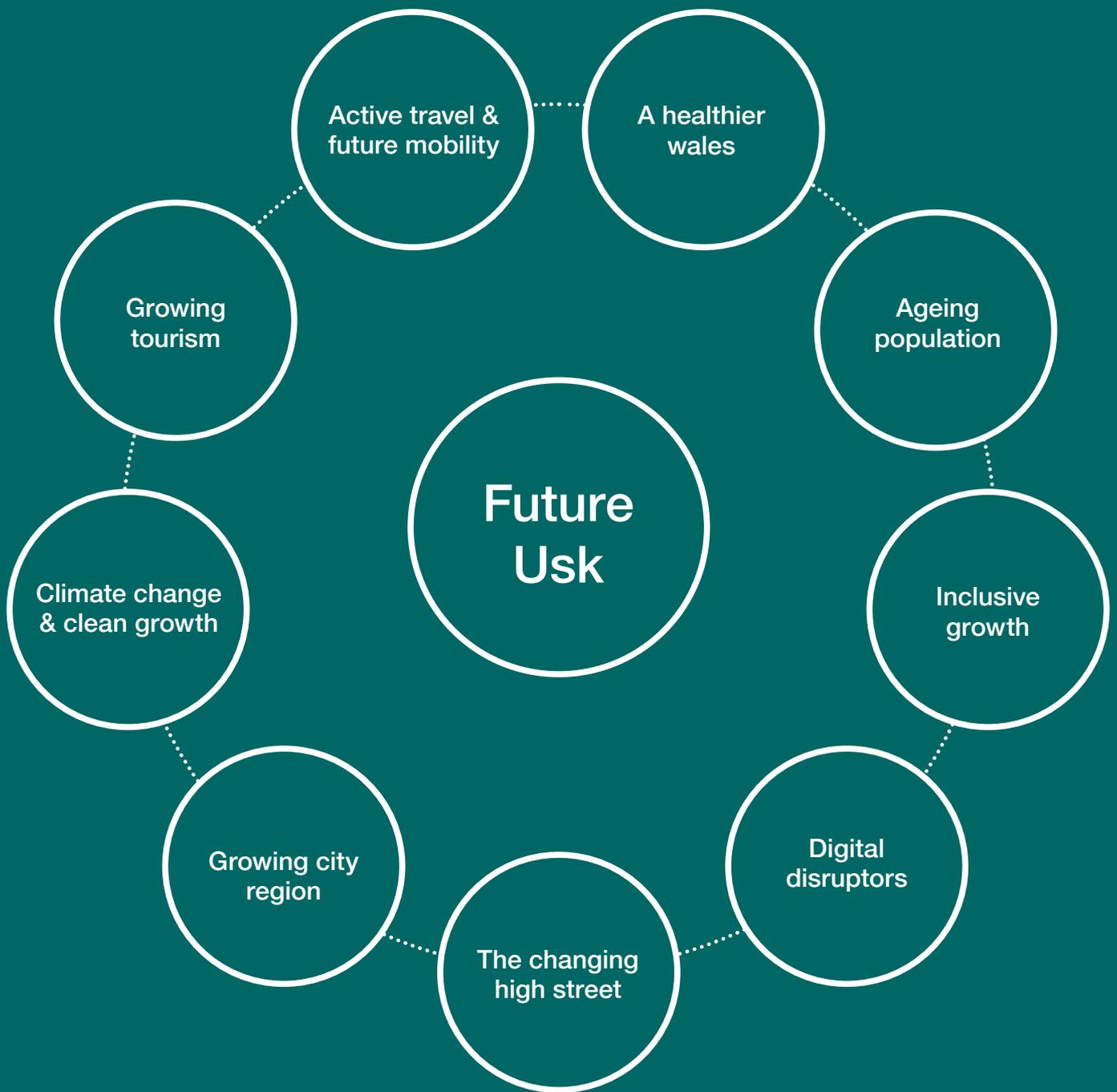




## 2.3 The big challenges

Usk will be subject to continuing and growing change over the coming decades. Climate change, the unknown future for agriculture in a post-Brexit Britain, ageing populations and the radical transformation of our high streets are just some of the issues that Usk will need to prepare for.

Despite the scale of these challenges there is an enormous opportunity to embrace this change and ensure that Usk becomes an exemplar of a 21st Century sustainable community.



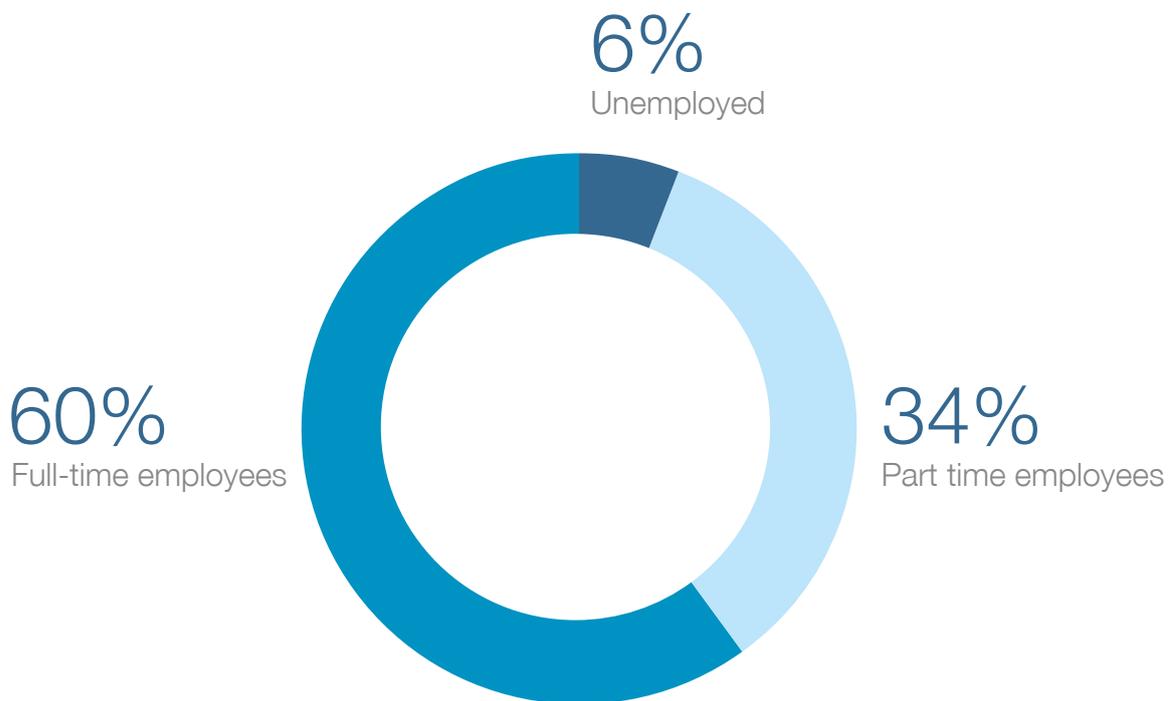
### 3. BIG CHALLENGES

The key drivers which will influence Usk

## 2.4 Usk today - Socio-economic overview

Socio-economic indicators highlight the affluence of Usk in comparison with the wider nation. Usk has attracted and retained a large population who earn above the national average wage whilst unemployment levels are low.

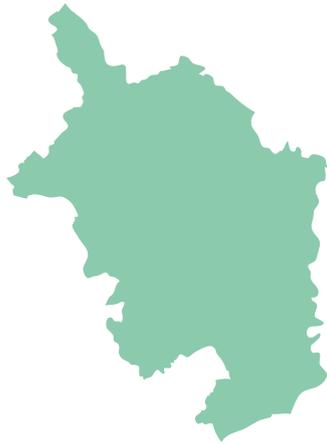
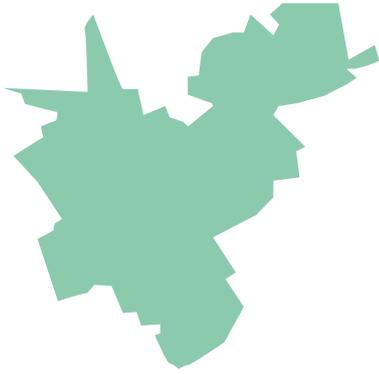
Whilst the general absence of socio-economic deprivation is welcome within Usk itself, house prices are more than double the Welsh national average. This lack of affordability, particular for younger local people is likely to lead to displacement to surrounding areas where property prices are lower. It should also be noted that despite the general appearance off affluence there are still those who are dependent on low wage income and local deprivation will be present.



### 4. USK EMPLOYMENT

Percentage of adult population by category

Source: Experian data



£47,592

Mean income - Usk

14%

£43,640

Mean income - Monmouthshire

16%

£33,651

Mean income - Wales

26%

5. **INCOME DATA**

Comparison of mean income and % of households below 50% of GB median income

Source: Experian data

Usk

Monmouthshire

Wales

UK



£380,000



£284,835



£160,000



£227,000

6. **AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES**

Source: Rightmove.co.uk August 2019

## 2.5 Usk today - 'High Street' overview

### A TRANSITIONING TOWN

Usk remains an important service centre for a wider rural hinterland, however it reflects wider changes occurring throughout the UK's high streets. Digital services and on-line retail continue to replace comparison retail such as electronics and services such as banking.

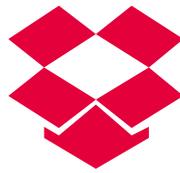
The lack of national chains and presence of independent service providers and specialist comparison retailers suggest the role of Usk as a commercial centre is transitioning toward an experiential and social function.

This is further highlighted by the percentage of people going outside of Usk for their main food shopping and comparison shopping.



84%

Do their main food shopping outside of Usk



Most

Residents of Usk do comparison shopping in Cardiff, Cribbs Causeway and Cwmbran



48%

Visit Cineworld, Newport for the cinema

0.5%

Vacancy rate

Co Star Q1 Data 2019 (NB this data can vary significantly over each financial quarter)

76%

of people want more retail  
(Future Usk Survey)

8%

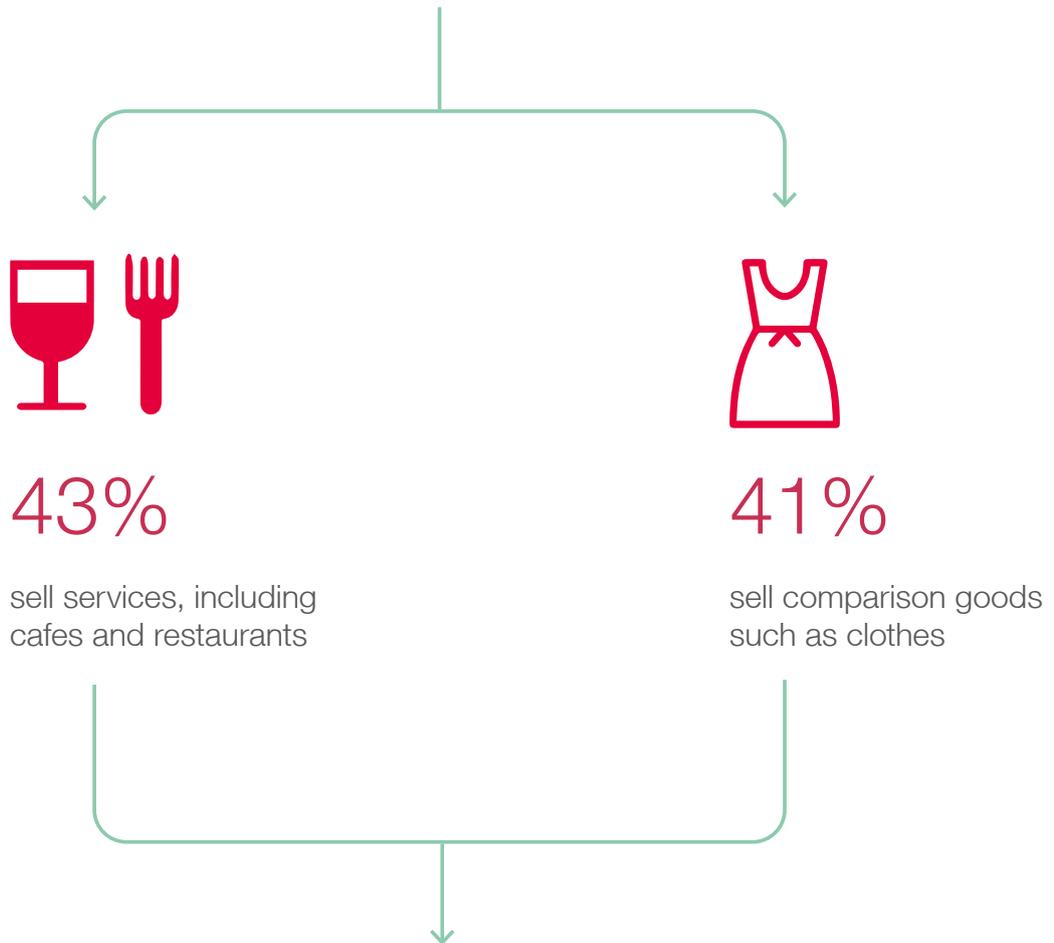
Visit a cinema within Monmouthshire

### 7. RETAIL HABITS

Beaufort research report  
Future Usk Survey, Usk Town Council 2018

# 95%

of shops are independent



## Suggests an experiential and social function

### 8. RETAIL HABITS

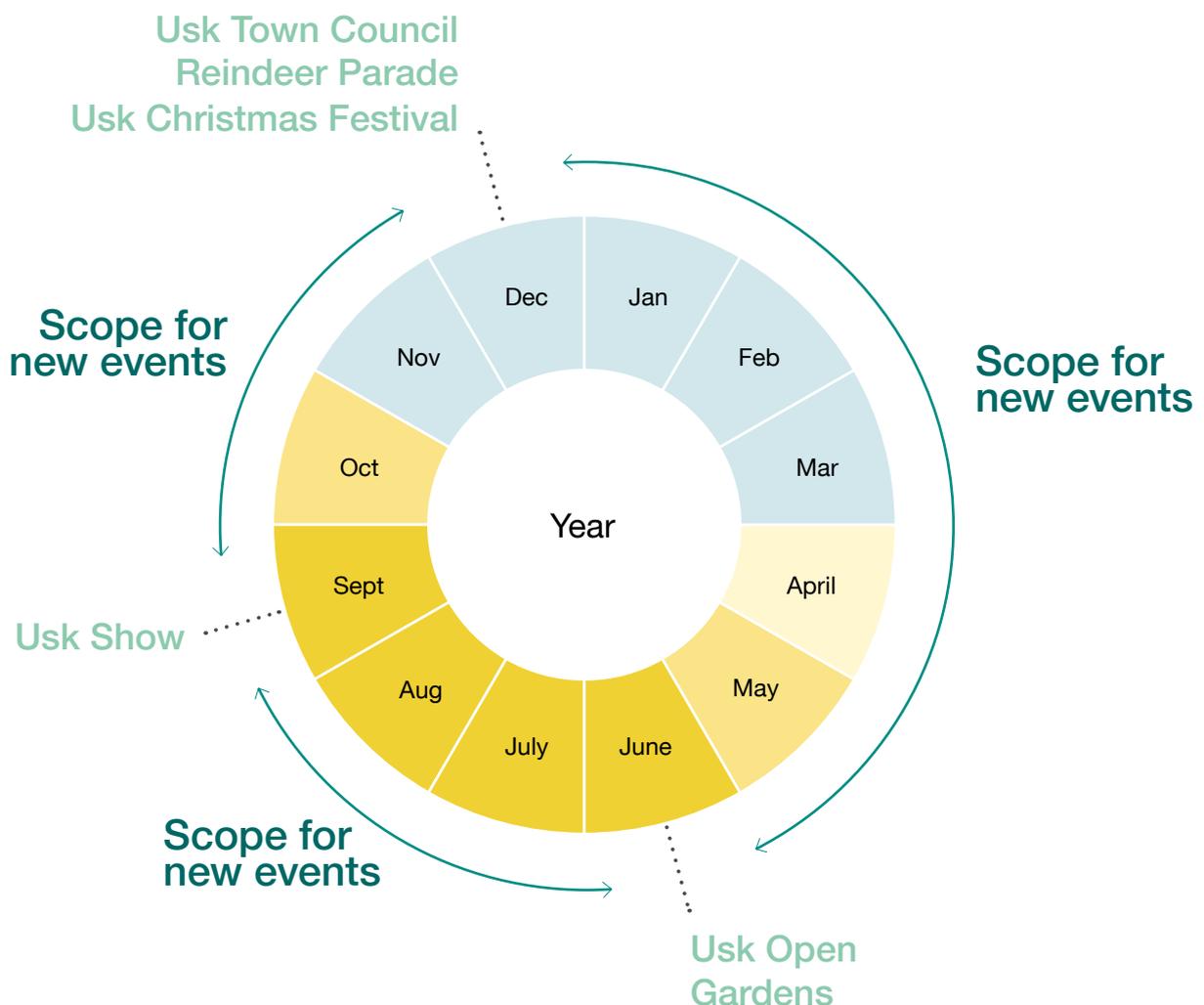
MCC retail background paper

## 2.6 The events calendar

Successful, managed and targeted events are an integral means of delivering wider benefits. These include:

- Community engagement;
- Attracting new visitors and broadening the range of visitors;
- Supporting local businesses;
- Showcasing a place and projecting a positive image;
- Improving profile and awareness.

The success of the town's current events, including the recent street closure event on the August Bank Holiday, demonstrates the value they can bring. What is evident from the calendar is the scope to extend Usk's events calendar to attract more people over the course of the year.





**9. USK STREET PARTY**

August Bank Holiday street party 2019

### 3. SHAPING THE PLAN

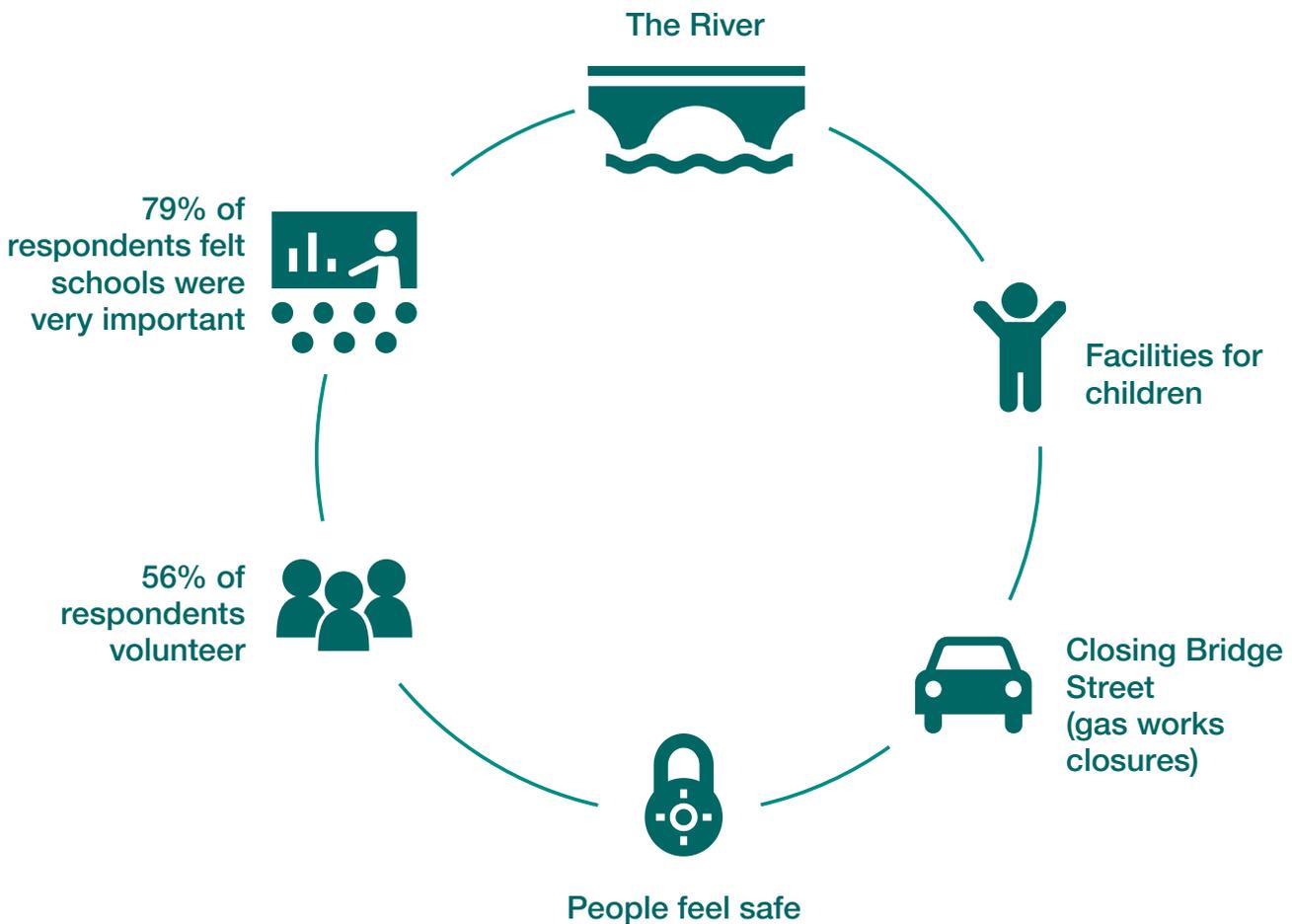
## 3.1 The community view

#### FUTURE USK SURVEY

In 2018, Usk Town Council undertook a town wide survey to better understand the community's view on Usk.

Completed by over 500 residents the survey provides a valuable insight into the concerns and priorities of residents and has informed the development of specific initiatives within this masterplan. A summary of the main findings were:

### *What is important and what works well?*



## *Where can we improve?*



Viability of new businesses



Regenerate Bridge Street



Catering for younger people



Improved events



Environmental issues associated with traffic



Improve parking



Affordable housing



Need more local services/amenities/retail

## 3.2 Stakeholder engagement

### STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

On 11th and 18th September, 2019 stakeholder engagement events were held at Sessions House, Usk. In total, six sessions were held with attendees from a wide spectrum of the local business community and local action groups. Further engagement was undertaken during the Usk Show and the August Bank Holiday Street Party where the public were invited to discuss the emerging proposals. The groups were presented with the emerging ideas for Usk including:

- Temporary closures to Bridge Street
- Transforming Twyn Square into a public square
- Strategies to support local businesses.
- Possible strategies for the surrounding landscape including sustainable tourism and increased biodiversity.

Whilst there was overlap with elements of the Future Usk survey findings, further invaluable feedback was gathered. This is summarised below:

### *Issues & concerns*



Business rates are proving prohibitive.



Maintaining adequate parking.



Need more local services, amenities & retail.



Maintaining access for agricultural and commercial vehicles through Usk.



Parking and speed enforcement is critical.



Need to consider strategies for the young, especially teenagers.

# Opportunities



Linking food production, catering skills and sales from Coleg Gwent with the town centre.



Electric car charging points



An active travel hub in Twyn Square



Improved connections between Coleg Gwent and Usk including bike/electric bike hire schemes.



Consider using land adjacent to the prison for additional parking.



Could Usk become a specialist wedding town?



An active travel connection over the River Usk.



Provide safe routes to school.

## 3.3 Planning and environment

In addition to taking onboard the views of the community the plan has considered the constraints posed by national, regional and local planning and environmental designations.

### **THE RIVER USK**

The River Usk is both a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The river also provides significant visual and amenity value forming a central feature of the town's identity. Careful consideration should be afforded to ways of increasing public access to the river corridor whilst maintaining and enhancing the unique ecological and environmental qualities.

### **RESTRICTED GROWTH**

Areas of potential development within the town are limited. Parts of Usk fall within both flood zones C1 and C2. This curtails the potential to develop in this area. Any development within these areas would require a Flood Consequence Assessment (FCA) to ensure development is both safe and will not have an adverse impact on existing and future flood management.

The extent of the flood plain, presence of several Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM) and the development boundary restrict expansion of the town. This means that land within the town centre needs to be carefully managed to ensure that maximum benefit is drawn. This is particularly pertinent to areas of public use – the streets, spaces and car parks of Usk.

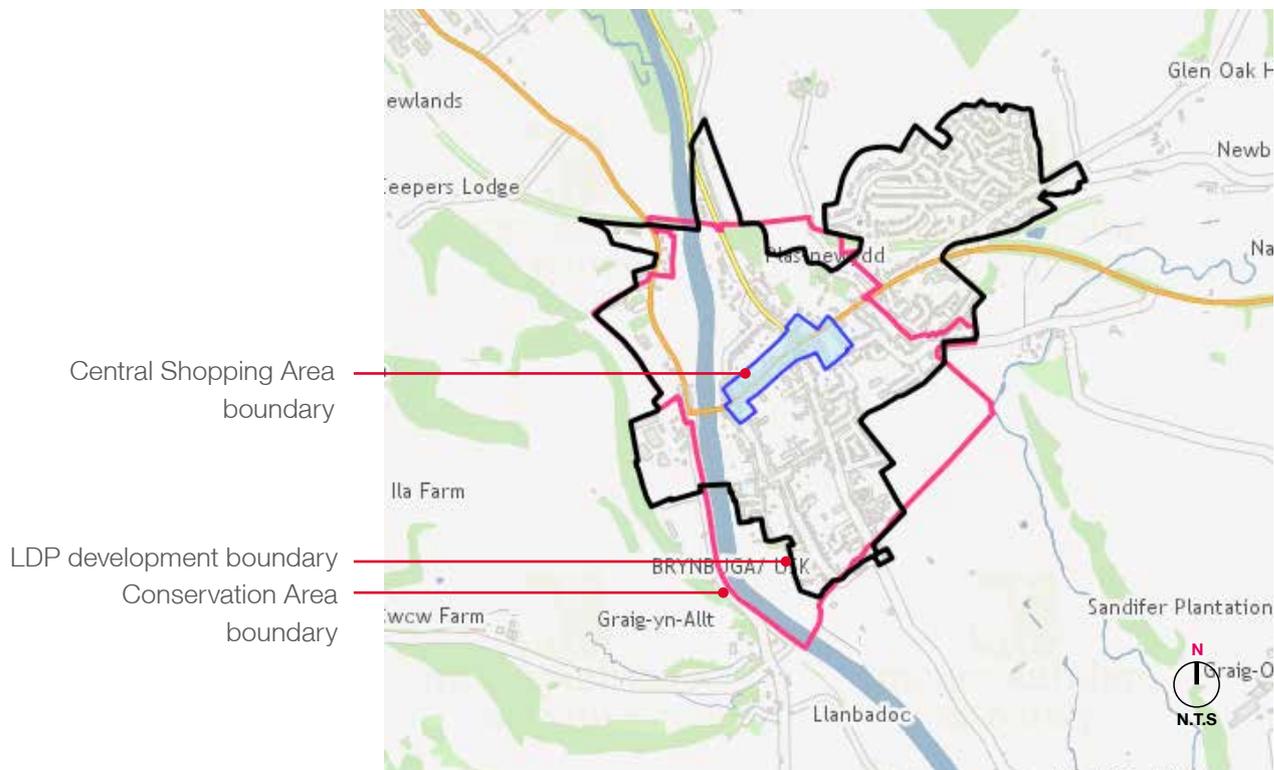
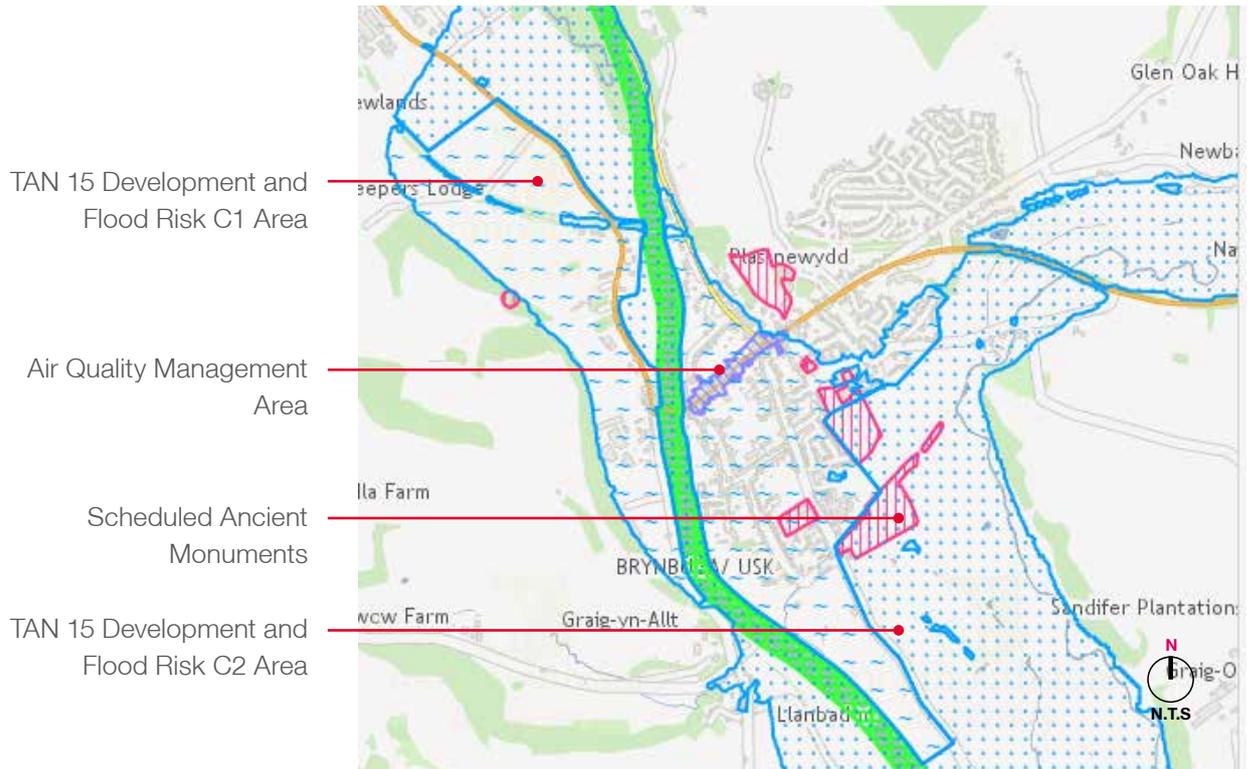
### **A DEFINED SHOPPING AREA**

Usk's Central Shopping Area is clearly defined and set within a historic pattern of buildings. The relatively small scale of this area combined with the limited size of available retail units will continue to limit the scope for national chain stores to locate within Usk. This presents an opportunity to maintain an established community of independent businesses.

### **AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT ZONE**

The Usk Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) was declared by Monmouthshire County Council in November 2005 due to an exceedance of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective level of 40ug/m<sup>3</sup> (micrograms per meter cubed). This places a legal obligation on MCC to reduce the level of pollution in the designated area.

Whilst the 2018 monitoring report indicates that the level of NO<sub>2</sub> had decreased to the lowest level since 2007, air quality remains a concern. An integrated strategy to reduce car usage is included within the Air Quality Management Action Plan which is coordinated by the Usk Air Quality Steering Group. This includes a modal shift away from personal car use toward more walking and cycling, effective management of on street parking, 20mph speed restrictions and the promotion of flexible working to reduce commuting traffic.



10. **CONSTRAINT MAPS**

Extracted from Monmouthshire LDP interactive map.

## 3.4 National and Local Planning Policy

### PLANNING POLICY WALES 10 (PPW10)

Promotes well-being through placemaking; defined as a process for considering the context, function and relationship between a development site and its wider surroundings. Placemaking adds social, economic, environmental and cultural value to development proposals resulting in benefits which go beyond a physical development boundary and embed wider resilience into planning decisions.

Key planning principles that should guide development proposals include:

- 1. Growing our economy in a sustainable manner;** The planning system should enable development which contributes to long term economic well-being, making the best use of existing infrastructure and planning for new supporting infrastructure and services.
- 2. Making best use of resources;** The efficient use of resources, including land, underpins sustainable development.
- 3. Facilitating accessible and healthy environments;** Our land use choices and the places we create should be accessible for all and support healthy lives.
- 4. Creating & sustaining communities;** The planning system must work in an integrated way to maximise its contribution to well-being.
- 5. Maximising environmental protection and limiting environmental impact;** Natural, historic and cultural assets must be protected, promoted, conserved and enhanced.

### LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (WORK HAS STARTED ON THE 2018-2033 LDP)

Usk is described as serving the wider rural hinterland and is recognised for its high-quality landscape setting. It is lacking many of the facilities of larger towns, such as a supermarket or secondary school, and has relatively low levels of employment self-containment (at just under 40%) which is indicative of its function as a commuter town. In terms of local policy context specific to Usk;

- 6.** Policy S6 identifies the town as a local centre that provides an important role in the retail hierarchy, serving a more local function for residents with a predominant focus on convenience shopping and an element of comparison shopping, together with some local service provision.
- 7.** Policy SAH10 defines the town as a rural secondary settlement suitable for small scale residential development that complements its local centre retail function.
- 8.** Policy RET2 defines the town as a central shopping area, towards the top of the retail hierarchy within the wider county, and seeks to safeguard its vitality, attractiveness and viability.

The strategic policy context encourages most development in and around the 'three towns' of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth; which represent the county's most sustainable locations.

## **VISION MONMOUTHSHIRE 2040: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND AMBITION STATEMENT**

The statement sets out the aspiration to raise the profile of Monmouthshire. It identifies three core themes:

- A dynamic Place to do business
- A valuable place to invest
- An incredible place to visit

The council is committed to promoting an inclusive economy and contemporary local economy which capitalises on the natural environment. The priorities are to:

- Raise the profile of Monmouthshire as a key investment opportunity for the private sector;
- Lay the ground rules for an economic environment which enables businesses to land and expand and provide sustainable employment opportunities for local people;
- Attract funding and investment to Monmouthshire to attract the right conditions for 'an inclusive economy' – Equitable, Sustainable, Stable, Participatory, Growing; and
- Set an ambition which is sensitive to the landscape to ensure Monmouthshire remains an incredible place to visit, stay, live and invest.



## 4. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.1 Issues and opportunities summary

A number of core issues and opportunities have emerged following the consultation process and the evaluation of relevant guidance, policy and legal framework. An invaluable range of suggestions and recommendations were received from stakeholders and the public.

Some of these have been incorporated below whilst other more focused comments can be considered at a later date as project themes and initiatives evolve.

#### ISSUES

#### OPPORTUNITIES

1

- Bridge Street is vehicle dominated with limited space for pedestrians and few opportunities for activity.

- Create a safer, more comfortable and attractive streetscape which supports a wide range of activity and helps increase footfall.

2

- Twyn Square is vehicle dominated with extensive space provided for vehicle movements and limited space for pedestrians.

- Rationalise highway space to create a vibrant heart to the town, a spill out space for surrounding businesses and a possible location for events such as the farmers market.

3

- Coleg Gwent campus and MCC County Hall are disconnected from Usk with limited opportunities to contribute to the town's vitality.

- Improve pedestrian and cycle links and cultivate business and skills connections between the town and the college.

i

- Car parking space is free, unmanaged and currently oversubscribed.

- Improve management, including charging to encourage better utilisation of land including potential development space.

ii

- HMP Usk car parking is currently accommodated on surrounding residential streets.

- Potential to utilise parts of the prison site for staff and visitor parking.

iii

- There is an inefficient use of land around the woodside industrial estate

- Consider utilising some of the land for uses that will benefit the town as a whole such as 'spill-over' parking space.

A

- Riverside paths could be improved to encourage more walking and cycling. The Usk Valley Walk currently bypasses some of the town's main features. The existing bridge is too narrow for cars, people and cyclists.

- Enhanced riverside paths to create high quality recreational walking and cycling routes. Create links to the Usk Valley Walk. A new active travel bridge across the River Usk.

B

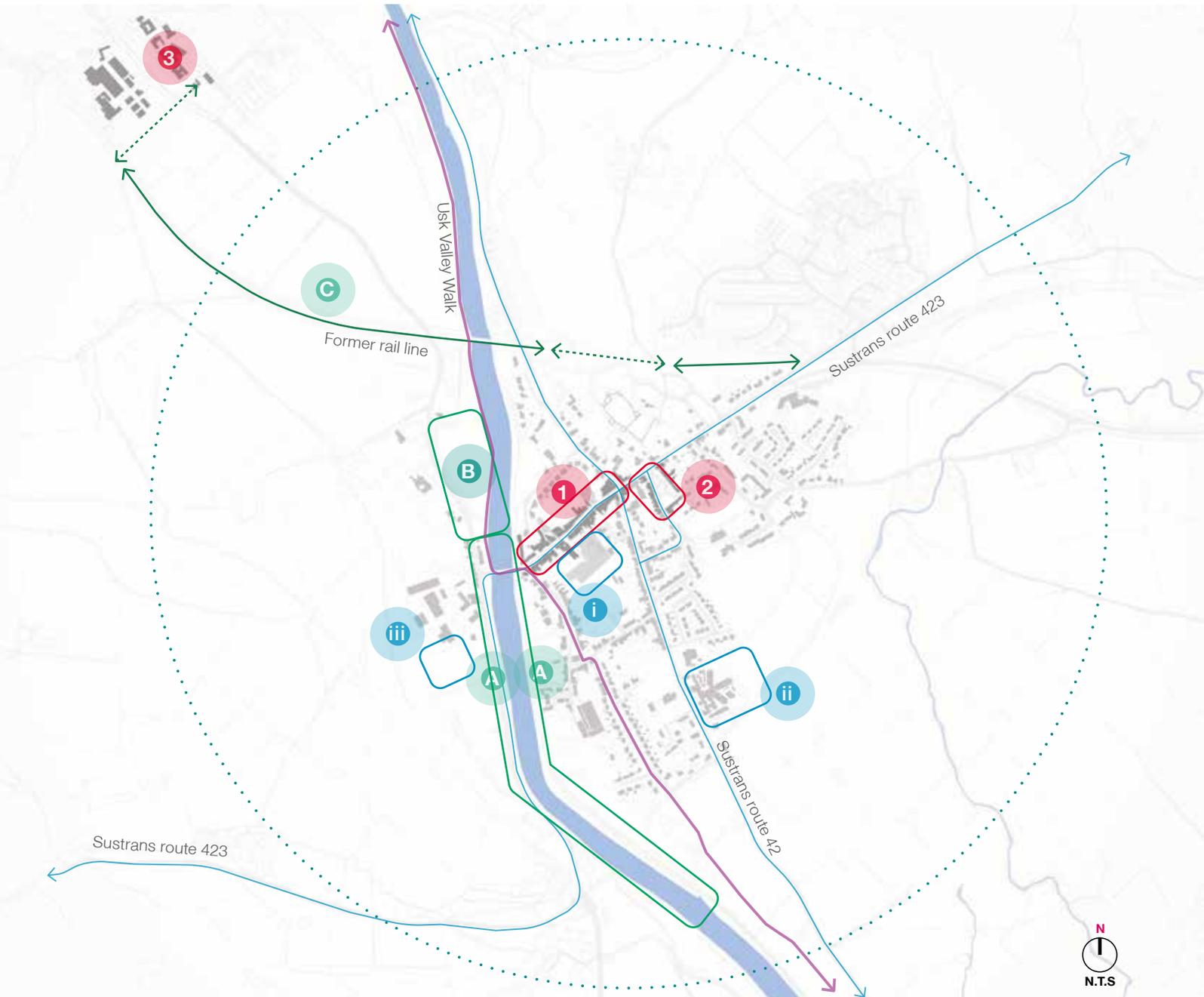
- Usk Island recreation ground is associated locally with anti-social behaviour.

- Improve quality of landscape and introduce more active uses to encourage stewardship and increase utilisation and community value.

C

- Former railway line is not utilised and is inaccessible to the west of Usk.

- Create a high quality pedestrian cycle route along the former railway connecting to Coleg Gwent and beyond.



**11. ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES**

Summary plan of the town wide issues and opportunities

## 4.2 The four cross-cutting themes

The plan for Usk is ambitious and bold. It responds to the significant challenges the town and the wider country face at a time of considerable change.

It is drawn from the assets that make Usk a unique rural town and the global and national agendas for change.

These four cross-cutting themes provide the strategic frame within which this plan will be delivered.

1

*Botanics and environment*

2

*Business; Proudly independent*

3

*Reclaiming our streets and  
spaces*

4

*Action for future generations*

## 4.3 Botanics and environment

### EVOLVING AN ESTABLISHED THEME

The theme of botanics is already established in Usk with international recognition. Usk in Bloom is a successful initiative that has raised the profile of the town, drawn the community into a common cause and continues to reinforce a sense of identity. It also provides a powerful position of strength from which associated initiatives can be explored.

Usk's rural location, its relationship with agriculture and wider considerations around biodiversity and health & well-being offer significant opportunities to expand on this theme.

### EXPANDING USK IN BLOOM

Usk in Bloom currently centres on the town and fringe landscapes. There is scope to extend this initiative to two further areas of influence: enhanced public spaces such as Twyn Square and Usk Island; and the wider landscape.

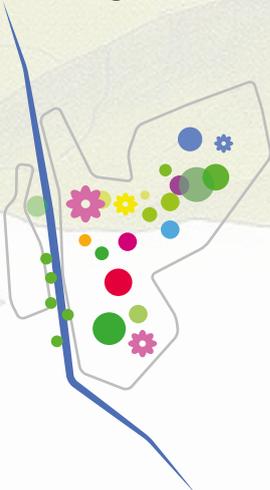
### ENHANCED PUBLIC SPACES

Expanding Usk in Bloom should ensure any new public realm improvements are centred around a botanical theme by:

- Embedding sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as part of a town-wide rainscape strategy to reduce surface water run-off and improve quality of the public realm. Such schemes use 'rain gardens' and swales to capture, filter and slow down the rate at which rainfall enters the water system whilst supporting a variety of soft landscape.
- Improving local biodiversity by selecting pollinator species and micro habitat creation
- Provide generous space for planting.
- Conserve existing plants and trees where possible and appropriate.
- Provide interpretation to help the public understand what is being done and why.

#### THE CURRENT TOWN

Award winning initiative



#### ENHANCED PUBLIC SPACES

Twyn Square, Bridge Street, River Usk corridor and Usk Island





## 12. POLLINATOR PLANTS

The planting strategy for Fitz Park, London was carefully chosen to support local biodiversity. ©Arup, Paul Carstairs



## **THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOWN AND COUNTRY**

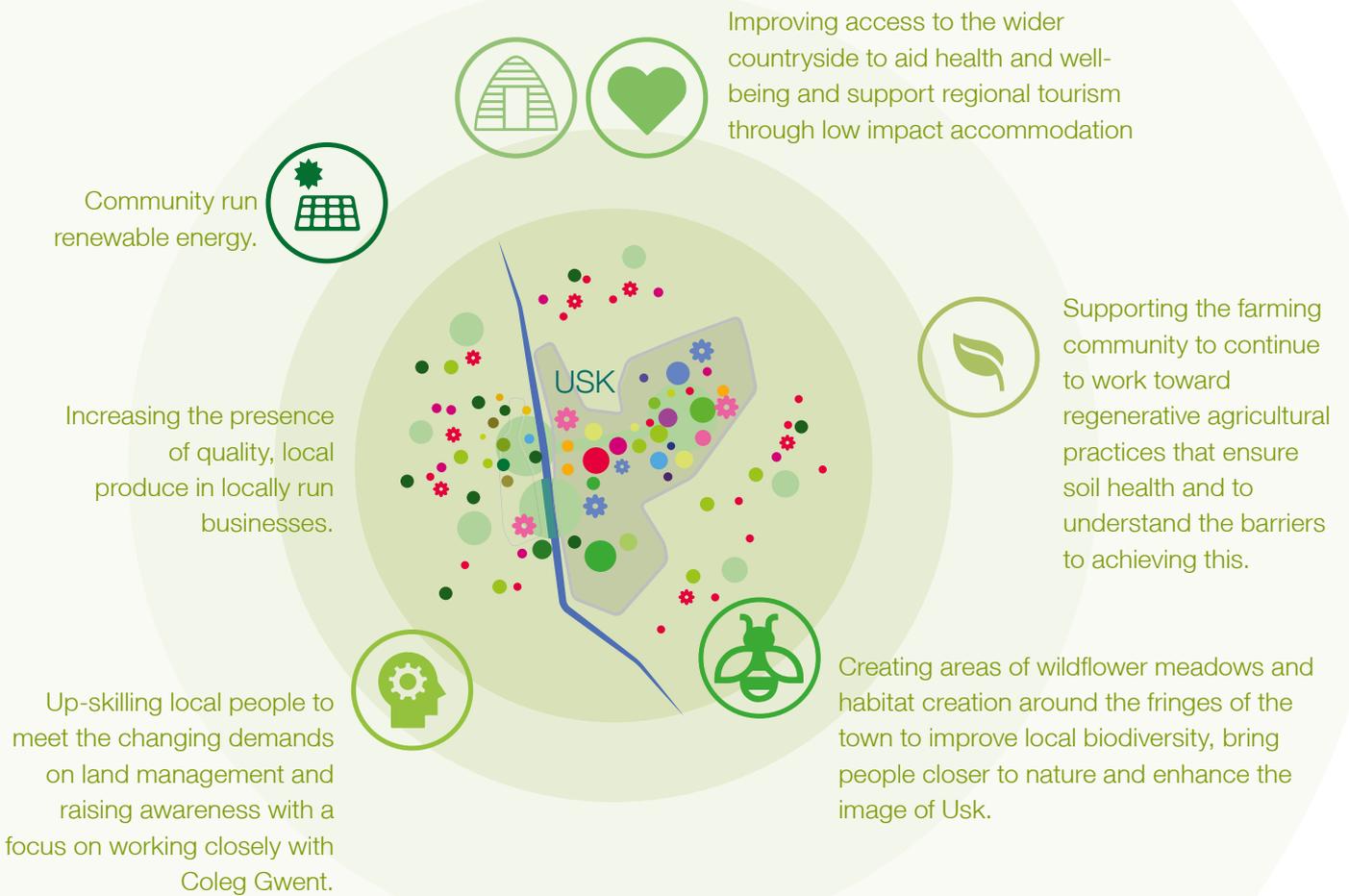
Some of the challenges facing Usk such as poor air quality along Bridge Street are known. In these instances, clear strategies can be created to mitigate and improve the problem. In contrast, the relationship of the town with the wider agricultural community and economy are far more complex and beset by the fundamental unknown that is a post-Brexit Wales.

The future management of agricultural land may be subject to considerable change in the near future. The challenge of meeting a Zero-net Carbon target, new trading arrangements with long standing markets, changing attitudes to animal produce and the continued loss of ecological habitat will likely lead to further pressure on farmers and their supply chains to change.

Usk and its rural hinterland are not mutually exclusive and never have been. This report has recommended partnership working and 'whole-place' approaches and this is especially important in this instance to ensure people work toward a shared goal. New partnerships will need to be forged and new objectives sought to ensure that challenges can be met in a sustainable way. This is a subject of profound importance to Monmouthshire and will require in depth study and appraisal in the immediate future.

## THE WIDER LANDSCAPE

During the development of this report, initial ideas were presented to demonstrate how and where new interrelationships between Usk and the surrounding countryside could be made. These are intended to promote discussion between various parties, illustrate what is possible and how this aligns with our global and national agendas for change. This included:



### 13. THE WIDER LANDSCAPE

Post-Brexit agriculture and a coordinated strategy with Coleg Gwent

## **FIELD TO FORK & THE FOOD CAPITAL OF WALES**

Monmouthshire is recognised as the ‘Food Capital of Wales’ a status that is a core part of the tourism strategy for the county and a mechanism for bringing the rural and urban economies closer together.

At a wider scale, there is growing awareness of the localised food production that underpins local farmers and businesses whilst providing a point of differentiation for visitors as part of food tourism strategy. This reduces supply chains, cuts carbon emissions, ensures more money is recycled within the area and provides local employment. As the town shifts toward a more social and experiential function, the food economy should be a central component by:

- Supporting the existing agricultural community by showcasing and marketing locally produced food.
- Cross-selling these strategies as part of the Monmouthshire and Visit Wales tourism strategy.
- Reinforcing Monmouthshire as the recognised ‘Food Capital’ of Wales.
- Encouraging vendors of the existing farmers market to engage in this emerging strategy and consider longer term opportunities to hold food events or further farmers markets in the renewed Twyn Square.
- Encouraging participation by expanding allotments and community gardens/orchard initiatives such as Incredible Edible Usk.
- Up-skilling the next generation of producers, marketers and proprietors by working with Coleg Gwent to explore and develop techniques for future agricultural practices that further promote biodiversity and local supply chains.

### **14. A NEW FOOD CYCLE**

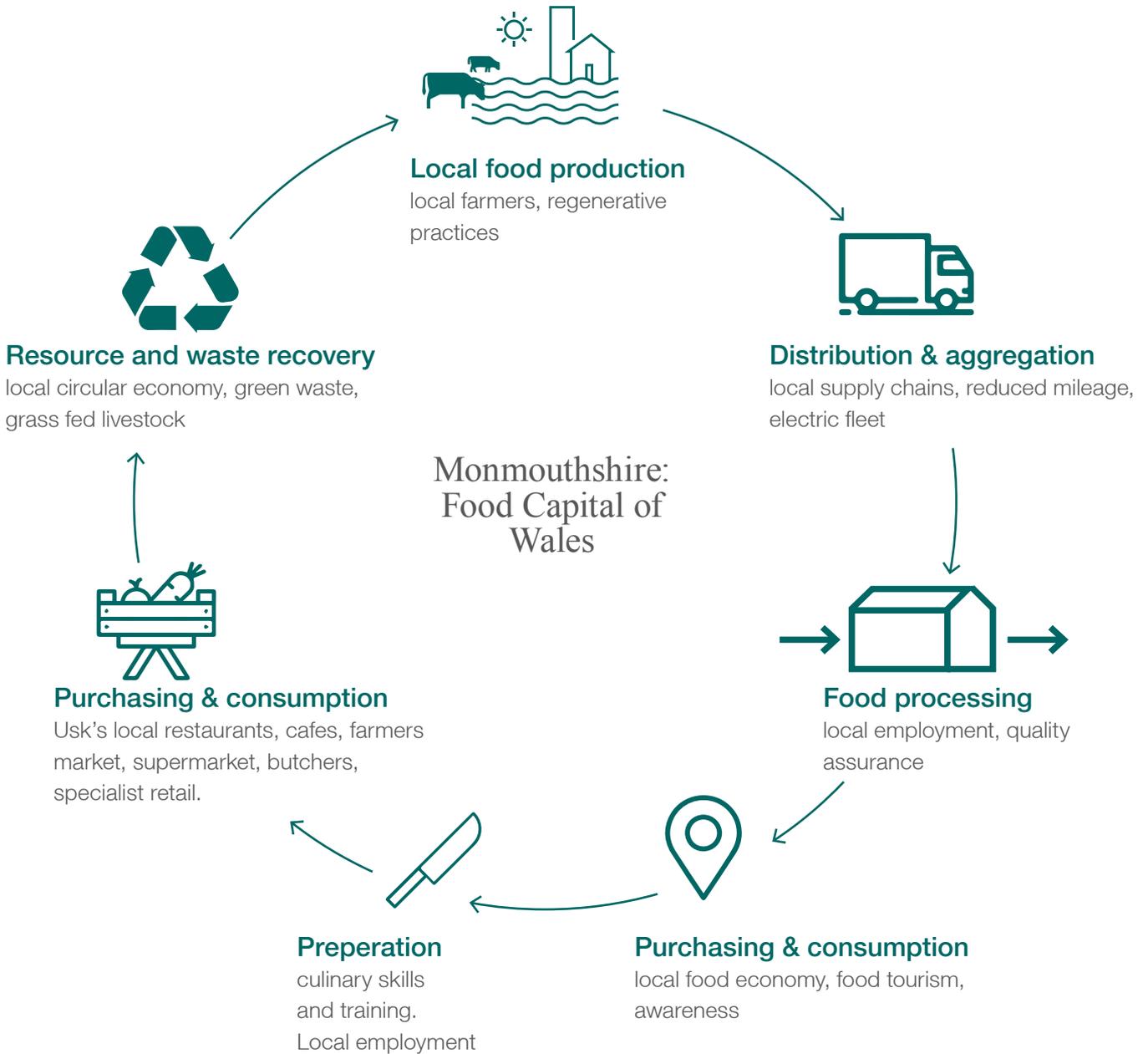
(Overleaf) How a circular economy of food production and consumption can benefit the town and respond to global challenges such as climate change.

## Social influences

Climate change sentiment, possible changing attitudes to animal produce, awareness of the value of local produce

## Political influences

UN SDGs, Well-being of Future Generations Act, Declaration of a Climate Emergency, Brexit



## Economic influences

Farming subsidies, market value of produce, target markets and their spending power

## Contextual/environmental influences

The quality of the Monmouthshire landscape, access to larger markets (Cardiff, Bristol, Newport) and the type of produce that can be grown

## 4.4 Business - Proudly independent

### POSITIONING USK

Healthy, vibrant town centres are essential to the economic and social well-being of our rural communities. As many of the UK's towns undergo radical change it essential to understand the future trajectory of Usk and identify what type of town Usk is and is not.

### MORE THAN RETAIL

Typical assessments of town centres often overlook the place-specific qualities or experiential qualities they possess. They focus on retail and the position a place holds within a hierarchy of retail centres. This largely ignores cultural, heritage, leisure and social value.

### FOUR TOWN TYPES

A more relevant and useful assessment is to understand a town based on its role and function by looking at footfall.

Research (undertaken by Cardiff University, Manchester Metropolitan University and Professor Cathy Parker) has identified four types of town and city centre. This approach moves away from thinking about mono-function (retail) centres to a broader, experience-based offer which looks at footfall rather than retail floorspace as a key indicator. This provides an important starting point for understanding a way forward for Usk town centre.

### Comparison Shopping town (e.g. Carmarthen)

- Strong retail offer with a wide range of shops;
- Larger catchment;
- Accessible by multiple modes of transport;
- Attract a greater number of shoppers over the Christmas period.

### Speciality Town (e.g. Crickhowell)

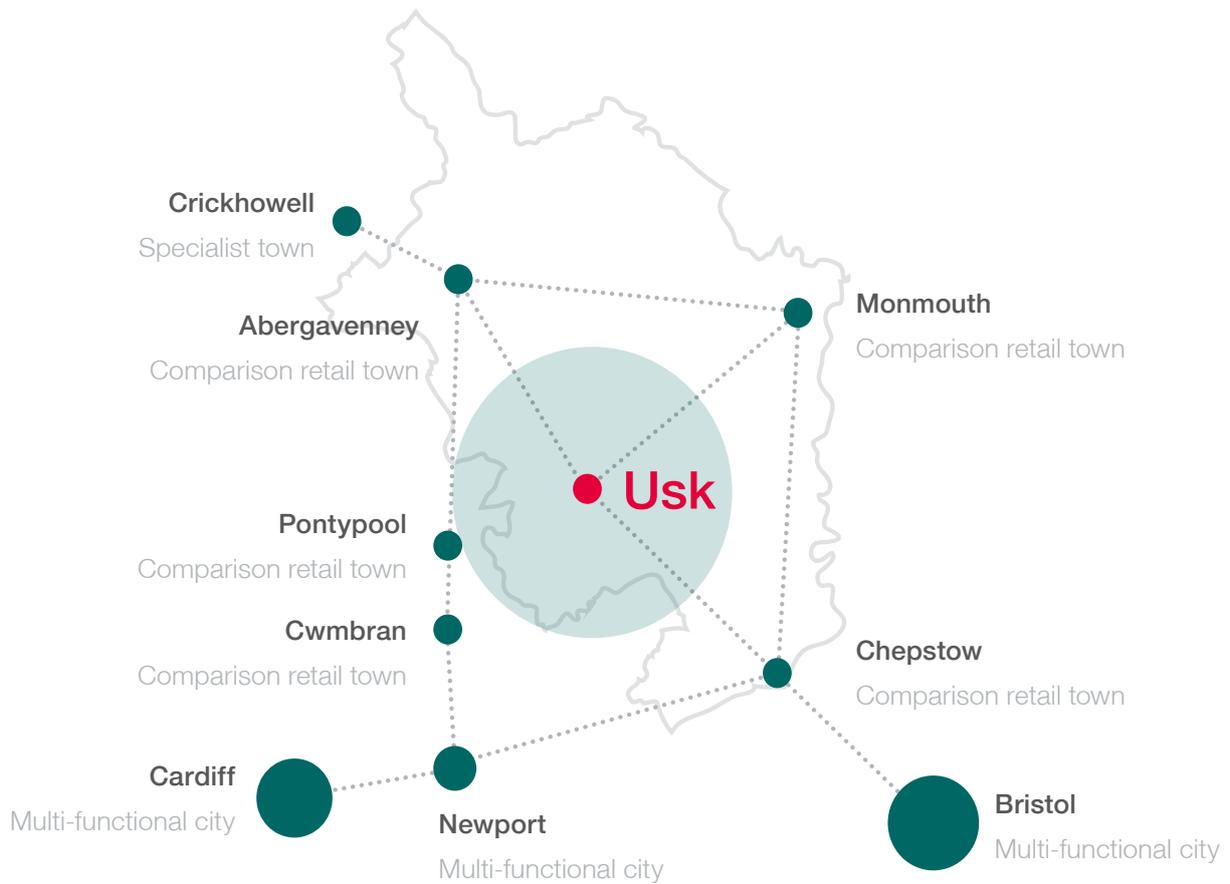
- Offer something unique or distinctive;
- Anchored more by historic or cultural assets rather than retail;
- Draw local residents and visitors over the course of the year;
- Organised to protect and promote their identity.

### Multifunctional centre (e.g Cardiff)

- Anchored by employment, education, leisure, public transport access and/or shopping;
- Convenient and highly connected;
- Footfall is largely consistent over the course of the year.

### Holiday town (e.g. Tenby)

- Most footfall during summer months;
- Attract visitors from a wide area;
- Does not adequately serve local communities.



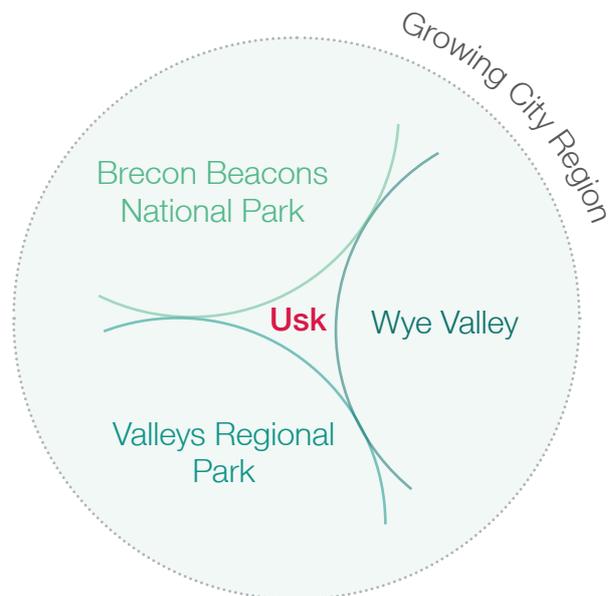
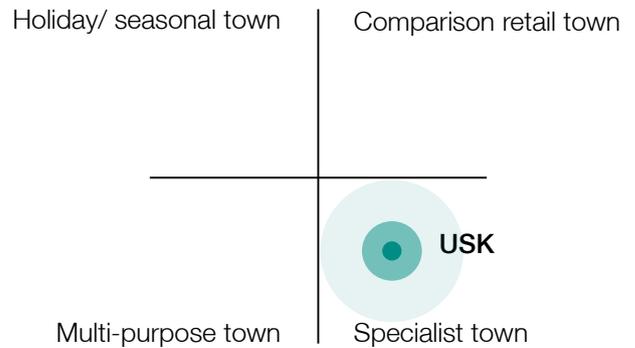
## 15. A MOSAIC OF TOWNS

Usk is framed by a series of established market towns and retail centres. Usk's rural location, sense of place and connectivity with the major urban settlements of Cardiff, Newport and Bristol offers significant potential

## AN INDEPENDENT, SPECIALIST TOWN

The small scale of Usk's shopping area, the lack of larger premises, the absence of chain stores and the presence of numerous nearby retail centres points toward a future as a 'specialist town' focusing on:

- Usk's historic character and the natural beauty of its surrounding landscape.
- Celebrating and promoting Usk's independent businesses and farmers market.
- Drawing on existing strengths such as the 'Town of Flowers'.
- Cross-selling Usk as part of wider national and regional tourism strategies. This will include benefitting from the proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park, The Valleys Regional Park, The Wye Valley and the City Region. Nearby places such as Crickhowell which potentially offer a similar experience should not be seen as competition but as part of a collection of complementary places.
- Capitalising on the recent opening of the International Convention Centre in Newport by attracting more overnight stays.



### 16. STRATEGIC POSITION

Usk benefits from the proximity of major visitor destinations and nationally recognised landscapes.



## 17. A LOCAL ECONOMY

A focus on independent businesses and local supply chains allows for money to be recycled locally ensuring that longer term benefits are felt by those who live within and around Usk.

Local entrepreneurs  
& place champions



Usk:  
A Speciality  
town

Local premises &  
historic character

Local produce,  
locally sourced



## 4.5 Reclaiming our streets and public spaces

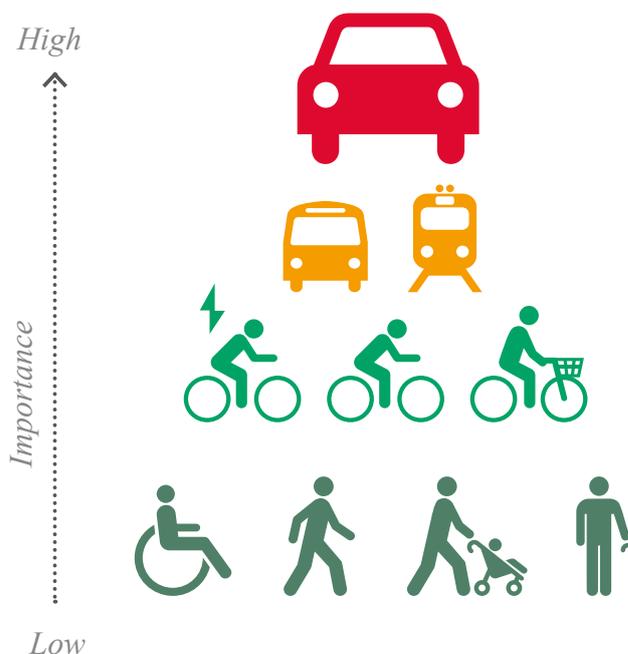
### A TWENTIETH-CENTURY LEGACY

Policy, legislation and research all point toward the need to reverse decades of car orientated thinking and design around our streets and public spaces. The impacts of this approach are profound and continue to blight our towns and cities. In Usk, a combination of factors have led to an acute and evident problem including:

- Lack of parking management and enforcement.
- Long-standing car-orientated highway design methods.
- A historic form that restricts space for highways and parking.
- Growing dependency on car use.
- The dispersal of key services throughout the county.
- Increasing commuting patterns to Cardiff, Newport and the valleys.
- Insufficient or inadequate space for people walking and cycling.
- The need for an Air Quality Management Zone along Bridge Street.

### The Twentieth-Century Approach - Car-orientated.

- Increased infrastructure costs
- Unhappy people
- Dirty air
- Less attractive streets, spaces and parks
- Reduced social inclusion
- Carbon used not calories
- Natural world harmed



A photograph of a busy street scene. In the foreground, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a green t-shirt and blue jeans, is walking away from the camera. She has a brown shoulder bag and is carrying a white plastic shopping bag with a black logo. To her right, an older man in a red and white checkered shirt and khaki trousers is also walking away. In the background, a white van is parked on the street, and a dark blue car is visible on the left. The street has double yellow lines, and there are buildings and flowers in the background.

£14.2bn

Yearly inactivity cost

In the UK, the cost of illness derived from physical inactivity has been estimated at £14.2bn per annum.

69.7%

Private car split of emission by mode<sup>1</sup>

Private vehicles account for the vast majority of all emissions produced on our roads.

## 18. REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> UK Road transport emissions, by mode, 2016 (MtCO<sub>2</sub>)

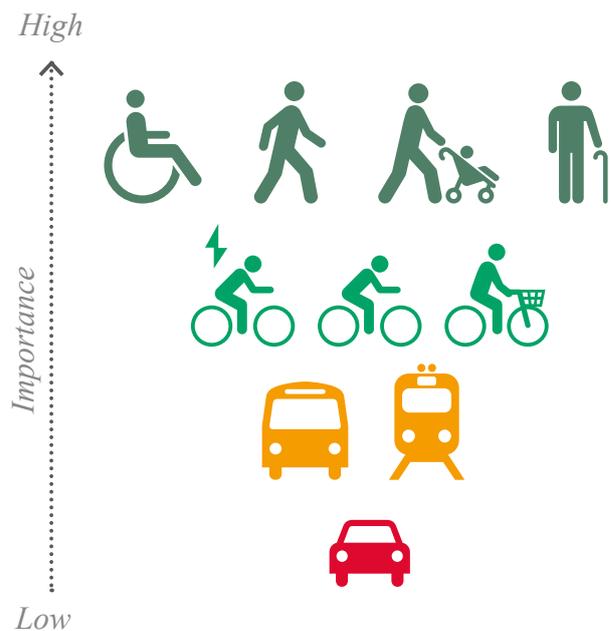
## TOWARD A NEW MODAL HIERARCHY

Usk will be a pioneering town where the Active Travel (Wales) Act will be implemented to invert the modal hierarchy by:

- Making walking and cycling the preferred mode of transport for local trips by re-purposing the town's streets and spaces.
- Capitalising on the visitor economy by becoming a hub for cycling and walking for people of all ages and abilities. Ensuring safe and attractive access to the surrounding countryside and National Cycle Network.
- Treating the public realm with the same level of care as the historic buildings of Usk.
- Improving bus links with the emerging Metro network at Pontypool.
- Educating the young on the benefits of active travel.
- Raising awareness across all ages of the benefits of active travel.
- Ensuring effective enforcement of speeding vehicles and parking both on- and off- street.

## The Twenty-First Century Way - People orientated.

- Reduced infrastructure costs;
- Healthier, happier people;
- Cleaner air;
- More attractive and safer streets, spaces and parks;
- Greater social inclusion;
- Calories used not carbon;
- Natural world helped.



### 19. OVERLEAF

Greener Grangetown is a ground breaking project delivered in Cardiff in 2018. The project drew together Dwr Cymru, Cardiff Council and Arup to create a rainscape strategy that transformed water management along the Taff corridor, delivered an enhanced walking and cycling route and provided wider ecological and environment benefits.



33%

Mental health<sup>1</sup>

A study found that those who walk for more than 8.6 min per day are 33% more likely to report better mental health.

-4.8%

Obesity probability<sup>2</sup>

According to Transport for London, the likelihood of individual obesity decreases 4.8% every km of walk per day.

-22%

Early death risk<sup>3</sup>

People aged 60 and over who do just 15 minutes of exercise a day reduce their risk of dying early by 22%.

## REFERENCES

1 Making the case for investment in the walking environment: A review of the evidence, by Danielle Sinnett, Katie Williams, Kiron Chatterjee and Nick Cavill. 2011. UWE. Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/15502/>.

2 A 15-minute daily walk 'will help you live longer' says study, by National Health Service. 2015. Available from: <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2015/08August/Pages/15-minute-daily-walk-will-help-you-live-longer-says-study.aspx>

3 Improving the health of Londoners: transport action plan, by Transport for London. 2014. Available from: <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/improving-the-health-of-londoners-transport-action-plan.pdf>.

## 4.6 Action for future generations

Usk will be at the forefront of action in relation to the social, environmental and economic sustainability of rural Wales by acting now to leave a prosperous legacy for future generations. Central to this will be the notion of local resilience and community inclusion.

### TOWARD NET ZERO CARBON

In June 2019 the UK Government committed to bring all green house gas emissions to net zero by 2050.

‘Net zero means any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage.’<sup>1</sup>

Key sectors and industries will need to evolve or transform to meet this target. For Usk this could mean:

- **Energy** micro and macro renewable energy and reducing consumption.
- **Food & agriculture** currently around 1/3 of subsidies are for livestock farming a recognised source of methane. The future financing of agriculture may look to reduce this and encourage land management that delivers far reaching benefits in terms of methane reduction and improved biodiversity.
- **Local environment** by reducing waste and providing more habitat for local species.
- **Transport** Increasing active travel and reducing the dependency on private vehicle use.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-becomes-first-major-economy-to-pass-net-zero-emissions-law>

### LOCAL RESILIENCE & COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Local resilience involves the creation and adoption of strategies that allow the local community to respond to often sharp changes in:

- **Climate** such as flooding events.
- **Economics** for example fluctuations in costs associated with long supply chains.
- **Environment & ecology** such as habitat loss.

Opportunities to build local resilience can create a sense of purpose, identity and draw the local community together by:

- Integrating sustainable urban drainage strategies to slow rainwater run-off rates, filter impurities and provide more habitat.
- Using local supply chains to reduce dependency on longer, more complex chains
- Supporting businesses to reduce use of single-use plastic.
- Promote community litter-picking initiatives as part of awareness raising.
- Promote partnership working.



20. FUTURE GENERATIONS

Children's play space as part of the  
Queen Elizabeth II Park, London

## 5. DIRECTING CHANGE

### 5.1 Objectives

The following objectives should be adopted and delivered through the integrated plan to initiate and guide positive change.

#### IMPROVED PUBLIC REALM

Ensure that Usk is a safe and attractive place to walk and cycle for people of all ages and abilities through:

- The adoption of a modal hierarchy that clearly prioritises pedestrians and cyclists over private cars through more crossing points, wider pavements, narrower junction crossings, signage and de-cluttering;
- Enforcing speed restrictions and parking violations;
- Improving cycling infrastructure for people of all ages including cycle parking and where possible designated bike lanes.

#### RETAIN, SUPPORT AND ATTRACT INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES

Maintain and enhance Usk's position as a specialist, independent town by ensuring business owners benefit from:

- A clear vision and clarity on future proposals;
- Branding and marketing guidelines;
- An extensive events calendar that draws visitors throughout the year;
- High speed internet access for all businesses;
- Improved partnership working between local businesses and the public sector.

## **SUPPORT & EXPAND THE VISITOR ECONOMY**

Encourage more people to visit Usk more frequently, for longer durations and throughout the year by improving the visitor experience through:

- Branding and marketing strategy that provides clear guidelines for a range of media including digital (web, video and social media), print (including press and handouts);
- Partnership working with Monmouthshire tourism and Visit Wales;
- Public Relations strategy to articulate and manage news, messaging and via various media sources around the town;
- Identifying existing and potential individuals to act as local ambassadors;
- Capitalising on the International Convention Centre and where appropriate diversifying the range and type of accommodation.

## **A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER USK**

Make Usk one of the happiest and healthiest towns in Wales by:

- Partnership working with key agencies such as Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales to provide access to the natural world including and to understand place-specific health issues;
- Encouraging greater use of active travel over private car usage;
- Facilitating access to open space and interaction with nature;
- Improving air quality through a reduction in private vehicle use;
- Supporting social inclusion and interaction by offering people with a range of public and private spaces to meet and socialise;
- Promoting existing and potential community initiatives such as Incredible Edible Usk to encourage social interaction and to avoid isolation particularly amongst the elderly.

## **ENHANCE USK'S GREEN CAPITAL**

Work from Usk's position of strength in terms of the natural environment by:

- Helping to preserve and enhance key natural assets such as the River Usk and Usk Island;
- Improving existing routes along the river corridor;
- Adopt SuDS strategies as part of any public realm improvements;
- Exploring opportunities for 'wild play'.

## **SUPPORT THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY**

Recognise the intrinsic connection between Usk and its agricultural hinterland by:

- Creating more opportunities for local produce to be sold through local premises;
- Ensuring that alterations to the existing street do not impinge necessary vehicle movements;
- Ensuring on-going partnership working with key representatives from the agricultural community.

## **A THRIVING COMMUNITY AND SENSE OF IDENTITY**

Preserve and where possible enhance the natural and historic environment building on Usk's identity as a historic, rural market town and Town of Flowers by:

- Encouraging community cohesion through events and participatory schemes such as Usk in Bloom;
- Meeting the demand for affordable housing;
- Ensure that people of all ages are provided for particularly the young and the old;
- Providing opportunities for young people to become involved in community projects such as teenage markets;
- Consider providing multi-purpose spaces that can host different uses at different times of the day and year;
- Provide outdoor recreational facilities that cater for all ages.
- Preserve the historic built form of Usk

## **A RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE USK**

Ensure that Usk responds to global and national threats related to climate change, environmental degradation, economic and social sustainability by:

- Targeting a Net Zero Carbon status;
- Exploring opportunities for renewable energy;
- Limiting the use of single-use plastic and packaging;
- Taking a lead role in reducing private vehicle use.
- Increasing local biodiversity

## **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

Work in an integrated manner with key stakeholders and partner agencies to deliver and maintain the plan by:

- Creating a Town Partnership to bring together key stakeholder including Natural Resources Wales and Dwr Cymru.
- Creating a steering committee to deliver the plan;
- Continuing to work with the public and key stakeholders;
- Exploring the creation of a web platform to communicate progress;
- Undertaking further events to draw the community into a shared objective.

## 6. THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### 6.1 The Plan

#### THREE KEY MOVES

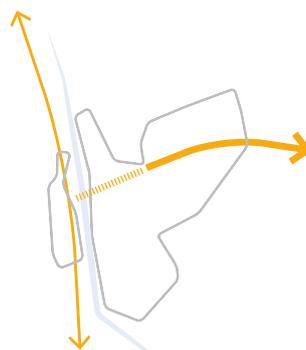
The improvement plan is underpinned by a simple concept that focuses change and improvement in a few important areas. This will mean using the town's spaces, streets and buildings in new ways. It also means new partnerships and relationships. These can be thought of as the three key moves. The first of these being;

#### 1 ENHANCING THE TOWNS ASSETS

A strategy to improve traffic management throughout Usk but particularly along Bridge Street where other initiatives are proposed to help local business and make Usk a bustling, specialist independent town. Transforming Twyn Square into a public space and linking this to the improvements to Bridge Street to create a continuous and complimentary set of positive changes. Enriching Usk Island by creating more habitat, more opportunities for exercise and play and bringing field to fork enterprise to the town.

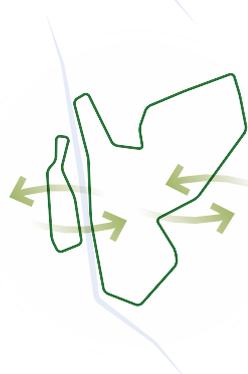
#### 2 STREETS FOR PEOPLE

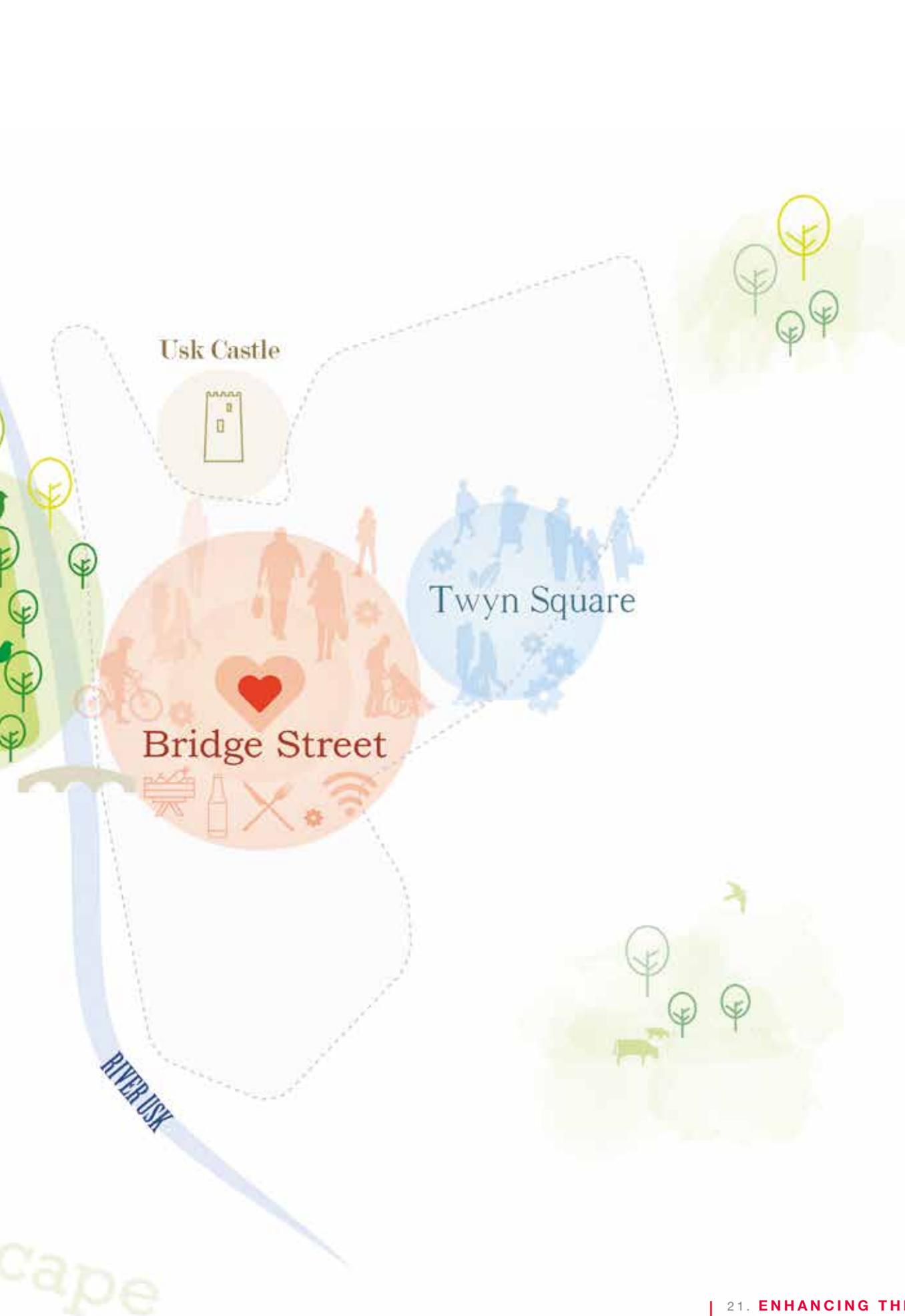
Changing the management of traffic and parking to create a safer, healthier and more attractive place to live, work and visit.



#### 3 TOWN AND COUNTRY

Rethinking and improving the relationship between town and country





**21. ENHANCING THE TOWNS ASSETS**

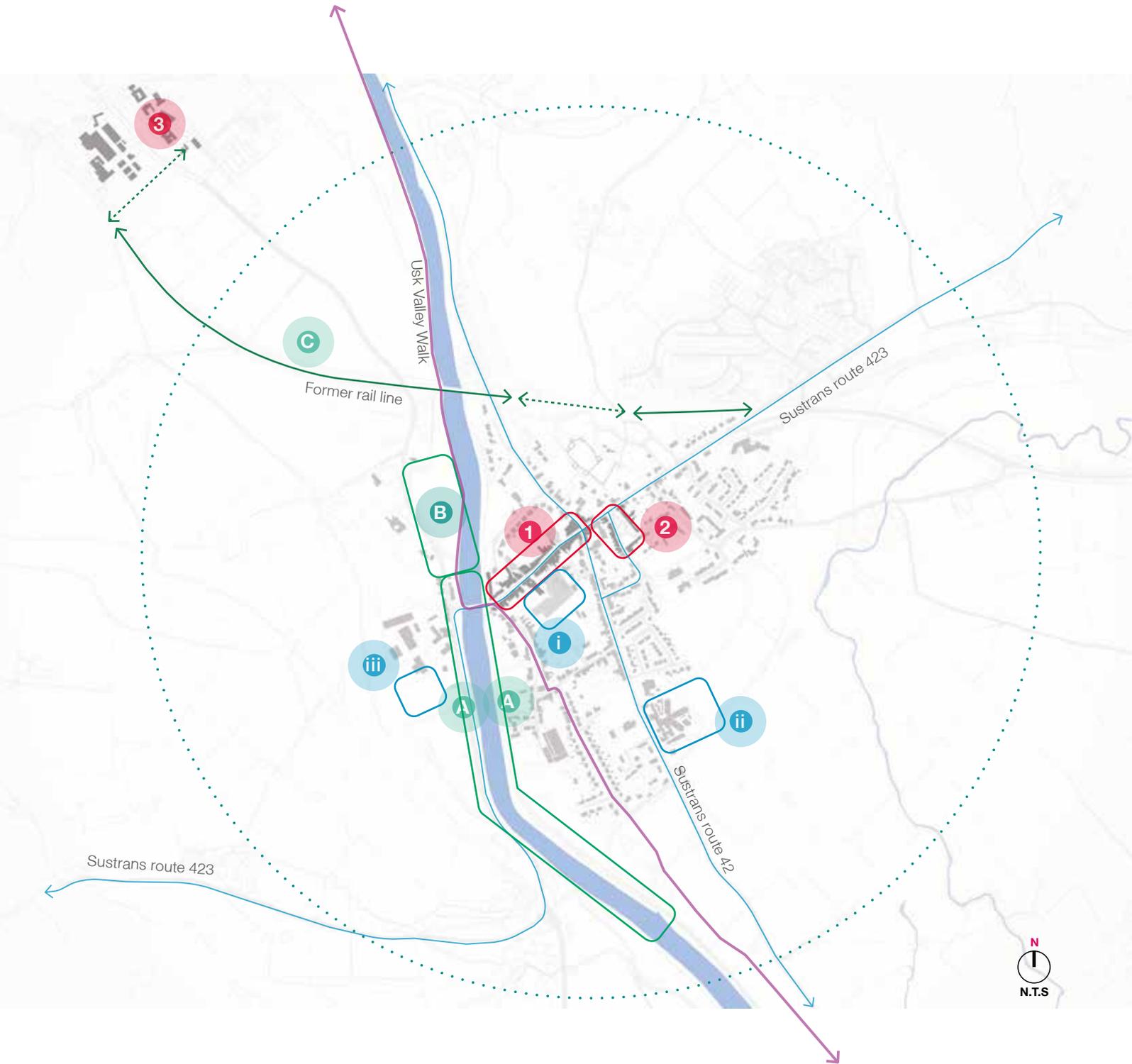
Focusing change and improvement on key areas in Usk.

## 6.2 The Plan - physical change

The improvement plan for Usk includes both physical and non-physical projects. This section set out in more detail, the strategic framework of physical interventions drawn from the themes and objectives.

These projects will be reliant on capital and revenue expenditure and integration across multiple agencies and groups.

1	Bridge Street - Pedestrian priority design and trials of new traffic management
2	Twyn Square - Reclaiming Usk's town square
3	Community Solar Farm - Renewable energy production and local revenue generation
A	River Usk corridor improvements - Improved access and potential linkages to the Usk Valley Walk. A new active travel bridge over the River Usk
B	Usk Island improvements - Wild play, habitat creation and a new cafe/restaurant
C	Active travel connection (currently being explored independently from this study)
i-ii	Town wide parking strategy - Managed parking, a possible new location for a co-working space, affordable housing and community use
iii	A longer term plan to consider reuse of land around the industrial estate to respond to future needs such as edge of town parking



22. **THE PLAN**

The Strategic Framework for improvement

## 6.3 Bridge Street - A Place

### THE CASE FOR ACTION

Bridge Street has a crucial role to play in providing what all communities should strive for, a thriving local centre that provides amenity, a sense of local identity, local pride and community cohesion. It should be a 'place'.

The challenge in achieving this is profound. A basic conflict exists between strategic road infrastructure and the function of Usk as a 'place' where businesses operate and where people gather, shop and socialise. For residents and visitors, Bridge Street is a place of social value. For those passing through the town it represents simply another location on a route to a further destination.

Usk's location along the A472 places it directly on a strategic route between the M50, its catchment and Cwmbran, Pontypool and the wider Valleys communities. Modern in-car GPS mapping have been shown to present the A472 as the most convenient route for drivers traversing these two regions further contributing to pressure placed on Usk to accommodate traffic.

As car usage and dependency has increased over time this conflict has become heightened. The particularly tight pattern of streets within Usk and the limited width between buildings along Bridge Street simply exacerbates this issue, restricting options to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

As well as noise pollution, visual intrusion and safety concerns associated with traffic there is growing awareness of the environmental and human health implications of vehicle borne emissions. This has led to the creation of an Air Quality Management Zone at the western extent of the street which is subject to an Action Plan. This Action Plan sets out clear recommendations to improve air quality, one of these strategies is to look at means of managing traffic through the town to alleviate areas of congestion.

Through the consultation exercise it has become clear that there is a desire to vastly improve Bridge Street for pedestrians, cyclists and as a 'place'. This is both in terms of safety and in terms of the experience for people of all ages and abilities – does it feel safe and comfortable for someone using a wheelchair or for someone using a pushchair? Is this somewhere I could sit and spend time?



### 23. BRIDGE STREET TODAY

Local businesses, private vehicles, pedestrians, agricultural vehicles, commercial vehicles and cyclists all vie for the same restricted space.

## A BALANCED JUDGEMENT

The town is now showing a determination around chosen aims and objectives for its own benefit. Simply leaving Bridge Street as it is has not been deemed an acceptable proposition. Usk has shown it is resilient and able to adapt when forced (for example during the gas works closures).

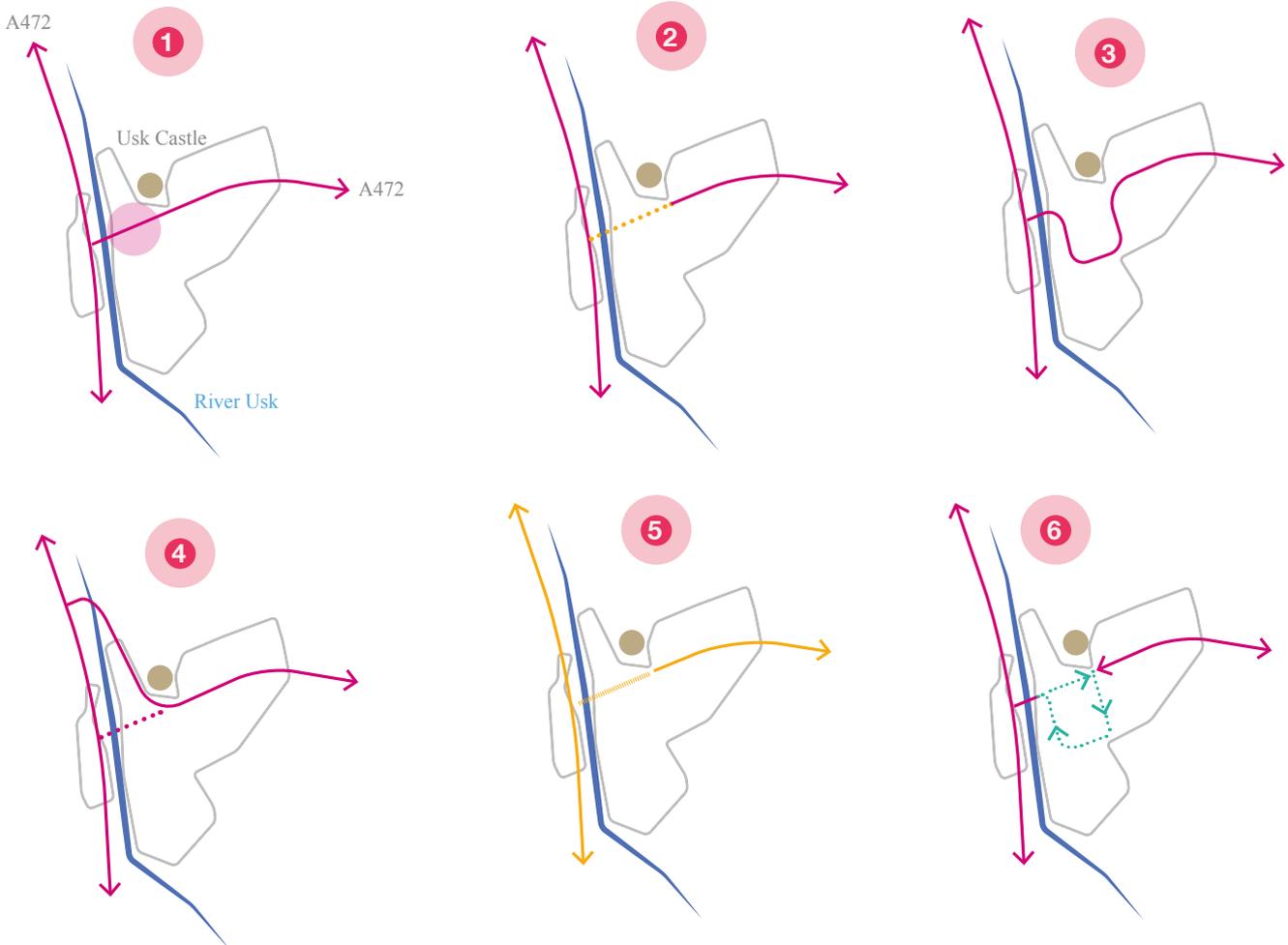
It is equally evident that there is no simple or obvious solution to the conflict along Bridge Street. Each option will create benefits for some and new issues for others. The decision will therefore be a judgement based on the perceived balance of benefits vs costs.

In considering changes to Bridge Street, three key themes have been considered:

- **Structural change:** Managing traffic in a different way.
- **Pedestrian priority design:** Changing the look, nature and feel of Bridge Street to reflect its importance as a 'place' and to encourage walking, cycling as part of a safer, more attractive environment. This is explored in more detail in the ensuing section.
- **Deterring through traffic:** Methods to increase the journey time of those simply travelling through Usk such as speed enforcement.

The most complex of these is likely to be at the level of structural change. During the course of this study a number of options were considered at a strategic level to structurally change Bridge Street. These included:

- Doing nothing and simply managing the existing situation. This is not an option is considered acceptable.
- A flexible street system that would maintain two-way traffic but would see Bridge Street subject to restricted access at given times of the day or week to enable a largely car-free environment. Initial feedback indicated that given current resources, managing such a proposition would be difficult and would not offer a permanent solution to the restrictive pavement widths.
- Full closure of Bridge Street with traffic redistributed through the town's wider road network including Old Market Street and Twyn Square. The impact of this on these streets was felt to be too significant.
- A new by-pass using the old railway bridge. An initial review of the structure indicates that it would not be viable as a road bridge. Further road infrastructure and the purchase of third party land would be required to allow traffic to reach the grade of the bridge.
- A new by-pass and new road bridge. Whilst a route has not been determined as part of this study, the likely cost and timescale of this option led to it being dismissed at this stage. This does not preclude this happening in the future. However, the recent decision to halt the M4 relief road shows us that decisions around new road infrastructure require us to think far more broadly around the environmental, social and economic impacts these decisions have on ourselves, our environment and future generations.
- The creation of a one-way system along Bridge Street. Initial representations indicated a one-way system with traffic redistributed south around Mill Street. Initial feedback during consultation raised serious concerns over the impact of redistributed traffic.



**1** Do nothing - exist situation is maintained

**2** 'Flexible' street

**3** Permanent closure of Bridge Street

**4** New bypass using railway bridge or a new bridge

**5** Pedestrian Priority design throughout Usk

**6** Creating a one-way Bridge Street

#### 24. EARLY TRAFFIC OPTIONS

A number of options were considered during the initial stage of the project.

#### THE A449 CELTIC MANOR JUNCTION

One of the challenges in altering the existing flow of traffic is how best to allow agricultural vehicles to move in and around Usk. The continued mechanisation of agriculture has led to larger machinery and vehicles which present a further challenge for the narrow and circuitous street network

During stakeholder engagement, the prospect of reopening the Celtic Manor junction on the A449 was suggested as a means of allowing agricultural vehicles to avoid moving through Usk. This optionshould be explored in more detail and prioritised in partnership with the local agricultural community.

## PEESTRIAN PRIORITY STREETS AND SPACES

The 2016 Hamilton Baillie report contained recommendations to improve the pedestrian and cyclist experience in Usk. The report endorsed the application of shared space design and a place-based approach to street design. This seeks to redress the imbalance in street design toward vehicles by affording pedestrians and cyclists priority. Typically this is achieved by:

- Removing the delineation between carriageway and footpath to encourage lower vehicle speeds and to improve the attractiveness of streets and spaces
  - Creating horizontal deflections in the carriageway
  - Reflecting the quality of the built environment through the quality of finish to the street and spaces
  - Reducing clutter by removing unnecessary signage
  - Creating clear and unfettered paths for people and cyclists
- Specifically for Usk, this could mean:
- Increasing the number of crossing points along Bridge Street
  - Creating areas based on the principles of shared space to mark gateway points to Usk, prominent local buildings and additional crossing points.
  - A possible central shared space area along Bridge Street.
  - Applying pedestrian priority principles to Twyn Square
  - Reconfiguring junctions to reduce crossing distances and to improve pedestrian visibility
  - Providing cycle stands and adequate rest stops (seating areas) for the elderly and less able bodied.



## SPEED MATTERS - 20MPH USK

One of the key objectives of pedestrian priority design is safety. Speed matters; the statistic cited here reinforces the need for both a 20mph limit throughout Usk but also, the design interventions to ensure it is adhered to.

A 20mph speed restriction should be applied across the town with detailed design used to discourage speeding.



**90%** Chance of survival when hit at 20mph or less



**50%** Chance of survival or less when hit at 30mph

Source: [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/publications/road\\_traffic/world\\_report/speed\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/road_traffic/world_report/speed_en.pdf)

### 26. LEFT: SHARED STEET, BRIGHTON

New Road, Brighton has been transformed to reflect the importance of the street as a 'place'. The street now provides invaluable space for people to meet, walk and mingle along a length of bars, restaurants and a theatre. Although vehicles are permitted, the design, look and feel of the street deters drivers.

### 27. ABOVE; CAERNARFON SHARED SPACE

Subtle material changes delineate pedestrian space from vehicle routes to encourage lower speeds.

## CHANGING THE STREET

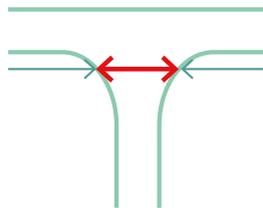
Any traffic management strategy should be combined with a redesign of Bridge Street that creates a pedestrian priority street.

Whilst it is not recommended that a 'pure' shared space design is applied in Usk, many of the principles involved have informed the concept design.

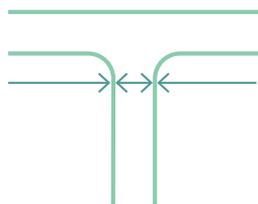
The plan indicates a potential series of improvements along the length of Bridge Street. These outline where interventions could be made with a primary focus on reducing speed, improving the pedestrian and cycling environment and linking with Twyn Square.

### PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY JUNCTIONS

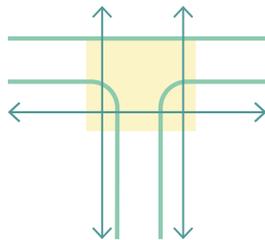
Over-designed corner radii permit faster turning manoeuvring and create longer crossing distances.



This is mitigated by reducing the radii.



Raised crossings facilitate ease of movements for people of all abilities and create a subtle traffic calming measure.



- A** A new active travel - pedestrian/cycle bridge
- 1** Raised crossing and change of surface material to mark gateway space.
- 2** Raised table crossing.
- 3** (No text provided for this marker)



9 Town gateway points should be demarcated through changes to the surface treatment to signal to drivers they are entering Usk.

- 3** Potential focal shared space.
- 5** The revived Twyn Square.
- 7** Raised crossing and table junction.
- 4** Raised crossing and change of surface material to mark gateway space.
- 6** Clear way created past chip shop - no parking
- 8** Key school crossing area further delineated through changes to the surface materials.

## **AN EYE ON THE FUTURE**

Much of the debate around Bridge Street has understandably focused around existing issues, established methods of managing traffic and long-standing technologies. As the strategy moves forward it will be prudent to understand and where appropriate, embrace new technologies and emerging trends in transport to remedy the core problems associated with congestion. Whilst it is impossible to depict a truly accurate picture of the future the following factors offer an invaluable insight:

### **MOBILITY AS A SERVICE (MAAS)**

This centres around the concept of the traveller not personally owning assets for transportation - be that a car, bicycle or similar. Instead users pay for the service of moving from A to B. This includes car clubs, demand responsive bus, bicycle rental, and ride-hailing services such as Uber. The general trend is for lower car ownership rates amongst younger people. For Usk, this may mean that over the longer term, car ownership levels drop as the coverage and availability of MaaS grows and adapts to the rural hinterlands.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS**

The recent prevalence of the climate emergency in main stream media and public demonstrations is manifesting in a noticeable impact on individual travel behaviour. In Germany, the number of people flying domestically dropped by 12% in November 2019, compared to a year earlier. At the same time, the German rail firm Deutsche Bahn AG posted record passenger numbers [Bloomberg, 2019]. Car ownership amongst younger people is generally dropping as newer generations opt for alternate modes of transport such as active travel and public transport. These offer cheaper, healthier and more environmental sensitive options.

### **URBAN INFORMATICS**

Urban informatics with its implied reference to information systems and information studies, is less about the technology or computing in a place and hints more towards the softer aspects of information exchange, communication and interaction, social networks and human knowledge. Open access to data from a variety of departments or businesses can have many effects, such as the ReRoute.it mobile application. This application aggregates transport data and then presents it with regard to time, cost, health, and environmental impact. Such indicators are not usually highlighted by operators but help people make informed decisions on their transport choices. For Usk this may form part of wider cultural change and rethink on the impact of our transport choices and reliance on personal cars.

## AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES

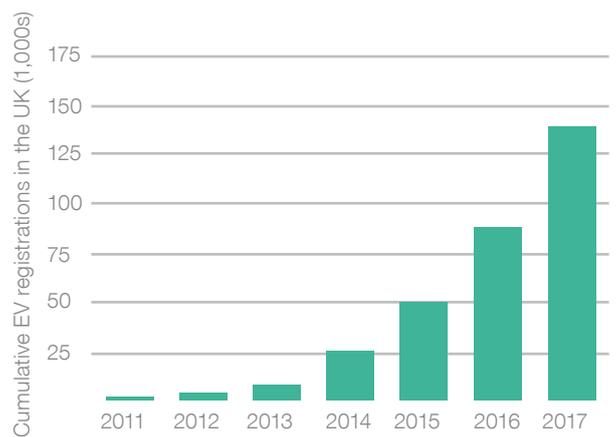
Fully autonomous fleets could provide an opportunity to transform urban centres resulting in safer, cleaner places with increased mobility for all. Even at the lowest adoption rates, self-driving cars are projected to constitute 40% of new vehicles by 2030. Large-scale use of automated vehicles could eliminate urban congestion, reduce emissions and traffic incidents. Pairing autonomous vehicles with MaaS may begin to transform our movement networks. Whilst this may initially lead to more congestions as more vehicles are used this would improve with Connected Autonomous Vehicles that automatically coordinate with one another for optimum efficiency. In both future states it is likely that the need for car parking would decrease, but with an increased need for safe and convenient pick-up/drop-off space. Despite the emergence of this technology there remain multiple technological, legal and societal problems to overcome.

## ALTERNATIVE FUEL

As of February 2020 the UK Government committed to banning all new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars by 2035. Due to clear government policy, awareness of cleaner fuels and enhanced performance, consumers are increasingly moving away from Internal Combustion Engines (ICE) to options such as Electric Batteries and Hydrogen Fuel Cells. Despite the relatively small UK market share of Electric Vehicles (EV) compared to ICE engine vehicles, the growth is significant (see accompanying fig).

With the compact power source which technology like electric batteries provide, there are emerging transport modes such as electric bicycles and electric scooters (the latter is currently illegal on UK roads and pavements). These transport modes open up active travel to those who were previously deterred by more strenuous physical activity, and in turn offer a compelling low-carbon option for travellers.

For Usk there are several considerations. Firstly, charging points which are already being introduced may need to be extended. Secondly, air pollution and potential noise pollution that are directly linked to traffic will likely reduce. This will not mean however that the problem of traffic will disappear. Changing fuels will simply mean that moving traffic is cleaner, it will not resolve issues over safety, the land take of parked vehicles or the health implications associated with inactivity.



### 28. GROWTH OF EV CARS

The number of EV registrations is accelerating quickly. A trend that is set to continue. Source: Next Green Car 2019.

## TAKING THE STRATEGY FORWARD

Determining the preferred solution will ultimately require a carefully considered judgement as to whether benefits to the physical environment along Bridge Street outweigh the potential issues created elsewhere within Usk.

A structural change to the road system is not a solution in itself. It must be considered as part of a package of measures to Bridge Street and beyond to fully reach the objectives of through traffic reduction, slower traffic speeds, a pedestrian and cycle friendly town, cleaner air and improved green infrastructure.

Neither should this be seen as simply a traffic issue. The outcome for Bridge Street will reflect the underlying direction the town wishes to follow. Do we now rethink our relationship with cars to mitigate the known negative impacts of traffic or do we continue in the knowledge that the problem will not resolve itself without intervention?

Given the sensitivity and complexity of the subject, further engagement will be essential to take the town forward. This will need to encompass a broad spectrum of local stakeholders and interest groups and be framed within the context of the overarching objectives set out within this report.

Changes to Usk's movement system will require a 'cultural' change to the perception of traffic. Sudden or stark changes to long standing movement systems often result in immediate reactions as people haven't had time to adjust or fully appreciate the benefits of a different approach. Phasing therefore becomes a critical consideration. Trialling of options is one means of demonstrating in real time how a proposal may work. It is also integral that people can see positive change occur. This may be as simple as installing bike racks, improving crossing points or encouraging more school children to walk or cycle to school as part of organised events.

These initial options were considered as part of the strategic framework of recommendations. In order to determine the most appropriate solution, further study and modelling will be required. For example, it will be essential to understand the exact origin and destination of through traffic. Once this is understood the impact of lower speeds and possible rerouting can be modelled to test the effectiveness of each option.



## 29. BRIDGE STREET TODAY

Further engagement will be critical in agreeing on a preferred approach

## 6.4 Walking and cycling

### INCLUSIVE ACTIVE TRAVEL

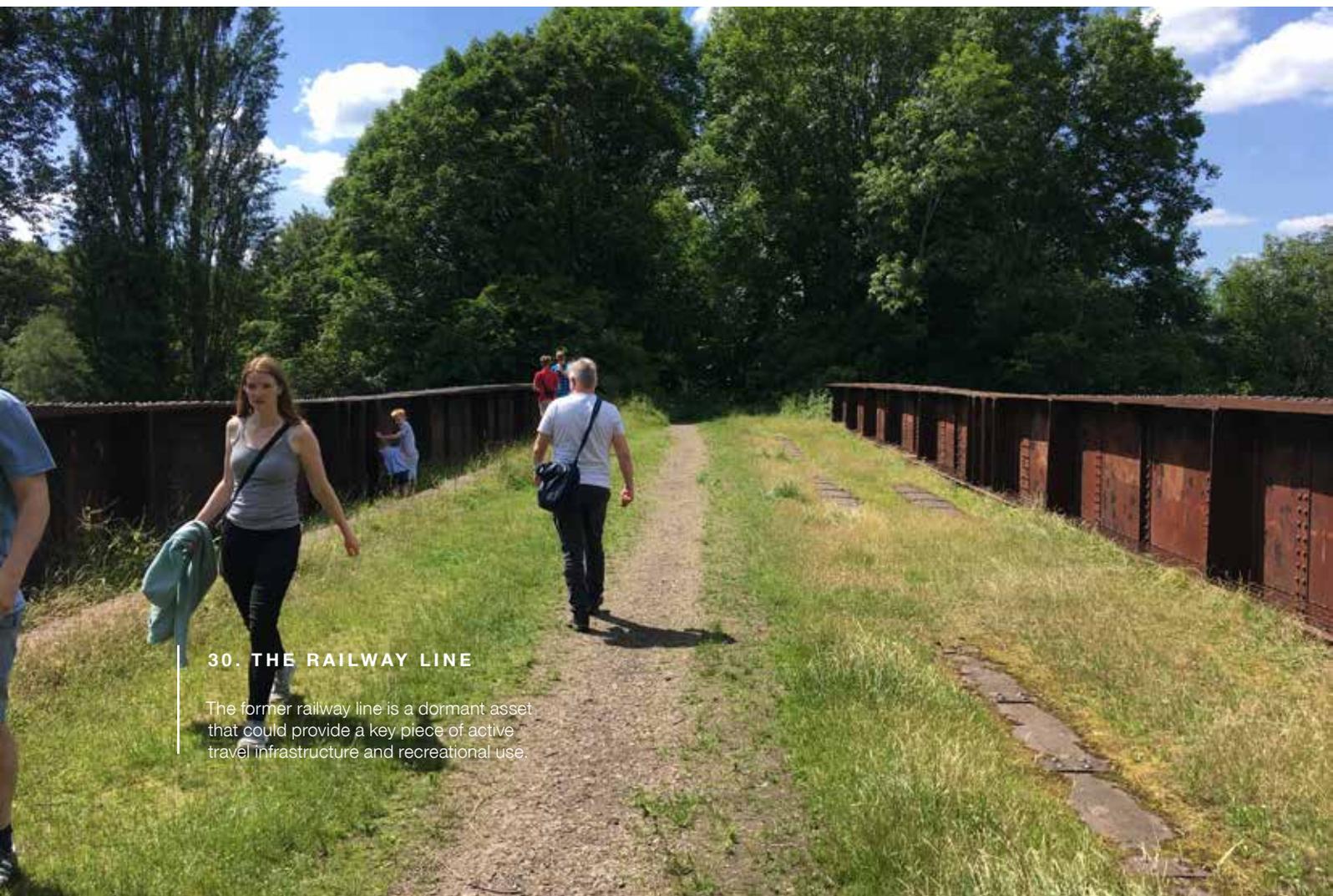
Throughout Usk, an active travel strategy should be created to improve the quality and attractiveness of walking and cycling routes. The proposed improvements to Twyn Square, Bridge Street and wider parking initiatives will improve the experience of walking and cycling. However, a broader strategy that looks to improve the existing cycle routes through interventions such as:

- Further traffic calming.
- Designated bike lanes.
- Improved awareness and profile via the recommended branding and marketing strategies contained within this report.

Cycling is often perceived as a minority or 'select' mode of transport. It should be viewed as a universal mode of transport regardless of age or gender. Through further consultation with selected groups, strategies to encourage more women, disabled people and older people should be actively pursued.

### THE RAILWAY LINE

The Town Council and MCC should continue to support efforts to open the former railway as an active travel corridor. To encourage more movement between Coleg Gwent, the MCC offices and Usk, a bike hire scheme should be considered to test the appetite and viability of a broader scheme and to deliver an early demonstration project.

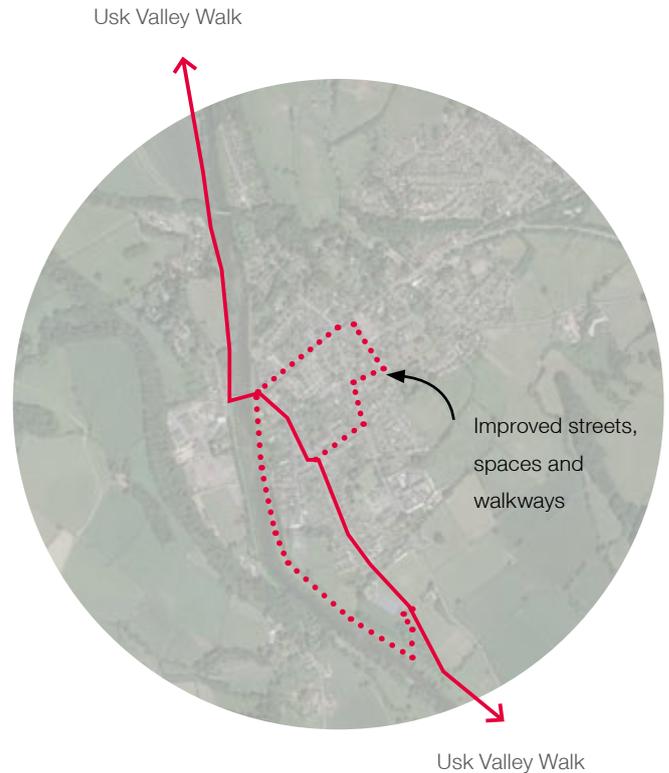


### 30. THE RAILWAY LINE

The former railway line is a dormant asset that could provide a key piece of active travel infrastructure and recreational use.

## USK VALLEY WALK

The Usk Valley Walk is an incredible asset that could be reinvigorated as part of the proposals contained within this report. The current route by-passes many of the town's features instead providing a direct route along Mill Street that passes through Usk Island and onward to the north following the River Usk. Whilst the proposed enhancements to Usk Island will improve the experience for visiting walkers there is scope to better connect this key route through additional signage or partial rerouting to draw more walkers into the town. The plan indicates potential linkages between the Usk Valley Walk, the town including Twyn Square, Bridge Street and the river corridor, all of which are recommended for improvement.



73%

Of women do not cycle<sup>1</sup>

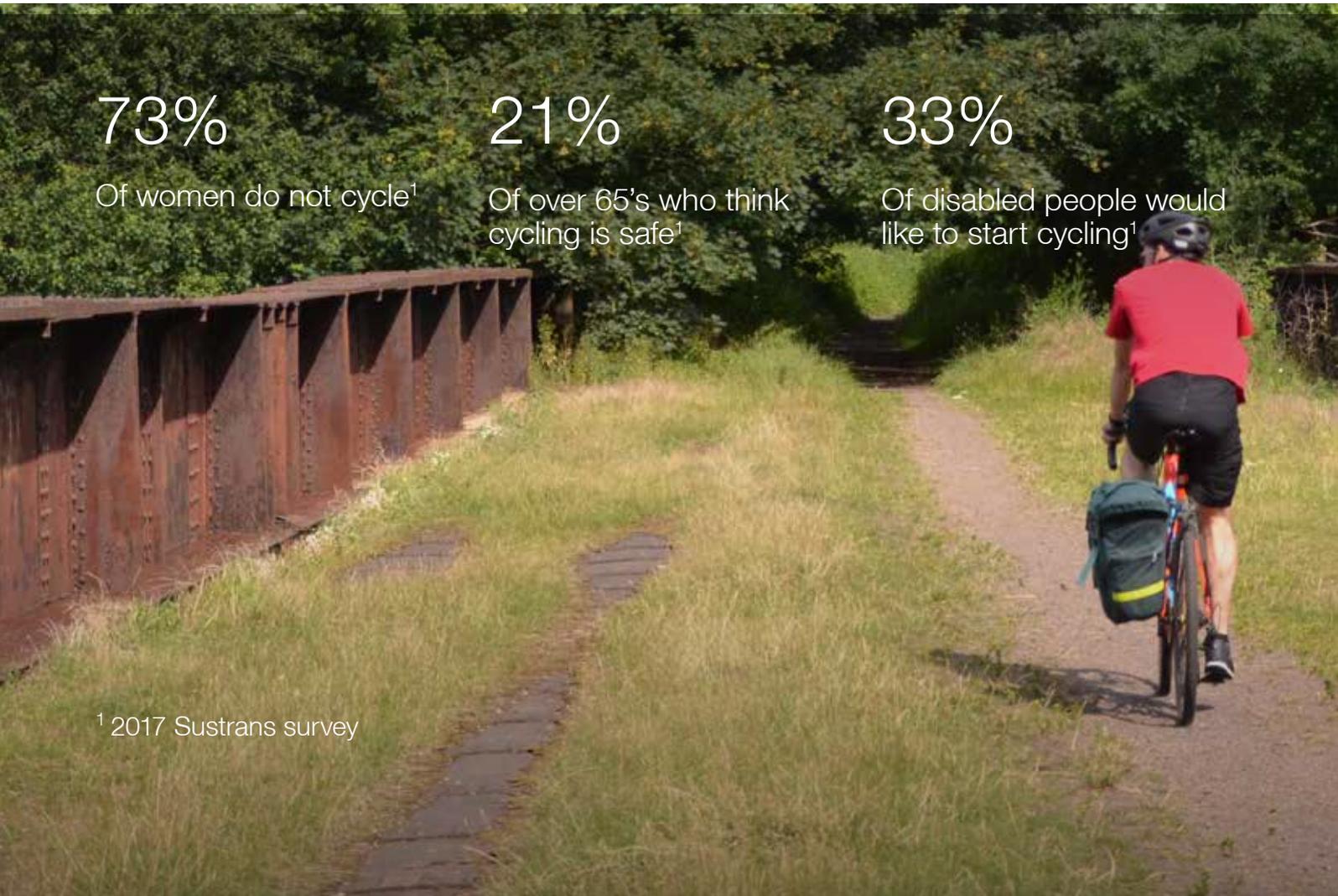
21%

Of over 65's who think cycling is safe<sup>1</sup>

33%

Of disabled people would like to start cycling<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2017 Sustrans survey



## 6.5 Public transport

The lack of available and frequent public transport in rural areas is a widespread issue and in the case of Usk, is a contributing factor to the predisposition to car use. Despite the significant investment into the South Wales Metro system, this will be of little direct benefit to Usk unless better access to this network is provided. Access to health provision is another major challenge with no existing public transport from Usk to Neville Hall Hospital in Abergavenny.

To begin to tackle this issue new ideas and initiatives will need to be sought. The Monmouthshire Rural Transport Study (2018) investigated the issues and opportunities for public transport in the context of a largely rural county.

### GRASS ROUTES

Monmouthshire Grass Routes provide an on-demand flexible bus service between the main Monmouthshire towns and outlying areas. It operates low floor, fully accessible vehicles with volunteer drivers. The scheme is operated on a membership basis and is open to all members of the community.

Monmouthshire's successful bid to the GovTech Catalyst resulted in funding to encourage technology firms to develop and pilot solutions to loneliness and limited rural transport. A number of projects are underway and have potential to provide the foundations for improved connectivity and well-being in Monmouthshire's rural communities.

### DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRAVEL

As part of the study, recommendations were made to investigate a demand responsive bus service initiative. Demand responsive travel utilises emerging technology to allow people to pre-book shared travel (typically a mini bus) in the same capacity as Uber. This has been enabled by the pervasive nature of smart phone usage and the development of GPS app-based systems that allow anyone with a smartphone access to the system.

This could be considered for key routes to Cwmbran, Abergavenny and Pontypool to facilitate access to the wider, emerging Metro network

No single solution will remedy the existing problem – a lack of access to and provision of public transport. A 'whole approach' as discussed throughout this report is needed to:

- Promote active travel.
- Reduce the need to travel by allowing people to work and shop more locally through improved services.
- Discourage car usage by continuing to raise awareness of the associated environmental impacts.



### 31. DEMAND RESPONSIVE BUS

Speke, Liverpool: Passengers no longer wait at the bus stop, and instead are picked up at an agreed time within 100m of their desired pick-up point, and dropped off as close to their final destination as possible.

## 6.6 Parking

Several interventions could be undertaken to improve the management of Usk's main car park and on-street parking areas. The impact of these options is summarised below, although **it is noted that further data collection is required to refine parking options and develop a preferred strategy.**

### REVIEW TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS AND ENFORCEMENT

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) are a legal instrument that enable enforcement of restrictions on the parking of vehicles, such as single or double yellow lines, restricted parking zones or limited waiting on local roads in Usk. Monmouthshire County Council are responsible for civil parking enforcement in Usk, having taken over responsibility from Gwent Police in April 2019. A review of TROs could be undertaken to manage car parking in Usk and improve pedestrian amenity and traffic flow.

#### Pros:

- Keep traffic flowing on roads that are not wide enough for parked and moving vehicles;
- Enhance road safety for pedestrians, and increase visibility for vehicle drivers and cyclists;
- The removal of opportunities for commuter parking in residential areas encourages consideration of alternative modes of transport and therefore contributes to reducing congestion.

#### Cons:

- Requires legal process which involves consulting people and businesses in the surrounding area;
- Both residents and non-residents would be equally affected by any regulations that are put in place;
- Requires enforcement by Monmouthshire County Council on a regular basis.

### ON-STREET RESIDENTS PARKING SCHEME

Due to capacity constraints within Usk's car parks, some parking by visitors to the town centre is undertaken within nearby residential areas. A residents parking scheme could be implemented to wholly or partly restrict parking to vehicles displaying a permit issued by the Monmouthshire County Council. Permits would be issued to residents living within or in the immediate proximity to the controlled parking zone and issued at the discretion of the Council.

#### Pros:

- Residents with no off-street parking have an improved opportunity to park close to their homes;
- The removal of opportunities for commuter parking in residential areas encourages consideration of alternative modes of transport and therefore contributes to reducing congestion;
- Pedestrian amenity may be improved with fewer vehicles being parked during the working day.

#### Cons:

- Requires enforcement by Monmouthshire County Council on a regular basis;
- MCC may decide to apply an administration fee for each permit;
- A residents' parking scheme in one part of Usk may create or worsen parking problems in adjacent areas;
- There is potential for insufficient space for all residents' vehicles, especially those with more than one car per household. The number of permits available would need to be monitored closely by MCC;
- Parking for visitors is restricted by virtue of the space, permit availability or time limits on waiting.



### 32. THE IMPACT OF PARKING

A lack of enforcement combined with the town's popularity, increasing levels of car ownership and the narrow pattern of streets has led to an abundance of parked vehicles throughout the town.

## MAIN CAR PARK PARKING REGULATIONS

From the engagement events and initial site visits, it is evident that parking capacity within Usk's main car park is not sufficient to cater for demand at peak times. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many cars park for long periods throughout the working day, reducing available spaces for visitors to the town centre. Currently, the town's car parks are free of charge. The introduction of short-stay restrictions (up to 2hrs) on some or all of the spaces could improve parking availability and following consultation, appear to have the support of the public:

### Pros:

- Change of regime could free up additional spaces for visitors and shoppers;
- The removal of opportunities for commuter parking encourages the consideration of alternative modes of transport and therefore contributes to reducing congestion.

### Cons:

- Both residents and non-residents would be equally affected by any conventional regulations that are put in place;
- Requires additional enforcement as each contravention requires two or more visits by enforcement officer(s).

## INTRODUCE CAR PARK CHARGES IN MAIN CAR PARK

An alternative to short-stay restrictions would be the introduction of a parking charge mechanism within the car park, such as pay-and-display. Parking charges could be set to better match supply with demand.

### Pros:

- Potential revenue source for wider transport interventions in Usk;
- The removal of opportunities for commuter parking encourages consideration of alternative modes of transport and therefore contributes to reducing congestion.

### Cons:

- Potential negative impact on demand for retail within Usk, as shoppers may decide to travel elsewhere;
- Parking charges may create or worsen parking problems in adjacent areas, especially if considered in isolation;
- A scheme could be introduced whereby local businesses can 'validate' tickets if a certain amount is spent in store. Requires enforcement by Monmouthshire County Council on a regular basis or management by a private contractor.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Subject to survey data and further study, there may be scope to rethink the role of the main car park by potentially releasing land for development. A successful, town wide strategy would be required including the creation of new parking within the confines of HMP Usk to release parking at the Memorial Hall, the removal of long stay parking which is not contributing to the town and greater efficiency through the potential relocation of the recycling centre. Such as scheme could potentially deliver:

- New affordable homes in the heart of Usk;
- A broader business community by providing a modern co-working space;
- Invaluable new community space including a youth centre.



1

Potential to relocate recycling centre

2

Potential trial Electric Vehicle charging points

3

Potential development plot:  
**Living** - Affordable housing  
**Local jobs** - Co-working space  
**Social** - Community space

33. MARYPORT STREET CAR PARK

Potential opportunities

## 6.7 Twyn Square - Usk's renewed public space

### A LEGACY OF CAR ORIENTATED THINKING

The layout and design of the square is a legacy of a post-war approach to the streets and spaces of our towns and cities. During this time, primacy was afforded to vehicles resulting in public spaces dominated by extensive roadways with little regard to the needs of people walking and cycling.

Despite its obvious restrictions, the town has made good use of Twyn Square becoming the focal point for christmas events and the centrepiece of Usk in Bloom. But these would undoubtedly be better facilitated through the renewal of the Square that would bring with it broader opportunities.

Over recent years there have been valuable pointers toward a new purpose for the square that will draw more visitors and promote healthier lifestyles. The increased popularity of cycling and the strategic location at the cross roads of two Sustrans routes indicate a credible usage for the square.



### 34. TWYN SQUARE TODAY

View South through Twyn Square

## A NEW SPACE FOR PEOPLE AND LIFE

Twyn Square should become a true public space to:

- Create a new public space for the local community and visitors to Usk;
- Create an active travel hub at the cross roads of National Cycle routes 42 and 423 by providing safe bike storage, places to eat, meet and rest and wayfinding;
- To help reduce flood risk and increase biodiversity by incorporating an innovative rainscape strategy as part of an exemplar SuDS scheme;
- Allow ample space for floral planting as part of the Usk in Bloom initiative;
- Create an attractive public space that encourages low vehicles speeds through;
- Provide generous space to sit outside the existing pubs and businesses;
- Create an improved setting for Usk's historic buildings;
- A safe place for children;
- Space for events, temporary uses and temporary landscapes.



Temporary landscape created through the use of a modular 'parklet', London



### TWYN SQUARE TODAY

The square is defined by and dominated by roadways with little space for people.



### UNLOCKING SPACE

By rethinking the alignment and location of vehicle movement, a public space can be reintroduced.



## 36. CAERNARFON

The town's main square has been transformed into a shared space to provide a setting for the UNESCO inscribed Caernarfon Castel and a hub for visitors, local people and businesses



1

Realigned carriageway

2

Possible space for residents parking

3

Extended outdoor seating for the local businesses

4

New SuDS features and planting areas

5

Space for pop-ups and events



37. **THE INITIAL CONCEPT**

A new multi-use public space

## 6.8 Usk Island and the river corridor

### A PLACE FOR ALL AGES

The Designing for Urban Childhoods research study undertaken by Arup highlights the importance of children within placemaking. Children are often a barometer of success; the absence of children from a given space or area can often indicate a failure to ensure that is safe, functional and playful. Conversely, the presence of children indicates that the needs have been met not only of children but also for parents and guardians.

A truly successful place will cater for all generations. '8-80 Cities' is a not-for-profit organisation that promotes the benefits of multi-generational thinking; if a place works for an 8 year old and an 80 year old it will work for everyone.

Taking this simple idea, evolving Usk Island as a multi-generational space presents an enormous opportunity to meet some of the key challenges present within Usk - responding to the needs of an ageing population and providing opportunities for the young.

Thinking across age groups.  
Designing for all



Under 2 and  
parents

Changing  
facilities,  
informal  
play, access  
to nature



Under 10  
and parents

Active and  
informal  
play, access  
to nature.  
Places for  
parents  
to sit and  
watch.



10-18 year  
olds

Places to  
meet, sit  
and gather.  
Access  
to active  
exercise  
such as  
skate parks



Adults

Places  
to meet,  
access to  
exercise,  
access to  
nature



All abilities

Ease of  
access  
across all  
surfaces



The elderly

Places to  
sit, places  
to meet,  
access to  
moderate  
exercise and  
nature

## **WILD PLAY**

Creating more wild space at local and neighbourhood scales allows us to integrate the benefits of natural ecosystems into our everyday lives. The rocks, logs and other materials found in wilder spaces lend themselves to the types of creative and adventurous play essential for developing physical coordination, teamwork and risk assessment skills, while also supporting more reflective and imaginative play.

Since these spaces are flexible and adaptable, they have the potential to be enjoyed by everyone. Many of these assets exist within Usk Island and the river corridor providing a low cost and low maintenance amenity. Through simple and subtle improvements, further benefits can be captured.

## **A PLACE FOR NATURE TO THRIVE**

Wildflower areas provide a low maintenance and cost-effective way of increasing local biodiversity and extending the Town of Flowers initiative.

Areas of land which are currently mown grass could be transformed to designated wildflower areas within Usk Island. These can be integrated with play features redistributed from the current play area to bring children in direct contact with local flora and fauna.

“No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”

Sir David Attenborough,  
broadcaster and naturalist

## **A PLACE TO MEET OVER COFFEE**

The introduction of a new café would offer a year-round, all weather resource and additional attraction. The presence of 'eyes' on the surrounding park will assist in deterring anti-social behaviour. Linkages could be sought with Coleg Gwent to offer an outlet for the 'Field to Fork' concept explored within the themes of Botany and Environment to create a local circular economy of food production and consumption.

Usk Island falls within flood risk zone C2. Any proposed development would need to accord with the guidance contained within TAN 15, the Welsh Government's technical guidance note on flooding and be subject to a flood consequence assessment (FCA).

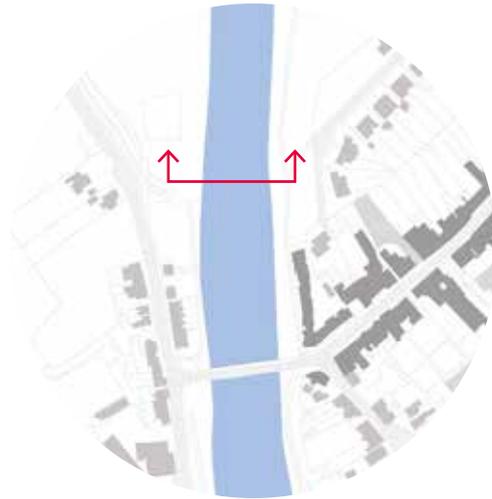
- 1 Possible trim trail & improved Usk Vally Walk
- 2 Wildflower planting
- 3 Children's play trail - Wild Play
- 4 Potential Multi Use Games Area and/or pump track
- 5 Cafe/ restaurant



38. **USK ISLAND: AN INITIAL IDEA**

The possible arrangement of features and improvements.



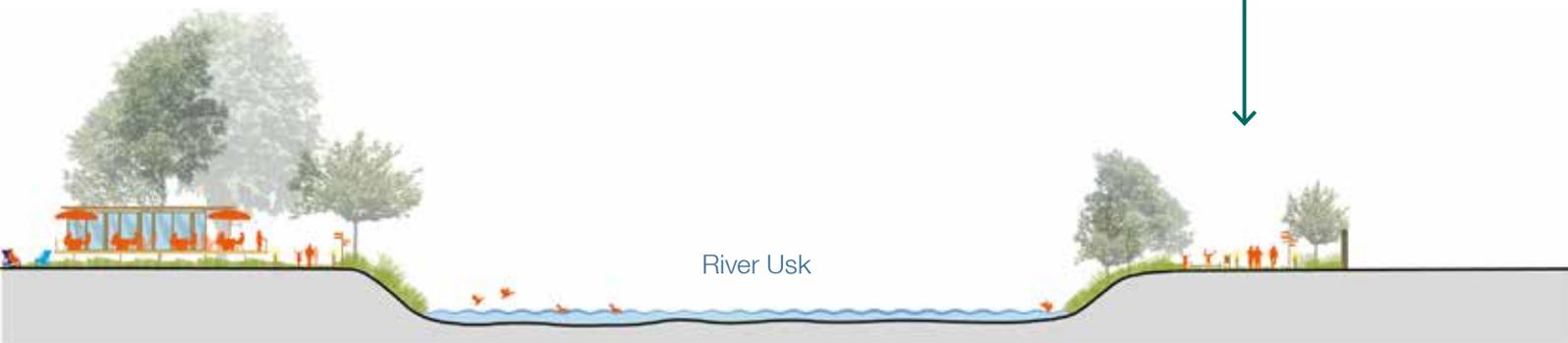


Location of section

- Potential cafe/restaurant
- Wild flower planting
- Wild play



- Low level lighting to avoid disturbance to wildlife
- Improved signage and wayfinding
- Trim trail fixed exercise points
- Seating areas
- Improved access and walkways
- Trim trail



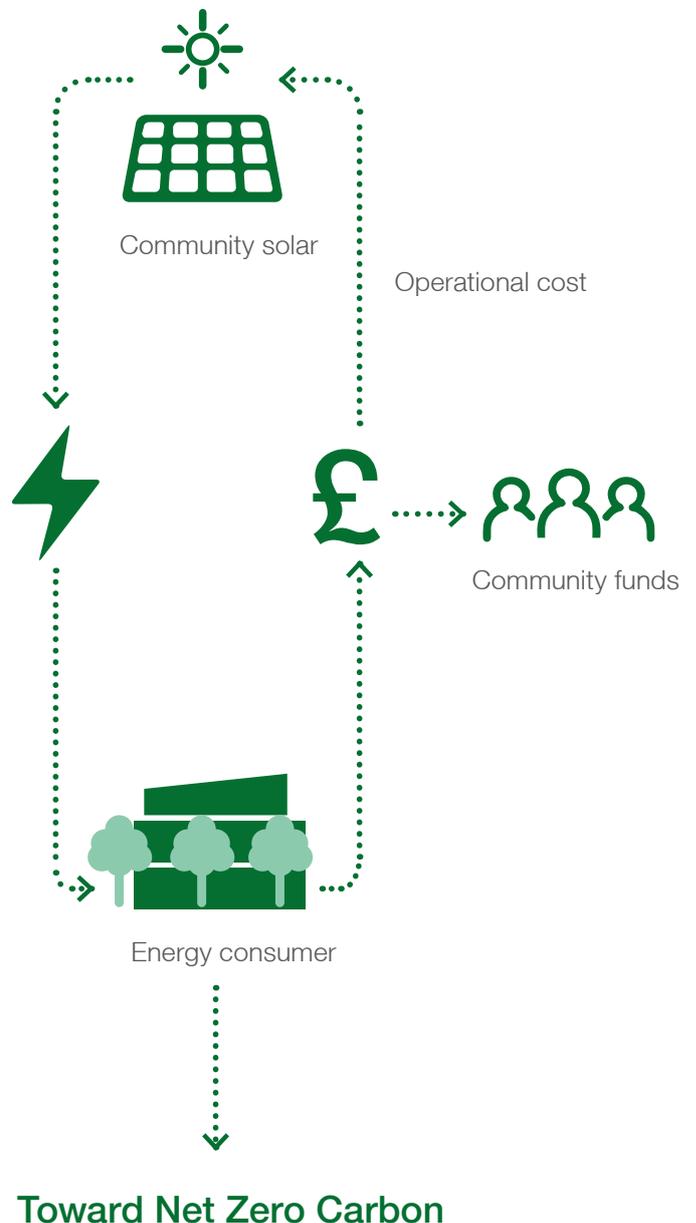
## 6.9 Community Solar

### CREATING A RENEWABLE COMMUNITY ASSET

Historically small-scale renewable projects received Feed-in Tariffs offering guaranteed electricity prices for the next 20 years. Many communities built community-financed wind and solar photovoltaic (PV) projects, utilising a mix of bank loans and community shares offering rates of return of circa 4-6%. Surplus profits are then utilised for wider community benefit, e.g. investing in energy efficiency projects or supporting job creation.

With the removal of Feed-in Tariffs, small-scale (sub-5MW) projects only tend to be commercially viable in places of very high renewable resource (e.g. very windy locations or very sunny places).

For the other 95% of the UK, community schemes will remain attractive if a private wire agreement can be secured, i.e. where the solar panels are connected directly to large users of electricity as a win-win long-term contract can be negotiated where the consumers will pay less than they currently pay for their electricity, and the community venture will make profits for community benefit. In Usk, ideal candidates would be the BAE Systems, Coleg Gwent and the MCC offices.





### 39. GOWER POWER

Gower Power is a community co-operative which helps deliver renewable energy schemes that in turn provide residual community benefits. ©Gower Power

## 6.10 Supporting local business

This report recommends that Usk focuses on becoming a specialist, independent town. Whilst this offers a vision of a bright future for Usk's businesses, there is need to address immediate issues. During the stakeholder engagement, the cost of business rates was cited as a prime concern and restriction for local business. Business rates in Wales are set by Welsh Government. Despite lobbying from MCC for a fairer system, at the time of writing, proposals to reform business rates within Wales have not materialised. Other strategies will need to be adopted to ensure the viability of the businesses that are integral to sustaining the town. Physical improvements to Bridge Street and Twyn Square will help create a more attractive and safer town. Beyond this, partnership working and targeted strategies will be required.

The challenge for Usk will be the ability of the local business community to initiate change. Finite financial resources and limited time from these individuals are obvious restrictions. Despite this, case studies of similar places such as Crickhowell have demonstrated what can be achieved and the need for coordination and a shared vision amongst those who work and operate the local 'high street' on a daily basis. The recommendation to define Usk as a 'Specialist Town' will only be successful if there is a willing, active and local business community to deliver them. Local champions will be needed who can bind the business community and work in close partnership with the public sector.

### **ZERO-VACANCY RATE**

Usk should aim for a zero-vacancy rate through a series of strategies:

### **CLARITY ON DIRECTION**

The critical first step will be providing clarity to existing and potential businesses on the future direction of the town.

### **TRUSTED INTERMEDIARIES**

A stumbling block for potential businesses, particularly new entrepreneurs can be the apparent complexity of dealing with lease agreements, understanding business rates and finding the right premises. A trusted intermediary is an individual or group who act as a point of contact providing advice and help to identify premises in unison with selected landlords. This is often undertaken by a neutral party such as the County Council to ensure impartiality.

### **OPEN DOORS PILOTS**

This is a government endorsed initiative that aims to bring vacant properties back in to use by putting landlords in contact with community groups who often struggle to pay the full lease requirements of a property but need space to operate. This is often undertaken as a meanwhile activity to provide landlords struggling to pay rates with income and to increase social, community and economic activity on the high street.

### **PUBLIC SECTOR INITIATIVES**

Given the high cost of both rates and rents in Usk, the public sector can play a role by procuring premises as part of a strategy to support critical local services, new businesses and or social enterprises. Discounted rents can be offered to services and businesses that accord with a agreed criteria of use. This same model can also be considered to deliver a co-working space to support the county's and Capital City Region aspirations of supporting the creative sector. The retainment of the Post Office and Hub shared by Social Services and the Health Board by MCC demonstrate how the public sector can plan a direct role.

## **LOCAL SHOPPING**

### **LOYALTY CARDS**

A simple and effective means of encouraging local shopping is the use of town wide loyalty cards where benefits are enjoyed by local charities and community initiatives.

### **CAR PARKING CHARGING**

Car parking charges can be waived by spending a designated amount within a local business to help encourage footfall and to entice people to visit and use Usk' shops and businesses. Please refer to section 6.12 for further explanation on how this may be delivered.

## **ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE**

Business Improvement Districts are a proven method of empowering local businesses by transferring agreed town centre management and capital expenditure control to local businesses. This is based on the simple notion that these tasks are better undertaken by businesses who better understand their town and will directly benefit from the improvements.

The BID is funded by contributions from local businesses (typically 1-1.5% of rateable value). The funds are then managed and spent by the businesses on works and projects that will deliver mutual benefits.

Given the current business rates and high rents within Usk, the potential creation of a business improvement district may well be viewed as a further, unsustainable cost. However it should be noted that the role of a BID is to increase footfall, expenditure and to engender partnership working to offset the capital outlay. It is recommended that further consideration is

afforded to a possible Usk BID. The potential delivery of improvements to Bridge Street and Twyn Square will bring with it the need for greater management and curation of these two key pieces of public space. An expanded events calendar, wider marketing, PR and online presence (a well-maintained, outward-facing Usk website) would also potentially fall within the remit of an Usk BID. Further engagement with the local business community should be undertaken to assess the potential viability.

## **TOWN-WIDE INITIATIVES**

The 'Transition Town' movement began during the mid 2000's as an initiative to move away from carbon based economies and towards a more sustainable way of living. Chepstow has become a Transition Town and has used the status as a means of drawing the community and local businesses into a common cause. The appetite for such an initiative should be tested with the local business community and local action groups.

## **TOWN TWINNING**

This is an immediate, free means of exchanging experiences with similar towns throughout the UK to learn from successes and failures and develop ongoing partnership working.

## **ULTRA-FAST CONNECTIVITY**

High-speed internet is now a basic element of business infrastructure. The Cardiff Capital Region Industrial and Economic Plan emphasises the need for high speed internet access as key driver for targeted growth areas including research and development, clean growth and AI and data industries. For the existing and potential businesses within Usk, next-generation connectivity should be secured as a priority particularly given the rural context.

## CO-WORKING

The recent growth in co-working has been facilitated by the freedom offered by high speed internet access and progressive approaches to working practices. Traditional ‘homeworkers’ are being attracted by the growing trend for co-working. The creative industries have been particularly quick to embrace a co-working ethos where ideas can be quickly exchanged within attractive and stimulating working environments. These co-working spaces can quickly generate new business ecosystems, add to community cohesion and create local ‘place-champions’ or individuals and groups with a vested interest in seeing the quality of the town improve.

Rural co-working is not a new proposition. The Glove Factory Studios in Bradford upon Avon and the Old Church School in Frome are both successful co-working spaces located in rural areas. In both cases redundant property has been brought back into use with a focus on the creative industries.

The 2017 report ‘Co-working in the Vale of Usk’ into co-working within Monmouthshire identified a strong latent demand for a new co-working space within the county. Although Abergavenny and Monmouth were viewed as more attractive locations for a co-working space, this report was completed in advance of this broader strategy for Usk. In light of the potential improvements identified within this report, it is recommended that a co-working space for Usk is considered. This could potentially form part of a broader mixed use proposition including community space, affordable housing and a publicly accessible café



### 40. CO WORKING

Rural co working spaces such the Glove Factory Studios (left) meet the same demand for flexible working that has led to the rise of numerous, similar enterprises in more urban areas such as the Engine Shed, Bristol (right top) and Arup’s Digital Acceleration Studio. ©Engine Shed & Glove Factory Studios



## VISITOR ECONOMY

Monmouthshire's tourism represents a significant portion of the region's economy performance. In 2018 tourism was worth £218,900,000 to the county employing over 2989 people (STEAM report 2018). The improvements recommended within this report in conjunction with the opening of the International Convention Centre at Newport provide a catalyst for further growth in the visitor economy in Usk. The Monmouthshire Destination Management Plan identifies five priorities:

- Serviced accommodation - upgrading and increasing capacity;
- Consolidation of the activity offer - especially walking and cycling;
- Broaden impact of Food Capital of Wales status, focussing on improvements to the everyday food & drink offer;
- Building on Monmouthshire's rich 'border country' heritage and incorporating a contemporary creative offer;
- Development of events that create year round added value to extend the season.

With the exception of serviced accommodation provision, the priorities are addressed via the four cross-cutting themes and the project objectives.

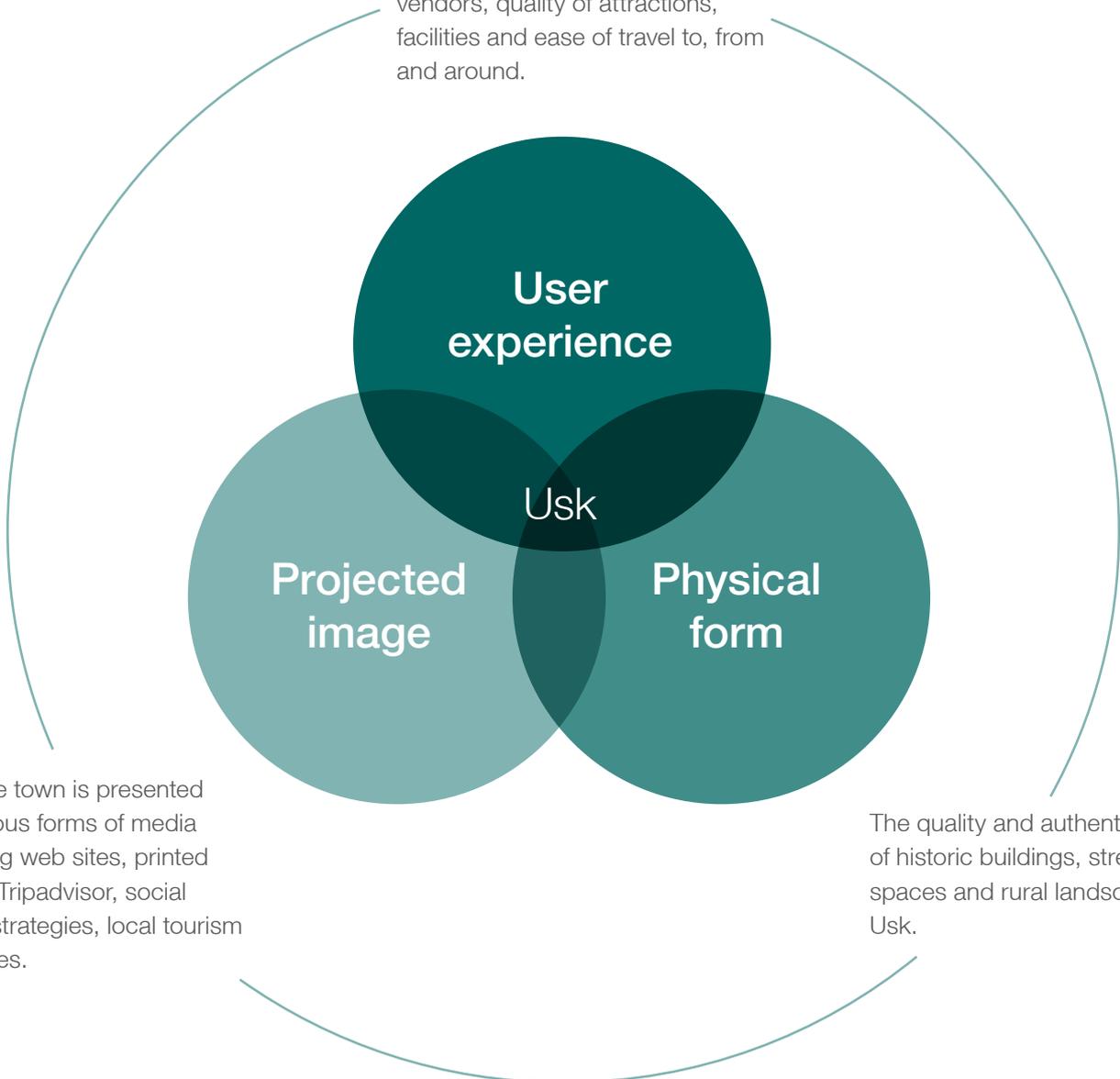
Increasing the capacity of serviced accommodation brings both benefits and potential concerns. The rapid expansion of platforms such as Airbnb have allowed individual property owners and tourists with immediate access to a wealth of accommodation. However, given the lack of affordable property within Usk, care should be taken in advocating significant expansion of the serviced accommodation sector which will inevitably lead to a reduction in available properties. Instead, controlled enhancement and expansion of serviced accommodation potentially via the planning system within the town should be considered.

Bespoke, low impact accommodation should also be considered. This could take multiple forms from purpose built accommodation sites (including hotels) through to camping/glamping sites that are directly connected with the town and allow for agricultural diversification should be encouraged. The viability of any such hotel operational will need to be determined through further market research and testing.

### **BRANDING, MARKETING AND PR**

As positive change occurs to the streets, spaces and local businesses, Usk will need to project an enticing image of the town that will attract a diverse audience, provide key information and guide people to the unique qualities of the town. This will need to be done to a professional standard using multiple forms of media including an outward facing web site, printed material and a public relations strategy that utilises social media platforms.

The depth of the offer including the quality of accommodation, friendliness of staff and local vendors, quality of attractions, facilities and ease of travel to, from and around.



How the town is presented via various forms of media including web sites, printed media, Tripadvisor, social media strategies, local tourism strategies.

The quality and authenticity of historic buildings, streets, spaces and rural landscape of Usk.

#### 41. A QUALITY VISITOR EXPERIENCE

When considering what will influence visitation in Usk and help grow the wider tourism economy there are three overlapping themes that need to be recognised and understood. If any of these are deficient there is a collective failure in the visitor experience.

## 6.11 Affordable homes

Affordable housing for local people, particularly the younger generations has been identified as a significant concern. Throughout the course of this project the high cost of housing and lack of provision for those without the means to buy or rent locally has been a constant theme. This is evident from:

- Results from the Future Usk survey,
- Feedback received during stakeholder engagement
- The empirical data which clearly shows Usk to have amongst the highest average house prices in Wales.

High quality, affordable housing is fundamental in achieving a truly sustainable community by:

- Avoiding the displacement of younger generations to outlying areas and retaining local skills and workers.
- Ensuring key workers such as the fire service are able to live near the places they work
- Creating an inclusive society that provides for all.

Tackling issues of affordability will need inventive approaches to the reuse of existing buildings and spaces as well as utilising the planning system to enact change. Three strategies have been identified to help provide affordable homes within Usk:

### **A NEW ADDRESS IN THE HEART OF USK**

This report has made a recommendation to consider new affordable housing within the centre of Usk in land south of the main car park. This will need to be investigated further to determine land ownership and will ultimately require planning consent and a Flood Consequence Assessment (FCA).

### **THE SPACE ABOVE THE SHOP**

In advance of delivering new greenfield development it is essential to make best use of Usk's existing buildings. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) are encouraged to look at means of facilitating the reuse of the upper floors of local shops and offices to provide affordable housing within the town centre. Attracting more people into the town to live is known to bring life, activity and a sense of ownership.

### **NEW CANDIDATE SITES**

At the time of writing the Local Development Plan is under review. This will mean new candidate sites for housing coming forward for open market sale. It will be essential that the LPA secures a sufficient percentage of affordable housing as part of this process. Early engagement with Registered Social Landlords and Housing Associations can provide invaluable insight the deliverability of these sites.



**42. HIGH QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOMES**

Goldsmith Street, Norwich - Affordable homes and winner of the 2019 Sterling Award for architecture. ©Dezeen

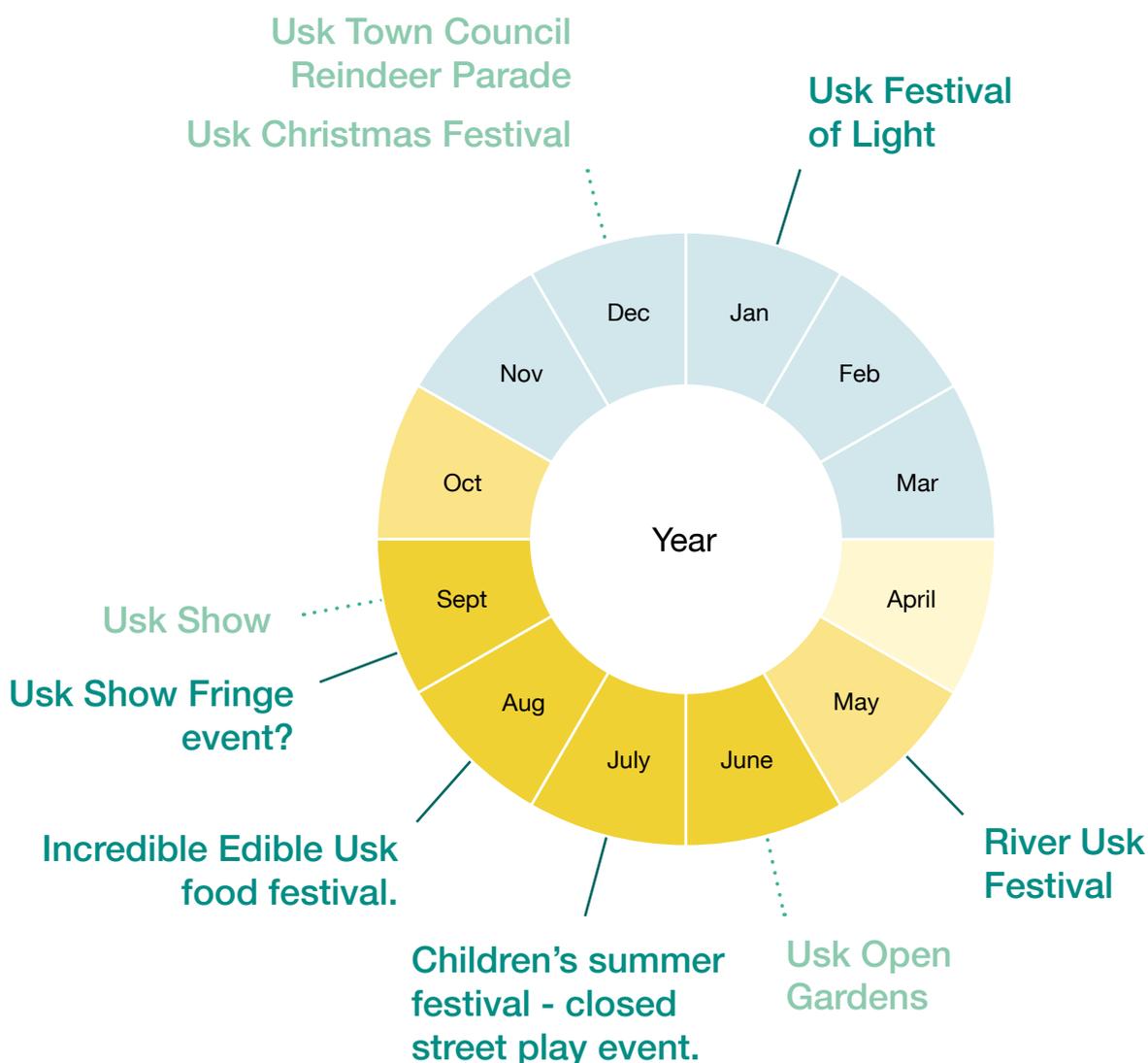
## 6.12 Supporting local business - events

A number of additional events have been identified to supplement the existing calendar and to align with the four cross-cutting themes. Given the finite resources available to fund and manage such events, consideration should be given to third-party event organisers for specialist ventures such as a lighting festival. Careful coordination will be needed to ensure these compliment the local and county wide programme.

To reduce risk, existing events could be evolved such as a fringe event associated with the Usk show or a focus to the street closure events around children.

Stockton-on-Tees has recently delivered a series of interventions to redress its ailing town centre including public improvements and a greater focus on its long-standing market. To encourage younger people to become actively involved in the community and to develop entrepreneurial skills, a series of teenage markets have been held. These events allow younger people to test ideas, develop social networks and play a positive role in their local towns.

Twyn Square would provide the ideal setting for Usk's teenage market drawing together young people from the town and surrounding area.





## 6.13 Digital infrastructure

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

As global economies become increasingly competitive, those which can innovate to increase the speed of processes or 'own' new ideas will have a competitive edge. Digital technology is enabling an unprecedented rate of innovation. This is transforming our economy and supporting the growth of a knowledge economy based on skilled workers who create goods and services.

The same technology is playing an ever-increasing role in our daily lives. It is changing the way we work, the way we shop and the way we socialise. In less than a generation, internet access has become an essential part of everyday life, from social media to on-line shopping.

Rural communities have often endured poor connection speeds in contrast to the high speed access enjoyed by larger urban areas. This is now recognised as a major inhibitor to the rural economy. Monmouthshire's Digital Strategy sets out the county's plan for digital technology and processes. Two of the central aims of this strategy are to:

- Grow the local creative and technology sector, preparing and positioning our communities for jobs of the future.
- Accelerate an enterprise culture, enhance quality of life and provide increased digital access and skills.

High speed and ultrafast broadband speeds and the availability of mobile devices have seen a radical change in the way people are beginning to work. Traditional, fixed office environments with inflexible working hours are being replaced in some sectors. People are

now able to work remotely either from home or within shared co-working spaces with like-minded people. This creates enormous opportunities for job creation in areas that would previously have been inaccessible. For a rural community like Usk, there is an opportunity for people to work remotely, reduce the need to travel and to spend more time and money in the town they live in.

### TOWARD A SMART USK – A DIGITAL MASTERPLAN

Usk should embrace the opportunities presented by existing and emerging digital technology. This approach can be thought of as comprising two themes that begin to form a 'digital masterplan'

- **Infrastructure:** The means of enabling the technology through networks and devices.
- **Innovation:** The uptake of new ideas and technologies to better manage and monitor.

### THE INTERNET OF THINGS (IOT)

The IOT concept refers to the devices and systems that access or communicate via the internet. Examples include the increasing use of voice recognition home hubs, internet ready thermostat systems and the ubiquitous use of smart phones to undertake a multitude of tasks.

Long Range Wide Area Networks (LoRaWAN) operate on a different frequency to standard WiFi systems and is utilised at a local scale to connect IOT devices across long distances to manage, control and record data.

The pace of change and rapid development of technologies is creating new opportunities to manage and monitor systems that would previously have been left untended. Usk could create its own local network of devices utilising a LoRaWAN network, several key areas of opportunity have been identified jointly with MCC:

**Parking:** Previous work that investigated Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) was deemed too expensive however it is recommended this is revisited in the light of new opportunities. Emerging technologies that monitor parking include stationary parking sensors. These are highly durable parking sensors embedded in the ground that can perform a number of tasks including: Enforcement of prolonged stays, monitoring of usage to maintain a constant record of utilisation and the identification of free spaces.

A parking charge reimbursement initiative could be facilitated via an app based system aligned to ANPR allowing local shops to waive parking charges once a minimum spend has been made in their premises.

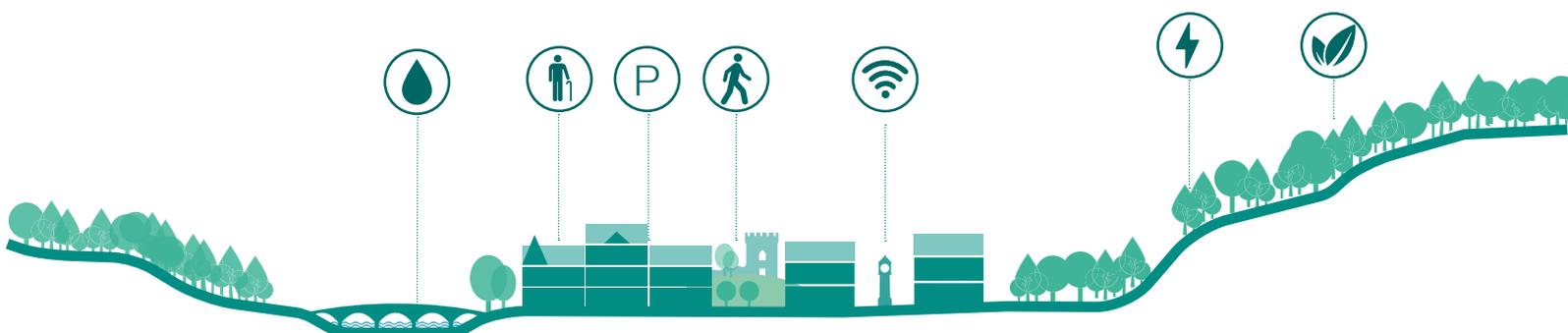
**Enforcement:** The use of ANPR to enforce HGV restrictions through Usk and smart tag systems to permit local business HGVs.

**Independent Living:** IOT devices such as voice activated home hubs can be adapted to provide the infirm or less able means of operating home devices, doors and communicating with others.

**Electrical Vehicle Charging Points:** At the time of writing proposals are in place for eight charging points within the Memorial Hall car park. Further charging points will be required as the uptake in electric vehicles continues. These charging points not only provide a resource but are invaluable in demonstrating a tangible change toward lower emission travel.

**Pedestrian flows:** Simple devices can track the number of people walking along particular routes to provide a constant stream of data on the usage of Usk at different times of the day and throughout the year.

**Flood and soil monitoring:** Ultra-sonic sensors can track water levels and provide early warnings of flash flooding and detect changes to the moisture content of soil.



## 6.14 The action plan

**The action plan is the route-map to direct the next stages of the Master Plan. It is ambitious but with concerted partnership working, the will of the community and project champions, it can be achieved.**

The action plan provides an indication of timescales, suggested delivery partners and next steps. Outline costings are provided where possible but it must be noted that these are to offer a guide as to potential costs. In each instance a detailed review of the project scope would be required and or more detailed design work to provide more accurate costings.

The plan is presented in three stages, short, medium and long term with a suggested level of priority afforded based on stakeholder engagement and the need to complete certain tasks such as data collection to enable development of key projects including Bridge Street.

It is recommended that a series of early, 'quick win' projects are identified and initiated in order to demonstrate action and gain community buy in. These will typically be

projects that can be funded from existing revenue streams or of low capital outlay. Where more complex but high priority projects are identified such as Bridge Street, early development of outline business case modelling and design development should be prioritised.

Funding streams often vary from year to year. Whilst some funds such as the Target Regeneration Fund may not be available in the short term, the local authority and its partners should remain primed to respond when these funds are reviewed.

With UK's departure from the EU there will be significant changes to the way in which certain funding is directed through local government. Existing mechanisms such as the European Regional Development Fund will be replaced. At the time of writing there is no certainty as to how this will be done. In light of this, the action plan will need to be responsive over the coming 12-24 months and aligned to emerging sources of finance.

what would  
be in newtopia  
to keep you  
connected?



# Short term - initial 12 months

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale
<b>EVENTS CALENDAR</b> Expanding the existing calendar	Medium	£15,000 - £30,000	12 months
<b>TRAFFIC DATA</b> Procurement of ANPR based through-flow data and parking survey.	High	£7,000-£11,000	12 months
<b>TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT</b> Speed and traffic enforcement	High	£ tbc	12 months
<b>TOWN WIDE PARKING STRATEGY</b>	High	£ tbc	12 months
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Town twinning -	Low	no cost - existing staff resource	12 months
<b>IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORT</b>	Medium	Minimal	12 months

Key Stakeholders and delivery partners	Potential funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, Local business, Residents, UTC	Third sector, UTC, potential BID	Engagement exercise with local businesses, MCC and Visit Wales representatives to determine potential events, management and delivery	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC	MCC	Procure up to date through traffic data (based on ANPR) and analyse to further develop a preferred option for Bridge Street. Undertake a parking survey exercise to understand the duration of stay, reasons for using the car park and the frequency of visits. This will be required in order to develop a town wide parking strategy and to further explore opportunities for the main car park.	Reclaiming our streets and spaces. Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Police, Residents	Revenue from enforcement	Speed: Agree enforcement plan with Go Safe. Investigate the potential repair/ replacement of the existing fixed speed camera, or replacement with average speed camera. Parking: MCC to deploy civil parking enforcement officers to Usk on a regular basis. Explore the potential to share officers across Monmouthshire's other towns.	Reclaiming our streets and spaces. Action for future generations
MCC. UTC, Residents, Local businesses	MCC	Develop a scope and procure services to provide a detailed town wide parking strategy. This would involve data collection, consider future trends such as EV and working from home. Defined solutions based on gathered data and agreed objectives would be made with a delivery strategy provided.	Reclaiming our streets and spaces.
MCC. UTC, Local businesses	-	UTC and MCC to initiative communication with identified partner towns.	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, Local business, Residents, UTC,	Bus operator/ MCC	Align bus timetable with rail services from Pontypool to connect with the emerging Metro network and existing rail services.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations

## Short term - initial 12 months

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale s
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Trusted intermediary programme	Medium	no cost - existing staff resource	12 months
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Open doors pilot	Medium	no cost - existing staff resource	12 months
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Transition movement	Medium	no cost - voluntary sector	12 months
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Space above the shops	Medium	£tbc	12 months
<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b> Loyalty cards	Low	£5,000-£10,000	12 months
<b>SMART USK</b> Digital Masterplan	Low	£25,000 - £50,000	12 months
<b>BIKE HIRE</b> Coleg Gwent bike scheme	Medium	£5,000 - £15,000	12 months
<b>BRIDGE STREET</b> Public realm improvements -potential trialling of preferred option of traffic management	High	£10,000 plus existing resource alllocation initially	12 months

Key Stakeholders and delivery partner	Potential funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, UTC, Local businesses	-	MCC to review staff resourcing and propose a suitable individual(s) to act as the public sector liaison. UTC to assist in identifying relevant landlords.	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Local businesses	-	MCC to review staff resourcing and propose a suitable individual(s) to act as the public sector liaison. UTC to assist in identifying relevant landlords.	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Local businesses	-	UTC and MCC to liaise with local businesses to assess interest and if this is positive, identify the project champion(s). Initiative to be led by the local business community in partnership with UTC and MCC	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Local businesses/owners	Targeted Regeneration Fund Investment - if available	MCC to review staff resourcing and propose a suitable individual(s) to act as the public sector liaison. UTC to assist in identifying relevant landlords. MCC to review current planning restrictions/policy to facilitate delivery	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Local businesses/owners	MCC	UTC and MCC to liaise with local businesses to assess interest and if this is positive, identify the project champion(s). Initiative to be led by the local business community in partnership with UTC and MCC	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, CCR	MCC, CCR	MCC to extend existing initiatives into a coordinate strategy or 'masterplan' to understand the full potential of digital infrastructure and to outline a full plan and delivery strategy	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Botanics and environment
Coleg Gwent, MCC, UTC, Local action groups, NRW	WG Active Travel Fund. Sponsorship	UTC and MCC to coordinate with Coleg Gwent to confirm their interest or otherwise in the scheme. Coordinate with Next Bike or a similar rental company to establish a trial scheme.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces
MCC, UTC, Police, local businesses, local residents, NFU	MCC	Further coordination between UTC, MCC and key stakeholders to determine the most suitable timing of any trial.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces

# Medium term- 1-5 years

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale
<p><b>IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORT</b></p> <p>Additonal bus routes to Pontypool and Abergavenney</p>	High	£70,000 - £140,000 pa	1-5 years
<p><b>REPURPOSE THE EXISTING CAR PARK</b></p> <p>Charging, management and possible land release</p>	High	£ tbc	1-2 years
<p><b>LOCAL FOOD STRATEGY</b></p> <p>Food initiatives</p>	Medium	£30,000 - £40,000	1-5 year
<p><b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b></p> <p>Potential BID</p>	High	£30,000 + existing staff resource to initiate.	1-2 years
<p><b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b></p> <p>Public sector owned properties- Pop up/ temporary use &amp; social enterprises</p>	Medium	£250,000 - £750,000 (subject to size and location of property)	1-2 years
<p><b>SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES</b></p> <p>Visitor economy strategy to explore means of sustainably expanding the provision of serviced accomodation</p>	Medium	£30,000-£50,000	1 year
<p><b>NEW CAR PARK</b></p> <p>Creation of a new prison site</p>	High	£150,000-£350,000 (implemented)	1-2 years

Key Stakeholders and delivery partners	Potential funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, Local business, Residents, UTC,	CCR funding, MCC operational budget, bus operator, Transport for Wales	Review existing services and potential for additional revenue spend for contracted service. Engage with key delivery partners and align to emerging place-based schemes such as Twyn Square to ensure stops are placed in popular and attractive locations.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, UTC, Police, Residents	Revenue from enforcement	Assess and develop a preferred strategy for managing the car park based on the results and recommendations of a Town Wide Parking Strategy.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, UTC	MCC, Coleg Gwent	Engagement session with local businesses and food producers convened by UTC and MCC. Project champion(s) to be identified to carry the initiative forward.	Botanics and environment Business; Proudly independent Action for future generations
MCC, UTC, Local businesses	MCC lead	Engagement session with local businesses convened by UTC and MCC. Consider the involvement of a third party BID specialist to assess the potential viability and benefits. Project champion(s) to be identified to carry the initiative forward if deemed viable.	Business; Proudly independent Botanics and environment
MCC, UTC	MCC/UTC	UTC and MCC to explore budgetary means of procuring and managing such as a venture. If viable, a community and local business outreach session would help to identify potential occupiers. There is potential to combine this with an Open Doors initiative.	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Visit Wales	Successor to Rural Development Fund.	Prepare a brief, objectives and acquire funding to procure consultancy services to deliver the study	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Usk Prison	HMP Usk	Engage with HMP Prison to explore opportunities to provide visitor and staff parking within the confines of the prison.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations

## Medium term- 1-5 years

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale
<p><b>HIGH QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING &amp; CO-WORKING SPACE</b></p> <p>New site within existing car park</p>	Medium	£500,000-£1,500,000	1-5 years
<p><b>TWYN SQUARE</b></p> <p>Public realm improvements</p>	Medium	£500,000 - £1,500,000 (implemented)	1-5 years
<p><b>COMMUNITY ENERGY</b></p> <p>Solar farm</p>	Medium	£300,000 - £500,000 (implementation)	1-2 years
<p><b>IMPROVED SUSTRANS ROUTES</b></p> <p>Improvements to existing routes and inclusive cycling proposals</p>	Medium	£30,000 - £500,000 (implemented)	1-5 years
<p><b>BRANDING &amp; MARKETING</b></p> <p>Media strategy, web, digital and print</p>	Medium	£30,000 - £100,000	12+ months - ongoing

Key Stakeholders and delivery partners	Potential funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, UTC, Private Sector developer, local Businesses, Identified RSL	Potential MCC/private partner JV. Potential CCR funding. Welsh Property Development Fund.	Once clarity is provided on available space (assuming space is available after the delivery of a management strategy) produce an initial site design and outline viability test for potential uses including those recommended in the report. If successful extend this to a potential Outline Business Case and outline planning. Seek a potential JV partnership with an RSL or private sector body.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, WG, UTC, Local businesses and residents	Active Travel Funding. Targeted Regeneration Fund Investment - if available.	Develop the design through to detailed planning consent and viability testing based on an initial cost appraisal. Continue with both statutory and non-statutory engagement to build consensus and community support.	Botanics and environment Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, UTC, Coleg Gwent, BAE Systems	Welsh Energy Service Grant (for feasibility). Community Share Offer for delivery. Successor to Rural Development Fund.	Engage with BAE systems, Coleg Gwent and MCC to determine potential interest. If this is successful, explore potential delivery partners, suitable site location and a commercial feasibility study.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, NRW, UTC, Local action groups, Sustrans	Active Travel Funding. Successor to EU Rural Development Fund.	Develop a town wide active travel strategy to identify projects and to provide initial cost estimates for interventions.	Botanics and environment Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC. Local businesses	MCC revenue budget, Successor to EU Rural Development Fund.	Develop a brief and objectives with local businesses. Procurement of suitably qualified graphic design and branding consultant.	Business; Proudly independent

# Medium term- 1-5 years

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale
<p><b>USK ISLAND IMPROVEMENTS</b></p> <p>Creation of wildflower area, wild play route, trim trail and potential cafe.</p>	Medium	£250,000-£750,000 (implemented)	1-5 years
<p><b>DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p> <p>Ultra-fast connectivity</p>	High	tbc	1-5 years
<p><b>BRIDGE STREET</b></p> <p>Delivery of long term solution including pedestrian priority interventions</p>	High	£100,000 - £1,000,000 (implementation)	1-5 years
<p><b>RIVER USK PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE</b></p> <p>Active travel bridge</p>	High	£1,500,000	1-5 years

Key Stakeholders and delivery partners	Potential funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, NRW, UTC, Local action groups including Incredible Edible Usk	Successor to the EU/WG Co-operation and Supply Chain Fund. Successor to Rural Development Fund. Welsh Town Investment Fund. Micro Small Business Fund. Potential S106 funding.	Undertake a design development exercise and initial viability assessment of the cafe option to determine whether an FCA would permit such development. Coordinate with Coleg Gwent to assess interest in operating such a venue. Coordinate with potential local interest groups such as Incredible Edible Usk	Botanics and environment Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, UTC, Local businesses	Community Fibre Partnership (to assess costs). Successor to Co-operation and Supply Chain Fund.	Undertake an initial feasibility and costing exercise to determine viability and benefits.	Business; Proudly independent
MCC, UTC, Police, local businesses, local residents, NFU	MCC, Active Travel Fund, CCR, Successor to Rural Development Fund.	The ultimate solution for Bridge Street will require extensive and continued stakeholder engagement. Following the initial through-flow data, detailed traffic modelling will be required alongside a professional multi-disciplinary strategy to determine detailed carriageway alignments, public realm treatments and costing.	Business; Proudly independent Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations
MCC, UTC, NRW, Police, Coleg Gwent, WG, local businesses, local residents	Active Travel Fund, MCC.	Assess the strategic need for the bridge as part of the town wide active travel strategy. If there is a strategic case, undertake an initial feasibility assessment to determine a potential location, outline costs, funding and concept design development.	Botanics and environment Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations Business; Proudly independent

# Longer term 5 years+

	Priority	Outline cost range	Phase - timescale
<b>RIVERSIDE WALKWAYS</b>			
Flood defence related improvements	Medium	£100,000 - £500,000	+5 years

Key Stakeholders and delivery partners	Funding and delivery mechanism	Next steps	Associated theme
MCC, UTC, NRW	NRW (longer term), MCC, Active Travel Fund.	Engage with NRW to understand potential timescales for the delivery of improvements to the existing flood defences and to develop a partnership to steer future outcomes for the river corridor.	Botanics and environment Reclaiming our streets and spaces Action for future generations

## 6.15 Next steps

The plan makes clear recommendations as to how local action in Usk can respond to global challenges of an unprecedented scale. Climate change, ageing populations and the rapid advancement of digital technologies are just some of the challenges we face. These are manifest in Usk and in tackling them we will need new, inventive and in some instances radically different ways of working and taking action.

We will need new partnerships that mobilise the community's greatest asset - the people within our towns and cities. This is made explicitly clear in the Five Ways of Working within the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Swift progress on the agenda will, in large part, be a consequence of how well leadership within the town embraces this challenge, or alternatively ignores it. The question of governance is fundamental and there must clear project 'champions' and partnerships based on the pursuit of common goals, namely the recommendations of this document. To garner support from the public early 'quick wins' that demonstrate change will be essential. The question of 'who' will take this forward is as important as the 'why' and the 'how'.

### **TOWN IMPROVEMENT MASTER PLAN**

- defined themes & objectives
- identification of projects
- outline timescales
- identification of potential funding
- recommendations for further study

### CREATE THE PARTNERSHIP GROUP

- strategic partners - eg NRW, Dwr Cymru, Sustrans, NFU, CCR
- ensure cross departmental working
- identify mutual benefits
- collaborate and share knowledge

### CREATE THE STEERING COMMITTEE

- current representatives (UTC, MCC)
- next generation committee members
- selecting priority projects linked to available funding
- apply for initial funds

### DESIGN DEVELOPMENT & STATUTORY APPROVAL

- secure initial funding to develop projects
- design development, feasibility and detailed costing
- outline and detailed business case development
- outline and or detailed planning consent and other statutory approvals

### FUNDING

- application for funds
- securing development funds

### DELIVERY

- award contracts
- project delivery
- ongoing maintenance strategy
- on-going evaluation



ARUP